

# The Miracles of Jamie, Ray Bradbury

## The Miracles of Jamie

Jamie winters worked his first miracle in the morning. The second, third, and various other miracles came later in the day. But the first miracle was always the most important.

It was always the same: "Make Mother well. Put color in her cheeks. Don't let Mom be sick too much longer."

It was Mom's illness that had first made him think about himself and miracles. And because of her he kept on, learning how to be good at them so that he could keep her well and could make life jump through a hoop.

It was not the first day that he had worked miracles. He had done them in the past, but always hesitantly, since sometimes he did not say them right, or Ma and Pa interrupted, or the other kids in the seventh grade at school made noise. They spoiled things.

But in the past month he had felt his power flow over him like cool, certain water; he bathed in it, basked in it, had come from the shower of it beaded with glory water and with a halo of wonder about his dark-haired head.

Five days ago he'd taken down the family Bible, with real color pictures of Jesus as a boy in it, and had compared them with his own face in the bathroom mirror, gasping. He shook all over. There it was.

And wasn't Ma getting better every day now? Well—there!

Now, on Monday morning, following the first miracle at home, he worked a second one at school. He wanted to lead the Arizona State Day parade as head of his class battalion. And the principal, naturally, selected Jamie to lead. Jamie felt fine.

The girls looked up to him, bumping him with their soft, thin little elbows, especially one named Ingrid, whose golden hair rustled in Jamie's face as they all hurried out of the cloakroom.

Jamie Winters held his head so high, and when he drank from the chromium fountain he bent so carefully and twisted the shining handle so exactly, so precisely—so godlike and indomitable. Jamie knew it would be useless to tell his friends.

They'd laugh. After all, Jesus was pounded nail through palm and ankle to a Calvary Hill cross because he told on himself. This time, it would be wise to wait. At least until he was sixteen and grew a beard, thus establishing once and for all the incredible proof of his identity!

Sixteen was somewhat young for a beard, but Jamie felt that he could exert the effort to force one if the time came and necessity demanded.

The children poured from the schoolhouse into the hot spring light. In the distance were the mountains, the foothills spread green with cactus, and overhead was a vast Arizona sky of very fine blue.

The children donned paper hats and crepe-paper Sam Browne belts in blue and red. Flags burst open upon the wind; everybody yelled and formed into groups, glad to escape the schoolrooms for one day.

Jamie stood at the head of the line, very calm and quiet. Someone said something, and Jamie realized that it was young Huff who was talking. "I hope we win the parade prize," said Huff worriedly.

Jamie looked at him. "Oh, we'll win all right. I know we'll win. I'll guarantee it! Heck, yes!"

Huff was brightened by such steadfast faith. "You think so?"

"I know so! Leave it to me!"

"What do you mean, Jamie?"

"Nothing. Just watch and see, that's all. Just watch!"

“Now, children!” Mr. Palmborg, the principal, clapped hands; the sun shone on his glasses. Silence came quickly. “Now, children,” he said, nodding, “remember what we taught you yesterday about marching. Remember how you pivot to turn a corner, and remember those special routines we practiced, will you?”

“Sure!” everybody said at once.

The principal concluded his brief address and the parade began, Jamie heading it with his hundreds of following disciples.

The feet bent up and straightened down, and the street went under them. The yellow sun warmed Jamie and he, in turn, bade it shine the whole day to make things perfect.

When the parade edged onto Main Street, and the high-school band began pulsing its brass heart and rattling its wooden bones on the drums, Jamie wished they would play “Stars and Stripes Forever.”

Later, when they played “Columbia, Gem of the Ocean,” Jamie thought quickly, oh, yeah, that’s what he’d meant—“Columbia,” not “Stars and Stripes Forever”—and was satisfied that his wish had been obeyed.

The street was lined with people, as it was on the Arizona rodeo days in February. People sweated in intent layers, five deep for over a mile; the rhythm of feet came back in reflected cadence from two-story frame fronts.

There were occasional glimpses of mirrored armies marching in the tall windows of the J. C. Penney Store or of the Morble Company. Each cadence was like a whip thud on the dusty asphalt, sharp and true, and the band music shot blood through Jamie’s miraculous veins.

He concentrated, scowling fiercely. Let us win, he thought. Let everyone march perfectly: chins up, shoulders back, knees high, down, high again, sun upon denimed knees rising in a blue tide, sun upon tanned girl-knees like small, round faces upping and falling.

Perfect, perfect, perfect. Perfection surged confidently through Jamie, extending into an encompassing aura that held his own group intact. As he moved, so moved the nation. As his fingers snapped in a brisk pendulum at his sides, so did their fingers, their arms cutting an orbit. And as his shoes trod asphalt, so theirs followed in obedient imitation.

As they reached the reviewing stand, Jamie cued them; they coiled back upon their own lines like bright garlands twining to return again, marching in the original direction, without chaos.

Oh, so darn perfect! cried Jamie to himself.

