



The Best Things in Death

Lenore Appelhans

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Neil -- A week before his car crash with Felicia, Neil spends a perfect day at the swimming hole. He and Felicia have never been happier. But can he work up the courage to tell her that he loves her?

Julian -- Months before the events of THE MEMORY OF AFTER, Julian and Mira spy on Felicia and Autumn during a trip to Iceland.

Libby -- Character first introduced in CHASING BEFORE. Libby and her boyfriend Jeremy head off on a road trip to Las Vegas and stumble upon truths potentially deadly to their relationship.

Brady -- Character first introduced in CHASING BEFORE. An unexpected encounter with the charming Oliver brings cancer-patient Brady out of his shell.

The Best Things in Death Details

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From Reader Review The Best Things in Death for online ebook

Tessa Lillie says

I'm usually not a sucker for novellas. I mean, it is not as if I did not like to read them or something, but I always find it so hard to get into the story, especially when you know there might be sudden ending to the story.

With The Best Things in Death, it was different. I am not lying when I say that Level 2 (I do believe the book has got a new title now, but I cannot remember it right now and could not find it on Goodreads) was one of the weirdest books I have ever read — and I do not mean weird in a bad way. In fact, I was really fascinated by the way the story was told: through flashbacks. Oh, and did I mention that I am a die-hard Neil-Felicia shipper? When I found out that both characters would be featured in the novella I think my heart leapt for joy!

I do not exactly remember if the same narrative style was also used in Level 2 but each character's point of view is written from the third person point of view, present tense. I usually find it really hard to get used to it because the feeling is simply awkward which is why I had some trouble getting into the story. I did not feel like an integral part to the story as a reader; it was rather like reading Neil's thoughts through jerky sentences (his flashback is featured first). The tense generally simply did not flow. However, once I got used to it I had so much reading each individual story!

Basically, Appelhans knows how to play with the readers' feelings. I do not know what I was thinking but I actually expected some quick and fun read without any depth or something. But man, I was so wrong! There was a seriousness in each of the individuals' stories, making the title The Best Things in Death almost nostalgic and wistful.

The first story involves Neil and Felicia, both spending a perfectly happy day at the swimming hole together. If I had to sum up his memory with one word, it would be sweetness. I really felt Neil's longing to overcome his own doubts and fears just to tell Felicia he loves her. There was a simplicity and yet heartbreak thing in the story I definitely did not see coming and it took me pretty off guard.

Same goes with Story No. 3: The story actually deals with a young guy cancer patient. My first instinct: WTF? That was not even mentioned in the synopsis! But I really grew to love Brady's story with Oliver, seeing them open up to each other, especially Brady: The moment where he realizes he does not hide all his secrets and not-so-perfect side was just so heartwrenching, and I really found myself falling for their story.

The second story also really gripped me right from the beginning. It is about a college girl called Libby who is on a road trip with Jeremy, her boyfriend, to get married in Vegas. I do not want to tell you much about this story, but you just clearly know right from the beginning that their relationship is foredoomed to failure since they simply do not share an equal relationship. Her life is dominated by him. However, I did not feel aggressive or something when the ultimate disaster happens (she is obviously blind with love), I just felt sorry for her since the author perfectly knows how to capture the character's twisted feelings.

Which leads me to Story No. 4. My heart breaks when I think of Julian. I have never seen this soft side Julian before (of course it is already indicated in Book 1, but the feeling is definitely not the same. It was so interesting to see Felicia from his POV!) and the moment I shut the book, melancholy swept over me because the story was just so beautifully written. The story is more than about unrequited love. Just like the

other three stories, it deals with failure, but also with moving on and appreciating all those small little things in everyday life.

Appelhans's writing really improved from page to page and I found myself drowning in the book. Also, I really loved the way the author described all those small little details in the book; the way she depicts the places and settings where the stories takes place (-> Iceland for the win!!). That being said, there were always those glimpses of hope and joy in the book and ultimately, I do believe the author manages to "convey" the meaning of the title.

The book enhanced my admiration for Appelhans's writing since it was so easy to connect with each single character in the book! And now, please excuse me while I'm busy to find my own copy of *Chasing Before*.

Melody says

While we wait for the sequel to *The Memory of After*, *Chasing Before* which releases this August, a novella has recently released that has just enough familiarity with the world Appelhans has created and is equally a very satisfying tease for what's to come.

I love that this novella begins with Felicia, begins with familiar ground and she's just thinking about life and cherishing what she may have taken for granted before. The best things in death are reliving those "five star" memories as she describes it and that leads us into the memories. I loved this introduction if you will before the memories begin because it refreshed my memory as it's been awhile since I've read *The Memory of After*. In fact, when I first read it, it was originally titled *Level 2*. Anyway, I love that these four memories are cherry picked from the tag, "The best things in life are free." Awesome tag! Just take a minute to think about what memories or memory you'd tag as "The best things in life are free." A few memories come to mind for me and really knock things back into perspective for me. But you don't want to hear about my memories! Let's get to the characters...

