



Jim's Life

A novel by Jason Matthews

Sample - Kidnapped

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We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home. - Australian Aboriginal proverb

From her balcony in Brazil, Mariposa Salvatore watched Brison haul Jim back inside. She wore a purple gown and sipped a cup of tea. The sun had yet to rise. She placed the cup on the railing and took a calming breath.

"Show the other side," she said.

The view moved out to encompass the Ranck property. A huge collection of tents and people was sprawled out just beyond the property on the other side of the orange fence. Jim's comments had stirred the masses. People moved about excitedly. Many were engaged in fierce debates. Mari watched it all with distaste.

"I can't stand this any longer." She left her cup on the railing and walked quickly back to the bedroom. "Angelo!"

A groggy male response came back through thin air. "Yes."

"It's time to get him."

"Is it?" he replied, not sounding awake. Through a yawn he added, "Are you sure this is the best way?"

"It was advised by the Council. We've been through this, Angelo."

"I won't mention it again."

"I'd like to leave as soon as possible."

"Yes, Mother."

Angelo rubbed his eyes, trying to wake fully. He stood in his bedroom with a silver unit watching him from the corner. Angelo wore all black clothing as he packed essentials into a small bag. He also placed several canisters in it and some small capsules in his shirt pocket.

Mariposa's voice came through the air. "Five minutes?"

"Fine."

"He'll probably have his unit with him everywhere he goes."

Angelo rolled his eyes. "I'm aware of that."

"The home is with his father and mother. Just one dog, a shepherd mix."

"Thank you," Angelo added to end the conversation.

Reminding him of the smallest detail was unnecessary. For the past few months Angelo had studied every facet of Jim's life. He knew that Brison weighed one hundred and twenty kilograms and was not only large but very strong and right-handed. He knew the floor plan of the Ranck home. He also knew his own mother was a perfectionist.

Minutes later Angelo was in the basement of the estate. He loaded the pressurized tunnel car with his small bag and one for his mother. Mariposa also wore black, a dress and hat. A couple of units watched as he helped Mariposa inside the vacuum-sealed transport. The shuttle would take them from their home in Brazil to the Eastern coast of Australia in about seventy minutes at speeds over ten thousand kilometers per hour.

Angelo sat opposite his mother.

"You look a little pale," she observed. "Have you eaten?"

"I'm fine."

"Nervous?"

"No."

She felt her own heart racing. "I am."

Angelo leaned forward and took his mother's hand. He flashed an assuring look with his brown eyes. "It's meant to be."

"You're right," she added. "Everything will be fine."

The transport whooshed away into the darkness of the underground tunnel.

The Brazilians stepped out of the transport car in Brisbane just before 8pm local time. They walked quickly through the busy terminal, stepping around slower pedestrians. Angelo let his mother lead. He occasionally glanced around to monitor anyone who might be paying attention.

Once they reached the upper level they continued out the doors of the huge transportation building into the clear, mild Australian night. Mariposa looked above and thought, *Not as warm as home but what a sky!* She tried to remember the last time she had seen so many stars.

When they reached the ground transportation area Mari waved her arm in the air. A taxi flew over and they boarded.

"Where are you heading?" the taxi's voice asked.

"Queensland Outback," Mari replied.

A map appeared, and the taxi's voice switched tone to match her Brazilian accent. "A large area. Which part would you like?"

Mari touched the map. "Here. South of Mitchell."

"Popular location," the taxi replied. "Are you heading to the Ranck property?"

"Yes," she said.

"I have the address. The fare is seventy-five GA dollars. I detect no chips. Are you Simplists?"

"Yes."

"Enter your card, please."

Angelo slipped a card into the slot.

"Thank you, Mr. Lee." The taxi sped off.

As the taxi approached the property, the Brazilians surveyed the scene. The arid area had never contained so many visitors. A thousand people camped just beyond the well-drawn property line of the Rancks. They were guarded by a fleet of police units.

"Where shall I pull over, Mr. Lee?"

"Around the back of all this," Angelo said. The taxi hovered over to the far edge of the spectacle.

"Your account has been billed."

"Please add another twenty as a tip."

"Thank you, sir. Ninety-five is the total. Your donation will go to preserving Australian wildlife."

"We'll need a ride back to Brisbane," Angelo said.

"I can pick you up. What time?"

"Can you meet us here in this spot, at 3am local time?"

"I'll be here, Mr. Lee."

The Salvatores emerged from the cab. They stood there, slightly illuminated by the scattered bonfires. They watched the spectacle of people, only two hours removed from the comforts of their Brazilian home.

