

Dark Contemporary Stand-alones

Marrow

Rival serial killers battle for hunting ground at West Paine University.

Black Sheep

Serial killer Bria Brooks becomes entangled with Forensic Psychology professor Elijah Kaplan as they hunt an elusive cult leader.

Other Works - 2023 Release

The Poison Pastry Bakery – coming soon
Why Choose dark comedy contemporary romance

The Shadow Realm Series - (completed)

Siren vampire Lu accidentally binds herself to her most dangerous enemy, the demon bounty hunter Ashen.

A Shadow In The Reaping (book 1)

A Heart Of Bitter Poison (book 2)

A Queen Of Broken Realms (book 3)

Monster Smut Novellas (aka Brynne takes down twitter trolls)

Exterminatrix

The Diviner Series (dark fantasy romance)

The Diviner

The Elysian – coming soon

The Resurrectionist – planned

BUTCHER & BLACKBIRD

BRYNNE WEAVER



LBRIS

We know
books

PIATKUS

Originally self-published in 2023 by Brynne Weaver
Published in Great Britain in 2023 by Piatkus

7 9 10 8 6

Copyright © 2023 by Brynne Weaver

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-349-44156-6

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Eicograf S.p.A.

Papers used by Piatkus are from well-managed forests
and other responsible sources.



Piatkus
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.littlebrown.co.uk

CONTENT & TRIGGER WARNINGS

As much as *Butcher & Blackbird* is a dark romantic comedy and will hopefully make you laugh through the madness, it's still dark! Please read responsibly. If you have questions about this list, please don't hesitate to contact me at brynneweaverbooks.com or on one of my social media platforms (I'm most active on Instagram and TikTok).

- Eyeballs and eye sockets
- Amateur surgery
- Skin ornaments
- Chainsaws, axes, knives, scalpels - a lot of sharp objects
- Accidental cannibalism
- Not-so-accidental cannibalism
- Questionable use of a mummified corpse
- Lobotomized man servant
- Ill-advised use of kitchen implements
- I'm sorry about the cookies and cream ice cream (I'm not really)
- Detailed sex scenes which include (but are not limited to)

LBRIIS

We know
books

cock warming, rough sex, praise kink, anal, adult toys, choking, spitting, dom/sub interactions, genital piercings

- References to parental neglect and child abuse
- Parental loss (not depicted)
- References to child sexual assault (not in detail)
- It's a book about serial killers, so there's some generally messed-up murder and chaos

*For those of you who read the trigger warnings and said
"Accidental cannibalism?! Count me in!"
This one's for you.*

*'That lesson suggests that in the end, we can only find peace in
our human lives by accepting the will of the universe'
Stephen King, Pet Sematary*

LBRIS

We know
books

PROLOGUE

Butcher & Blackbird - Annual August
Showdown

- 7 days
- Tie-breaker by rock paper scissors
- Best of Five
- Winner takes the Forest Phantom

ICHI-GO, ICHI-E

SLOANE

Being a serial killer who kills serial killers is a great hobby...
Until you find yourself locked in a cage.

For three days.

With a dead body.

In the Louisiana summer.

With no air conditioning.

I glare at the fly-riddled corpse laying beyond the locked door of my cage. The buttons of Albert Briscoe's shirt strain against the bloat of his distended, green-gray stomach. His *moving* stomach, the thin skin undulating over the gasses and maggots that chew through the flesh beneath. The stench of decay, the buzz of insects, the smell of shit and piss that have vacated his body, it's fucking revolting. And I'm not squeamish. But I have standards. I prefer my corpses fresh. I just want to take my trophies and stage my scene and go, not hang around and watch as they liquefy.

As if on cue, there's a quiet tearing sound, like wet paper ripping apart.

"No..."

I can almost hear Albert from beyond the grave: *Yes.*

"Oh *no no no...*"

It's happening. This is for killing me, you fucking bitch.

The skin splits open and a white mass of maggots tumbles out, like little orzo pastas. Except a significant number of those pastas are crawling toward me at a glacial pace, looking for a quiet place to complete the next stage of their maggoty lifecycle.

"Jesus fucking Christ." I schooch on my bum across the grimy stone floor of my cage to curl myself into a ball. My forehead presses to my knees until my brain aches. I start to hum in the hope I'll drown out the sounds that are suddenly too loud around me. My melody grows louder, and louder, until my chapped lips start to form the occasional word. *No one here can love or understand me... Blackbird, bye, bye ...* I hum and sing until the words fade away, and the melody too.

"I renounce my wicked ways," I say after the song disintegrates among the dust motes and the hum of opalescent insect wings.

