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Workshop Submission #2

**For Family**

James was in his senior year of high school. After being worn out by the past for years, he was earning to graduate. Most of the other seniors felt the same, fed up with the pointless drama and childish rules they’ve had to follow the high school provides. Most talked about going to college or enlisting in the military or settling down with their significant other and starting a family. Not James though, once he was out, he was going to pack up his truck and drive as far away as he can from this town.

He grew up in this town, had a happy childhood. His parents provided well for him and his two siblings and his family was very close. Every Sunday they would attend mass at the local church and go to the local café for donuts after. He was also very good at talking to people, and had many friends. He had every he could have asked for, and now that things were different, he realizes how much he took it for granted. Almost six months ago, Ben, his younger brother had stepped into a life of crime and drugs. They were only a year a part and were the closest of friends growing up. Whether they were skateboarding at the park or playing soccer for the school team, they were practically inseparable. But that was another time. After the head of the drug organization fell, someone new would take a seat at the thrown. And it broke James’ heart to hear that his brother had taken the position. Months leading up to this Ben had been more distant from James, on account that he was always working his job at the grocery store after school, but none the less James was shocked. Ben started hanging out with new people and his grades dropped. He started coming home at later times and sometimes wouldn’t come home at all. On the nights come home thought, he would stumble into the bedroom, crash down onto his bed, and confess everything to his brother laying in the bed next to him. He would tell him what he drank and what drugs he sold and where he got them and how much he made. He would tell him about prostitutes he would beat and rape and the people he killed and the plans he had for the future. And every night James would lay there, silent, concentrating on every detail. He would never dare confront Ben or anyone else about this, for he would let tears run down his face, feeling responsible for his brother’s actions.

Before Ben stepped into the underground, there was another power in place, one much more organized and laid out. It started with the Smiley Brothers at the top and worked its way down. One giant organization that made millions. They sold weapons of every kind, drugs, and moonshine like crazy, but by far their top product was weed. It was sold in droves throughout my town, we had more than we knew what to do with. Nothing got past Ryan, the oldest and smartest of the two brothers. If he didn’t like it, it didn’t happen. Many ideas were proposed to him and turned down. Things like meth, cocaine, heroin and many of the other hard drugs were forbidden, killing under contract or bounty was not allowed either, but it happened anyway and people were being killed all the time. But above all Ryan would never stand for human trafficking. Most found the art of pimping people out to be sick and inhuman, and when it happened police would always find some kid tortured and beaten to death in a ditch on the side of the road somewhere. In a way, these rules kept the town safe. In a completely crazy way, it felt calming. The system was almost perfect, except for one issue. Over the years, word got around and one night the police department raided the Smiley Brothers’ old warehouse. Many students went to jail that night and many others joined them in the coming months. Some even died trying to shoot their way out, but most just gave up. If there is any reason to learn from this, it’s that all things must come an end.

While Ben had been working James was having trouble finding a job, and one day a friend had asked him if he wanted him to make some money. James knew this friend worked under the Smiley Brothers, but the need for money forced him to accept. After a few jobs, James started selling regularly, almost every night he’d make a delivery. As he worked his way up he became one of the top middle men for the Smiley Brothers. He would pick up a product from a supplier and deliver it to the customer. But James was smart. Unlike other middle men he was always on a skateboard instead of in car, he never showed his face, and he never carried a gun. He never revealed his identity to anyone. Instead he carried a couple of knives and long ball hitch wrench that he would use on people for not paying up or if he was ordered to. He would beat his customers that tried to play games on him, trying to make deals or lie their way out of paying. And when he beat them he would do it relentlessly without mercy. Sometime Ryan would offer him a little extra cash to go “handle” a rival or problem, and James would take his orders without question every time. His target would be found beaten to death in a hole somewhere or in a building or shed burned to the ground along with the body the next day. Even with all the money he was making though, he felt extremely guilty, so after every job he finished, he would roll up his sleeve and carve an “X” into his forearm with a knife and recite the Hail Mary as a way of repenting for his sins. He knew that that would never be enough to earn him God’s forgiveness, but it kept him from going insane from the stress and guilt. Everyone thought it was weird, but all dealers had their weird little issues, it’s a very stressful job after all. After the Smiley Brothers were busted, he stopped all his involvement with anything and everything illegal, threw out his entire supply along with any evidence that would lead to the job. It was a good thing he was out with is family that night.

James had always thought he’d kept it away from the family, not because he didn’t want them to know they, he wanted to keep out of it. He had two younger siblings to set an example for, especially Anna. Anna was only 7 years old and loved very much by her two brothers. She was always drawing pictures and after she finished them James and Ben would hang them up around their bed room. James loved waking up every morning to his favorite one that hung on the ceiling above his bed. It was a stick figure of him with a hat and long straggly strands of hair coming out from under it and a curved line with two circles that resembled a skateboard underneath the body. Even though she drew that picture 3 years ago for him and her artistic skills have heavily improved, it’s still by far his favorite one.

