

Queers like me

Michael V. Smith

poems

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For Francis, my forever family

Grandma Cooper's Corpse

Here is how this story show
works:

I have a Magic Story Bag
and every day
I draw a card
with a title on it.

Today we drew...

GRANDMA COOPER'S CORPSE

which is
a fucking
whopper
because it's hard to talk about
your grandmother's corpse

tho it *is* good
to learn new things.

It doesn't matter how pretty you are,
you always have more to learn cuz
pretty doesn't last.

[Michael taps forehead.]

Brains do.

Grandma Cooper
was my mom's mom.

My extended family, both sides,
all live in a little tiny place within
a twenty-minute drive of each other.
Kemptville, Ontario.

(We lived an hour away, in the city.)

Grandma Cooper
lived next to the beer store, so she knew
what was going on with the Smith side—
she could watch them
coming and going.

When I'd show up
at Grandma Cooper's, she'd say,
OH you know your grandfather
—she meant my dad's dad—
your grandfather was at the beer store
yesterday AND today,
he got a two-four both times.

I knew my Smith grandparents'
drinking habits
because Grandma Cooper
paid attention.
Small town.

One day Dad phones
when I'm in Cornwall visiting my sister,
Mom is there too,
and Dad says
Are you sitting down?
I got some weird
news for you. Have you heard
about your Grandma Cooper?

And I'm like, No.

And he says, Well,
I think your Grandma Cooper is dead.

And I'm like, Oh fuck.

And he says, The story I heard from your uncle Ted
is that your uncle Bob got arrested
for transporting a corpse.

And your grandmother is dead.

I was all *Holy crazy shit*.
That is some crazy-ass shit.

Now,
there are a few things
you need to know:

The reason why I'd hear through the grapevine
that this happened
is because
we don't talk to Uncle Bob
Mom's only sibling.

Bob came along quite by accident
after a few miscarriages
not long after Grandma and Grandpa Cooper
adopted my mother.

We always suspected
THAT
had made Bob special:
the natural-born one
who managed to survive.

Bob
liked to wait until after we'd arrived
to have a shower
then wander the rooms
in a towel not quite big enough
to fit around his waist.

Grandma would say, ROBERT,
stop parading around the house
and get dressed.

It was Uncle Bob who brought me
to watch the first *Star Wars* movie
at the Seaway Drive-in

and gave me his stack of 1950s
comics, then realized they were
worth something
and made me return them.

When I was growing up, I used to stay with my grandparents a week at a time. Once I brought my bicycle with me—I had this BIG,

well, “BIG”—I was ten—

I had a fancy ten-speed
to replace my banana bike
whose long orange seat had separated
from its post
during my last ride with it.

Bob said, I'm going to help you tune your new bike.

Bob was a mechanic.

He never really had a job,
only reasons
why he didn't have a job.
He kept getting fired from places
for his ATTITUDE.

My grandmother had financed a brand new double-door garage in the back property where Bob could do mechanic work under the table.

So

we took my bike up there,
Bob laid out all the tools on a towel
and he showed me how to do things.

I was like, *Oh my god, Bob's actually being nice to me.*

He didn't do things like this for me,

he preferred my sister,
and here he was
showing me
how to take things apart
and use this tool
and put this here
and put that there.

I took off the pedals and chain
and brakes and axle
and removed all the ball bearings.