Mari sensed the people in her immediate vicinity were those that believed Jim to be the Messiah. She tugged Angelo on the shirt and led him through the midst of the believers. They nodded and smiled at anyone who glanced their way. They walked through the crowd to a spot where they could settle. From a distance they made eye contact with Christian and his kids, who were reclining near a small fire. They nodded to each other, two sets of strangers suddenly sharing a glance. Judas and Magdelaine each rested in their father's arm, one on each side of him. The kids looked as if they were about to fall asleep. The Brazilians continued to an empty spot.

Mari looked around. "Here we are," she said almost in disbelief. "How do you feel?"

Angelo surveyed the crowd and quietly replied, "Historic."

"It's electric," she added. "I can barely wait to see him."

From his satchel, Angelo produced two rods. He pressed a button on one, and an unfolding process began that turned the rod into a small camping seat. He offered it to his mother. Then he activated the second one and sat next to her.

He looked up and said, "Nice sky." The crux, or Southern Cross displayed prominently against the moonless night.

They waited patiently as night deepened. The constellations edged slowly across the sky. Nearly everyone in the crowd had retired into tents and sleeping bags. A few remaining bonfires drew the attention of most of those still awake. Some people played guitars and bongos, some danced, others passed alcohol from person to person. Mari and Angelo sat comfortably under their dark cloaks. For all appearances, they looked asleep. The police units focused primarily on the activities around the bonfires.

Angelo checked the time. 1am. He planned on needing less than fifteen minutes, but the suspense of sitting was agonizing. He reminded himself of the mission at hand. *Perhaps the most important thing I'll ever do.* Mariposa was anxious too, though her son would never know it. She spent the time quietly meditating on their success. She visualized pure light within her son that built ever more.

At 2:45am nearly everyone was asleep. The bonfires crackled lightly. The light they emitted did little to expose those beyond their warmth. Dressed in his black cloak from hood to toe, Angelo blended into night.

A unit guard walked along the fence near the Salvatores. It walked beyond the Brazilians and took no special notice of them. Soon the guard was twenty meters away down the fence.

Angelo walked nimbly to the orange energy fence that towered three times his height. No one was near. Hydraulic springs mounted to his boots depressed. He jumped gracefully over the fence and landed on the other side as softly as possible, making barely a sound. The guard down the way didn't notice. Angelo scrambled toward the garage and shrank against its wall.

Shep slept in the corner of his pen closest to the fence. Angelo approached ever so quietly. He took a plastic capsule from his pocket and opened the contents into one hand. He brought his palm to the dog's nostrils and blew a puff of air into it. A small cloud scattered about Shep's nose. Angelo turned his head away as the dog breathed in the fine mist. *Sleep well.*

Angelo scampered to the side entry of the house. He removed a canister from his cloak and sprayed a fine liquid into its corners, disabling the alarm system. He then took a black suction cup that molded over the old-fashioned door handle. A wire within the black cup wormed its way through the handle and unlocked the door. The handle turned and the door opened.

Once in the kitchen, Angelo heard a faint noise from down the hall. Flow's light snoring was just enough to wake Brison to the point of rolling over in bed. Sleep was difficult with the craziness going on outside their home.

Angelo crept down the hall. Jim's room was the second door on the right. *Okay my friend, Iggy. Where are you?* Angelo removed a second canister, a freezing agent, from his cloak. His boots made no sound as Angelo carefully managed the wooden floor. He turned the door handle gently and pressed it open.

Jim slept. Iggy sat in a chair next to him in standby mode. Angelo crept toward Iggy, leading the way with the canister ready. As he approached, Iggy woke up and realized the intruder. Angelo sprayed the cold gas into Iggy's face.

"Hey," Iggy managed just before he froze in place.

Jim turned slightly from the noise. Angelo, not worried about the boy, returned to the open door and put his head out. Silence. He waited a moment longer.

Brison heard something. Having already been partly awake, he decided to get up for a glass of water and check the noise. He carefully got out of bed to avoid waking Flow.

Angelo heard the footsteps. By the pace of them, it didn't feel urgent. *Hide*, his instincts told him. He moved to the corner of the room and covered himself with his dark cloak. He shrank into the smallest form he could. He checked the time. 2:50am.

Brison looked in the room. When he saw the boy asleep, he entered completely. Iggy sat next to Jim in sleep mode. Brison walked over to the unit to tap him. Angelo's heart raced as he watched his plan unravel before his eyes. Brison would be dangerous in this situation. There were no laws keeping Brison from killing an intruder in his own home. Brison reached out to tap Iggy on the shoulder.

Just then Brison thought, *Let him rest. The boy's fine. Why wake them?*

With that Brison crept back out of the room and went down to the kitchen for a glass of water. Angelo breathed easier though Brison was still at large in the house.

