



THE
LAST TIME
I DIED

FANIE VILJOEN

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The Last Time I Died
by Fanie Viljoen

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BREAKOUTS

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ONE

DYING DAY

The sword struck like a bolt of lightning. It crashed into Sam Carver's blade. The shock sent him reeling. He staggered. The man in the black cloak smiled grimly. 'Had enough, young master Sam?' he asked. His monstrous face twisted.

'No!' cried Sam. The boy seemed older and wiser than others of his age: sixteen. There was a determination in his eyes. With his sword at the ready, Sam straightened up. 'You killed my father, Black Crow. I'll have your blood.'

The crowd watching from a safe distance laughed. Sam

shot a sideward glance at them. A bunch of ugly bastards. Dirty. And scared of Black Crow. Everybody in Old Town was scared of him. He had influence. People who didn't agree with him disappeared. Some say they were beheaded and left for the wolves in the forest. Others were tortured in secret dungeons below the rotten city streets.

I won't be one of them, decided Sam. *This time I'll have my revenge.*

Then a face caught his eye in the crowd. A man in his forties and a friend of his father's. Peter. He seemed to be praying. No, he was murmuring something: 'Stop. Please stop, Sam.'

The swoosh of Black Crow's sword brought Sam back to reality. The blade sliced through his shirt, his skin. A stream of blood came gushing out. The shiny red liquid seemed unreal. The pain was like a red-hot poker. But it sharpened Sam's senses.

He attacked. His dad's silver sword was like a hungry monster, intent on devouring its prey. The crash of metal on metal echoed in the town square.

Clang! Whoosh! Bang!

Sam's injured arm felt weak, but he pushed through the pain. The darkness in Black Crow's eyes spurred him on.

'Argh!' cried Black Crow, as he launched another

attack. The crowd made way as Sam retreated. His back pushed up against a wall.

‘No escaping Black Crow now,’ yelled somebody in the crowd.

Yeah, right, thought Sam.

Black Crow dashed forward, his sword menacingly above his head. With an almighty blow it came down on Sam.

‘You got him!’ somebody cried again.

No he hasn’t, thought Sam, swooping left. He avoided the lethal blade.

Black Crow’s eyes flashed red with fury. His next blow came in an instant. This time Sam was too slow. He felt the cold blade piercing his back. It pushed through his rib cage, his flesh. The sharp point emerged at the front. Streaks of blood covered the black blade.

‘Revenge?’ He heard Black Crow laugh. ‘Is this what you call revenge? Dying like a scared dog, more likely.’

Foul-tasting blood flooded Sam’s mouth. It pushed past his tongue, his teeth and spilled out onto the wet cobblestones. Black Crow extracted his sword.

Sam’s knees buckled, no longer able to carry his weary body. He fell forward, each breath more painful than the one before. Dying slowly.

Again.

TWO

FATHER

Sam felt something lightly tugging at his body. Then, as if escaping, it raised up, past the bone and skin and flesh. A soul, he guessed.

His soul.

It was light as a morning breeze after a storm. Drifting up ... up ... up ...

He felt free as the Old Town disappeared far below him. Dark clouds enveloped Sam for a second or two. But then a light pierced the clouds, the sudden brightness blinding him.

‘Sam,’ a voice called out to him. ‘Sam.’

It was as if he had awoken from a dream. He was laying on a bed of clean white linen. Everything around him was strange and surreal. It was bathed in a gentle white glow. Even the kind face next to the bed had a soft glow to it.

‘*Dad?*’

The man smiled. ‘My son.’

‘What ... what happened?’

‘You died, Sam.’

Sam frowned. Faint memories of swords, a man in a black cloak, a crowd of people and blood drifted through his mind. But it was like a dream.

‘Did I really die?’ He had to ask.

‘Yes, son. The sixth time.’ His father was cleaning his wounds now. His touch was soft and healing. Sam recoiled when he touched the wound on his chest. But a warm reassuring glow radiated from his father’s palms. ‘The next life, Sam, will be your last.’

‘The *next* life?’

‘You’re a special boy, Sam. Unlike most people, you’ve been given seven,’ explained his father. ‘You’ve used up six already.’

‘Does that mean that I have to go back?’

‘Yes, I’m afraid so.’

‘But what will I do?’

His father looked at him wisely. ‘You’ve taken it upon yourself to revenge my death. That is your final life’s mission.’

‘And will I succeed?’

‘That is up to you, Sam.’

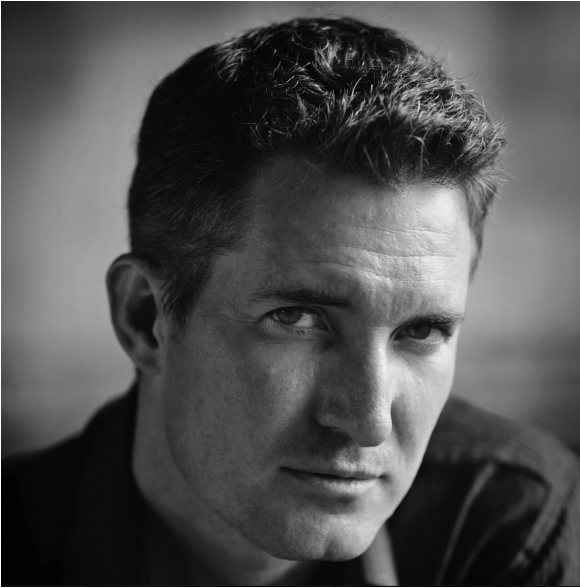
‘I don’t want to go back. Let me stay here with you,’ he pleaded.

His father smiled. Then he hugged him and kissed his forehead. ‘Don’t be scared, son. You’re already leaving. Your wounds have healed. You’ll be fine.’ His kind blue eyes touched something deep inside of Sam. It made him want to cry. *It is not possible*, he thought. *He can’t leave already.*

‘Dad, please!’

He felt his soul drift off again.

‘Don’t be scared, son.’ Those were the words that gave him strength. Those were the words echoing through him as he fell back to earth.



Fanie Viljoen is a well-known South African children's author, illustrator and artist. He writes in both Afrikaans and in English and some of his books have been published in both languages.

Fanie has written numerous short stories, radio plays and books for children and teenagers. Several of these books have won awards for children's and youth literature in South Africa.