It was hot. Holy sweat poured out of Jamie, and the world sagged from side to side. Presently the drums were exhausted and the children melted away. Lapping an ice-cream cone, Jamie was relieved that it was all over.

Mr. Palmborg came rushing up, all heated and sweating.

“Children, children, I have an announcement to make!” he cried.

Jamie looked at young Huff, who stood beside him, also with an ice-cream cone. The children shrilled, and Mr. Palmborg patted the noise into a ball which he made vanish like a magician.

“We’ve won the competition! Our school marched finest of all the schools!”

In the clamor and noise and jumping up and down and hitting one another on the arm muscles in celebration, Jamie nodded quietly over his ice-cream cone, looked at young Huff, and said, “See? I told you so. Now, will you believe in me!”

Jamie continued licking his cold cone with a great, golden peace in him.

Jamie did not immediately tell his friends why they had won the marching competition. He had observed a tendency in them to be suspicious and to ridicule anyone who told them that they were not as good as they thought they were, that their talent had been derived from an outside source.

No, it was enough for Jamie to savor his minor and major victories; he enjoyed his little secret, he enjoyed the things that happened. Such things as getting high marks in arithmetic or winning a basketball game were ample reward. There was always some by-product of his miracles to satisfy his as-yet-small hunger.

He paid attention to blond young Ingrid with the placid gray-blue eyes. She, in turn, favored him with her attentions, and he knew then that his ability was well rooted, established.

Aside from Ingrid, there were other good things. Friendships with several boys came about in wondrous fashion. One case, though, required some little thought and care.

The boy's name was Cunningham. He was big and fat and bald because some fever had necessitated shaving his skull. The kids called him Billiard; he thanked them by kicking them in the shins, knocking them down, and sitting on them while he performed quick dentistry with his knuckles.

It was upon this Billiard Cunningham that Jamie hoped to apply his greatest ecclesiastical power. Walking through the rough paths of the desert toward his home, Jamie often conjured up visions of himself picking up Billiard by his left foot and cracking him like a whip so as to shock him senseless.

Dad had once done that to a rattlesnake. Of course, Billiard was too heavy for this neat trick. Besides, it might hurt him, and Jamie didn't really want him killed or anything, just dusted off a little to show him where he belonged in the world.

But when he chinned up to Billiard, Jamie got cold feet and decided to wait a day or two longer for meditation. There was no use rushing things, so he let Billiard go free. Boy, Billiard didn't know how lucky he was at such times, Jamie clucked to himself.

One Tuesday, Jamie carried Ingrid's books home. She lived in a small cottage not far from the Santa Catalina foothills. Together they walked

in peaceful content, needing no words. They even held hands for a while.

Turning about a clump of prickly pears, they came face to face with Billiard Cunningham.

He stood with his big feet planted across the path, plump fists on his hips, staring at Ingrid with appreciative eyes. Everybody stood still, and Billiard said:

“I’ll carry your books, Ingrid. Here.”

He reached to take them from Jamie.

Jamie fell back a step. “Oh, no, you don’t,” he said.

“Oh, yes, I do,” retorted Billiard.

“Like heck you do,” said Jamie.

“Like heck I don’t,” exclaimed Billiard, and snatched again, knocking the books into the dust.

Ingrid yelled, then said, “Look here, you can both carry my books. Half and half. That’ll settle it.”

Billiard shook his head.

“All or nothing,” he leered.

Jamie looked back at him.

“Nothing, then!” he shouted.

He summoned up his powers like wrathful storm clouds; lightning crackled hot in each fist. What matter if Billiard loomed four inches taller and some several broader? The fury-wrath lived in Jamie; he would knock Billiard senseless with one clean bolt—maybe two.

There was no room for stuttering fear now; Jamie was cauterized clean of it by a great rage. He pulled away back and let Billiard have it on the chin.

“Jamie!” screamed Ingrid.

The only miracle after that was how Jamie got out of it with his life.

Dad poured Epsom salts into a dishpan of hot water, stirred it firmly, and said, "You oughta know better, darn your hide. Your mother sick an' you comin' home all banged up this way."

Dad made a leathery motion of one brown hand. His eyes were bedded in crinkles and lines, and his mustache was pepper-gray and sparse, as was his hair.

"I didn't know Ma was very sick anymore," said Jamie.

"Women don't talk much," said Dad, dryly. He soaked a towel in steaming Epsom salts and wrung it out. He held Jamie's beaten profile and swabbed it. Jamie whimpered. "Hold still," said Dad. "How you expect me to fix that cut if you don't hold still, darn it."

"What's going on out there?" Mother's voice asked from the bedroom, real tired and soft.

"Nothing," said Dad, wringing out the towel again. "Don't you fret. Jamie just fell and cut his lip, that's all."

"Oh, Jamie," said Mother.

"I'm okay, Ma," said Jamie. The warm towel helped to normalize things. He tried not to think of the fight. It made bad thinking. There were memories of flailing arms, himself pinned down, Billiard whooping with delight and beating downward while Ingrid, crying real tears, threw her books, screaming, at his back.

