

JAKE MUTTITT

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## *Spacetime*

**F**or the record,  
At ninety-nine point nine-nine-four percent the speed of light, special relativity causes time to dilate to the traveller to such an extent that a single year at this speed would equate to a little over ninety-one to an observer on Earth. Commander William A. Lewinsky and the crew of the Asteria XII mission embarked on just such a year-long journey.

What follows is a selection of correspondences from Jason James Flynn to his father, Commander William Lewinsky.

Mr Flynn's words have been transcribed, properly punctuated and spelling corrected for clarity. Any instances of profanity have been censored.

General Augustus Marks  
Project leader, Asteria Group

*2 May, 2111*

To Daddy,

Today I am five! I am so happy! Mummy said you bought me a space hopper and that I had to write to you to say thank you and the people at the space place would give it to you. So, thank you daddy! The space hopper is really good and I've been bouncing around the house all day but I think it upsets mummy because Blue kept barking and she started shouting.

Mummy told me again about how you are a spaceman and one day when I'm big, I want to go in space with you. Have you seen any

aliens yet? Do they look like us? Could you bring one home for me to talk to?

I asked mummy again if you were coming home soon but she just started crying. I thought I upset her but I don't know what I said that was bad. She said she didn't know.

Can you tell me when you are coming home?

Thank you,

From your son,

Jason Lewinsky

(Mummy says we should always write our name out properly on letters)

*6 September, 2111*

To Daddy

I started school today! I know you will be proud of me. I was really scared at first but I think I have made lots of friends. There was another boy called Tom who looked really sad so I sat with him and we talked. I'm so glad I have someone I can talk to. We are in the same classes as well and I can't wait to go back tomorrow.

Mummy said she was proud and I know you are as well. How is space?

Jason

*15 March, 2112*

To Daddy,

School wasn't too bad today but tonight I had my first parents' evening and I saw all the other children with their daddies and it made me upset because you are far away but mummy told me it made me special.

I hope it does.

When I came home I stared at the stars and looked for you and waved. Please come home soon.

Jason

*21 October, 2117*

Hey Dad,

So today, one of the boys in my maths class who sits behind me

started making fun of me because I didn't have a dad because I took a picture of you in to show and tell. He said I was a loner but I know you're up there looking out for me.

I just hope he doesn't do it again tomorrow. I hope space is looking after you.

Jason

*13 November, 2117*

Hey,

The boy in my maths class won't stop. Sometimes he makes me want to cry, but I just look up at the sky and remind myself that you're there.

And Mum seems a bit angry at the moment as well. I haven't asked her why, but she gets annoyed with me all the time lately. I asked if it was to do with you but she just yelled so I ran upstairs. I don't know why she's not happy, but I hope she cheers up soon.

Hope everything is good with your mission.

I asked Mum if you were coming home any time soon again. But she didn't really say anything and just cried sort of. I want her to be happy. I hope you both can be happy.

You are going to come home, aren't you?

Jason

*February, 2121*

William,

I thought it would be best if I wrote to you just to let you know that Jason's in hospital at the moment. He's fractured his collarbone, but the doctors say he will be fine, thank god, although I am starting to worry about him more and more. He got into a fist fight with this boy at school who's been asking him about you and making fun of you, saying you 'abandoned' him and such like.

To be honest, he seems to be getting more and more reckless. Jason's an extremely clever lad, but I worry, between his school work, having to look after me because I know I've not been in the best shape recently. Lashing out. Crying. Jason told me to go to the doctor and I've been diagnosed with clinical depression so am on medication at the moment. Great. Sometimes, I just have these

angry turns when I just snap and that wears off on him... I worry.

Writing to you, even if you can't reply, just seems the clearest way to get my thoughts out, you know? I know I've done wrong by not telling him how long you're gone but, for now, it seems to be the right thing.

I just hope it stays that way.

I love you.

Maria

*20 August, 2122*

Dad,

I've not done this for a while and to be honest it hasn't felt right. No matter that I used to feel close to you, like you were only just out of reach but now, I've got to be honest, you feel every one of those trillions of miles you are away.

Mum's got worse and I'm not sure if it's because of me or you or both of us. I was in juvenile last week, which was an interesting experience. You see, Mum lost her job down at the care home because she kept snapping at the residents and they got scared of her, some of them. I stole her medication because we're like skint—I mean, nothing. I need a part-time job, or, a full-time one. Hell, two actually because I don't think Mum's going back to work any time soon. She's started having a glass of wine a day. I try to tell her no, and she yells at me. When I come home from school, some days she'd had six or seven and was so drunk she could barely talk straight.

And today, I got my school grades. They were alright. A couple of As, few Bs and a couple of Cs. I enrolled for college, but I'm not sure I'll be able to go, I think Mum will break soon, and she has no one else to look after her.

