



Jim's Life

a novel by Jason Matthews

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Sample 1 - Prologue and first chapters

Prologue

Worn-out garments are shed by the body; worn-out bodies are shed by the dweller within the body. New bodies are donned by the dweller, like garments. - Bhagavad Gita 2:22

The human body is a temporary home for something far more eternal than the body itself. The soul is the essence and everlasting entity within the body. Upon physical death, the soul vacates the flesh and returns to universal source. Physical death is merely a dropping of the body as the soul is eternal. The return to source is often followed by rest and reflection on the lifetime. Eventually some souls embark again to enter a new body for further experiences. The revisit to

the physical is widely known as reincarnation. Not a popular belief among Western societies, reincarnation has been accepted for thousands of years among vast groups including Buddhists, Hindus, Orthodox Jews, Africans, Native Americans, Gnostic Christians, ancient Greeks and more. These people believe, or believed, the soul is the true essence of life while the body is a shelter in which to experience and grow.

In rare cases a soul may decide to leave the body without it physically dying, to vacate it and allow that body to become the home for another soul. It is known as *soul transference*, where one soul leaves a living body as a gift for another. This is a story of one such event.

Body of Jim's Life

The wise fisherman cast his net into the sea. When he drew it up, it was full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman saw a fine large fish. He easily chose that one and threw all the little fish back into the sea. Let those with good ears hear this lesson. - Gospel of Thomas

Queensland, Australia 2150AD

Iggy trudged one step at a time across the sandy terrain of the outback. The rover was a hundred meters back, scattered about the harsh landscape in busted pieces by the splintered gum tree. His master, James Ranck, lay like a crumpled heap in the robot's arms.

Iggy looked down. James didn't appear to be alive. No sign of breathing showed in his chest, and the broken limbs of James' legs and arms hung straight to the ground with no resistance, swinging loosely in tempo with Iggy's steps. The robotic unit was distressed by the look of it. His emotional programming would have created a mournful sound from his voice box if it were still working.

The crash had damaged Iggy as well, including his transmitters. Wires protruded from an open shoulder joint. Dirt covered his metallic frame. He had lost some power too, and without his solar cells recharging he wondered how long he might hold out. *What are the chances of getting home?* Iggy thought. Iggy had carried a few children before, but they were much smaller than James, a fifteen-year-old who felt surprisingly heavy. He walked for hours in the afternoon sun. With each step Iggy debated internally if he could make it back. He also wondered what the reception would be if James was dead.

Iggy resented the burden he carried. *How did I ever get assigned to this boy?* Iggy had been designed for professionals like architects, to be used in their creative processes. Instead, he got sold to a mechanic and then given to the man's son. He hated the nickname. *For a thousand times, my name is Ignatius! I've never asked for anything else, and still James can't even do that.*

Brison Ranck flipped the meat on the grill. He sprinkled salt from a shaker and pressed it into the sizzling slabs with the tips of his fingers. He adjusted the angle of the solar receiver to catch more light of the setting sun. Now that it was February and late summer, the Australian sunset came much earlier than the past few months.

Flow chopped vegetables as she watched her husband through the kitchen window. She reached over the stove to stir the rice pudding, James' favorite desert. She sipped her glass of red wine then checked the clock. Six-thirty. Ten minutes after James was supposed to set the table. The knife took out some of her anger onto the carrots.

Brison caught her eye and held up five broad fingers, indicating the time needed for the meat. Flow nodded and checked the clock again. James had his faults, but being late for supper wasn't one of them.

Brison came in with the steaming steaks as their juices bled into a puddle about to run over the plate. He walked with great care not to spill on the carpet. Flow watched him in his balancing act, appreciating her gentle giant moving so delicately.

"How we doin'?" Brison asked.

"Two minutes, love." Flow stirred the pudding with a wooden spoon while she put the veggies in a small oven.

"No response from Iggy?"

"Not yet."

Flow took another sip of wine and stared at the clock. She became lost in thought until the oven's timer sounded. She took the greens and carrots out and placed them on the table.

"Anything else?" Brison asked as he lit candles on a table set for three.

"No, nothing."

Brison served himself the largest of the steaks, Flow the smallest and the middle one for the absent boy. He poured his wine and added some to Flow's glass. He checked the time and looked out the window. Twilight was taking over with no sign of their son's return.

"What do you think, Bris?"

"He'll be in," he assured her and sat down. "Something must've happened to the transmitters. Iggy's with him. Not to worry."

Flow sat in compliance. Brison sawed into his steak and placed a large piece in his mouth. Flow sipped her wine then stabbed at a carrot. They ate in silence.

Minutes later the evening sky had become fairly dark. Flow's steak had a few bites in it while Brison had nearly finished his meal. They heard their dog begin to bark outside.

Brison jumped from his chair and went to the front door. Flow followed and stood by him on the threshold of the home, peering into the dim horizon.

"See anything?" Flow asked.

"No."

The barking persisted.

"Shep in his pen?"

"Yeah."

"What's that?" Flow pointed at an object that appeared to be moving toward them.