But one day, when James came home from a friend’s house, he found Anna finishing up a new drawing at the kitchen table. Their parents wouldn’t be getting home for another few days. James hated how much they traveled, but the bills had to be paid somehow. After a kiss on the head, she looked up at him with a smile that stretchered from ear to ear and handed him the drawing. It showed three people sitting in big chairs with smiling each with what looked like a cigarette the hanging out of their mouths. Smoke clouds working their way up the page from each of the red colored ends of the cigarettes, and at the bottom of the page the letters “BEN” were in a circle with a line that lead to one of the people. He was confused, if Ben had started smoking, he would’ve smelt the it off him almost instantly. He asked her where she saw this and she pointed to the back door. He then smiled and asked if he could hang it up in his bedroom. She shook her head yes and started drawing a new picture. James walked out the back door onto the patio. It had around table with an umbrella through the middle and four lounge chairs sitting around it. They were filthy from sitting outside in the wind and rain and carried a bit of a funny smell, but there was no smell of tobacco. On the table sat a bowl that Ben and his friends had used as an ash tray. As James leaned in close to see what was inside, he caught a whiff that made his eyes widen and his heart sink. The smell was like a sweeter form of burning rubber. James stood perfectly still, trying to except the fact that his brother was smoking crack on the back porch, in view of his innocent little sister. James took the picture and stuck it in his pocket, there was no way he was hanging it up on the wall.

James made the decision to confront his brother. Bringing this home so close to the family, especially Anna, had gone too far. James sat in a chair by the door and waited for his brother to come home.

Late into the night, Ben stumbled in the door, the smell of alcohol radiating from his cloths. James grabbed his shoulder and told him we need to talk. Ben knocked the hand off his shoulder that and shoved his brother. They were yelling at each other now, too fired up to make sense of any of the words. James returned the shove, knocking him off balance. When Ben come back with a sloppy punch, James grabbed his arm and flipped him over on the ground, pinning him down. Ben used all his energy thrashing around his body trying to get loose, but James wouldn’t let up. Suddenly Anna come running in the room, screaming her head off with tears in her eyes. Her forehead collided with one of Ben’s kicking legs and she fell back. The two boys fell silent. As James let go of his grip to help his sister, Ben got to his feet and ran out the door. James sat on the floor, rocking his sister back and forth as they watched the tail lights disappear behind the door way. James felt the rage build up as he wiped away the tears. A brother that hurt his family was no brother of his.

The next night James would end this. From the nights where Ben would confess his plans, James knew where he’d be, and it would be one of Ben’s biggest sales. He told his brother he would have five bricks in the spare tire hatch that sat right above the gas tank in the back of his car. With each brick weighing 1000 grams, he was carrying up to $300,000. His plan was to make the exchange at 1:30 a.m. in a parking lot of a neighborhood park.

After James put his sister to bed, pulled out an old box from under his bed. He blew off the layer of dust and emptied it out on the bed. Laying in front of him was an array of knives, a ball hitch wrench, a pair of black gloves, a red hoody and an old tattered mask. As he picked up the mask it started falling apart at the in hands. He dropped in into the trash and dug through his closet until he found a bandana. He suited up, grabbed his skateboard on the side of the house, and headed for the park.

When he got close, he got off his board and hid it in a bush to the side, and continued to move forward. When he got there, he picked out Ben’s car, the buyer nowhere in sight. James started walking up to the car and Ben exited his car to greet him. But as Ben stuck out his hand, James snapped Ben’s wrist back and used it as leverage in to shove him up against the car. He looked through the window and saw Kat in the front seat. She was one of Ben’s most expensive prostitutes and was scared speechless. James pointed away from the car and in a deep, rough voice he said, “GET OUT!” Those were the only words that Ben and Kat ever heard him speak. She then ran behind a nearby tree. When she turned, she saw something that would make the devil cringe. Ben was now laying on the ground, blood spilling out of his out of his mouth, and James holding high above his head the long wrench just before laying it upon Ben’s cheek. He continued to swing again and again, every sound made by the cracking bone. James then grabbed Ben by his blood soaked jacket and sat him up straight, his back against the car. He got face to face with him and pulled down the bandana and showed Ben his face, then quickly pulled it back up again. Ben’s eyes widened, shocked to see his brother standing before him. With a shaky hand, Ben tried to pull the gun out of the inside pocket of his jacket, but once he got it out the James snatched out of his hands. He took a few steps back and put a bullet in each leg, Ben’s yelp silenced but the sound of the gun, then got in close again. He then pulled out knife and used the back of his hand to hold his head back. They both could here Kat’s sobs off in the distance, but it didn’t even compare to the blood driven whine that came from Ben. Blood poured out from his forehead and James continued to scribe Anna’s name into this skin. When James finished, he walked ten steps back and put three bullets in the gas tank, which sat diagonally to the right of Ben’s now unrecognizable head, then threw the gun to the side. The tank caught fire and exploded a few seconds later. For a moment everything was lit up by the giant inferno. As James walked away, he rolled up his sleeve and carved in an “X”, then ran off into the night.

He took all the evidence he had and the cloths he wore and through them in a dumpster across town, but it really didn’t matter. When the police came looking for evidence they didn’t put much effort into their search, that typically happened when the they have reports of the victim breaking the law. They even brought James and his parents into the station the and showed them the files of Ben’s drug distribution and abuse. James and his parents told the officers that they didn’t know anything about it, but seeing his parents’ hearts break made tears flood his face.

For several days he laid in bed, unable to stop the tears. He couldn’t sleep either for every time he closed his eyes he could only picture his brother. What had he done? He knew he made the worst mistake possible. There were a thousand different ways he could’ve handled it. It didn’t matter now though, nothing he could do would bring his brother back. Once you make a choice, you must live with the consequences the follow.

A few months later James received his diploma, and packing up his truck. While he was digging though his room, he came across the drawing that Anna drew of Ben smoking in the back porch. It startled him for a moment, but then took it into the back yard and used a lighter to light the corner and watched it slowly burn away. He didn’t want to remember his brother like that. He wanted to remember sitting in church together and playing on the same baseball team and going to the park together and always looking forward to their sister’s next masterpiece that she created for them. It felt good burning the drawing, a sense of relief filling James body. Maybe he would never return, but he would always have those special memories.