



## *The Death Collector* by Justin Richards

**Subjects:** Monsters; Zombies; Mystery and detective stories

**Book List:** Gifted

**Props:** Dog, leash



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*(Have dog sitting on the table)* The ear splitting shriek *(Shriek)* from Nora Wilkes did not break the dog's stare. Woman and dog mirrored each other, transfixed, backing away from the nightmare that walked into the room. Albert Wilkes, oblivious to the reaction he had provoked, sat down at the small round table. Just as he had every evening for the last thirty years. He sat silently and still and waited for his tea.

But on this evening something was different—he was dead. His widow had buried him four days ago. The dog sniffed *(Have dog sniff)* and smelled a cloying, slightly sweet smell that spoke of decay and neglect. A graveyard stench. The man stood and gently swaying walked to the door with hands cold, pale, almost blue and took the leash from the hook by the door. The dog cringed away as the leash was fastened to his collar *(Fasten leash to dog's collar and drag him away)* and he was dragged reluctantly towards the door. Moments later the front door slammed shut breaking the spell at last. The widow, Nora, collapsed to the floor, sobbing and crying for her dead Albert. Wanting him to come back, no matter how he stank of the earth and reeked of decay.

But the old man and his dog shuffled awkwardly away along the pavement—head down, jacket caked in dirt, hands twisted into claws and every movement an effort. Considering this weakened and dead condition, he would be an easy target for a thief or a pickpocket.

In fact, the foggy streets of Victorian London were thick with thieves. Thieves such as Eddie Hopkins, who had just noticed a strange old man walking his

dog. The dog was straining at its lead as if trying to escape. It struggled and pulled and yelped, but the old man refused to quicken his pace. The dog would be no trouble and the old man would never notice Eddie's quick dip and away, would never realize his wallet was missing until Eddie was long gone. Eddie looked around and as he did he noticed that he was not the only person interested in the old man. Two men were also following him. Their eyes were fixed on the old man and Eddie could tell that they meant the man no good. Their hands were clenched into meaty fists. Their eyes were dark and narrowed and focused with violent intent. Nothing of what Eddie saw boded well for the fragile old man. And although it was none of Eddie's business, he was annoyed. *(Put dog and leash down)*

Eddie will try to help the old man. But his act of concern will plunge him into a world of the reanimated dead where Frankensteinish creatures are being assembled from bits of human tissues and organs, dinosaur bones, and complex machinery. It is a world beyond Eddie's worst nightmare. A place where death is collected, dissected and reused. Can he possibly do anything to save the old man? Certainly not alone, but luckily, he will have help. By mutual need, they will find each other: a young man, George, who works for the British Museum; Elizabeth, a budding actress; and another old man, though this one is very much alive, Sir William. They will be brought together for one common good—save the old man. Will they succeed? Find out for yourself, read *(Hold up book)* *The Death Collector* by Justin Richards.