

# The Brother

by Melissa Ann Chadburn

My family and I grew up in Akron, Ohio. My father worked for Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. An important thing to tell you that I know now that I didn't know then was that working with rubber has a strange affect on the consumption of alcohol. There's a chemical at the plants that made many men sick when they came home at night and tried to tie one on. For this reason a lot of the men at the plant were sober. Except for my father. I guess it's extremely difficult to be a decent human being in all aspects of your life. I heard one guy say it was like if the wind was full of sand and it keeps hitting you in the face and he just kept on going out with a fresh clean shaven face.

We lived in a very patriotic part of town, lots of flags and a post office nearby. There was one foreigner in town and she worked at the post office. If you ever went there you would hear her say to the customer in front of you, "Thank you very much and when you have a chance you can go to this number and tell how was my customer service and thank you very much." Then she would quickly look up at the air before her at no one in particular and call out, "How we are doing there?" And she said the same things all day. They did not mean anything at all. Nobody missed a chance to decorate their front lawn. Johnnie down the road even had a green outfit for his scarecrow for St. Paddy's day.

Since this piece is called "The Brother" I guess I should tell you about my brother.

He is an enigma and has provided fodder for many a regret and humor. My family is riddled with love, addiction, unhealthy levels of swooning boundarylessness and a heightened sense of pride. Pride in their beauty, their culture, their professional success, although a complete disregard for material things. The way this misshapen balance of events occurs is a very strict traditionally conservative pot smoking father and a very fun loving secret-keeping hippified pot smoking mother. My father was a scientist. He came from very

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little and grew into having very much. He was the first African American Omega man of the year. He was a genius. He was driven. He was tough. He loved more than anything pussy, pot, and a gin and tonic. His first wife supported him through college and bore four of his children. He was a chauvinist. He finally landed a job at Firestone and left her. He has a great deal of pride in his race and his sons and wanted to arm them with the tools to fend off suffering. He named his first son William, after himself. He is narcissistic and needs to live forever. His sons took after him and suffered greatly from addiction. He moved on to marry again, he married an easy going woman that had a career but also liked to give love and head and make dinners and left the butter out the way he liked it so it was always soft and spreadable. She was there for his big break. They got a nice house in a really patriotic neighborhood and decorated it with Elephant printed Batik fabrics. They raised two and a half kids that turned out beautiful and loving and sometimes smart but always coordinated like them. It took some decades for his kids from his first marriage to forgive him. To be able to accept that he only gained this capacity to show up for his family in his second marriage. Although he showed up he showed up with many demands and a little too much pride. His son William that he was once so proud of carrying around his name and making him immortal had smoken so much crack that he had become mentally delayed. He had long since gone by the name Billy.

This brother is the brother I wanted to speak of. He has since gotten sober and found a joy and love for god. In fact he loves him so much he gleefully participates in his church choir and sings Jesus rap. Now every holiday he gets up at the table with a huge toothy grin and begins to rap. His distinct daddy's features, flaccid and drooling he smiles and sometimes even beat boxes so hard you try to guard your own plate from the remnants of his flying corn and when he's done he claps so hard and laughs so full, trying desperately to fill the silence because only then will he feel that sense of longing that all expectant children have after a joke they already told. He wants those words and we know he wants them and it kills us to say

them. At the head of the table the dad William looks down maybe rubs his forehead or grabs some bread and if he's in an even more sour mood he might even get up and say "That's enough son that's enough." But those aren't the words he wants. So he'll just stand there arms dangling at his side. An ape with a dream. Till finally I say it, "Again Billy. Again." And the light goes on.

