

After It All

by Drew Ellis

"I hate your kind," snarled Samuel, "all of you. You're a drain on our world and you'll never amount to anything in your life." He was sitting across the fire from a boy. The boy's name was Orion James. He was a meek boy who tried to keep his head down in school. But, of course Samuel Williams, the stud of the school, always found him. He would do things that not only hurt Orion physically but also mentally. Anytime Orion showed any sort of happiness or even confidence Samuel would remind him who he was and all he was ever going to amount to. Orion was what everybody called a "meagerly." A person who lived in the slums of the city. While most of the kids at school were rich and had paid to be there, Orion had earned the right to be there. Yet, he never felt accepted.

Now, Orion found himself sitting across from his tormentor for the rest of the night. At the time entering a black-market school bet to spend one night with a random person from the drawing didn't seem so bad. It was an easy way to make some quick cash. But, since finding out the person he had to spend the night with was Samuel he instantly regretted signing up.

"Just because you think you're better doesn't mean you are," muttered Orion, keeping his head down. He was never afraid to stand up to Samuel because his father had always told him to stand up to bullies.

"What did you say to me boy?" Samuel stood up from across the fire and glared into the top of Orion's hair. *How dare this pig speak to me without looking at me.* Samuel grabbed a branch and whipped Orion across the exposed part of his neck. It was one of those willowy branches that was still green in the middle. You could hear it

slice through the air before it raked across the back of Orion's neck. Instantly thin lines of bright red blood appeared. As the lines grew thicker they started to swell into drops and slide like tears down Orion's back. Just like the tears that had burst forth from the pain that now ran down Orion's face. He slowly looked up and quietly whimpered "I'm sorry." He then looked back down at his ripped shoes and silently cried.

Orion had felt worse pain but he knew that he was going to have to explain it when he got home. He hated when he disappointed his family. He was supposed to be the one to not fight in school. He was supposed to be a good kid. He was supposed to be his family's hope for a better life. All he cared about in life was his family and if that's all he ever had then he would be happy.

Samuel went to sit back down, "you should always look at a person when you are speaking to them Meagerly." He slowly turned his weapon of choice and looked at the power he held. *I could hurt this boy and who would care. This pig doesn't matter to anyone except other Meagerlies. I have to hold back though. I can't hurt him too badly or else people will ask questions.* "You know, I've always wondered what was too far." said Samuel, still looking at the bloodied branch. "Is killing someone the worst a man could do. What if letting someone live is even worse? Letting them live a meaningless life knowing that they will never amount to anything. Knowing that they will never have happiness so long as something is holding them down." Samuel spoke this all in a single tone. His eyes never moved off of the stick. He then tenderly leaned back against a rock that was near him to settle in for a long night.

Orion wasn't quite sure if Samuel was even talking to him or just thinking aloud. *This man is sadistic. No way is he thinking of killing me. That's crazy even for him.*

Maybe if I stay quiet he'll just forget I'm here and fall asleep. Then I can sneak out.

Orion just sat there and listened to Samuel look longingly into the stick and mutter to no one. When Orion really listened he could faintly hear the phrase, "like father like son."

What a genius. Just because my father had a chance to be successful and choose to stay with Mom doesn't mean he's a failure. I don't even care if I end up like him because I'll have a family to love. That's all anyone needs to live in this messed up world of ours. I can't imagine living without someone to love you. Everyone needs someone and I have my family. It had been a while since Orion had started his train of thought and now that he had finished he looked up and saw that Samuel was looking at him over the fire. The wispy flashes of flame broke their eye contact but Orion could still see that something had changed in Samuel's face.

Samuel had snapped. He knew there was going to be death tonight and he was going to be the one to do it. Before he did it though he wanted to let the meagerly know why. "I've always wanted to know what killing feels like." Samuel said in that same even tone as he got up. He calmly looked between the stick in his hand and Orion's terrified eyes. "Whether it's a release from pain or a burden of it." Slowly Samuel picked up a baseball sized rock from the ground.

