

James woke up at 7:00. The day did not feel very special or different, but James had no idea what changes were coming to his life. The nine-year-old boy walked down the stairs to the kitchen like he did every morning. As he opened the cabinet to get his favorite cereal he heard noises coming from the kitchen.

James walked over to the door that led to the living room. He leaned into the door and pressed his ear against it.

“You can’t tell me what to do, I’m better than you!” James knew that was his older brother yelling.

He then heard his mother respond, “I sure as hell will do what I want because you are a child, and I am an adult!”

“I am sixteen years old, stop treating me like a child!” James’ brother responded.

“Brendan, why don’t we just calm down and stop yelling?” James’ mom said in her calm soothing voice.

“No, I’m tired of this crap house!” Before his mom could respond Brendan shouted, “I’m done with this, I’m Leaving!”

“Come on honey, don’t be ridiculous, we all love you.”

“Please, the only one in this house who loves me is James.”

Upon hearing his name James stepped back from the door. He had known that his brother didn’t get along with his mom but he had no idea it was that bad. He sat down and ate his breakfast thinking about what he had just heard.

His brother came out of the room with a furious look on his face. His brother turned to look at James and said, “Hey, you want to come with me somewhere?”

James replied, “If that’s what you want.”

“Yeah that would be great. Why don’t you tell mom bye?” He said.

James walked over to his parent’s bedroom and knocked on the door.

“Brendan, give your mom some time to relax!” His dad shouted.

“No, it’s James not Brendan” James said back.

“Okay James, what do you want?” His mom said.

“I just wanted to say bye, Brendan is taking me somewhere,” said James.

“Okay honey, what time will you be home?” his mom asked.

“Brendan didn’t say, but I’m sure it won’t be long,” James said.

“All right, just be back near dinner time,” his mom said.

James walked back to where his brother stood in the doorway. His brother told him to grab a bag with some clothes and his favorite toy. James walked to the door of his brother’s car and got into the back seat. James’ brother turned on the ignition and started to pull the car out of the driveway.

James looked back at his house not knowing that it would be a long time before he would ever see that house again. They drove for hours that night without stopping. James saw a look on his brother’s face that made him know he should not ask where they were going.

Eventually James asked his older brother, “When are we going to be home?”

“I don’t know if we will ever go home, James,” said his brother.

“Brendan, I love you, but what are you doing?” James asked.

“We can’t return to that house. It’s for your own good, now please stop asking questions!” James’ brother said.

James loved and respected his brother so he didn’t ask again. Since the age of 6, he had always thought his brother was the most sensible person in his family. He loved his mom, but he loved Brendan more.

Four years after that night, James walked home to his apartment from Central Park. He had been spending his evenings in the park since they arrived in New York City three years earlier. Him and his brother had moved around several different states before settling in New York. The city was a beautiful place. It was filled with parks, interesting people, and many cultures.

The main reason they settled in New York City was because James’ older brother, Brendan, could find work. His older brother was 17 and it was hard for him to find work in several other east coast states that they had tried living in.

James didn’t know what his brother did but it didn’t seem legal. He made a surprisingly large amount of money for such a young kid. James was 13 at this point, and he wasn’t an idiot. His brother brought home all of his money in cash

and only worked late at night. James had also noticed some shady activity, including the recent purchase of a gun.

James didn't care if what his brother did was illegal, as long as his brother was safe. James started noticing worse and worse things going on with Brendan. Some days he wasn't coming home and other days he would just sit by the door of the apartment with his gun in his hand.

One day James woke up and walked to the kitchen. Brendan was all ready at the table quietly sobbing. James was used to this behavior, as it was happening more frequently. James just sat down and started eating. Brendan looked up and said, "We need to talk."

"Okay," said James.

"I am leaving New York"

"What!" James exclaimed.

"Just quiet down, and let me explain," Brendan said.

"All right, I will listen." James said in a quiet voice.

"Work has begun to get dangerous." Brendan said. "I am leaving for Connecticut to extend my business practices. It will be safer for me there and you will not be in danger. I am leaving you with \$500,000 to live with. I have also purchased this apartment so you may live here without worrying about rent."

