
Black Words

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Grandad kept a bottle of mouthwash and a bag of chips in his burgundy pick-up truck.
I asked why and got a sip of beer for an answer.

Grandad kept a can of it in the cup holder, a case of it behind the seat.

He chuckled when I frowned and stuck out my bitter tongue.

I was in the middle, "sittin' on the hump," Mom was in the passenger seat.

She took a big swig after me. I heard the bubbles burst in the can and wondered
how she could drink the stuff.

Mom keeps a bottle of mahogany rum under the sink, behind the dishrags and cleaning solutions.

I don't ask why for fear of the answer.

She keeps a drying lime in the fridge where the butter should be,
slices its flimsy green flesh and squeezes its few drops into a foaming glass.

I sit in the middle of her home, on a Value City sofa.

She takes a swing at me with her speech, her syllables echoing against the peach
painted walls of her cave on West First Street.

I will keep a stack of black words piled in the bottom drawer of my beige wooden desk
and let them ask questions that I won't answer.

I will keep the words waiting there in the dark, feeding them scraps of recent past.

The times I woke up on stained floors, bare-assed, sore, and trapped
in the middle. Of when I filled myself with vodka and Captain Crunch

and took a sulk in a stranger's filthy shower with a sour bar of soap. The mouths of
black words detest the flesh of hope.