And then Jamie staggered home alone, sobbing bitterly.

"Oh, Dad," he said now. "It didn't work." He meant his physical miracle on Billiard. "It didn't work."

"What didn't work?" said Dad, applying liniment to bruises.

"Oh, nothing. Nothing." Jamie licked his swollen lip and began to calm down. After all, you can't have a perfect batting average. Even the Lord

made mistakes. And—Jamie grinned suddenly—yes, yes, he had meant to lose the fight! Yes, he had. Wouldn't Ingrid love him all the more for having fought and lost just for her?

Sure. That was the answer. It was just a reversed miracle, that was all!

"Jamie," Mother called him.

He went in to see her.

With one thing and another, including Epsom salts and a great resurgence of faith in himself because Ingrid loved him now more than ever, Jamie went through the rest of the week without much pain.

He walked Ingrid home, and Billiard didn't bother him again. Billiard played after-school baseball, which was a greater attraction than Ingrid—the sudden sport interest being induced indirectly by telepathy via Jamie, Jamie decided.

Thursday, Ma looked worse. She bleached out to a pallid trembling and a pale coughing. Dad looked scared. Jamie spent less time trying to make things come out wonderful in school and thought more and more of curing Ma.

Friday night, walking alone from Ingrid's house, Jamie watched telegraph poles swing by him very slowly. He thought, If I get to the next telegraph pole before that car behind me reaches me, Mama will be all well.

Jamie walked casually, not looking back, ears itching, legs wanting to run to make the wish come true.

The telegraph pole approached. So did the car behind.

Jamie whistled cautiously. The car was coming too fast!

Jamie jumped past the pole just in time; the car roared by.

There now. Mama would be all well again.

He walked along some more.



Forget about her. Forget about wishes and things, he told himself. But it was tempting, like a hot pie on a windowsill. He had to touch it. He couldn't leave it be, oh, no. He looked ahead on the road and behind on the road.

"I bet I can get down to Schabold's ranch gate before another car comes and do it walking easy," he declared to the sky. "And that will make Mama well all the quicker."

At this moment, in a traitorous, mechanical action, a car jumped over the low hill behind him and roared forward.

Jamie walked fast, then began to run.

I bet I can get down to Schabold's gate, I bet I can—

Feet up, feet down.

He stumbled.

He fell into the ditch, his books fluttering about like dry, white birds.

When he got up, sucking his lips, the gate was only twenty yards farther on.

The car motored by him in a large cloud of dust.

"I take it back, I take it back," cried Jamie. "I take it back, what I said, I didn't mean it."

With a sudden bleat of terror, he ran for home. It was all his fault, all his fault!

The doctor's car stood in front of the house.

Through the window, Mama looked sicker. The doctor closed up his little black bag and looked at Dad a long time with strange lights in his little black eyes.

Jamie ran out onto the desert to walk alone. He did not cry. He was paralyzed, and he walked like an iron child, hating himself, blundering into the dry riverbed, kicking at prickly pears and stumbling again and again.

Hours later, with the first stars, he came home to find Dad standing beside Mama's bed and Mama not saying much—just lying there like fallen snow, so quiet. Dad tightened his jaw, screwed up his eyes, caved in his chest, and put his head down.

Jamie took up a station at the end of the bed and stared at Mama, shouting instructions in his mind to her.

Get well, get well, Ma, get well, you'll be all right, sure you'll be fine, I command it, you'll be fine, you'll be swell, you just get up and dance around, we need you, Dad and I do, wouldn't be good without you, get well, Ma, get well, Ma. Get well!

The fierce energy lashed out from him silently, wrapping, cuddling her and beating into her sickness, tendering her heart. Jamie felt glorified in his warm power.

She would get well. She must! Why, it was silly to think any other way. Ma just wasn't the dying sort.

Dad moved suddenly. It was a stiff movement with a jerking of breath. He held Mama's wrists so hard he might have broken them. He lay against her breasts sounding the heart and Jamie screamed inside.

Ma, don't, Ma, don't, oh, Ma, please don't give up.

Dad got up, swaying.

She was dead.

Inside the walls of Jericho that was Jamie's mind, a thought went screaming about in one last drive of power: Yes, she's dead, all right, so she is dead, so what if she is dead? Bring her back to life again, yes, make her live again, Lazarus, come forth, Lazarus, Lazarus, come forth from the tomb, Lazarus, come forth.

He must have been babbling aloud, for Dad turned and glared at him in old, ancient horror and struck him bluntly across the mouth to shut him up.

Jamie sank against the bed, mouthing into the cold blankets, and the walls of Jericho crumbled and fell down about him.

Jamie returned to school a week later. He did not stride into the schoolyard with his old assurance; he did not bend imperiously at the fountain; nor did he pass his tests with anything more than a grade of seventy-five.

The children wondered what had happened to him. He was never quite the same.

They did not know that Jamie had given up his role. He could not tell them. They did not know what they had lost.

The End