



Famous Last Words

Jennifer Salvato Duktorski

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In *Famous Last Words* by Jennifer Salvato Doktorski, sixteen-year-old Samantha D'Angelo has death on the brain. Her summer internship at the local newspaper has her writing obituaries instead of soaking up the sun at the beach. Between Shelby, Sam's boy-crazy best friend; her boss Harry, a true-blue newspaper man; and AJ, her fellow "intern scum" (aka the cute drummer for a band called Love Gas), Sam has her hands full. But once she figures out what—or who—is the best part of her summer, will she mess it all up?

As Sam learns her way around both the news room and the real world, she starts to make some momentous realizations about politics, ethics, her family, romance, and most important—herself.

Famous Last Words Details

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Author : Jennifer Salvato Doktorski

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From Reader Review Famous Last Words for online ebook

Lisa Lunney-Boyd says

What a wonderful little book!

I was expecting it to be a light read, offering only a few hours of entertainment---what I got, was one of the best reads of the summer. I really and truly loved every single detail of this book. Doktorski is a master of the YA craft, and I cannot wait to see more from her.

Her characters were realistic, compelling and most important: interesting. The female protagonist was a character I actually found myself cheering for. She is eccentric, silly and relatable. She is the kind of girl you would want to be friends with. This is a hard thing to master in character development, to create a character so real the reader actually cares. Doktorski banged the nail on the head with her group of eccentric characters.

It was not the typical run of the mill "teenage love story," it had depth, moments of humour and overall a great experience for the reader.

This is the perfect book to turn to when you are having a bad day, or when you are simply looking for an escape from life for a few hours.

As you turn the pages, you find yourself immersed in the story, and smiling along with the characters.

Brilliant.

Celeste_pewter says

Two-second recap: Jennifer Doktorski's sophomore novel is a fun, smart summer read about pursuing your passions and learning how to be at ease with yourself.

Things that worked:

As usual, let's start with the bookish things!

*** The writing**

Famous Last Words is Jennifer Doktorski's sophomore novel, and it's extremely evident by the writing. Even though I absolutely loved *How My Summer Went Up in Flames*, the writing in *FLW* is stronger, more detailed and more well-rounded.

I was especially taken with Doktorski's voice for Sam. It's a strong, teenage voice, and her personality clearly

shines through in everything she thinks and says. She's smart, likable, and more or less a good role model for young girls. I loved how she gradually learned how to be comfortable in her own skins - from acknowledging her personal interests and goals, to learning the importance of being in a place where she feels positive and confident in her abilities.

* **The plotting**

The book moves at a perfect pace. It starts after Sam's already started her internship, which I think was a perfect decision on Doktorski's part. There's no need to explain the backstory, and we already see how much she loves what she's doing.

After establishing Sam's love for her job, Doktorski interweaves a series of personal, professional and academic obstacles which drives the action forward and keeps the reader reading. I especially loved the mayoral subplot - it added a hint of the intrigue that I think most people will expect from a journalism-centric story.

I also appreciated the realism faced by the newspaper staff over budget cuts and sending the paper out for printing - it's something that I think most readers will have read about and/or considered in real life, and it brought the perfect hint of realism to the book.

* **The world building**

Doktorski seems to like to set her books in Jersey, and she always brings the surroundings to life in a way that's rich and easy to imagine.

As for everything else...

* **The romance**

I've read a *ton* of YA books with romantic subplots over the last two years, and I don't think I've ever wanted two characters to get to get together, as much as I wanted Sam and AJ to get together.

Even though they don't actually spend a lot of time together during the course of the book, Doktorski has written AJ and Sam's interactions in a way that perfectly captures the feelings of uncertainty over a crush-turned-possible-relationship. The feeling of romantic *possibility* seemed to hang over all of their interactions and conversations.

However, what I liked the most about their relationship, was the fact that it was formed on very solid foundations. AJ and Sam spent a significant amount of time working together, and learning about each other's quirks, before making any sort of moves.

When things *did* start turning romantic, neither one of them lost their minds or emotions over it. They were giddy, but still kept their cool. In fact, there was actually a scene where Sam wonders if AJ might like her, but then also thinks that AJ's a big boy, and totally capable of making a move if he did. I *loved* her rationality in that moment.

