Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Sculduggery Pleasant: The Faceless Ones

Written by

Derek Landy

Published by

Harper Collins

All text is copyright of the author and / or the illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

SKULDUGGERY PLEASANT: The Faceless Ones

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

The dead man was in the living room, face down on the floor beside the coffee table. His name had been Cameron Light, but that was back when his heart had a beat and his lungs had breath. His blood had dried into the carpet in a large stain that spread outwards from where he lay. He'd been stabbed, once, in the small of the back. He was fully clothed, his hands were empty and there was no other sign of disturbance in the room.

Valkyrie moved through the room as she had been taught, scanning the floor and surfaces, but managing to avoid looking at the body. She felt no compulsion to see any more of the victim than she absolutely had to. Her dark eyes drifted to the window. The park across the street was empty, the slides glistening with the rain and the swings creaking in the chill, early morning breeze.

Footsteps in the room and she turned to watch Skulduggery Pleasant take a small bag of powder from his jacket. He was wearing a pinstriped suit that successfully filled out his skeletal frame, and his hat was low over his eye sockets. He

dipped a gloved finger into the bag and started to stir, breaking up the smaller lumps.

“Thoughts?” he said.

“He was taken by surprise,” answered Valkyrie. “The lack of any defensive marks means he didn’t have time to put up a fight. Just like the others.”

“So the killer was either completely silent...”

“Or his victims trusted him.” There was something odd about the room, something that didn’t quite fit. Valkyrie looked around. “Are you sure he lived here? There are no books on magic, no talismans, no charms on the walls, nothing.”

Skulduggery shrugged. “Some mages enjoy living on both sides. The magical community is secretive, but there *are* exceptions - those who work and socialise in the so-called ‘mortal’ world. Mr Light here obviously had a few friends who didn’t know he was a sorcerer.”

There were framed photographs on a shelf, of Light himself and other people. Friends. Loved ones. From the photos alone it seemed like he’d had a good life, a life filled with companionship. Now it was over of course. There *was* no Cameron Light any more, just anempty shell on the carpet.

Crime scenes, Valkyrie reflected, were rather depressing places.

She looked over at Skulduggery as he sprinkled the powder into the air. It was called rainbow dust because of the way any residual traces of magic in an area would change its colour. This time, however, the powder remained the same colour as it drifted all the way down to the floor.

“Not one trace,” he muttered.

Although the couch was obscuring her view of the body, Valkyrie could still see one foot. Cameron Light had been wearing black shoes and grey socks with worn elastic. He had a very white ankle. Valkyrie stepped to the side so the foot was out of view.

A bald man with broad shoulders and piercing blue eyes joined them in the room. “Detective Crux is nearby,” Mr Bliss said. “If you are caught at a crime scene...”He didn’t finish. He didn’t have to.

“We’re going,” Skulduggery said. He pulled on his coat and wrapped his scarf around the lower half of his skull. “We appreciate you calling us in on this by the way.”

“Detective Crux is unsuited to an investigation of this nature,” Bliss responded. “Which is why the Sanctuary needs you and Miss Cain to return to our employ.”

There was a slight hint of amusement in Skulduggery’s voice. “I think Thurid Guild might disagree with you there.”

“Nevertheless, I have asked the Grand Mage to meet with you this afternoon, and he has promised me he will.”

Valkyrie raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. Bliss was one of the most powerful men alive, but he also happened to be one of the scariest. He still creeped her out.

“Guild said he’d talk to us?” Skulduggery asked. “It’s not like him to change his mind about something like that.”

“Desperate times,” was all Bliss said.

Skulduggery nodded and Valkyrie followed him outside. Despite the grey skies, he slipped a pair of sunglasses into place above his scarf, hiding his eye sockets from passers-by. If there *were* any passers-by. The weather, it seemed, was keeping most sensible people indoors.

“Four victims,” Skulduggery said. “All Teleporters. Why?”