"Where?" Brison squinted but saw nothing.

"Right there," Flow insisted as she extended an arm out in front of his face.

Brison found it. Sure enough, something slowly approached from a hundred meters away. They walked cautiously out into the yard.

"Who's there?" Brison demanded. No answer. He squinted as he moved further out toward the entity. "Who is that?"

The dark figure came closer. It made no sound except the shuffle of dust under its feet.

"This is private property," Flow said. "Who's there?"

The curious figure silently closed the gap between them. Brison's fists tightened instinctively. Flow held him at his shoulder.

"Want me to get the laser?" she asked.

Brison shook his head. He didn't know what it was but he wasn't afraid. Shep barked incessantly as Brison moved ever closer toward the dark figure.

Eventually Brison realized he was looking at the family robot as it trudged awkwardly through the desert night. *It's Iggy*, he thought with relief.

"Iggy," he called out. "Where've you been?"

He strode to the robot with Flow just behind him. As they came closer they noticed Iggy was carrying something and looked like he had been through hell, with dust all over him and several wires hanging out. How odd everything seemed. It took a moment in the darkness for them to realize that the motionless lump in Iggy's arms was their son.

Flow screamed, "Oh God!"

The darkest hour is just before the dawn. - Anonymous proverb

Nurses and robotic units bustled in and out of the Global Alliance hospital room. They connected the boy to a multitude of devices and medicines. Brison and Flow stood in the office of Dr. Sandra Maynard, the head of St. Teresa. They leaned against each other and somberly watched a holographic image of their son lying deathly still in bed. With the activity about James, his face was all they could clearly see. It was bruised and badly cut, more like a swollen blob of purples and reds than a human face. From inside the comfortable office they absorbed the grave reality of the situation. The buzzing sounds of machines, the sterile smells of antiseptic and the bright lights on the other side of the door were a stark contrast from where Iggy had returned their son. Flow wiped her reddened eyes while she mumbled to herself all the reasons why this shouldn't have happened. Brison squeezed her free hand.

When Dr. Maynard came into the room, the parents turned eagerly. She removed the thin hospital gown and gloves then tossed them in a receptacle.

"Mr. and Mrs. Ranck, sit down, please."

"Just tell us how he is," Brison said.

Maynard lowered her eyes and motioned to the couch. "Please."

They hesitated before obeying. Flow braced herself for the worst while Maynard pulled a chair over to face them.

"He was gone when he got here, but we were able to get a pulse back."

"He's alive?" Flow asked.

"His body is alive. EEG shows preserved brain activity but no reactions to external stimuli."

"In English," Brison said.

"Your son is brain-dead."

Brison couldn't believe it. "No. No, it can't be."

"Unfortunately, there's not much we can do. I'm very, very sorry."

Flow expressed panic in fragments. "No... oh no... this... this can't..."

Brison shook his head, refusing to accept it. "There must be something that can be done."

"Brain-death is typically irreversible. Especially after several hours. He's on life support, but that's the way he'll remain."

"What are his chances?" Flow asked.

"For recovery? Mrs. Ranck, there have been extremely rare cases, but I need you to realize... it's not likely."

"He's a fighter," Brison said. "Do whatever you can."

"We already are. Just be aware of what he's up against." She squeezed the couple's hands and stood to leave. "You may stay here and watch him as long as you like."

Minutes later, Brison led Flow down the hospital corridor. She moved numbly. Her mind spun with the turn of events. Two hours before she was angry at her boy for being a bit late to dinner. Now she wondered if she would see him conscious again.

The sky-car drifted down into the Ranck property. It hovered a meter over the ground and settled in front of the walk. Brison looked over to Flow and caught her staring at something.

"Who's that?" Flow asked.

Brison turned and noticed the Federation car parked just off the driveway to his left. "Dunno."

The Rancks got out of their vehicle as the front doors of the Fed car opened. Two men in dark suits emerged. One of them held up an illuminated image displaying his credentials as a Federal detective.

"Mr. Ranck?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Randall Hutchins. This is Burnum Jerara," the elder man said. Hutchins was old with pale complexion. The younger Jerara looked Aboriginal with very dark skin.

"Something I can help you with?" Brison asked.

"Do you have any idea why we're here?" Jerara said. Standing out from his black skin were shiny platinum eyes and teeth, two indicators of cybernetic body parts still uncommon among the native Australians.

"No, officer."

"It's about your son," Hutchins said.

Brison was confused. "We know he's had an accident. Is that why you're here?"

Hutchins looked away momentarily. "We're aware of that. I am sorry, but no."

Flow poured coffee into four mugs as the men sat around the kitchen table. Though it was too late for coffee, Flow didn't expect to get much sleep anyway.

"Thank you," the officers said in unison.

Randall Hutchins, a cyborg of half man and machine, accepted the mug with his artificial arm. His internal sensors indicated the Rancks were upset but not nervous, that they likely knew nothing of the event.

"We're sorry to hear the news of your son," Hutchins said. "And yet, your family being Simplists, we have to conduct this interview. Do you know if James was with Abigail Walkins earlier today?"

