

***Dying Words* by Jenny A**

She wasn't expecting to see what she saw that night... I shut the book with a snap. I can't bear to read any further. Sadie glances over at me. "What is it now, Blaze?"

"Do none of these books have a happy ending? They're making me depressed!" Sadie chuckles to herself.

"They're mortal, Blaze! No mortal's story ever ends well."

"Couldn't Father write them differently..." Sadie gasps.

"You can't change the lives of mortals! You cannot write them a longer life. That would be... that would be..."

"The right thing to do," I finish for her. She glowers at me and turns back to her book.

Our father is a Life-Writer. He writes the lives of mortals in leather-bound books, determining the twists and turns of their lives and, in the end, condemning them to whatever hideous or harrowing death he chooses. Every mortal that ever lived is ensnared in the rows upon rows of books hoarded in our library. I love to read the lives of each. To sit, enclosed in the warm dreams of others, caressing the pages that once determined the course of their life; from the moment they were born, to the moment they closed their eyes, never to open them again.

At the moment I'm reading the life of Isabella Wood, a tragic tale of a girl that found her mother dead in the street after a night raid then later killed herself out of grief.

Father says the lives of mortals are wretched. He says that he could never do anything with a life so short. "You can't get anything substantial done in just 80 chapters," he says. "It's much more amusing for me if I just kill them off and start the next one."

However, Father can't keep track of every mortal. So I wrote my own. Benedict. I picked the name especially. It means blessed. I am determined to give him an eternal and contented life, even if it means lying to my father almost every day.

At that very moment, Father barges into the library.

"I've finished it! Lilly Hammond died in a freak car accident!"

"Lilly Hammond? No! She was my favourite!" Father stops abruptly and rounds on me menacingly.

"Blaze. What have I told you? You cannot have favourites."

I ignore him and thunder out of the library.

I go to my room and open Benedict's life book. *His granddaughter had her 11th birthday and he got her a golden Labrador puppy. She was so happy and gave him an enormous hug to thank him.*

I think for a second. What if I could give him control of his own life? I tap my pen against the corner of my desk. Suddenly, I get inspiration. I dip my pen in my ink pot and write, *One night, something happened. Blaze, the daughter of the Life-Writer, finished her book and, in doing so, gave every mortal the right to decide the course of their own life. It was a momentous day and would be remembered forever.*

As I penned the last full stop, the ground began to vibrate like the wings of an mammoth insect. Father burst through the door, closely followed by Sadie.

"Blaze? What have you done?" I stand up and stare defiantly at them.

"I've given the mortals control over their own lives. You have no power anymore.

They are free to make their own mistakes and to live and learn from them and other people. Your reign is over! It's their turn now."

I throw the window open and leap out. I can hear Father calling me from inside but I am long gone. I run like I have never run before, like the very hounds of hell are snapping at my heels. When I finally stop and turn around, the castle of the Life-Writer is no more than a pile of rubble and shattered glass. Pages from the life books fly on the breeze into the gathering dawn and as the first free sun rises over the horizon, the age of mortals begins...