I need you, man. I wish you were able to reply. Hope space is treating you well

Jase

*4 June, 2124*

William,

You've f\*\*\*\*d my life, man.

Mum's going out with this guy she met called Drew. I mean, I'm

not going to lie, I never liked him from the moment I saw him. I tried to tell Mum this guy was bad news, ease her off him before things got too serious. The government's given us access to your trust but Drew's just helping her burn through it on alcohol and shit and we still have no money.

One day, I came in, saw her with a black eye. Tried to talk to her about it but she just pushed me away. The house is complete shit as well. I don't have a clue how we're getting out of this one, but we'll do it how it was always done—me and Mum together while you go and f\*\*k with your buddies on the Asteria.

Yeah, one hundred years you're gone is it? Now I realise why that guy all those years ago at school said you abandoned me: because you did. You don't ever plan on seeing us again, do you? How can any human being make a decision like that? Get someone else to do it! Someone without someone else!

I got in a fist fight with one of Drew's... 'mates'... the other day. We both got arrested and, not that I'm sure I would have gone, because Mum needs looking after properly by someone other than you or Drew (and at least he's actually there in her life for her), but all four universities I got accepted to have rescinded their offers.

Thanks, man; way to mess up my life, again.

Don't hold your breath for another letter. Though for you I know it's just a few days, weeks, between years down here, because you chose to elope with some bloody moon light years away.

Jase

*12 December, 2124*

William,

Just to let you know, I got myself an early Christmas present at the deed poll office. I took Mum's name instead; seemed more relevant to me than having yours.

Jase Flynn

*22 September, 2130*

William,

My therapist said it would be a good idea for me to start talking to you again. Apparently, your absence, our 'estrangement', is the

root of my anxiety. Yeah, I got a therapist. That's how bad things got. Thanks for all that fatherly guidance you gave me by the way. My life couldn't be more messed up without it if I tried.

Oh, you want to know why I have a therapist? Drew hurt Mum again, for the umpteenth time and now her face is all symmetrical again because she has two black eyes rather than just the one. Yeah, he's still around. We live in this shitty little apartment. I'm two doors down from them since I couldn't afford much better anyway but I stayed close to keep an eye on her.

I remember when I was so excited to stare at the sky, *beset with awe*. Tonight, it's dark and cloudy and there are no stars. How telling. No doubt my therapist will make me write again so.

Jase Flynn

P.S. I kept the name

*24 August, 2133*

Mum died yesterday.

Drew tried to strangle her (that was nothing new) but she tried to wriggle out of it and he snapped her neck. At least I'm free of him, and so is Mum, and may she rest in peace.

I need you

(Why did you go?)

*6 September, 2133*

The trial's ongoing but it's looking like it will be a long sentence and I thought you deserved to know. Drew's pleaded guilty for manslaughter but we're trying to get him on a murder charge. I'm burning up your trust on legal fees, so thanks for that.

I'm not sure I can stand to look at him anymore. I hate him almost as much as I hate you, Dad, I have to admit. I had been out of therapy for a few months but I had another session the other day, just to help me get over this hurdle.

One last thing, I have an interview for an apprenticeship tomorrow. It's a scheme for former offenders, so hopefully I'm the least worst of a bad bunch and get in, but who knows. I really need this.

Hope space is treating you well; better than you treated us at least.

Jase

*12 March, 2134*

I'll admit, at times I've gone out of my way to make you feel bad, so sorry for that. Maybe one day I can forgive you. I hope I will.

I just needed to get this off my chest.

Jase

P.S. I got in on that apprenticeship. It's as an archiver at the library. I feel like things are getting better.

*21 September, 2134*

So, basically, I started going out with this girl at the library. We've been to a couple of places together now and got talking and I told her everything but she was really cool about it. For once, I am certain, things are well and truly on the up. I need this.

I've spent the last fifteen years trying to convince myself that you are the reason for everything that's gone wrong in my life but it's getting harder and harder. And now, more and more I need you here, and at the same time it feels easier without you.

When I try and sleep at night, I twist and turn and struggle and find myself climbing under my curtains to stare at the stars, at you, before I sleep, like it's a drug I need, either to forgive you or convince myself of all you've f\*\*ked up for me. I'm not sure yet but I couldn't ever understand the sacrifice you were making when you chose to leave and I will never understand why. What is it like to know my life is flashing by in a year of yours?

I've never met you, but because of these letters all my life I have felt close to you and I am thankful for that, truly.

I'm sorry, Dad.

Jase

*1 June, 2139*

Hey,

I hope everything's alright, and I do mean it this time. I just thought you deserved to know me and Jessica have agreed that I should stop writing to you. We've been talking about it a lot, and she thinks it for the best, for all three of us if I stop writing, and I spoke to my therapist the other day as well. She said now I've (generally) overcome my difficulties with you and reconciled myself with your

work I should draw a line under this phase of my life. Jessica wants to focus on us having a family and she's apparently convinced you're holding me back and I need to let go. To be honest, I can't tell if she's right, but they say women know best.