Angelo returned to the boy. Standing over him, he blew the same puff of chemical into Jim's face that he had used on the dog, an agent that would induce sleep for several hours. Angelo removed the bed sheet and brought out a chip detector, knowing that Fed had at least one transmitter for surveillance. He slowly scanned Jim's body. The device only registered once, just under Jim's armpit.

Angelo turned Jim to one side, extended his arm and brought a syringe to his armpit. Watching a video display on the end on the device, Angelo inserted the needle and found the chip. The end of the needle opened to devour it. Angelo pulled the syringe back out and disassembled the device. He tossed the part containing the chip and some of Jim's blood back onto the bed.

With his glass of water in hand, Brison walked back toward his bedroom. He passed by Jim's door and paused. He thought, *Why didn't Iggy sense me?* He walked back to Jim's door. Angelo heard him and quickly hid in the corner.

Brison entered the room. He walked up to the unit and whispered, "Iggy." No response. He whispered louder, "Iggy, you hear me?" He snapped lightly in front of Iggy's face then tapped the unit firmly. "Iggy."

Angelo shrank further into the corner. As Brison checked about the room, he nearly stepped on Angelo's cloak. Then he noticed an oddly dark area in the corner. Thinking it a load of clothing, Brison kicked it lightly with his foot.

Angelo grabbed the foot and pulled the large man down. Brison landed hard. The glass of water released from his hands and rolled across the floor. Angelo leapt to his feet. Brison got back up and began swinging dangerous blows at an intruder he could barely see. Angelo ducked each one as Brison moved forward behind each mighty swing. Backed into the corner, Angelo leapt into Brison's chest and squeezed his legs around Brison's torso. The large man was utterly surprised but pounded Angelo on the back with all his might. Angelo blew a puff of mist into Brison's face and held his breath as he absorbed the last of Brison's blows. Finally Brison's strength gave out at once, and he collapsed into the corner where Angelo had been hiding.

Flow heard the commotion and called out, "Bris! What's going on?"

Angelo checked for another capsule, his last one. *Damn it! Why didn't I bring more of these?* In his

haste he opened it but spilled the majority, getting less than half of it into his palm.

The hall lights came on as Flow hurried down to Jim's room. As she entered, the bedroom lights came on. She saw Iggy slumped in his chair, Jim lying on his side with a bloody device next to him and Brison sprawled out on the floor.

"What in God's name?!"

Angelo had no choice. He didn't want to hurt anyone, especially Flow, but he had to make the most of his final capsule. He grabbed onto Flow's head and muscled her to the ground. With one arm he wrestled her firmly into a pinned position. She tried to yell, but Angelo muffled her mouth with his hand. She bit hard into it. Angelo placed the hand with the remaining dust right into her nostrils. Just as he thought she was going to chew through his palm, Flow went out.

"Damn it!" Angelo groaned. He ripped off the glove to administer some ointment to the throbbing palm, which dripped blood on the floor. "Merda!" He dropped to his knees and wiped up as much of the spilt blood as he could. Then he sprayed the floor with a concealing agent. He lightly sprayed around Flow's mouth as well. The detectives would be all over the room, he knew. Eventually he had to go. Flow would only be out for so long. He turned off the bedroom and hall lights.

Angelo picked up Jim, slung him over his shoulder and moved as quickly as possible.

At one minute before 3am, Angelo exited the Ranck house with a lump slung over his shoulder hidden under a black cloak. He moved swiftly passed the drugged dog, checked for any sign of a guard and continued straight for the energy fence. He leapt over it, landed without waking anyone and joined his mother, all the while carrying Jim.

Mariposa sensed his discomfort. "Are you okay?"

"I'll live. We've really got to move."

Mariposa stood, leaving the chairs on the ground. Seconds later the taxi approached. Its doors opened and the Brazilians entered. They placed Jim in the corner seat.

The taxi asked, "Is your friend okay, Mr. Lee?"

"He's fine," Angelo replied. "Just too much to drink."

"Very well. Your heartbeat seems dangerously high. Shall I take you to the hospital?"

"I'm okay. Just get us to Brisbane Central as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir."

The taxi sped off.

In the cab, Angelo and Mariposa worked quickly to pull two, ultra-fine gloves over Jim's hands, gloves that gave the readout of a different palm print.

The taxi asked, "Does your friend drink often?"

"He's fine," Mariposa said. "Just had too many at the party."

"We get a lot of that this time of night."

Mariposa pressed a solvent into each of Jim's eyelids. She and Angelo opened his lids so that they stuck in the solution. His retinas were a little out of center, but when they tilted his head back it looked as if he were gazing upwards. They placed contacts in his eyes. Finally, they spilled a whisky and beer mix over his collar and Angelo's.