Bottom line: I ship them. I ship them hard.

* **The adult factor**

If you've read any of my reviews before, you'll know that I always have an appreciation for YA books where adults take an active presence in a protagonist's life, verses just sort of hanging out on the peripheries.

Well, I'm happy to say that we have adults in abundance in *Famous Last Words*. From Sam's own family, to all of the reporters and editors in the newsroom, there is an incredible number of people for whom Sam is able to turn to for advice and inspiration during the course of the book.

I loved this for so many reasons. Not only does Doktorski show readers that adults *aren't* the adversarial figures that they're so often portrayed to be in YA books, she also shows readers that it's possible to be taken seriously by adults. And it's possible for teens to be recognized by adults for the work that they do, because hard work does pay off.

Without getting too corny about it, I loved how the relationship that Sam has with all of the adults in this book, really shows what it *means* to be a young adult, and what she's striving to become in the future.

* **The ending - both for Sam and the newspaper**

Though things don't end perfectly for Sam or the paper, I loved how realistic the endings were, and the promise/potential they show for the future.

Things that didn't work/Things to consider:

* **Uneven characterizations, or an overabundance of snark**

The one thing that slightly bothered me about *Famous Last Words*, was Sam's snarky reaction to certain things - e.g her attitude about hanging out with Shelby.

Sam would often think things like how she couldn't stand hanging out with Shelby, or how she would go out with Shelby just to keep the peace. While I could understand being annoyed with a friend, a lot of Sam's internal monologuing made me question *why* Sam put up with Shelby, if she clearly found Shelby annoying the majority of the time. Isn't it better to just part ways, rather than play the martyr?

I thought Sam's complaining about Shelby seemed out-of-place with the general positive, thoughtful tone of the book, and that's why I'm docking one star.

Final verdict:

Famous Last Words is a perfect read for the summer. It's fun and breezy, but also has significant moments of depth and beauty. This is a book that will encourage younger readers to get out of their comfort zone, and explore interests that may have seemed unreachable before.

I especially recommend this book for fans of *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* and *Suite Scarlett*.

Kathy Martin says

This story was sweet and cute and, oh so, satisfying. Sam D'Angelo is spending the summer before her senior year working for the local newspaper as an intern. Her main job is writing the obituaries. Her fellow interns are AJ and Tony. She loves being in the newspaper office even though it is separating her from her best friend Shelby who is spending their "last summer" partying and drinking.

Sam gets involved in writing feature obits which make her look into people's lives to write about what made them memorable. She also gets involved in investigating the mayor or a nearby town who seems to be hiring lots of people who never show up for work.

Sam also has to deal with romance. She and Shelby had a falling out when Shelby got a little drunk and told a fellow student who just happens to be the captain of the football team and student council president that Sam had a crush on him. And Sam did—when she was in junior high. But it was still an embarrassing thing for a friend to do. Then there is Tony at work. He is handsome and a real flirt who makes a play for Sam until Sam gets the assignment he wanted. Best of all, there is AJ who becomes her friend. It takes her quite a while to realize that AJ would like to be more than buddies.

I loved the family relationships in this story too. Sam has a great relationship with her lawyer parents. They are supportive and really care about her life. Sam also has a great relationship with her widowed grandmother who has lived with them since her husband died.

This was a story about growing up and accepting changes. Friendships changed. Relationships changed. And Sam changed as she started to learn what was important to her and what she wanted.

I really liked this story and can't wait to share it with my high students next Fall.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

This is my second experience with Jennifer Salvato Dottorski in as many months. In a lot of ways, her sophomore novel is much like her first, with similar strengths and weaknesses. Both novels exhibit a lot of promise, but left me vaguely irritated and unsettled at some of the themes and messages throughout. *Famous Last Words* is an improvement on *How My Summer Went Up in Flames*, with a slightly more likable heroine and the delightful focus on Sam's summer job.