Valkyrie buttoned her coat, struggling a little. Her black clothes had saved her life more times than she wanted to count, but every move she made reminded her that she had grown since Ghastly Bespoke made them for her, and she wasn’t twelve any more. She’d had to throw away her boots because they’d gotten too small, and buy a

regular pair in an ordinary, average shop. She needed Ghastly to change from a statue back to a man and make her a new outfit. Valkyrie allowed herself a moment to feel guilty about being so selfishthen got back to business.

“Maybe Cameron Light, along with the other Teleporters, did something to the killer and this is his - or her - revenge.”

“That’s Theory One. Anything else?”

“Maybe the killer needed something from them.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Teleporter stuff.”

“So why kill them?”

“Maybe it’s one of those items where you have to kill the owner to use it, like the Sceptre of the Ancients.”

“And so we have Theory Two.”

“Or maybe the killer wanted something that one of them had, so he was just working his way through the Teleporters until he found whoever had it.”

“Now that’s a possibility, and so becomes Theory Two, Variation B.”

“I’m glad you’re not making this needlessly complicated or anything,” Valkyrie muttered.

A black van pulled up beside them. The driver got out, looked up and down the street to make sure no one was watching, and slid open the side

door. Two Cleavers stepped out and stood silently, dressed in grey, faces hidden behind visored helmets. They each held a very long scythe. The last occupant of the van emerged and stood between the Cleavers. Wearing slacks and a matching blazer, with a high forehead and a goatee beard pointing down in an effort to give himself a chin, Remus Crux observed Skulduggery and Valkyrie with a disdainful expression.

“Oh,” he said, “it’s you.”He had a curious voice, like a spoiled cat whining for its dinner.

Skulduggery nodded to the Cleavers on either side of him. “I see you’re going incognito today.”

Immediately, Crux bristled. “I am the Sanctuary’s lead detective, Mr Pleasant. I have enemies and, as such, I need bodyguards.”

“Do you really need them to stand in the middle of the street?” Valkyrie asked. “They look a little conspicuous.”

Crux sneered. “That’s an awfully big word for a thirteen-year-old.”

Valkyrie resisted the urge to hit him. “Actually, it’s not,” she replied. “It’s fairly standard. Also, I’m fourteen. Also, your beard’s stupid.”

“Isn’t this fun?” Skulduggery said brightly. “The three of us getting along so well.”

Crux glared at Valkyrie, then looked at Skulduggery. “What are you doing here?”

“We were passing, we heard there’d been another murder and we thought we could get a peek at the crime scene. We just arrived actually. Is there any chance...?”

“I’m sorry, Mr Pleasant,” Crux said stiffly. “Because of the international nature of these crimes and the attention they’re getting, the Grand Mage expects me to conduct myself with the utmost professionalism, and he has given me strict instructions as regards you and Miss Cain. He doesn’t want either of you anywhere *near* Sanctuary business.”

“But this isn’t Sanctuary business,” Valkyrie pointed out. “It’s just a murder. Cameron Light didn’t even *work* for the Sanctuary.”

“It is an official Sanctuary investigation, which makes it official Sanctuary business.”

Skulduggery’s tone was friendly. “So how’s the investigation going? You’re probably under a lot of pressure to get results, right?”

“It’s under control.”

“Oh, I’m sure it is. And I’m sure the international community is offering help and pooling resources
- this isn’t just an Irish problem after all. But if you need any *unofficial* help, we’ll be glad to—“

“*You* may break the rules,” Crux interrupted, “but *I* don’t. You no longer have any authority here. You gave that away when you accused the Grand Mage of treason, remember?”

“Vaguely...”

“You want my advice, Pleasant?”

“Not especially.”

“Find a nice hole in the ground somewhere and lie in it. You’re finished as a detective. You’re done.”

Wearing what he probably thought was a triumphant sneer, Crux and the two Cleavers entered the building.

“I don’t like him,” Valkyrie decided.