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PREVIOUS BOOKS IN THE
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING RUINOUS LOVE TRILOGY

Butcher & Blackbird

Leather & Lark

SCYTHE & SPARROW

BRYNNE WEAVER



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CONTENT & TRIGGER WARNINGS

As much as *Scythe & Sparrow* is a dark romantic comedy and will hopefully make you laugh through the madness, it's still dark! Please read responsibly. If you have any 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 . . . again. If it's any consolation, I don't know why I keep writing them into books because eyeball shit freaks me the fuck out
- Also eyelids. Yep. We're there now
- I'm not sure as I really *ruin* cotton candy as much as maybe just defile it
- Possibly sausages and/or hot dogs
- Ill-advised use of staple guns
- Are drug-addicted raccoons a trigger? Debate!
- Clowns
- Sexy clowns
- Medical trauma including serious injury, ambulances, open fractures, puncture wounds, blood loss, hospitals, surgical recovery
- Impaling (not the sexy kind, but okay . . . that too)

- References to domestic physical abuse (not depicted), psychological/emotional abuse, sexual harassment, threats and intimidation, misogyny
- Injured dog—but if you’ve read *Leather & Lark*, you already know Bentley will be fine! He’s too grumpy and badass to die
- Parental neglect, child physical abuse (not depicted)
- Numerous weapons and sharp objects, including knives, guns, baseball bats, metal hooks, an edge beveler—you should be used to these by now
- Detailed sex scenes, which include (but are not limited to): adult toys, primal kink, cum kink, anal, rough sex, sexual acts in public
- Explicit and colorful language, including a lot of “blasphemy.” Don’t say I didn’t warn you!
- There is a lot of injury and death . . . it’s a book about a doctor and a serial killer falling in love, so I feel like that’s probably a given

Please note, if you’re the kind of reader who likes to skip epilogues, I humbly request that you make an exception! There are no babies or pregnancies, but there might be another surprise or two that you won’t want to miss. Just trust me! (“*But the ice cream!*” you say. “*The pizza! The beer and smoothies and fancy calcium!*” I know, I know—but just trust me *this time*. Haha!)

For those of you who read *B&B* and *L&L* and said,
“Hell, I’ve already endured the ice cream and pizza,
I might as well keep going” . . . you truly are my people.
This one’s for you!

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SCYTHE &
SPARROW

ACE OF CUPS

Rose

If you hit someone in the back of the head hard enough, you can pop their eyeballs right out of their face.

Or at least, that's what I read somewhere. And that's what I'm thinking as I shuffle my tarot deck, glaring at the sketchy-looking asshole thirty feet away as he pours alcohol from a flask into his soda and takes a long gulp. He wipes away the excess from his chin with the sleeve of his plaid shirt. A burp quickly follows, and then he shoves half his hot dog into his fuck-ugly gob before he takes another swig.

I could whack that big ol' egghead so hard his marbles spring right out of their sockets.

And the woman sitting across from me? I bet she wouldn't mind one bit.

I tamp down a dark grin and hope to fuck she hasn't noticed the devious glint in my expression. But even despite the murderous vibes I'm probably giving off, and the distractions of Silveria

Circus beyond the open door of my tarot tent, her attention seems stuck on the cards, all her concentration glued to them as I shuffle. There's no light at all in her eyes, one of them rimmed with a fading black bruise.

Blood surges in my veins as I force my gaze not to creep back to the man. *Her* man.

When her attention finally lifts from the repetitive motion of my hands, and she starts twisting in her seat to catch sight of him, I abruptly stop shuffling to slap the deck down on the table. She startles more than seems normal, just like I thought she would. Just like I hoped she wouldn't.

"Sorry," I say, and I mean it. She looks at me with fear in her eyes. *Real* fear. But she gives me a weak smile. "What's your name?"

"Lucy," she says.

"All right, Lucy. So I won't ask you what your question is. But I want you to keep it in mind."

Lucy nods. I turn over the first card. I already know what it will be. Its edges are worn with use and the image has faded with time.

"Ace of Cups," I say as I lay the card on the table and push it closer to her. She looks from the image to me, a question in her crinkled brow. "It represents following your inner voice. What does it tell you? What do you want?"

There's only one thing I hope she'll say: *to take flight*.

But she doesn't say it.