The best part, and what makes *Famous Last Words* stand out from the bulk of YA offerings is that the main plot deals with Sam's job. At 16 going on 17, she's got a summer job as a paid intern at the *Herald Tribune*. She doesn't get to do much but write obits and fetch coffee, but the excitement of the newsroom delights her. In fact, she's much happier working late nights and crazy hours at the newspaper than dealing with other teens in high school.

Sam has quite the work ethic, though that is in part due to her desire to avoid thinking about other things, like her problems with her best friend, boys, and college. Getting caught up in the mystery of the case against the mayor, who seems to be doing something illicit, Sam assists the actual reporters and does some amateur detective work. Through her job at the newspaper, she discovers a passion she didn't realize she had - for writing and for life. Writing obits makes her realize how important it is to truly live. I love that the

newspaper work isn't something in the background here at all; it's in the forefront and Doktorski really delves into the process and the problems facing the newspaper industry today.

As with *How My Summer Went Up in Flames*, I'm also largely impressed with Doktorski's characterization and writing. Most of the characters feel very authentic and human, with the little quirks that really make them feel alive. My personal favorite is definitely Sam's sassy grandma and her touching stories about Sam's late grandfather.

However, Sam has a lot of the troublesome qualities that made Rosie such a frustrating heroine in *How My Summer Went Up in Flames*, though I do not think Sam's quite as hateful. Both Sam and Rosie are judgmental, jealous of any girl who talks to a boy they have any sort of interest in, and terrible friends. One of the main focuses of the book is the deteriorating friendship between Sam and Shelby. Sam has a lot of legitimate reasons to be mad at Shelby: the way Shelby wants Sam to be someone she's not, the way Shelby ignored Sam for a boyfriend, and the way that Shelby abandons Sam at parties. Instead, Sam gets mad about other things; Shelby's drinking and flirtatiousness, and the possible damage to her reputation (love that subtle slut-shaming).

Meanwhile, Sam turns into a puddle of goo at the feet of an obviously obnoxious guy just because he has a pretty face, much like Rosie did over and over again. For all her judgment of Shelby for flirting with guys, Sam tries (though she pretends to be in ignorance of what she's doing) to string two guys along during the summer. She's single and has every right to do it, but so is Shelby free to do what she wants. Since Sam doesn't respect Shelby, I don't respect Sam. The actual romance in *Famous Last Words* is cute, but I was so irritated by Sam I didn't feel like she deserved the nice guy she got, because she learned very little. She does determine to do some more work on her relationship with Shelby, but her sense of elitism over the drunken, popular, pretty people never dissipates in the slightest.

Running through both of Doktorski's books is an intense distaste for underage drinking, and perhaps any drinking at all. The "good" characters almost never drink in both. While I'm not saying underage drinking or perpetual drunkenness is admirable, arguing, even through fiction, for such abstinence education is silly; we all know how the prohibition turned out. Neither Rosie nor Sam has, to my knowledge, a reason to be so anti-drinking, like a family member who suffers from alcoholism or was killed by a drunk driver. It just seems very out of place and preachy.

Both Sam and Rosie seem like believable people, and they are well-characterized. At the same time, they're not likable, at least for me. Of course, unlikable characters can be pulled off admirably, but my issue here is that I do not think that either was meant to be perceived as unlikable by the reader. The other characters generally seem to find them charming, and any hate they get is because they're too cool or talented and the other person is jealous. The fact that the two are so similar also seems a weakness.

My second experience with Jennifer Salvato Doktorski leaves me still convinced that she can do great things as a writer, but that she's not there yet. The continual themes of hatred of other women, of drinking and of slut-shaming bog down otherwise incredibly fun books. If you want to try Doktorski, I would recommend *Famous Last Words* over *How My Summer Went Up in Flames*.

Sara Grochowski says

4.5 Stars.

Jennifer Salvato Doktorski's young adult novel *Famous Last Words* is one of those novels that makes you suddenly laugh aloud in a quiet room and leaves you with a warm, satisfied feeling upon finishing.

