



Jim's Life

a novel by Jason Matthews

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ISBN: 1452402390

EAN-13: 9781452402390

Sample 2 - Vicki and Missy on Past Life Recall

Have no friends not equal to yourself. - Confucius

Missy rode her bicycle on the foggy day, keeping to the side of the street. Unlike past years, few vehicles now made use of the lower roadways. Most commuters flew well above the ground in sky-cars or PFD's, stand-up personal flying devices. Rare vehicles actually touched the ground while a few hovered near her height. Some of the drivers honked when they saw her, amused by the devout Simplist on the old-fashioned bike. On the back of her bike a wrapped package was attached to the platform above the fender.

Missy rode to the St. Teresa parking lot. Once she got there, she removed the package and unwrapped it to reveal a bouquet of flowers that matched her green shorts and yellow top. She

sat down on a bench closer to the vehicles in the lot than to the front entrance. She waited.

Vicki left the hospital minutes after 2pm. The mist-filled parking lot steamed with late summer heat and humidity. Vicki walked quickly, her mind on her schedule. She had time to go home for a meal and some rest before returning for a late shift. As she walked past rows of vehicles, Vicki slowed her pace. She looked around with the sense she was being watched. She glanced back toward the hospital entrance. Nothing but mist. She looked to both sides. Nothing but cars and fog.

She continued to her vehicle which detected her at fifty meters. When she got within five, the door dematerialized. She was about to enter it when she noticed someone waiting beyond the car, a pretty girl with a bright face and intriguing eyes. Vicki thought, *Now she looks interesting. Oh my, that's her.*

Vicki sensed who she was. The hospital had strict rules for patients like James. Abigail Melissa Walkins, also known as Missy, was at the top of his 'not permitted to visit' list. The girl sat on the bench just past Vicki's car. There were no other cars near hers. *Did she know this was mine?*

Missy stared pleasantly at Vicki as the nurse approached.

"Hello," Vicki said. "What a nice bouquet you have."

Missy held them up. "These are for James."

"James Ranck?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that a coincidence? I'm his nurse."

Missy offered the flowers. Vicki took them as the right thing to do though she was heading home. She brought them to her nose. "They're lovely. What's your name?"

"Missy."

"Pretty name. These flowers didn't come from a shop, did they?"

Missy smiled at the compliments. "I grew them. Can you take them to him?"

"Visiting hours haven't ended."

Missy hesitated. "Well, unfortunately..."

"You're not on his visiting list?"

"My parents don't want me to see him."

"I understand."

Vicki didn't enjoy tip-toeing around the subject. Surprisingly, she sensed Missy actually wanted to visit him. Very few people had seen James.

Vicki looked more directly into the young girl's face. Her multi-colored eyes, tan cheeks and full lips showed nicely in the filtered light. Vicki felt herself drawn in and immediately jealous of her looks. *My God, she's amazing.*

Missy returned Vicki's stare then asked, "You know who I am?"

"I think so. Abigail, correct?"

The girl seemed disappointed. "Missy is fine. I've been wondering when we would finally meet."

Vicki found it an odd thing to say. "Are you here to see me?"

Missy nodded.

"Why?"

"I need to talk with you."

"About what?"

"James, of course."

"How so?"

"About how he's doing and what I can do to help."

Vicki paused. She knew Missy couldn't go near the boy. But for some reason, she liked her. "You know I can't talk about him with you," Vicki answered. "Can you understand that?"

"I do, Vicki. I just want you to know that I love him too. Even more than you do."

The nurse laughed at the suggestion. "What makes you think I love him?"

"Are you saying you don't?"

Vicki found herself unable to answer. The girl had cornered her, and either response would be difficult. Finally Vicki said, "I don't see any need to be talking about this."

"Aren't you curious about me?"

"Yes, Missy. That's true. I am."

"There's no court order keeping me from seeing you."

"I suppose," Vicki said. She stared at the open door of her car. "Want to come with me?"

"Love to."