"That's a shame. I bet I would like your wicked ways."

I startle at the sound of a man's deep, smooth voice, the cadence of a faint Irish accent warming every note. My curses cut the humid air when my head smashes against an iron crossbar of my small cell as I scurry out of reach of the man who saunters into the thin thread of light from the narrow window, the glass opaque with fly shit.

"You seem to be in a predicament," he says. A lopsided grin sneaks across his face, the rest of his features sheathed in shadow. He takes a few steps into the room to stare down at the corpse, bending to get a closer look. "What's your name?"

I'm on day three of no coffee. No food. My stomach has probably imploded and sucked other organs into the void. A loud chorus of desperately hungry internal monologue is trying

to convince me that those are, in fact, little orzo pastas marching toward me, and they might just be edible.

I can't deal with this shit.

"I don't think he's going to answer you," I say.

The man chuckles. "No shit. I already know who he is anyway. Albert Briscoe, the Beast of the Bayou." The man's gaze lingers on the corpse for a long moment before he shifts his attention to me. "But who are *you?*"

I don't answer, remaining still as the man takes careful, measured steps around the corner of the cage to get a better look at me where I'm huddled in the shadows. When he's as close as the bars will allow, he crouches down. I try to hide beneath my tangled hair and folded limbs, giving him only my eyes.

And because my luck is *the worst*, he, of course, is *stunning*.

Short brown hair, artfully disheveled. Strong features, but not severe. A sly smile with perfect teeth and a straight scar that cuts through his top lip, lips that are far too inviting given my current state of captivity, the bottom one a little fuller than the top. I shouldn't be thinking about how I would like to bite it. Not at all.

But I am.

And for my part, I'm fucking *disgusting*.

Knotted hair. Stained, bloodied clothes. The worst breath ever to be breathed in the history of breathing.

"You're not Albert's usual type," he says.

"What do you know about his usual type?"

"That you're too old to be it."

He's right. Not that I'm old, at a mere twenty-three. But this guy knows it as much as I do, that I'm far too old for Albert's tastes.

"And how would you know that, exactly?"

The man's gaze slides to the corpse as a faint look of disgust passes over his shadowed features. "Because I've made it my business to know." He looks at me once more and smiles. "I'm guessing you made it your business too, judging by the quality of the hunting knife stuck in his throat. Handmade Damascus steel. Where'd you get it?"

I sigh. My gaze lingers on the body and my favorite blade before I press my cheeks to my drawn-up knees. "Etsy."

The guy chuckles and I pick up a little pebble in my enclosure just to drop it on the floor.

"I'm Rowan," he says as he extends a hand into the cage. I look at it and toss another pebble, and though I make no move to accept his gesture, he still keeps his hand lifted toward me. "You might know me as the Boston Butcher."

I shake my head.

"The Massacre of Mass...?"

I shake my head again.

"The Ghost of the East Coast...?"

I sigh.

I've totally heard of all those names, even though I'm not telling *him* that.

But on the inside, my heart hammers my blood through my veins. I'm just glad he can't see it ignite my cheeks with crimson flame. I know *exactly* the names he's called by, and that he's not all that different from me—a hunter who favors the worst that society can dredge up from the pits of hell.

Rowan finally removes his hand from my cage, his smile taking on a dejected quality. "Shame, I thought you might recognize my little nicknames." He slaps his hands to his knees and rises. "Well, I'd best be going. Pleasure to almost meet you, nameless captive. Best of luck."

With a final, fleeting smile, Rowan turns and strides toward the door.

"Wait! Wait. *Please.*" I clamor to my feet to grip the cold bars just as he reaches the threshold. "Sloane. My name is Sloane. The Orb Weaver."

There's a moment of stillness between us. The only sound to fill the space is the buzz of flies and the steady work of maggots as they consume decaying flesh.

Rowan turns his head, casting a single eye over his shoulder.

And in a heartbeat he's there, right in front of me, his motion so fast it startles me back from the bars but not before he grabs my hand to shake it vigorously.

"*Oh my God.* I knew it. I fucking *knew* they had it wrong. It had to be a woman. The Orb Weaver! Such a cool name. The intricate fishing line, the fucking *eyeballs*. Amazing, I'm such a huge fan."

"Uhh..." Rowan continues to shake my hand despite my effort to pull it away. "Thanks... I guess...?"

"Did you come up with that name? The Orb Weaver?"

"Yeah..." I snatch my hand free so I can step away from this strangely enthusiastic Irishman. He grins at me as though awestruck and if I wasn't wearing sixty layers of grime on my skin, I'm sure he'd be able to see the blush flame in my cheeks for the second time. "You don't think it's dumb?"