The novel follows 16-year old Sam, a summer intern at a local newspaper, the Herald Tribune. Among her other "intern scum" duties, Sam shares obituary duty with fellow intern AJ, a sarcastic college intern. The newspaper office is filled with quirky characters, from Harry, her armadillo-loving boss, to Tony, known as Coma Boy to the rest of the newspaper staff and summer crush to Sam. This summer is the beginning of something different for Sam... There's no lazing around the pool with her best friend Shelby, who just doesn't seem to understand why Sam works so much and has no interest in their usual summer activities. And Sam, usually reserved and shy, is finding her niche and her previously small social circle is expanding. This summer, she's breaking rules, keeping secrets, and learning, little by little, that a summer of writing obituaries might just teach her how to live.

I easily identified with the main character of *Famous Last Words*, Sam. She's a hard worker, rarely gets into trouble, is protective of her much wilder and social best friend, Shelby, and is generally shy and awkward in the situations Shelby thrives in. When Sam finds something that both challenges and suits her - writing for the Herald Tribune - she flourishes. I cringed when Sam embarrassed herself, got herself reprimanded, or something so obvious to the reader went right over her head (especially in the romance department!), but that also means I couldn't help but cheer for her when she was congratulated, loved, and finally, finally realized that everything she needed (romantically and otherwise) was right there for her to grab on to.

I highly recommend this sophomore offering from Jennifer Salvato Doktorski. I'm kicking myself for overlooking her first novel, *How My Summer Went Up in Flames*, which I will definitely be reading. Laugh-out-loud funny, briskly paced, and filled with memorable and quirky characters, *Famous Last Words* is fantastic pleasure read.

Mina says

"When we are gone, what words will we leave behind?"

Mary says

I previously fell in love with Jennifer Salvato Doktorski's first novel *How My Summer Went Up In Flames*. So when I saw that she had another book I knew I just had to read it! I've been trying to get my hands on it since the summer without luck of finding it at a bookstore, when all the sudden our book club at school had the book to review. To say I was ecstatic was an understatement! Unfortunately another girl broke the rules of grabbing the book before the book talk was over :(. So I had to wait quite a bit to get it. The wait of getting the book was finally over on Dec 18th, I dropped the excellent book I was reading, just to make sure I had the chance to read it (as you can tell my expectations were pretty high for Jennifer Salvato Doktorski's sophomore novel.)

The book is about Sam a girl who's life is well... boring. She doesn't necessarily want this job as an intern who writes obits for the newspaper but her parent's do. She goes on a mission of discovering whether she actually enjoys writing. She interns with both a boy named AJ and a boy named Tony. Tony is not the brightest light bulb in the box (in fact AJ calls him coma boy), yet very,very cute. AJ is a drummer in a band

who works on obits with Sam but has very little interest in doing so. Sam also continuously battles on friendship versus her job. Her friend Shelby consistently wants to go out partying and enjoy their last real summer. Sam wants to too but would rather keep her job. Sam also is on a mission to discover what's going on with the mayor and Syd, who she recruits AJ to help her with.

I must say I preferred *How My Summer Went Up In Flames* yet this was a hit too! The whole idea of interning at a newspaper was a creative idea that I enjoyed reading. I guess the only part I truly disliked was how Sam treated Shelby, I found it to be very rude. My favorite part was the jumping jack scene between AJ and Sam because I found it to be adorable. I'd recommend this book if you are looking for a quick, easy, happy-go-luck novel :)

Wendy Darling says

3.5 stars Cute! Not sure if the stars will stay tipped up, but I did enjoy this.

Review to come.

Jeff Raymond says

On the surface, this book comes across as a fun, quirky tale about a teenage girl who writes obituaries for the local paper. There are a lot of good books that embrace the quirks of their protagonists, but the actual book here is less interesting. Is it a friendship story? A family story? A mystery? A coming of age tale? It tries to be all of these, and jumps around so frequently as to ultimately succeed in being none.

It's not a complete failure, but it's a tough slog even for this adult reader. The lead character, Samantha, is likable even when those around her aren't. She's wise beyond her years, but not treated as such. Her boss at the newspaper is a complete and total throwback to the point of unrecognizability. The development of the characters is equally scattershot, which is unfortunate.

Overall, again, not terrible, but also not worth the time on a whole. Great idea, not so great execution.