The novella consists of four memories, two from Neil and Julian, characters we know, and two from Libby and Brady, characters we will meet in *Chasing Before*. It was such a blast getting inside Neil and Julian's heads. I'd missed these characters and their memories did not disappoint!

We begin with Neil hanging out with friends at the swimming hole which is like their local water park that they have connections to get into for free. The best things in life? Sometimes, it's connections. Neil and his friends are celebrating the end of the school year, talking about their summer plans (which involves a family wedding and Felicia's 18th birthday), games, and just enjoying each other's company. What makes this memory of Neil's so special to me is that I saw not only this memory as a special one for Neil - it's a defining moment because it's the last moment in Felicia's life that he unknowingly has to tell her he loves her - but it's the simple fact that love is free and love is one of the best things in life and that makes this memory so special. All throughout the memory, Neil yearns to tell Felicia he loves her. But he chooses to wait for a special time. Like her birthday. But we all know death comes first.

Then there's Julian. His memory is actually told last in the novella. I like that full circle effect. He's following Felicia and Felicia doesn't know it. He's on a mission from higher up but has a mission of his own to control himself and not go directly towards Felicia, interacting with her. Watching him watch her, yearning... it was something! I love that in Neil's memory, it's the summer time and in Julian, we're in Iceland. There's so much to be said about the hot and cold aspects but I don't want to look too deep into it so I won't. I'll just say that I

really enjoyed this memory, really enjoyed them all.

Which brings us to the new characters, Libby and Brady and their memories. Whoa. What in the world are we in for in *Chasing Before*? So many intense emotions and memories, I can tell you that!

First, we follow Libby as she says goodbye to her best friend, Marie before heading on a road trip with Jeremy so the two can get married in Vegas. The road trip doesn't go very well. I don't know what's more captivating, road trips gone wrong or road trips gone right but this memory kept me on edge the entire time. Jeremy is too smart for his own good, set in his ways...stubborn, dare I say selfish in a twisted way because at the same time he is selfless, a killjoy, more practical than he is lovable... essentially he has a hardened heart and makes strides to open up when pushed but he clearly has a long way to go. Not taking into account Libby's feelings, not compromising, not being a team like a soon to be married couple should be (long before thinking of marriage), all of this leads to their downfall. This unhealthy relationship was doomed and it certainly goes down in the worst way on this road trip. And it makes for a very heart pounding conclusion. Danger! Danger! Libby speaks up but also gives Jeremy space to be... Jeremy. She gives him the benefit of the doubt and doesn't stand her ground when it matters most...she does at the very last moment but will it count? And will Jeremy see the error in his ways when he's able to see the bigger picture?

Then there's Brady. Recently discharged from the hospital. Chatting it up with Oliver whose sister calls the hospital a temporary home as Oliver recently did. Oliver opens up to Brady. Brady, afraid of certain outcomes, lies until he sees that he doesn't have to anymore. The best things in life? Honesty. Being genuine. Being you. I could go on but this memory was so delicate, so beautiful, I don't want to share too much. Go in blind for this one.

The Best Things in Death flows beautifully from memory to memory. I had a blast reading and am certainly satisfied while I wait for *Chasing Before*! Also, if you missed it, check out my review for *The Memory of After*, previously titled *Level 2* here.

Favorite Lines:

They treat their memories like a sea of endless precious stones, picking and choosing them at random to take out, polish, and admire.

You do the same thing every day, you run on autopilot. Time seems to go faster. But you do things you've never done before, you pay attention. Time slows down.

She would prefer classical music or Broadway show tunes.

He boxes Gracie up and shoves the memory into the deep, dark recesses of his mind - not in the junk drawer, because she's too dangerous for that - but in the wall safe, one that he hopes to lose the combination to.

Today might even be the perfect day to tell Felicia he loves her.

Review originally on my blog, Hollywood the Write Way.

Louisa says

Oh, what a great short story! And it introduced some characters that I'm going to meet more of now!!

Lenore Appelhans says

A collection of 4 new memories.

2 are from book 1 characters (Neil, Julian)

2 are from book 2 characters (Libby, Brady)

I loved writing this and love how it turned out!

Some additional info about the stories: <http://presentinglenore.blogspot.com/...>

Reading Teen says

This was a great way to refresh my memory about this series and I loved getting a glimpse into Neil & Julian's memories. Also excited to meet the new characters that will be in the next book (which I'll be reading ASAP!)

Sarah says

I should have known better than to go and download this novella. I didn't enjoy the first book in this series very much, but I was trying to give it a second chance before I totally wrote it off and a series I have given up on. If this novella is an indicator of what is left to come in the rest of the series, I am done.

The novella is broken into four parts, each a mini story that details a memory of an individual currently stuck in "Level Two", a purgatory-like place.