Open passenger, Vicki thought. The door dematerialized and the two got in the vehicle. Vicki gazed at Missy and hesitated. She felt confused, tired, hungry. Yet Missy had a point. Vicki was terribly curious. *What had happened between James and this girl?*

"Do you mind coming over to my apartment?" Vicki asked.

"I'm a bit hungry."

"I have some things."

"Okay."

The vehicle started up, lifted off the ground and pulled away from the parking space. Missy's eyes lit up as the vehicle adjusted its altitude to match traffic. It climbed quickly through the foggy sky. Missy scanned about the display on the dashboard with great curiosity. Vicki noticed, remembering the girl was a devout Simplist.

"First time in a sky-car? Are you alright?"

"Oh, yes. A little nervous though."

Vicki figured explaining the actions would help. "What we're doing now is merging our altitude with—"

"Other traffic moving in the same direction," Missy finished the thought. "Altitude and bearings are all mapped out and coordinated with other drivers. That way cars can't run into each other. I know how they work. I've studied them."

"I see." Vicki returned to her original plan of relaxing in the car for the three minute ride.

Vicki led Missy into her apartment. The girl walked around the spacious front room. Kiki came to greet her.

"Hi kitty," Missy said. She bent down to pet the large tabby.

Vicki checked her food supply on a screen. "Cheesy noodles okay?"

"Sure."

"Two bowls," Vicki said.

"Coming right up," the house computer answered.

Missy explored the living room. She was drawn to a holographic album on the coffee table. She paged through electric, three-dimensional images of Vicki's past, scenes of Vicki with family and friends.

"Do you like being a Simplist?" Vicki asked.

"Yes and no."

"How so?"

"I like helping Mother Earth, but some of the things you have are a lot of fun."

"I like helping Mother Earth too," Vicki said. "Sometimes it's not so clear what's right and wrong in that regard."

"True," Missy said. "How do you like Global Alliance?"

"Feels like the least extreme choice. You get some of the benefits of Fed but they don't own you. Your thoughts are private when you want them to be."

The moment became awkward until the two bowls of cheesy noodles came out on a spinning console. Vicki grabbed them and joined Missy in the living room. They sat on the carpet.

"Lovely," Missy said.

She placed a large bite in her mouth and exhaled steam as she chewed, which evoked a laugh from Vicki. Kiki nuzzled in close to Missy's bowl and smelled it as if he were interested. Missy picked up a small piece of cheesy noodle with her fingers and blew the heat off it.

"Can I give him a bite?"

"You can try," Vicki answered.

Missy offered the food. The cat nosed it intensely and licked its lips but he wouldn't eat it.

Finally Vicki said, "He's artificial. He doesn't eat."

Missy's eyes grew large. "He is? Oh my, I'm not supposed to be playing with him."

"Kiki? That's silly. He's my pet."

"His name is Kiki?" The cat looked up and pushed its nose against Missy's then turned to offer its backside. "He's so real," she said, petting the purring creature. "I wonder why Mum's so against this?"

Vicki didn't want her to dwell on it. She thought, *Kiki, leave us*. The cat walked down the hallway. "How long have you known James?"

"Forever."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You've lived close to each other all your lives?"

"Mm-hmm."

"So you two are occasional friends or more like brother and sister?"

"We have been brother and sister. Mostly we've been married," Missy said casually. "Sometimes I'm the parent, sometimes the kid. Usually though, we're married."

"Married? What, like a game kids play?"

"No, really married. You know, man and wife. In other lifetimes."

Vicki held her fork in mid-air, unsure if she had heard the girl correctly. "You and James have experienced past lifetimes together?"

"Bunches of them."

"Was James aware of that?"

"No," Missy said, as if it were unfortunate. "He doesn't see things like I do."

"How do you see them?"

Missy waited to swallow. She looked directly into Vicki's eyes. "I know everything that's ever happened to me. I know who I've been, where I've been. I know others around me, who they were in past lifetimes."

"Past lifetimes?" Vicki asked. "How many have you had?"

"Never counted," Missy admitted, returning to the noodles. "Dozens and dozens."