Jana at ThatArtsyReaderGirl.com says

Famous Last Words is a cute, light, contemporary read that made me smile. I loved the idea of a newsroom setting, which reminded me of the Mary Tyler Moore show on TV, and I was very excited to read about a quirky teenager who writes obituaries. What a unique idea, huh? While I did enjoy it, there was nothing extremely special or memorable about it. Definitely read it if you're an aspiring journalist and want to see what the newsroom is all about.

Visit me at [ThatArtsyReaderGirl.com](http://www.thatartsyreadergirl.com) for my full review:

<http://www.thatartsyreadergirl.com/2013/10/famous-last-words-by-jennifer-salvato-doktorski-mini-book-review/>

Christianna Marks says

You can read this and many other reviews on my YA book blog [The White Unicorn!](#)

This is the 2nd book by Doktorski, her first novel (*How My Summer Went Up In Flames*) was a big hit with me and so I went into this one expecting greatness. It lived up to my expectations, even if it wasn't fully what I was thinking it would be. I have to tell you that I think Doktorski comes up with some of the most interesting and fun details and plot tools for her novels. Placing our lead, Sam, in a local news paper and forcing her to write about dead people every day was a genius idea. And there are large heaps of 80 references throughout the novel, as well as shout out to one of my favorite musicals "Rock of Ages". (Though in all honesty Jennifer could have been eluding to the 80s song of the same title?)

It was fun to watch a writer learn how to write a good story. And that's what we get while watching Sam. She got a job at the local paper because she liked writing, but as the story unfolds and she learns more tools of her trade, it's fun. Seriously, Sam makes writing about dead people seem like fun. I also really enjoyed how she would sit down and write obituaries for the living people around her when they pissed her off or when they did something worth noting. It made those moments stand out. All in all, I liked Sam. I think she was definitely in transition, which made some of her antics a little nerve grating, but as she grew and got comfortable in her own skin, she also grew on me as a reader. She starts out so young and angsty, but she's also really strong. She doesn't do anything that she doesn't want to do. And it's when she realizes that it's okay to be different, while being surrounded by a ton of people who are different, that you really see her grow up and grow into her already oddly mature persona. Plus, she really is clueless about boys. I guess I liked her so much, because I could see a lot of teenage me in her character.

The side characters sometimes take the spotlight away from Sam, but I like that her personality stands out in a subtle way. Her best friend Shelby is sure something. Where Sam is very introverted and clueless when it comes to the man characters, Shelby knows what's up. She feisty and spunky and not at all what you would guess Sam's bestie would be like. As the novel progresses it's sad to see them grow apart, but they are both growing up and figuring things out. I thought that Doktorski explored that aspect of redefining a long running friendship really well.

There are two boys in the novel, but I liked the way the triangle (if you could call it that) was handled. While one attraction was slow burning and developed over the course of the book, the other was instant crush material. I like how the whole thing was handled. No one was professing undying love or pulling ridiculous gestures, it was honest. I thought it was cool that they were both so different too. A.J. is nerdy and has a pony tail and plays drums in a band. While Tony (Coma Boy) is the rich, hot guy who is Sam's competition. The only thing I wish is that Doktorski would have gone into both guys background a bit more. They seemed interesting, but not as fleshed out as I would have liked. Some deep stuff was hinted at, but never really explored.

I also appreciate the fact that Doktorski doesn't make things easy on her main characters. Not only that, but the way that she does it. There is always something really funny lurking in the background, ready to pounce and ruin a romantic moment, or something completely serious. She also managed to weave in a whole Nancy Drew thread, that would have seemed weird, but somehow worked in *Famous Last Words*. It helped wrap things up nicely and added some extra tension to the plot, cause sometimes teenage angst just isn't enough.

If you like contemporaries with quirky characters, strange plots and laugh out loud moments, then Famous Last Words might just be the right book for you. I know it worked for me!

Jenny says

Famous Last Words is a completely satisfying comfort read, a beautifully simplistic story about finding something that ignites passion and drive, and embracing the things that passion teaches us about ourselves. There's very little drama, romance or otherwise; it's more a delightful romp in the day-to-day life of Sam as she stumbles through a summer internship, a crush, and an evolving friendship in completely adorable fashion, and though nothing momentous or epic takes place, our time with her feels valuable and well spent regardless...