"I don't know," she says, her voice barely more than a whisper. Disappointment lodges itself like a thorn beneath my skin as she twists her fingers on the table, her simple gold wedding band scratched and dull. "Matt wants to buy another plot of land to farm

next year, but I want to put some money away for the kids. Maybe it'd be nice to get out of Nebraska for a week, take the kids to see my mom and not be fretting about the price of gas. Is that the kind of thing you mean . . . ?"

"Maybe." I shrug and pick up the deck, giving it another shuffle. This time, I won't guide the Ace of Cups to the top of the pile. I'll let it tell her whatever she needs to hear. "What's important is what it means to *you*. Let's restart, and you keep that in mind."

I do Lucy's reading. Seven of Cups. Page of Cups. Two of Wands. Signals of change, that choices for her future are there, if she's ready to have faith and embrace them. I'm not even sure if she's open to receiving a message from my cards. I've barely finished the reading when her three kids pile into the tent, two girls and a boy, their faces sticky and stained with candy. They talk over one another, each wanting to be the first to tell her about the rides or the games or the upcoming performances. *They have downs, Mama. Mama, did you see the fire-breather? I saw a game where you can win a stuffy, Mama, come see. Mama, Mama, Mama—*

"Kids," a gruff voice interrupts at the entrance of my tarot tent. Their thin bodies go still and rigid at his sharp tone. Lucy's eyes widen across from me. She doesn't let her gaze linger, but I still see it. The dull smear of chronic terror in her eyes. The way it deadens her expression before she turns away. I look up to the man in my doorway, his spiked soda gripped in one hand, a fistful of ride tickets in the other. "Go on, take 'em. Meet your ma at the big top in an hour for the show."

The oldest child, the boy, reaches for the tickets and grasps them to his chest as though they could be torn from him just as easily as they were given. "Thank you, Papa."

The kids edge past their father, where he stands unmoving in the entrance of the tent. He watches them disappear into the crowd before turning his attention our way. Bloodshot eyes fixed to his wife, he drains his plastic cup and drops it on the ground. "Let's go."

Lucy nods once and stands. She places a twenty-dollar bill on the table with a brittle smile and a whisper of thanks. I'd like to give her the reading for free, but I know men like hers. They're volatile. Willing to jump down a woman's throat for the smallest perceived slight, like pity or charity. I learned a long time ago to stick to the exchange of value, even if he might yell at her later for spending money on something as frivolous as a message from the universe.

Lucy leaves the tent. Her husband watches her go.

And then he turns to me.

"You shouldn't go fillin' her head with crazy fuckin' ideas," he says through a sneer. "She's already got enough of those."

I pick up my tarot cards and shuffle them. My heart scrapes my bones with every furious beat, but I keep my movement fluid, my outward appearance calm. "I take it you don't want a reading."

"What did you tell her?"

The man takes a step into my tent to loom over my table with a menacing glare. I lean back in my chair. My shuffling slows to a halt. We pin our gazes to each other. "Same shit I tell everyone who comes in here," I lie. "Follow your dreams. Trust your heart. Good things lie in your future."

"You're right about that." A dark smile tugs at the corners of the man's lips as he whips the twenty-dollar bill off the table and makes a point of folding it in front of me. "Good things do lie in my future."

With a tip of his head, he slides the bill into his pocket and walks away, heading for the nearest refreshments stand, where one of his equally shady friends is standing. I glare after him until finally I close my eyes, trying to clear him from my thoughts, re-focusing my energy as I resume shuffling my cards. I reach for my selenite crystal to cleanse the deck and sever the connection between us, but my thoughts keep wandering to Lucy. The image of the purple halo around her eye returns, no matter how hard I try to push it away. The deadened look in her eyes haunts me. I've seen that look so many times before. In the women who have come to draw the Ace of Cups. In my mother. In the mirror.

I take a deep breath. I draw my first card with a question in my mind.

Lucy didn't ask for help. But she needs it. What should I do?

I turn over the first card and open my eyes.

The Tower. Upheaval. Sudden change.

I tilt my head and draw another.

Two of Wands. There are opportunities if you're willing to venture beyond your castle walls. The land beyond might be rocky, but it's vibrant. Take a risk. Try something new. A meaningful life is built from choices.

"Hmm. I think I see where this is going, and that wasn't what I was asking."