"And James has always been with you?"

"Mm-hmm. Almost always."

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"Lots of times. We've always gotten along real well, best friends usually. That's why I'm here now."

"Well, that sounds nice." Vicki repressed a laugh.

"I know you think I'm crazy," Missy said, again casually.

She is observant. Would a crazy person have mentioned it? "It's just unusual to talk of such things."

"I thought people would appreciate hearing what I know. I thought they'd want to know more about themselves in past lives."

Vicki explored the idea. "Okay, who was I in my past life?"

"Last time? You were my friend, Amanda Young."

"Doesn't ring any bells."

"We lived north of Montreal. You lived on a farm and showed me how to care for the animals. We swam in the summer, skated in the winter. Your property had a pond—"

"Missy, wait. You're rambling."

Missy was hurt. She had begun reliving those moments until Vicki snapped her out of it. "But it's true."

"Just because you say it's true, how do I know that?"

"Look it up."

"You mean you'll give me all the facts on my life and I'll go look it up?"

"Unless you don't want to believe me."

Vicki was unsure how to respond. She took another bite of cheesy noodles and thought about it. She realized she had nothing to lose though she didn't like the idea of proving Missy to be a nut.

"This Amanda Young. How do I know you haven't memorized everything about her?"

"You'll know," Missy said. "Once you hear all the things you did, all the people and places that were important to you... it'll trigger something. Or never mind Amanda. We can go back further. Who do you want to hear about? Janet Planchard? Tomas Erickson? Hava Yassir?"

"All of those people were me?"

"And more."

Vicki sat there anxious, nervous, skeptical. Her fatigue was gone. Her mind raced with possibilities. Vicki had always believed in past lifetimes. She just never thought she'd have the chance to hear about them.

"Why are we always together?" Vicki asked.

"We make choices on the other side, choices that even I don't know. For some reason we like staying together and we like being with James. That's the part I haven't figured out."

"I'll admit, I'm curious. Where shall we start?"

Missy spent the next two hours telling Vicki about her past lifetimes. When she finished, Vicki asked the computer to make a check of everything Missy had said. In each case, from the mid-twentieth century and on, the girl was absolutely accurate with the details. These were real people who could be researched. For each case Vicki wondered, *Was that really me?* She had a strange sense that Missy was right.

Vicki still had questions, plenty of them, but they would have to wait. The time was approaching for her to return to the hospital, and she didn't want Missy to rush through any explanations. Plus it was time for the girl to be getting home.

Vicki drove back to the lot just before sunset and parked near Missy's bike. Fortunately, the weather would be clear for the ride home. Missy was about to exit the vehicle when Vicki grabbed her arm.

"Take this," Vicki said. She handed her a small, flat image maker. "It's tuned into his room."

Missy's lips widened into a smile. She grabbed it. "Thanks."

"For God's sake don't let your folks know. I can't believe I'm giving you this. I could lose my job."

Missy understood. "They won't see it. I promise."

"If they do?"

"I'll tell them I stole it."

Vicki relaxed, a bit surprised by her spontaneity with this new friend. A new friend who, according to Missy, had been her closest friend in at least a dozen lifetimes.

Missy carefully strapped the image maker to her bike fender and pedaled home.

That night, after Detty had checked on her and left the bedroom, Missy crept to the door and shut it. She pushed the contents on the nightstand aside and placed the image maker there. She

switched it on to the lowest level. A static image sprang up ten centimeters high of Jim lying in bed. Missy looked with pleasure at his three-dimensional image.

In case her mum surprised her with a late night visit, she propped a notebook on its side to block the view of the image maker from the door. She crawled back into bed and doubled-up the pillows to get a better look at her new sleeping companion. She watched him for half an hour before she fell asleep.

An identical image of Jim in his hospital bed was also displayed on the living room table at Roger Tolsom's apartment. A friend at the network had hacked into the hospital's system, thus gaining access to the frequency used by Vicki, Dr. Maynard and others.

(End of current sample)

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