"No, it's so great. The *Massacre of Mass* is dumb. The Orb Weaver is pretty kickass."

I shrug. "I kind of think it sounds like a lame superhero."

"Better than the authorities making something up for you. Trust me." Rowan's gaze shifts to the corpse and back again, his head tilting as he regards me. He jerks a nod once in Albert's direction. "He must have been really acting the maggot. *Get it?*"

There's a long pause, the silence between us punctuated by the hum of insect wings.

"No. I don't."

Rowan waves a hand. "Irish saying, meaning he was up to mischief. But it was a pretty clever joke, given the circumstances," he says, his chest puffed with pride as he hooks a thumb toward the corpse. "Beggins the question, though—how'd you wind up in the cage while he's dead with your blade out there? Did you knife him through the bars?"

I glance down at my formerly white shirt and the dirty boot print that hides beneath the splash of blood. "I guess you could say it was a moment of bad timing."

"Hmm," Rowan says with a sage nod. "I might have had one or two of those myself in the past."

"You mean you've been locked in a cage with a dead body and a little infantry of orzo pastas marching your way?"

Rowan looks down across the space around us and frowns. "No. Can't say that I have."

"Didn't think so," I mutter with a weary sigh. I dust off my hands on my grimy denim shorts and take a final step back as I cock a hip. I'm starting to become annoyed at this interloper who seems to be doing nothing more than delaying my slow death by starvation. I'm pretty sure he's a bit nuts and I don't get the impression he's that keen on actually letting me out of here.

Might as well just get on with it.

"Well...?"

"They're making decent progress, the little orzos," Rowan says, more to himself than to me as his gaze remains trapped on the trail of tiny white worms heading my way. When his eyes lift from the floor, they meet mine with an eager smile. "Want to get lunch?"

I level this stranger with a flat glare as I motion to my bloody, boot-printed shirt. "Unless you want to send us both to jail immediately...no...?"

"Right," he says with a frown before striding toward Albert's corpse. He rifles through the pockets, coming up empty. When he looks up to the bloated neck, he lets out a little sound of triumph, pulling my blade free before he yanks on a silver chain, the links snapping with the swift assault of his strong grip. He turns his smile toward me as he rises, his fingers unfurling around the key that rests in his palm.

"Have a shower. I'll find you some clothes. Then we'll burn the house down."

Rowan unlocks the door and extends a hand into the shadows of my cage.

"Come on, Blackbird. I'm in the mood for barbecue. What do you say?"

FUN AND GAMES

ROWAN

The Orb Weaver.

I'm sitting across the table from the fucking *Orb Weaver*.

And she's fucking *beautiful*.

Raven hair. Warm hazel eyes. A spread of freckles over her cheeks and a little nose that's turned a bit red. She clears her throat and takes a long sip of her beer and then frowns, her eyes trained on her glass as she pushes it away.

"You're sick," I say.

Sloane's eyes meet mine with a wary glance before her attention shifts to the diner. Her sharp gaze lands on one table of patrons for only a moment before it floats to the next. Sloane is a nervous one.

Probably justified, all things considered.

"Three days in that hell-hole was bound to take a toll. Thank fuck I had water in there." She reaches for the napkin dispenser and pulls a tissue free to blow her nose. Her gaze finds mine again but doesn't stay on me for long. "Thanks for letting me out."

I shrug and sip my beer and I watch in silence as her gaze flicks away to a server who exits the kitchen with another table's order. Sloane asked for a booth midway down the window, pointing to the exact one she wanted when the hostess led us into the room. Now I get why. It's equidistant between the front entrance, the emergency exit by the bathrooms, and the kitchen.

Is she always this flighty, or has her time in Albert's cage got her spooked? Or is it me?

She's wise to be wary.

My eyes stay fixed to her, and I take the opportunity to openly assess my dining companion as she surveys the restaurant. Sloane twists her damp hair over her shoulder and my gaze drifts down to her chest, like it has every two minutes since she walked out of Albert Briscoe's bathroom with a Pink Floyd T-shirt and no bra.

No bra.

The thought echoes through my brain like church bells on a bright Sunday morning.

Her body is curvy and strong, working some kind of witchcraft on her stolen clothes that should look anything but sexy given they came from Briscoe's closet. She even makes his jeans look good, the hems of the long legs rolled to her ankles and the baggy waist cinched with two red handkerchiefs tied together to form a makeshift belt. She knotted the bottom of the T-shirt so it nips in at her waist, showing a sliver of tempting skin and her pierced belly button when she leans back against the booth with an exhausted sigh.

