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Digressing

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James sat up when Death knocked on the door. He was there to collect James the way children collect laughter. James opened the door; he was not very bright with things like this.

When he was younger his sister smashed a vase over his head after his provokings grew into gaping creatures. After numerous X-rays and MRIs the doctors told them all, "We looked at his head, there's nothing there."

Much amusement among the brothers and sisters at this.

He could do Calculus problems in his head and tell you about wars that your great-great-great-grandparents fought in when they lived in the Old Country. But he was lacking in common sense.

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So Death was at the doorstep wearing his good cloak made of the most expensive souls when James pulled back the door like a trigger.

He has pulled a trigger once. A faceless man handed him the revolver and told him to be a man. He was not a man before that. His father never told him he was a man. Sons do not become men after the firstborn dies from the blood.

James pulled many triggers.

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James motioned Death inside out of the rain.

"Beer? Smoke?"

Death nodded and smiled like cancer. "I haven't had a smoke in a long time. Do you have any Cuban cigars?"

James shook his head. "Not since the embargo. I've got Camels."

Death frowned like atomic bombs. "Cold beer. I'll skip the cigarettes. They can kill you, don't you know that?"

James shrugged and pulled two bottles out of the fridge by their ears.

James's teachers were always fond of his ears. Well, the ability to pull him to the principal's office by them. Being the now oldest son he set some expectations for the following Jones boys to grace the hollow halls with their presence. Ah yes, they thanked God for giving James such snatchable ears.

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They sat at the kitchen table awkwardly. James took a sip and waited for Death to speak. He had spent his whole life waiting for people to speak so a few more minutes were nothing to him.

He waited for his father to speak. Or strike. Usually it was the latter. He always made his children wait to be hit. His hand would come down from their blind side like an edict. Or he stood with belt in hand for a minute. Stephen learned how to hit from his father. And he grew accustomed to the silence. After Luke died everyone seemed to forget their voices; he flew off

with the blue jays in his hospital room, leaving a featherless body hooked up to machines that all started alarming at once.

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Death fidgeted awkwardly. James was not surprised, fidgeting guests were a common occurrence. Not too much anymore, he hardly got visitors. There used to be women but they all just wanted the drugs. Yes, James used to get high with the fidgets.

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 Death finished his beer with a long swallow. James followed suit then offered another. Death agreed. His Africa trip had drained him last night. Bottles bottled up the recycle after an hour. James was used to binge drinking. Another think he learned from his father.

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 Death stood up, "Time to go."
 James nodded and kicked back the last of the liquor like a champion horse. They walked through the living room and Death held open the door. James stepped off the welcome mat and slipped his arms around thirteen year old Luke.
 James smiled like bird song.
 "You haven't changed a bit."
 Luke smiled like leukemia.
 "You have."
 James nodded like a flood.
 "Let's change that."
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