

My Brother the Painter

by David Cotrone

My father bouncing his leg to slow rock music with me on one knee, telling me I should keep a special place in my heart for my teeth, to remember where I lose them, on the playground like he did when he was my age, fighting a friend named Bobby-Joe. Or else I could lose them in my lunch, in an apple or a carrot, he says. My brother sitting next to us on the couch, a bit older and nodding, saying dad's right about the apples, better not take a bite and lose part of your mouth. But you've got to do it sometime, he says, pointing to my chin. Sooner or later they got to go. My brother pushing me on the swing in the backyard, betting I can't get as high up as he used to. Putting on his jacket and going out on weekends and coming home with his fingers like cigarettes, holding them under my nose for me to smell. Talking about a girlfriend and then another girlfriend, bringing the second one home but never the first, introducing her to me like this: *Little brother this is Gina, Gina this is little brother.* Gina and my brother out on the porch after mom and dad go to bed, talking loud for a while and then talking softer, not quite whispering and not quite making words. My brother and Gina crashing into each other, bumping into the grill, still smelling like meat and smoke from dinner earlier that night. My brother's voice cracking when I ask where she is. My brother saying she won't be coming back anymore, that she's with someone else now, that they're not seeing each other, that he's ready for something new, looking for something different. My brother cutting his hair while looking into the bathroom mirror, holding up a razor and telling me it's time I look like someone who could be taken seriously. My hair in the bathroom sink and my brother telling me that finally I look like I can handle myself, that soon enough I'll be able to shave my face and when that happens I'll be meaning business. My brother laughing at what he's saying, running his hand over my head while I laugh with him. My brother finding a job with a company that paints houses, working six days a week, coming home with paint on his hands, no more

Available online at «<http://fictionaut.com/stories/david-cotrone/my-brother-the-painter--2>»

Copyright © 2012 David Cotrone. All rights reserved.

cigarettes, white paint cracked over the lines on his palms. My brother moving out of the house, moving into his own place, finding another painting job with a different painting company, talking to me on the phone about the older guys he works with, Jim whose breath could kill roaches and Frank who doesn't talk much and Lim who never takes off his hat because he doesn't like the way his head looks without it. My brother who says these men aren't his friends but they're his coworkers so he has to be nice, has to go out with them to the bar downtown if they ask. My brother who meets a woman at the bar downtown and goes again the week after to see her, bringing her back to his apartment. My brother who asks the woman to stay with him for a long time. My brother who doesn't introduce me to the woman till he knows they're getting married. My brother who says he remembers when he used to push me on the swing and how I looked more like mom then but look more like dad now, my nose sticking out like a bird's about to land on it, he says, like a tree branch. My brother moving farther away from home with his wife, with his daughter, calling and asking if mom's okay, if she's doing all right. I can see my brother in my head, shadowboxing while speaking, asking about dad now. Still going at it? he says. Still getting along? He asks about me and I tell him I'm doing fine, almost out of high school, getting ready to leave like he did, getting ready, getting ready. Look at you, little brother. Look at that. Ask him if he's still painting houses and he says he wouldn't be doing anything else, says there's a whole world out there waiting to be painted, laughing, flecks of paint on his jeans, white and cracked, not dirty but not quite clean.