"She goes by Missy," Flow said. "Her middle name. I don't know where James was but it's possible. Her folks live down the road."

"The Walkins are also Simplists," Jerara said. "Are your families close?"

"Not really," Brison said. "They're a bit more devout."

"A bit?" Flow reminded him.

"About a hundred times more."

"They're good people," Flow said. "Just extremely devout."

"And the kids?" Hutchins asked. "James and Missy?"

"Her parents don't like Missy in our home," Brison said.

"Because you're liberal with technologies?"

"Right. Sometimes the kids see each other outside."

"How long have they been mates?" Jerara asked.

"For years. 'Bout the same age."

Hutchins gently raised the difficult subject. "Does it surprise you then, that Fed rescue responded to a life alert after Missy was raped and strangled?"

"That couldn't have been our James," Brison insisted.

"So her memory has already been checked of that?" Flow asked.

"Yes."

"And what did they find?"

"Even if I had that information, I couldn't disclose it."

"Officer," Flow said, trying to remain composed, "there's something Fed should know about Missy."

"What is it?"

"She's not entirely sane. She lives in a fantasy world."

Brison summed it up. "She's nuts."

"How so?"

"She fabricates things... a twisted sense of reality," Flow said.

"Twisted enough to alter her perception?" Jerara asked.

"I believe so."

"Anything's possible," Hutchins said. "That's why we're here asking you questions. We've talked with the Walkins. Missy's having forensic tests done, and your son is being evaluated by Fed investigators."

"In the hospital?" Flow asked in disbelief.

"There's no other way," Jerara said.

Hutchins tried to calm her. "Please don't worry. Our investigators are familiar with the needs of patients. Happens all the time. In some ways, they're better suited for it than hospital staff."

Brison ran his hands through his ruddy brown hair and lamented, "Christ, this is just what my son needs now."

Flow needed him to be a rock. She said quietly, "If something happened, I can't believe it was rape."

"Was anyone else with James at the time of the accident?" Jerara asked.

"No," Brison stated. Flow shot him a look and pinched his leg under the table.

"How did you find him?"

"The rover's transmitter. I tracked it in the car."

Flow sipped her coffee and wondered, *What the hell is he doing?* Hutchins' emotional sensors detected deception for the first time.

If Allah brings you to it, Allah will bring you through it. - Qur'an

Missy lay awake in bed at a Federal hospital room about ten kilometers from St. Teresa Memorial. Her glazed eyes fixated on the ceiling as her mum watched with concern. As a Simplist, Detty Walkins was not permitted to physically be there. Instead, her holographic image sat on the bed next to Missy and mimicked the efforts of wiping away the last remnants of her daughter's tears.

Detty wished she could pull the covers a tad more over her daughter. Her hologram continued the act of stroking Missy's blond hair with the back of her fingers. Time stopped. This wasn't supposed to happen.

Detty's image turned away from her daughter and whispered angrily, "You had no right to sedate her without my permission."

"We had every right," a Federal computer voice answered.

"You've committed a terrible sin. There will be an inquiry."

"That is your right. Our agents can assist you—"

"We'll use our own agents, thank you."

"Your daughter's own life alert brought about Federal involvement. She will resume the rights of a Simplist, but only after she is fully released from Federal custody."

"There's more to it than that!"

"I'm okay, Mum," Missy said. "Try to relax." Missy felt horrible, not only for herself but for her parents.

"I'm so sorry," Detty whispered. "This never should have happened."

"Then why did it?"

"I don't know. I wish you could be at home with your dad and me tonight."

"But everything happens for a reason. I know it does."

"Not this. It's the devil's work."

Missy clenched her jaw and rolled her eyes.

"Visiting time is ending," the computer said.

From above the hospital ceiling a clap of thunder split the night sky. Its reverberations rumbled within the room. Moments later, heavy drops pelted the roof and created a steady patter throughout the upper floor.

Detty stared at Missy's eyes. She'd always found them mysterious, one blue and one brown. *My beautiful child. Why this?*

She managed, "G'night, Missy."

"G'night, Mum."

Detty's hologram faded from the hospital room.

At the Walkins' house, Missy's image disappeared from the living room. Detty turned from it, furious that the image maker had been installed in her all-natural home. She went down the hallway, her emotions about to spill over. She opened the bedroom door and found her husband

waiting expectantly.

At the hospital, Missy lay awake as the tears welled up. A crack of lightning burst in the skies and flooded the room with flashes through the window. Then the calm of the rain returned, and the room powered down to its dimmest sleeping level.

"Help me understand," Missy whispered in the darkness. "All I want... is to understand it."

Ten kilometers away, lying in his hospital bed, a peaceful aura of blue light enveloped Jim. He was oblivious to the people and equipment working to keep his new body alive. Sleep. Breathe. Forget. Die and be born again. By now he had lost all consciousness of his previous existence. No memory of the lab. Nothing of his past friends or The Grandmother. He lay in a restful coma like a blank slate with no past and no foreseeable future. Sleep. Breathe. Forget. Die and be born again.

(End of current sample)

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