



Kiss of Death (Scarlett Wakefield Series)

By Lauren Henderson

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Scarlett thought Dan McAndrew's murder was long behind her, but when she and her classmates arrive in Edinburgh for a weeklong field trip, she's startled to be joined by her old St. Tabby's cohorts--and enemies--who are visiting the area on a field trip as well. Even more startling, Callum, Dan's surviving twin, is in the area--and his cold treatment leaves Scarlett wondering what's changed, especially when a series of attacks makes her believe that someone's out to get her for her past mistakes. Would Callum ever hurt her, though? And what's Scarlett to make of her conflicting feelings for Callum, now that Jase isn't around? Even more upsetting, why is her most trusted confidante, Taylor, acting distant and dismissive?

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

LAUREN HENDERSON is the author of several acclaimed "tart noir" mystery novels for adults, as well as the witty romance handbook Jane Austen's Guide to Dating, which has been optioned for film development by producer Kiwi Smith. She was born and raised in London, where she lives with her husband. Visit her online at laurenhenderson.net or myspace.com/mslaurenhenderson.

From the Hardcover edition.

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One

Blast from the Past

This is absolutely the worst thing that's ever happened to me.

In the dark, I look sideways at Taylor, who's staring straight ahead, her body stiff with horror. I can tell that she feels the same as I do. She and I have been through so much together; you'd think we'd be immune to anything life can throw at us. We were warned, I suppose. But nothing could have prepared us for this level of atrocity.

I pull out my silenced phone and glance down at it. Oh God. I turn the face to Taylor, nudging her, so that she can see it too. In the glow from the phone, her lips are stretched back over her teeth in a grimace, her eyes narrowed in almost physical pain. She looks like a gargoyle. The bluish light makes her seem even more eerie.

"I can't bear it!" she whispers.

"We have to," I say grimly, looking from side to side just to confirm what I already know: there's no escape.

The clock on my phone is telling me there are fifteen more minutes of this. Fifteen more minutes of sheer hell.

I close my eyes to block out the sight. But then I have to listen to the sounds, and they're even worse without the visuals. Hell, I imagine, is probably something along these lines. Trapped forever, forced to endure this torture, without ever being able to put an end to your misery.

And--an extra twist of the knife--having to watch your best friend go through it too.

A particularly excruciating screech snaps my eyes open in reflex. Nails scraping down a blackboard are soothing compared to this. And yet, if I had to describe the single worst part of the scene in front of me, I actually don't think it would be the noise they're making, atrocious and earsplitting though that is.

It would be the clothes.

I really don't know much about Norway. It has fjords, apparently, and lots of snow, and the people are tall and blond and very, very white: that was pretty much the limit of my Norway Fun Facts up till this moment. But now, looking at the four members of the Norwegian folk group Hurti Slartbarten (or something like that-I may have got some of those umlauts wrong) sawing grimly away at their violins onstage, I can add that apparently, Norwegians have no access to anything resembling modern fashion. They look as if some major blockade isolated them in the late 1980s. The two girls are wearing deeply unflattering red taffeta dresses with square-cut bodices, drop waists, and flouncy skirts, the kind of frocks a vengeful bride would choose for the bridesmaids she's being forced to include in her wedding. And the two boys, in shiny red shirts tucked into black pleated trousers, could be the waiters at the same event.

They are all tall and blond; I got that part right. And they're smiling and nodding at each other as they stand in line, dragging their bows over the strings, deliberately sawing out the kind of noises that would make any normal person stop in horror, stare at their violin, and apologize to the audience for having completely forgotten to tune it before going out on stage.

Taylor and I are right in the middle of the row of seats, thoroughly wedged in by other Wakefield Hall girls. And Miss Carter has strategically placed herself on one end of the row, with Aunt Gwen on the other. To get out, we'd have to clamber over everyone, plus face the wrath of the scariest teachers in the school. I actually duck down and look under my seat, wondering if it might be possible to crawl underneath it--there aren't that many rows behind us, maybe I could sneak out that way. . . .

But then, as I'm curled over, head between my knees, I realize something's happened onstage. There's rustling all around me; people are sitting up straighter. The screeching of the violins is even shriller and less tuneful, if that's possible. Narrowly avoiding cracking my head on the seat in front as I straighten up again, I catch sight of the stage just in time to join, gobsmacked, in the collective gasp as the girls fall back to one side, the boys to the other, and a fifth member of Hurti Slartbarten appears from the wings.

He's wearing the same silky red shirt as the other two boys, but its sleeves are belled out, then gathered back in at the wrists, making it, technically, more of a blouse. And if that weren't bad enough, it's accessorized with a black bow tie at the neck. His hair is gelled up and spiked out as if a pineapple had exploded on top of his head. And though he's tall and blond like the other group members, I can't honestly say that he's as white as they are, because his face is a mass of acne breakouts that match the flaming red of his shirt.

He struts out to the middle of the stage, wiggling his hips and waggling his violin, like he's some sort of pop star. He ducks and grins and winks at both of the girls, flirting with them; then he dances over to stand with the boys and leads them in a trio, chasing the girls around the stage, following them like he's enacting some bizarre courtship ritual, all of them still sawing away at their instruments. Every so often, he turns to wink at the audience, as if he's convinced we're all hypnotized by his sexiness and charm.

I'm paralyzed. My jaw's still dropped. I think every single member of the audience is in exactly the same situation: unable to believe that this boy with a faceful of spots, dressed like a really camp ice dancer, is acting like he's so gorgeous we're going to start screaming and rushing the stage any second now.

And then, farther down the row, I hear something. The unmistakable, high-pitched sound of mocking laughter.

There's a first for everything, I suppose. I'd never have thought that I'd be grateful to hear Plum laughing sarcastically. But right now, the sound is manna from heaven, because it releases the pressure on my rib cage, which has been almost suffocating me. Like a line of dominoes toppling, every single Wakefield Hall

girl starts laughing, giggling at first, and then increasingly loudly till we're howling with laughter. It's a wave, rippling through us, then spreading; I can see the shoulders of the people sitting in front of me rocking as they start laughing too.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joseph Woodruff:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in each way. By being competitive currently, people have do something to make these individuals survives, being in the middle of the crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that oftentimes many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. That's why, by reading a publication your ability to survive raise then having chance to stand than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading a book, we give you that Kiss of Death (Scarlett Wakefield Series) book as nice and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

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