He took a step towards Orion.

"Hey, what are you going to do with that?" stuttered Orion, who had scampered off the ground when Samuel picked up the rock. Orion was petrified with fear. He felt as if he was watching his body from the outside silently willing it to move but it just wouldn't.

Samuel took another step forward.

“I’m going to kill, kill, kill with rock,” he sang his song to the tune of “Row Row Row Your Boat.” Samuel’s mind was fractured beyond repair. His eyes were now solely looking at Orion. They were bloodshot and Orion could see the veins that had now covered his eyes, making them look a deep red color from a distance. He swayed from side to side as if he couldn’t keep his balance.

He took another step.

“Please, no.” Trembling with fear, Orion finally stepped back but was tripped. He fell back with a cry but never took his eyes off of Samuel. The two boys were so close that if they wanted they could touch hands. Orion could now see how wiry Samuel actually was. His skin was very pale and his veins could be seen up and down his arms and legs.

Samuel took his last step forward.

Samuel jumped onto Orion and straddled his torso. He pinned Orion’s arms under his knees and put all of his weight into Orion’s chest. Orion thrashed and writhed like a snake but there was nothing he could do. Still he persisted to struggle until Samuel spoke. Before he spoke Samuel let out a guttural laugh. With his hair plastered to his forehead he yelled to the sky. “This is it, don’t you see. The end is near and soon all will be right.”

Samuel raised the rock in the air with one hand.

“SAMUEL, PLEASE,” screamed Orion. “I’ll do anything to live.”

Looking down from the sky and into Orion’s eyes he whispered, “Don’t worry friend, I release you from your pain.”

Samuel brought the stone down with all the force he could muster into the side of his own head. Blood spurted from the wound as Samuel wound up for another hit. *Did he just hit himself?* thought Orion. *He's killing himself.* Orion could see the blood covered bone in the side of Samuel's head. He brought the stone even harder down into the same spot. This time Orion could see little white chunks fall out of Samuel's head as the stone was brought up again. Orion finally moved his eyes away from the horrid sight of the wound and onto Samuel's face. He didn't know which was worse: the bare brains falling out of Samuel's face or the sadistic smile that was still plastered onto Samuel's face. All his teeth were stained dark red and blood was dripping out between his teeth and onto Orion's face.

Orion could only lay there trapped under the weight of Samuel and watch as he beat himself to death. Samuel fell off of Orion and in the process lost the stone. But, he continued to move his hand and smash it into his head as if he still had it. His hand came away each time bloodier than the last. By the time Samuel had stopped moving Orion could see where the stone was. It was lodged so far into Samuel's head that half of it was submerged. Orion finally looked away and threw up. After there was nothing left in his stomach, he threw up bile.

Somehow, Samuel had lost his shirt in the brutal suicide, and in the light of the morning sun Orion could see something on his back. It looked like a red tattoo. Orion slowly crawled forward, avoiding the pool of blood that was slowly spreading outward, and tried to read the tattoo. It read "Mind your manners-Always look at someone when you're talking to them." Orion was perplexed, why would Samuel have that tattooed into his back. But as the light grew stronger he noticed that there were more tattoos. All over

Samuel's back were tattoos of manners that every kid learned when they were young. They went up, down, sideways, over, and under each other.

What Orion didn't know is that they were scars. From years of beatings. Anytime Samuel had misbehaved he was made to remove his shirt and his father took a knife and carved his rules into Samuel's back so he would never forget them.

Orion finally realized what the words were for. He realized that Samuel had never been loved. All he had ever known was pain. Now, Samuel was free from the pain that had tormented him his whole life. Samuel was right about everything he had said, there was a killing, and he was finally released from the pain that his father had always caused him. Samuel's mind had snapped when he realized that he was turning into his father. He had beaten Orion just like his father did to him. When his mind snapped he wanted to kill himself because he didn't want to end up like his father.

As the morning sky opened up and released all the beauty it could offer, Orion dropped his head and wept for the broken creature that had been Samuel Williams.