I don't know if I will write again, and god I hope if I do, I hope I have something good to say.

This is me, letting go.

Goodbye, and I hope space is treating you well.

Jase.

Over and out.

*22 March, 2142*

Hey Dad,

I know it's out of the blue but I just thought I'd drop a quick letter to let you know how things are going. It would be a regular occurrence (I don't think) but I have news! Good news, as well I hope, the best in fact. It's only just over a week, for you, since you got my last letter, so I hope the wait wasn't too bad, and everything's going good. God, this time dilation stuff really messes up your brain and god knows what it's been like for you, a billion times worse, I imagine.

Anyway, less of the weird, more of the good.

You're going to be a grandfather! Yep, we're certain now, but we don't know if it's a boy or a girl and Jessica is adamant we won't know until the birth. And, if I worked it out correctly, I'll be as old as you were when I was born so there's a nice symmetry. Hopefully I won't run away to space when the baby arrives (that's a joke)!

And, second piece of good news! Me and Jessica haven't touched your trust since we agreed I was to distance myself from you, and I haven't been to the trick cyclist in years either so, all in all, things are definitely good. I know Mum would be proud I've managed to turn things round. I know you'd both be proud. Anyway, we've decided to set up a charity using your trust! We're still in the planning stages and sorting out the logistics of it but we think things will turn out good. The William and Maria Lewinsky Foundation is the name we were thinking of (hope you like it), to support victims of domestic abuse, for Mum.

I don't know when/if I'll write next, but I hope it's soon.  
Still missing you. Hope space is treating you well.  
Jase

*2 May, 2196*

Dad,

I feel compelled to write this final letter as closure for myself and for you. As I understand it, your journey is at its end and I must confess, in a somewhat more philosophical sense, as is mine. I sit here now, scratching these words incessantly against the paper in the hope I may find some final peace, and for you too, but I sit here as a man on his ninetieth birthday. My fingers are thin and my knuckles gnarled while the rest of me is scarcely more than a living skeleton dressed in a suit of skin and yet, as I write out these words, I feel no less like a child than I did some eighty-five years ago on the occasion of my first letter.

It is poignant then, wouldn't you say, that I end our correspondence as it began: myself, a needy child on the night of his birthday, you, a proud father at the extremity of your journey.

My granddaughter, the youngest of three, visited today to drop off the kind regards of her siblings and my son. She is now the CEO of the WML Foundation—yes, our little gambit—mine and Jessica's, was successful. Know dad that our union was a long and happy one. Even now, she has never left me. I walk with her always.

There is too much to say and too little time. For a man I have never met, I feel I have come to know you so well, and for those last forty years, I kept you close, you and Mum.

Know I have no regrets. I hope space has treated you well.

All of my love,

Jason Lewinsky-Flynn

END OF CORRESPONDENCE

I smacked my lips in want of a late-night tea and lowered my pen. Howler sat, curled at my feet, and I had to nudge his tail for him to move. His matted body trotted after me as I left for the kitchen.

At that moment, there was a sort of shuffling from the front door

and Howler made to bark. Holding a finger to his nose to silence him, he instead merely snorted and dropped to the floor in obvious disappointment. I guided myself to the hallway, wondering what prompted something to drop through my letter box while I strained to find my door handle, with only the vague light of streetlamps arrowing through my windows to aid me.

I dragged the door open and whistled. At once, Howler sauntered to the door and sniffed at a small package on the floor of the lobby, digging his nose in and around whatever it was. I whistled a second time and the dog scooped them between his teeth and leapt to my waist.

Falling into the arms of my chair, I tugged on the cord of a lamp and fumbled for my glasses. It was unaddressed, a ragged package a few centimetres thick. As best an old man could, I tore at the paper and Howler mumbled as papers fell to the floor which he was swift to collect.

I sifted through the papers, all written by hand, some were rendered indecipherable by various smudges which had caused the ink to run.

In seconds, I realised what they were and my head fell back against the chair in a sort of wonder. The corner of my mouth curled in a smile and I slowly started to laugh to myself, in some manic, child-like glee. I put my hand on my mouth and it started to shake as my eyes turned red.

Too excited to stay seated, I giddily bounced to the window with the scarce energy I had, drew back the curtain and caught a gaze up at the night sky like I used to, full of stars and cloudless. My head panned down and my eyes were caught upon a figure who stood, as misty-eyed as I was, in the gloom of a street lamp, wearing the slightest of nervous smiles. His head stooped low into his shoulders in shame.

He made a movement to cross and I to the door but we both halted and considered ourselves for a moment and instead agreed to settle for a nod and a smile. I turned to make my tea and sit for my evening's literature and he walked to some other place, himself an alien, from some other time.

Having made my peace to a man I never knew, content in this life, we parted on to our own futures.