Black Words
Samantha Atkins

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.