

The Bad Things

by Tawnysha Greene

Mornings when Momma washes dishes, we watch
cartoons from the library sales, ones we buy for ten cents each.
Momma watches them before she lets us see,
makes sure they're appropriate, teach us what is good.

The day we pick out a new one, one she hasn't seen,
we ask to watch it while she's on the phone. She says, *yes, yes*,
waves us away. So we do and we like the movie. It's about two
mice,
a brother and sister. They play together, say funny things.

In one scene, the sister takes the brother's toy, and he asks
for it back, but she sticks her tongue out, fat and pink, and we
laugh,
try it, too. It becomes our game. Later, Momma sees,
asks where we learned it, we say the movie, the one we watched
today.

She goes to the kitchen, gets out a big black trash bag, fills it full
of movies, the new one and old ones, too, says we need
to get rid of them, they teach us bad things. Daddy comes home,
calls us to his room, makes us stand in line, tells us to do it again.

Sister goes first, obeys, and Daddy takes her, holds
her down, his hands over her face, fingers in her mouth,
nails under lips, pulls her tongue out, then making
his hand into a fist, bangs her chin until

she closes her eyes, bites her tongue through. My turn next
and I obey, but keep my eyes open, turn my head
when he makes the fist, hits, so my back teeth bite
down, my mouth doesn't bleed as much as sister's does.

Momma watches, then takes us to our rooms, holds ice to our mouths,
says Daddy did the right thing, tried to teach us what is good.
She gets out her Bible, the one with underlines and handwriting on each page, says that if part of our body does something bad,

we have to cut it off. *It is better for you to lose parts of your body,*
she says, *than for your whole body to go to hell.*