Full review available at: <http://supernaturalsnark.blogspot.com...>

Samantha says

If you want to read the cheesiest YA book filled with predictable plot points, failed attempts at witticism, and lackluster characters that will nevertheless drive you to finish the whole story in a sitting, this is your book. From basically the first chapter(s), I knew Samantha would end up with AJ and Tony would be a jerk and she would get the job. My one failed predication was ---spoilers--- that the grandma would die. I think the author tried too hard to make the book seem smart and unique by making Samantha seem to be "nerdy" or unconventional, when in reality, she seemed so one-dimensional. Okay, she tried to solve some mystery about Goldberg, which seemed to be a bad plot tool to me. However, Samantha was from NJ too, so that was kinda cool. And I was still mildly entertained, mostly because I wanted to revel in how typical YA it was and how predictable it was. I recommend this to anyone that loves really, really cheesy stories where everything is all patched up and clean at the end. I was also disappointed because I thought the book would include famous last words from, well, famous people... Maybe because I just read Looking for Alaska. Also, I didn't like Sam. Okay, I'm done.

Gabby says

This book had me from the very first couple of sentences from the summary. I am currently taking a journalism class, which is pretty much writing in the school newspaper and yearbook, and just a story about a teenage student who writes just intrigued me.! Who knew this story would turn out to be so much more than that and so scandalous, but so sweet at the same time!

Sam, Samantha, is the main character in this story and might I add that she is an amazing writer. Sam has a summer internship at the local newspaper which sound awesome right? Except that she's writing the obituaries instead of a lead story. The thing about Sam is that she doesn't care what she's writing as long as she's writing. Her friend,Shelby, may tease her and say her jobs lame and that she's not living her life .. etc, but Sam doesn't care because she's doing what she loves and does best -- writing. This is what I love about Sam she doesn't really care what others think about her as long as she's doing something she enjoys, she could care less and I really connect to her because of that.

As the story progresses, Shelby just starts to annoy the living hell out of me. I hate saying it, but she really does. She calls Sam all the time wants her to do things out of her comfort zone, Sam feels bad, goes and Shelby then, always, leaves her alone to do nothing. She also whines and complains a lot to because Sam is always working instead of hanging out with her. I don't really see how her and Sam are best friends -- they are nothing a like with no common interest and they are always fighting. I understand how best friends are and how sometimes we have friends that bring out the best in us because we are to shy, but Shelby just didn't do that for me and I couldn't connect to her character at all.

Throughout this story there is a mystery element that I really enjoyed. Being an intern, Sam doesn't really get to experience much besides making phone calls to the people who's died families. So when she finally gets a good, mystery, case to work with, I jump out of my seat for joy and then hurry up and sit back down for the ride because there was a lot of twist and turns to this fun mystery. I felt like I was kind of watching or reading Nancy Drew and I liked that a lot.

Another thing I didn't see coming, though it is in the summary, is the romance part of this story. There is just so many things going on throughout this story -- Sam trying to find herself and who she is, her trying to solve the mystery, making new friends who are just like her & getting closer to her family, that I just didn't expect it.

Sam really struggles throughout this story with herself. Sam is normally the shy girl who just has always been Shelby's shadow. She is finally making friends that actually have common interest with her and the guy who becomes her love interest is the guy you never would have expected because they've always been friends. I did, however, see it coming because I guess I read to many contemporary stories, but it was slow and progressive! I don't hate insta- love, but I like a story better when it doesn't have ista-love because I like getting to see the characters fall in love with each other and you really get to see that in this story and that makes me love it even more.

With this being said, the ending was amazing and breathtaking. I didn't want it to stop! In fact, I wish it would have been longer because I really connected with Sam and the person she became and was.

If you like contemporary stories with a little Nancy Drew this is the story for you and I promise you Sam-I-Am will leave you laughing, inspired, and in love with her and her secret guy ;))

So don't miss out!

Tara Weiss says

In that place where Passaic County meets Bergen County . . . love me some full-on Jersey complete with bands in seedy bars and deli runs. Throw in some journalism and reporting and corruption, this book was pretty good.
