

A Heavenly Encounter

a short story by

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"It's almost time Jim," Sarah said softly. She knew that the imminent operation was dangerous, and the outcome would be 'touch and go' as they say. She was putting on a brave face for him, trying to keep his spirits up. Jim knew this of course and was doing his best to make her think it was working. Inwardly, they were both breaking up, she perhaps more so than him. Jim knew that if it did go wrong, he wouldn't know anything about it -- he just wouldn't wake up. Sarah, on the other hand, would have to go on living without him, and Jim felt that pain much more than his own. He kept trying to imagine what life would be like without her, and reverse it. A pointless exercise to be sure, but somehow it helped. "We're ready for you now Mr. Davis," the nurse said cheerfully as she entered the room. Jim smiled kindly at her knowing she was just doing her job. He looked up at his beloved wife Sarah, "here we go Hun," he said with a smile, "pray for me." "I will Jim," Sarah said, fighting back the tears. "I will," she repeated as Jim was wheeled out of the room. Her little wave was the last thing he saw he do. His heart began to sink at the thought of what lay ahead, but an inner voice spoke words of comfort to him and a new confidence came over him. Jim settled back on the trolley as they wheeled him to the operating theatre.

Sarah stood staring at the open door as if waiting for him to be wheeled back in and it all be over. The porter's voice broke her out of the trance, "hello Mrs. Davis, would you like to come with me to the waiting room, you'll be more comfortable there." Sarah jumped a little at the sound of his voice, but soon recovered her composure. "Yes, thanks," she said and left the room following close behind him.

The waiting room was indeed better, furnished in soft pastel colours with comfortable sofas and a drinks table with coffee and tea making facilities. Sarah went straight to the table, it had been several hours since she had eaten anything or had a drink and she knew she was in for a long wait. With tea in hand she sat in one of the sumptuous arm chairs and tried to still her mind.

"Hello Mr. Davis." The prep nurse said. She glanced at the chart on the bottom of the trolley and began her preparations. A few minutes later she placed a needle in his arm and said softly, "think happy thoughts." Jim complied and thought of Sarah. A strange feeling came over him and the prep room faded into the distance.

There is no sense of time when you are sedated as heavily as Jim was, so he had no idea how long it was before he found himself looking down on the operating table from somewhere just above the operating light. There were five people gathered around the person being operated on. Jim had no sense that it was him, yet he knew it must be. It was a very strange feeling to be looking down on the frantic actions of the people below. He could hear some sounds, but couldn't make them out. They were voices, the

voices of the operating team, but to Jim, they were very muffled, as if afar off, and behind a blanket. Try as he might, he couldn't make out what they were saying, and so soon lost interest in them. Jim's interest began to wander and he began to look around the room. Up above the light it was mainly dark, so Jim tried to go lower but couldn't. "Well, if I can't go down, let's try up!" Jim found himself rising up through the ceiling of the operating room. His thoughts turned to Sarah, perhaps he could go and find her. It was no use, he could only go up, so up he went.

The tea was a great comfort, and Sarah had managed to relax a little. Her eyes scanned the room for magazines, "there are always magazines," she thought to herself. Strangely, she saw none. This really surprised her, she even managed a chuckle. "Glad to see you are smiling," a friendly voice came from near the door. Sarah turned to see the chaplain standing there smiling. Sarah couldn't help but smile back, he had such a nice demeanour. "Fancy a chat?" He asked. "Yes, why not," Sarah answered, glad of the company.

The vicar came and sat on the sofa nearest to Sarah. There was a short silence as he settled, then he began, "Is it a relative?" Sarah nodded and said, "yes, it's my husband Jim, he's in surgery now." The vicar listened intently to every word. Sarah went on, "he has cancer of the liver... it's... well, difficult." The vicar was a seasoned hospital visitor and knew just what she meant by difficult. His response was measured, "I know at these times it may seem impossible, but I believe that God can heal today, just as he did 2000 years ago." He waited for her response. "Have you seen a miracle father?" She asked. "Yes I have," he answered, "many, and please call me Mike." Sarah smiled. "Would you like to hear about it?" Mike asked. "Yes please, I'd like that very much." "Well, it was right here in this room with someone just like yourself, a young lady waiting for her husband to come out of the operating room. She had only been married a few months as I remember, and her husband had been in a bad accident at work, his arm being crushed in a metal press. Everyone thought he was going to lose his arm, even the surgeon." Sarah was listening intently. "Well, we prayed that God would save the arm... Right here on this sofa." He stopped. "What happened?" Sarah asked almost excitedly. "The arm was saved. The surgeon came and told the lady himself because he was so excited about it. He explained that in his opinion, it had been a miracle. The arm had been damaged beyond repair, yet when he opened it up he only found a fractured bone." Sarah's mouth had fallen open causing the vicar to smile. "It's true," he said, "it happened right here."

