



## Vicious (Villains)

By V. E. Schwab



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**A masterful tale of ambition, jealousy, desire, and superpowers.**

Victor and Eli started out as college roommates—brilliant, arrogant, lonely boys who recognized the same sharpness and ambition in each other. In their senior year, a shared research interest in adrenaline, near-death experiences, and seemingly supernatural events reveals an intriguing possibility: that under the right conditions, someone could develop extraordinary abilities. But when their thesis moves from the academic to the experimental, things go horribly wrong.

Ten years later, Victor breaks out of prison, determined to catch up to his old friend (now foe), aided by a young girl whose reserved nature obscures a stunning ability. Meanwhile, Eli is on a mission to eradicate every other super-powered person that he can find—aside from his sidekick, an enigmatic woman with an unbreakable will. Armed with terrible power on both sides, driven by the memory of betrayal and loss, the archenemies have set a course for revenge—but who will be left alive at the end?

In *Vicious*, V. E. Schwab brings to life a gritty comic-book-style world in vivid prose: a world where gaining superpowers doesn't automatically lead to heroism, and a time when allegiances are called into question.

"A dynamic and original twist on what it means to be a hero and a villain. A killer from page one...highly recommended!" —Jonathan Maberry, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Marvel Universe vs The Avengers* and *Patient Zero*

One of *Publishers Weekly's* Best Fantasy Books of 2013

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## Vicious (Villains) By V. E. Schwab Bibliography

- Rank: #48053 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-09-24
- Released on: 2013-09-24
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

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#### About the Author

V. E. Schwab is the author of *The Near Witch* and *The Archived*. The product of a British mother, a Beverly Hills father, and a Southern upbringing, Schwab has a penchant for tea and BBC shows, and a serious and well-documented case of wanderlust. *Vicious* is her first adult book.

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I

LAST NIGHT

MERIT CEMETERY

VICTOR readjusted the shovels on his shoulder and stepped gingerly over an old, half-sunken grave. His trench billowed faintly, brushing the tops of tombstones as he made his way through Merit Cemetery, humming as he went. The sound carried like wind through the dark. It made Sydney shiver in her too big coat and her rainbow leggings and her winter boots as she trudged along behind him. The two looked like ghosts as they wove through the graveyard, both blond and fair enough to pass for siblings, or perhaps father and daughter. They were neither, but the resemblance certainly came in handy since Victor couldn't very well tell people he'd picked up the girl on the side of a rain-soaked road a few days before. He'd just broken out of jail. She'd just been shot. A crossing of fates, or so it seemed. In fact, Sydney was the only reason Victor was beginning to believe in fate at all.

He stopped humming, rested his shoe lightly on a tombstone, and scanned the dark. Not with his eyes so much as with his skin, or rather with the thing that crept beneath it, tangled in his pulse. He might have stopped humming, but the sensation never did, keeping on with a faint electrical buzz that only he could hear and feel and read. A buzz that told him when someone was near.

Sydney watched him frown slightly.

"Are we alone?" she asked.

Victor blinked, and the frown was gone, replaced by the even calm he always wore. His shoe slid from the gravestone. "Just us and the dead."

They made their way into the heart of the cemetery, the shovels tapping softly on Victor's shoulder as they went. Sydney kicked a loose rock that had broken off from one of the older graves. She could see that there were letters, parts of words, etched into one side. She wanted to know what they said, but the rock had already tumbled into the weeds, and Victor was still moving briskly between the graves. She ran to catch up, nearly tripping several times over the frozen ground before she reached him. He'd come to a stop, and was staring down at a grave. It was fresh, the earth turned over and a temporary marker driven into the soil until a stone one could be cut.

Sydney made a noise, a small groan of discomfort that had nothing to do with the biting cold. Victor glanced back and offered her the edge of a smile.

"Buck up, Syd," he said casually. "It'll be fun."

Truth be told, Victor didn't care for graveyards, either. He didn't like dead people, mostly because he had no

effect on them. Sydney, conversely, didn't like dead people because she had such a marked effect on them. She kept her arms crossed tightly over her chest, one gloved thumb rubbing the spot on her upper arm where she'd been shot. It was becoming a tic.

Victor turned and sunk one of the spades into the earth. He then tossed the other one to Sydney, who unfolded her arms just in time to catch it. The shovel was almost as tall as she was. A few days shy of her thirteenth birthday, and even for twelve and eleven twelfths, Sydney Clarke was small. She had always been on the short side, but it certainly didn't help that she had barely grown an inch since the day she'd died. Now she hefted the shovel, grimacing at the weight.

"You've got to be kidding me," she said.

"The faster we dig, the faster we get to go home."

Home wasn't home so much as a hotel room stocked only with Sydney's stolen clothes, Mitch's chocolate milk, and Victor's files, but that wasn't the point. At this moment, home would have been any place that *wasn't* Merit Cemetery. Sydney eyed the grave, tightening her fingers on the wooden grip. Victor had already begun to dig.

"What if...," she said, swallowing, "... what if the other people accidentally wake up?"

"They won't," cooed Victor. "Just focus on *this* grave. Besides..." He looked up from his work. "Since when are *you* afraid of bodies?"

"I'm not," she snapped back, too fast and with all the force of someone used to being the younger sibling. Which she was. Just not *Victor's*.

"Look at it this way," he teased, dumping a pile of dirt onto the grass. "If you do wake them up, they can't go anywhere. Now dig."

Sydney leaned forward, her short blond hair falling into her eyes, and began to dig. The two worked in the dark, only Victor's occasional humming and the thud of the shovels filling the air.

*Thud.*

*Thud.*

*Thud.*

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