Back in Jim's room, Flow began to return to her senses.

The taxi stopped at the transit entrance. Angelo exited carrying Jim piggy-back and Mariposa following. The station was mostly empty, with a few commuters and security personnel wandering down its wide corridors. The Brazilians walked at a brisk pace, although Angelo staggered about drunkenly as if he and Jim were horsing around. He swung Jim on his back and sang in an Aussie accent loudly enough to gather attention.

Here's to young Nicholas, he's true blue

He's a piss-pot through and through

He's a bastard, so they say

Tried to go to heaven, but he went the other way

Drink it down, down, down

He looked back at Mariposa and cried out, "Come on then, Mum. You've got the next line."

Several security personnel frowned at them. 3:15am was a common time for drunks to be returning home, and they didn't appreciate the noise these people often made. Mariposa sympathized with their looks as if she was embarrassed.

"Sorry," she said in an Aussie accent. "They don't normally get this drunk."

Once they reached the security checkpoint, the guards gave them serious looks. One of them reprimanded Angelo. "You're not in the pub anymore."

Mariposa scanned her palm print and gave her ID to the computer. Angelo sang in a quieter voice with Jim on his back while he managed his palm print. The guard scanned his retina with a small device.

"Ooops," Angelo slurred. "I forgot my ID!"

Mariposa said, "You both did. I knew you'd need me here." She then swiped both ID's, one for Angelo and one for Jim.

A security guard put the device to Jim's eye. He noticed Jim's gaze looking straight to the ceiling.

"Is he alright?"

"No he's not alright!" Angelo shouted. "He owes for at least three rounds! Is there a bar past security?"

"No, there is not! Looks like he's passed out already. We still need a palm print."

Angelo continued with the song, "*Here's to young Nicholas, he's true blue!*"

"Stop that singing, or I'll have you arrested for public intoxication."

"Please forgive them. They're tired, sir. They'll be tucked in bed in less than an hour."

"This is your last warning. Not another word!" Angelo shut his mouth and looked at him sadly, mocking hurt feelings. The guard, visibly annoyed, assisted Mariposa with the palm print, holding Jim's hand in place as the scanner read it.

The security light cleared green.

"Go ahead then. Get moving!"

"Fled!" Randall Hutchins yelled as if from a bad dream. He lay in bed with his wife, both trying to come out of sleep. He watched Flow on the image maker calling in the emergency. "Damn it!"

Hutchins dragged himself out of bed as his Federation dispatch sprang up. "Call Brisbane Central right away. Put a stop on all outgoing traffic. Same with international flights. Do it for the Eastern coast then the rest of the nation. No outgoing cars or flights!"

Dispatch replied, "Shutting down all outbound traffic."

"Do it now!"

Burnum Jerara's image came up as well. "I'm on it, Randall. Be at your place in a minute."

His wife pushed the covers to the side.

"Stay in bed, love."

"I'll get your coffee to speed things up."

A minute later Randall was in the car with Burnum moving quickly through the dark morning skies, flying toward the Ranck property.

"Think the parents arranged it?" Burnum asked.

"Maybe."

"If he did, the father's dumber than I thought."

Mariposa and Angelo placed Jim in the middle seat of the pressurized transport car and sat on both sides of him. As they were about to close the door for the pressure locks, an armed guard approached them.

"Wait!" he said. He walked quickly over and brought his weapon down to the car door. He used it to point at Mariposa's cloak. "All clothing must be inside the vehicle, madam."

Mariposa pulled her cloak in tighter. "Thank you, officer."

"Please be more careful."

"I will."

The door shut. The transport sped off in a flash, quickly accelerating in the darkness of the pressurized tunnel. It would soon reach speeds over ten thousand kilometers per hour on its way to South America.

Their car was the last to leave Brisbane that night. Very soon Federation, the court, the believers and the non-believers would become aware that Jim had been kidnapped.

Merde! Alouise thought as she exhaled a tiny puff of vapor through pursed lips. From her home in Paris, the wary images of the Rancks looked as if they had been through an ordeal. "Are you alright?"

Brison nodded then looked to Flow.

"No, I'm not alright," she said. "My son's been taken. Fed is inside my house. We're about to be hauled in for examinations."

"I can get you in and out of Fed as quickly as possible. Of course they need to investigate you. I will be there. It is as you told me what happened?"

"The God's honest truth," Brison stated.

"Then you have nothing to worry about."

"They think we arranged something," Flow said with concern.

"I will be there," Alouise reminded her. "Please don't worry."

Brison hesitated. He wanted to tell Alouise more, things he had hidden from the start.

(End of current sample)

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