The first story is a memory of Neil's, a main character in the first book in the series. This story was cheesy, predictable, boring, and frustrating--I honestly cannot think of one single thing I liked about this. The chemistry between Neil and Felicia felt fake, the dialog between all characters was horrible. This was not at all for me.

The second and third short stories were really pretty good. The second story showcases the bad choices young girls make for what they believe is true love, and the sometimes fatal consequences. I really related to the main character, which might be why I enjoyed this so much, but I think more than that the plot was interesting, and the ending came out of nowhere which always makes me happy.

The third story involved a young gay boy with cancer. It was very touching and sweet, and reminded me of a David Levithan book. The two main characters have a good amount of depth given how short the story is, and the chemistry between them is awkward and nervous in a way that seemed real to me.

The fourth and final story brought back the girl I love to hate, Felicia. Luckily the story focused more on angels from Level Two and not her specifically. This made the story less terrible, but it was still just really

not for me. The angel's fascination with Felicia makes sense I suppose, but I just didn't see where there was justification to become completely infatuated with her so quickly.

Overall this novella did not feel like a very good investment for me. I paid \$2 for four mini flashback stories, two of which were good, one of which was okay, and one (the longest) drove me up the wall. I would say that if you loved Level Two and are looking for more, go buy this. It is not very expensive and it is a nice way for you to get more of the characters. If you have not read Level Two and want to try it out before you buy the first book, I would not say that this novella is a good indicator of whether you will like the book. It does have the same characters in it, but the entire feel of the novella focuses on the characters' past, and Level Two is more about their time in the present in purgatory.

Andi (Andi's ABCs) says

Interesting novella with some new and old. One memory from someone new thoroughly confused me. Let's see where it will go in Chasing Before.

Jen (The Starry-Eyed Revue) says

Thank you to the author for providing a copy for review. The opinions expressed below are my own.

This review can also be found at The Starry-Eyed Revue.

These memories were sharp and catapulted me right into the lives of the characters, which I'm sure was the author's intent. I can't wait to see how these new characters and memories fit into the next chapter of the story.

~~Full review TK...probably after I've read Chasing Before so I can tell you how relevant and/or necessary this novella is to completing the series. Though, if you were a fan of Level 2/The Memory of After, you'll enjoy this one.~~

I really liked the premise behind this collection of memories, the recurring theme of "the best things in life are free," and what we might see if we were able to pull up everyone's best memory. I also like that this novella serves to introduce us to some intriguing characters who will play a larger role in the sequel, as well as reacquainting us with the boys who stole Felicia's heart before her life was cut tragically short.

Neil Corbet, memory: Swimming Hole

This was the sweetest kind of memory. I can see why it would be a favorite of Neil's, except for that niggling need to divulge his feelings to Felicia. It's a memory of missed opportunities but also one that shows us that he hasn't *always* been the perfect church-going, youth-leading, choir-singing boy he is now. Or was, I guess I should say. I thought Neil was a little too perfect in *Level 2/The Memory of After*, but I'm terribly intrigued by what he's hiding, what he's locked away for safe-keeping, and who this Gracie person is to him.

Libby Hayes, memory: Road Trip

Libby's road trip memory was not at all what I was expecting from the title. Honestly, this memory was depressing, more depressing, and then just completely and utterly awful. Things seemed to be going okay for Libby and Jeremy, though I had some lingering doubts thanks to Marie. And the more I learned about Jeremy, the more I understood why Marie might be worried for her friend. But their plans aren't even the half of it. This particular memory will leave you reeling, shocked into speechlessness, and while some of the memories in this novella are at least somewhat hopeful...this one is decidedly NOT.

Brady Sandoval, memory: Latte Macchiato

A friendship based on a lie. A friendship that morphs into something more once the lie is out. Cancer. Coffee. Monster trucks and big-ass belt buckles. It's all quite entertaining if not but a little bittersweet. Brady himself is unbearably sweet and completely endearing and I want all the good things in life death for him.

Julian Jones, memory: Iceland

Julian, Julian, Julian. So many secrets. So much potential. I am still beyond intrigued by this boy angel angel-boy and what he means for Felicia's future. And now I, too, want to experience the joys of Iceland's thermal springs. Also, I just re-read *Level 2* somewhat recently, but I don't remember the significance of that keychain...maybe it's in *Chasing Before?* Good thing I'll be starting on it momentarily so I can figure it out! :D

I really enjoyed the insight these memories provided into the characters that are sure to prove important in the next installment of *The Memory Chronicles*. And I love what each memory reveals about them and how easy it was for me to connect to them all. I know that the fact that we have their memories to experience along with them means that they're all dead already, but I sure hope things work out for all of them. Even the enigmatic Julian...who, if I'm being honest, is still kinda my favorite.

GIF it to me straight:

Bittersweet. Hopeful. Sad. Much how I remember Casper. ?