"I have never lived alone, what will I do?" said James.

"You are almost 14. I know you are capable of buying food." Brendan said.

"What about my education? With you gone who will help me learn?" James asked.

"Just continue using the textbooks. You are a very intelligent young kid, you will figure stuff out."

"Can you please not leave me?" James said as he began breaking down into tears.

"Please don't cry James. I love you, and I must leave to protect you," Brendan said, as he tried to sooth James. A car honked outside the window. Brendan peered out the window then turned around to address James. "I'm sorry, I need to leave. I love you, and I will see you again," Brendan promised.

James watched as his older brother walked out the door. He felt shocked, betrayed, and most of all hurt. As his brother opened the door to leave James stammered the words, "I love you."

"I love you too, little dude," his brother said with a sad, longing, look on his face.

The door swung shut behind Brendan. The second that the door closed James collapsed. The shock of losing his brother almost five years after losing his parents was overwhelming.

James was 13 years old and living alone in New York City with a pile of cash. It was any kid's dream, but it was shadowed by the dread of having no leader, nobody to comfort him, and no family.

James had much money and nothing to do. He had enough to live on but it would be boring and depressing. James had not seen or heard from his parents in five years, although it felt like a century. He never told Brendan this but when he was in Central Park in the evening, he would always think about them.

James knew his brother hated and resented his parents but he never fully understood why. James knew that he would not be able to handle himself in the city alone. He had slowly been driving himself crazy with thoughts of his family.

James had a decision to make. Would he stay in this apartment and await his brother's return for years or would he leave to return to his parents? He contemplated both ideas for a long time. His brother had always told him that his parents were unloving, heartless people. James also feared his brother would feel betrayed by James if he returned to his parents.

James left the apartment and walked to Central Park. That is where he did all of his thinking. As James walked he couldn't help but notice every family walking around the city. They were smiling, happy, and peaceful. James tried to imagine if he could ever bring his family together. All he really wanted in life was his family to come together again and love.

James knew what he had to do. He walked back to his apartment and packed a suitcase full of all his favorite things. He found a bus that was leaving New York to go to his hometown in California. The bus was leaving in 14 hours.

James booked his ticket and left for the station in Buffalo. He took a cab there and waited 5 hours for the bus to leave.

He got off the bus 2 miles away from where he had lived. He looked around and was surprised to see what had changed. The houses were different, the streets were newly paved, and in the place of the park across the street from the bus station there was a cemetery.

James lifted all his luggage and began walking to his old home. As he walked he thought of the memories he had with his family. Every walk in the park, every time they got ice cream, and even memories of conversations over the breakfast table.

James reached the house and took a deep breath. He tried to calm his emotions and relax. He slowly knocked on the door. At first there was no response. James felt a sudden urge to cry. He had traveled so far to see people he thought he would never see and they wouldn't even open the door.

Again, James lifted his hand and knocked on the door, this time very loud. A man James did not recognize opened the door. James asked, "Who are you?"

"You knocked on my door, who are you?" the man replied.

"My name is James. My parents lived in this house years ago." James said as he fought back tears. He did not handle disappointment well.

"Oh my! You are the son of Dan and Mary. They spoke of you so much," said the man.

"What do you mean they did? Why did they stop?" James asked frantically.

"Well, they eventually couldn't handle thinking about you any more, they just gave up," the man said.

"Where are they now?"

"They are both at their retirement home 3 blocks away. When they moved there, we were great friends and they sold me this house."

James thanked the man and walked down the street. He couldn't contain his excitement. He approached the retirement home rapidly. James rushed to the front desk and asked if he could see Dan and Mary O'Brien. The woman at the desk told him they were located in room 304.

James walked to 304 with uncontrollable glee. He knocked on the door and waited two minutes. Eventually someone opened the door. He was shocked it was his dad! He just hugged him without thinking. His dad pulled him off and asked, "Who are you?"

James was at first heartbroken then realized his appearance had significantly changed. He said, "Its me, James!"

There was a moment of silence in the room before his dad exclaimed, "Thank God you're back!" His mother and father rushed to embrace him.

"Where is your brother?"

"I don't know."