Jim was ascending above the hospital roof. He seemed to be going faster and faster. Soon, the hospital was far below him and fading from view. It was as if he were travelling backwards through a tunnel, watching the world below fading into the distance. He soon lost interest in below, and turned to face up, the way he was going. To his surprise, it was light up there compared with the darkness below; this was much more interesting. As he approached the light, he could see the outlines of things that were moving. It was difficult to see because of the brightness, but as he rose higher and higher, his eyes became more accustomed to the light and more was revealed.

Suddenly, he was through the last barrier, and every sense he had was bombarded with delight. He could hear the singing of a celestial choir with voices no human could

match. His eyes were captivated by all the wonderful colours, such as he had never seen before. The air was sweet and clean, and there was a crystal lake in front of a throne. The throne was surrounded by 24 other thrones with beings such as he had never seen before sitting on them. These beings had crowns of gold on their heads. Inside the circle of thrones were four other creatures who never stopped speaking. And when Jim looked past the creatures, he saw a central throne with a huge emerald glow around it. Jim averted his eyes because he knew. He had never been a religious man, not even attended Sunday school, but he knew. This was heaven, and that was God. Suddenly his eyes filled with tears as he realised it was all true. It dawned on him that he must be dead... "You only go to heaven after you're dead," he said out loud. His voice reverberated loudly across heaven and he wished he hadn't said it. The four creatures turned to look at him. The 24 beings turned to look at him. God looked straight at him. The choir stopped singing and all was deathly quiet except for his heart beating which he could plainly hear.

"Do you think God would heal my Jim if we prayed?" Sarah asked. "I'm sure of it." The vicar answered. "Then let's pray, I believe too," she said, closing her eyes. The vicar closed his eyes and raised his head towards heaven in prayer. Sarah began to cry as she heard him pour out his heart on behalf of her husband. Somehow, the vicar found words that seemed just right for Jim, and she wondered how he could know such things about her husband. Mike prayed on, and Sarah kept saying "please Lord," in her heart.

Suddenly, Jim heard a man's voice echoing up from far below. It was a voice he didn't recognise, but it was followed by another that he did. He could just make out the words, "O please Lord." It was Sarah's voice, and Jim knew it instantly. "SARAH," he yelled with all his might, but this time, his voice went nowhere and sounded feeble in his ears. Instead, the voices from below echoed across heaven, and God heard them. His mighty voice tore through heaven causing everything to shake, his finger pointing right at Jim. "Are you worthy to be saved? Have you done even one thing in your life worthy of my mercy? It was no use trying to answer, Jim knew he was guilty as charged. With tears streaming down his face, Jim whimpered, "please forgive me." His voice so weak that even he could hardly hear it. Suddenly, the choir began to sing again, even louder than before, and the 24 beings threw their crowns in the air and fell down on their faces before God. The four creatures began to shout loudly as they flew around God's throne.

"Wake up Mr. Davis, you've had an operation. A very groggy Jim opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the nurse smiling down at him. She was beautiful. Not the way she looked, but beautiful for who she was, a fellow human being, a creation of God.

"Mrs. Davis... Mrs. Davis, it's a miracle." It was the surgeon who was running into the waiting room. "The cancer's gone, we couldn't find a trace of it." Sarah's face lit up and she turned to the vicar to thank him. "Don't thank me," he said, "thank God, He did it." Without hesitation, Sarah threw her head up and yelled, "THANK YOU GOD." The somewhat out of breath surgeon shouted "AMEN," and grabbed Sarah's arm, dragging her from the waiting room towards Jim's room. When they arrived, Sarah rushed in. Jim was still groggy, but managed a smile when he saw her. "Boy have I got something to tell you," he said through the haze. "Me too," she replied... "Me too."