No bra.

I need to get my shit together. She's the Orb Weaver, for Christ's sake. If she catches me ogling, she could pop my eyeballs out of my head and string me up in fishing line before I say the words 'no bra'.

Sloane rolls a shoulder, doing little to help my mission to give up my *no bra* mantra. Her fingers find the joint as a little wince of pain creases her features. She frowns when her eyes meet mine.

"He kicked me," she explains, her touch lingering on the top of her shoulder with her answer to my unvoiced question. "My shoulder hit the edge of the cage when I fell in."

My hands fold into tight fists beneath the table as white-hot rage burns in my veins. "Fucker."

"Well, I did stab him in the neck, so I guess it was justified." Sloane's palm slips down her arm and she sniffles, her nose crinkling. Fucking *adorable*. "He managed to close me in before he fell. He even laughed."

The server approaches with two plates of ribs and one of fries, earning a ravenous glance from Sloane. When the plate is set down in front of her she smiles, a little dimple popping out next to her lip.

We thank the server who lingers for a moment in the periphery before Sloane pipes up with confirmation that we have everything we need. When the woman departs, Sloane snickers, that dimple deepening. "Don't tell me you get that so often that it doesn't even register in your brain. That's just depressing."

"Get what...?"

Sloane's gaze darts to the server and I follow her line of sight to the woman who tosses a smile to our table over her shoulder. "Oh my God, it really *doesn't* register. Like, *at all*." Sloane shakes her head and tears a rib free of the steaming rack on her plate. "Well, be prepared, pretty boy. My stomach has been eating nearby organs for the last three days and I'm going to devour these fucking ribs in the most unladylike fashion possible."

I say nothing, riveted to the sight of her perfect teeth as she

tears into the steaming flesh that slides off the gray bone. A drop of barbecue sauce gathers at the corner of her lips and her tongue darts out to claim it, and I want to fucking die.

"So..." I clear my throat in the hopes my voice won't crack. Sloane's brow furrows as she sinks another bite into the meat. "How come not Blackbird?"

"Huh?" She slips the end of the rib into her mouth and sucks the meat right off the bone to pull it past her lips with sauce-stained fingers. My cock strains against my zipper just watching her cheeks hollow.

Imagine what she could do with that fucking mouth.

I take a sip of beer and look down at my plate. "Your name," I reply before starting on a rib, purely to distract certain body parts that are becoming pretty insistent about what they want. "How come you didn't pick a name with Blackbird? Raven hair, flighty nature, the song...I'm going to hazard a guess it's from your childhood, right? I heard you singing it back in the cage."

Sloane's chewing stops for a moment as she regards me with a thoughtful pass of her thumb over her bottom lip. It's the first time her gaze has really settled on me, and it burrows right into my skull. "That's for me," she says. "Orb Weaver is for them."

Sloane's eyes have darkened, and with just a blink she's gone from a sexy, runny-nosed and ravenous beauty to a wicked, remorseless, iron-willed killer.

I nod. "I get it."

I might be the only person who does.

Sloane keeps her unwavering stare pinned on me. "What's your deal, pretty boy?"

"My deal?"

"You heard me. You show up to fuckwit's house, let me out of his cage, burn his house down and take me for ribs and beer.

Yet, I know basically nothing about you. So, what's your deal? Why were you at Briscoe's?"

I shrug. "I came to hack off his limbs and enjoy his agonizingly slow death."

"Why him though? We're a little far from Boston. I'm sure there are plenty of lowlife drug dealers for entertainment up there that you don't need to come this far for one guy."

A weighted silence thickens the air, both of us paused with ribs heading toward our mouths. A sly smile spreads across my lips as Sloane's face falls.

"You *totally* know who I am."

"Oh my *God*."

"You do. You know what I like to hunt on my home turf. How long have you been a fan?"

"Dear Christ, *stop*."

I chuckle as Sloane drops her forehead onto the backs of her bent wrists, a rib still clutched between her sticky fingers. "Which one was your favorite?" I ask. "The guy I flayed and strung up on the bow of that ship at Griffin's Warf? Or what about the guy I suspended from the crane? That one seemed popular."

"I can already tell you are the *worst*." Sloane keeps her hands up in a futile effort to cover the flaming blush igniting her cheeks. Her hazel eyes dance despite the glare she tries to shoot my way. "Send me back to Briscoe's cell."

"Your wish is my command."

I look toward the serving station and raise my hand at the waitress who takes all of one second to spot me before she starts heading our way with a growing smile.

"Rowan...?"

"What? You said you wanted to go back to Briscoe's, so back we shall go."

"I was joking, you psycho—"