Knight of Cups. The arrival of romantic love.

"*Stop it.* My question was about smashing that dickhead's skull in. Not falling in love or some bullshit. Tell me about my actual question."

I shuffle the cards again. I keep my question in mind and draw the first card.

"Fucksakes, Gransie. Give it a rest." A deep breath floods my lungs as I fidget with the edge of the card and look out at the fairgrounds beyond the door of my tent. I should really be getting out of here. Leave this exchange behind. Get myself changed and ready for my upcoming performance in the big top. Zooming through the Globe of Death on a motorcycle with two other performers doesn't leave any room for error, and I need to be focused. But Lucy's husband is still in my line of sight. And then Bazyli walks by. I'll take that as the sign I was looking for.

"Baz," I bark out, stopping the teenager in his tracks. His gangly limbs are tanned and marred with grease. "Come here."

Sparks virtually shoot from his eyes. His lips stretch around a gap-toothed smile. "Gonna cost ya."

"I haven't even told you what I want yet."

"Still gonna cost ya."

I roll my eyes and Baz grins as he saunters into my tent with all the cockiness of a typical fifteen-year-old. I nod toward the fairgrounds. He follows my gaze. "The guy out there with the plaid shirt next to the grease joint."

"The guy with the head that looks like an egg?"

"Yeah. I need his details. Just the driver's license. And twenty bucks if he's got cash in his wallet."

Baz's attention latches to my hands as I shuffle the Tower card back into my deck. "I'm not a thief. I'm a *magician*," he says, and with a flutter of his hands, a flower appears on his palm. "The only thing I steal is hearts."

I roll my eyes and Baz grins as he gives me the flower. "I know you're not a thief. But Egghead over there is. He just stole twenty

bucks from me and I want you to give it back to his wife over there. The one with the blond hair and blue top." I nod toward Lucy in the distance as she makes her way alone toward a concession stand. "She'll have three kids with her in the tent during the show. I want you to get the money back to her and the license to me."

Baz faces me, his eyes narrowing. "Whatever you're up to, I could help, you know."

"You are helping. By getting me that license."

"I'll do it for free if you let me help."

"No dice, kiddo. Your mom will string me up by the throat from the trapeze. Just get me that license. I'll buy you a Venom comic."

Baz shrugs. He twists the toe of his shoe into the trampled grass, trying to keep his attention away from me. "I have most of them."

"Not from the Dark Origins series." Baz's eyes snap to mine. I try to repress a smile at the longing he can't hide. "I know you're missing the last two. I'll get them for you."

"Okay . . . but I also get to borrow your inflatable pool."

I scrunch my nose and tilt my head. "Sure . . . I guess . . ."

"And I need bananas."

"All right—"

"And a pineapple. Some of those little cocktail stick things too."

"What the hell?" It's not unusual for the other circus performers and crew to send me out for random items or treats from the towns we stop in. I'm one of the few who has a second vehicle to escape the grounds with. I don't have to uproot my whole home just to go to the store. But that means I've had requests for an assortment of shit. Condoms, frequently. Pregnancy tests too. Vegetables

in season. Fresh croissants from a local baker. Books. Whiskey. But . . . “A pineapple?”

“Mom said she’d get me a PlayStation when she finally gets a vacation. Since there’s a fat chance of that, I thought I’d bring the vacation to her.” Baz crosses his arms and squares up his stance as though he’s about to go into battle. “Take it or leave it, Rose.”

I thrust my hand in his direction, my heart a little warmer than it was before. “Deal. Just be careful, yeah? Egghead is trouble.”

Baz nods and pumps my hand once and then he’s gone, darting off to fulfill his mission. I watch as he weaves his way through children with their popcorn and cotton candy and stuffed animals, and teenagers chattering about the best rides, and the couples who come from the haunted house, laughing with embarrassment about how much our actors scared them in dark corners. These are the moments I usually love about my home with Silveria Circus. Moments of magic, as small as they might be.

But today, the only magic I’m after is the dark and dangerous kind.

I watch as Baz maneuvers close to the two men. My heart rolls against my ribs as he comes up behind Lucy’s husband and pulls his wallet from his back pocket when the man is occupied with a laugh. When Baz has it in his hand, he pivots a turn, just long enough to open the wallet and pull the license from its slot. The money is next, and he slips it into his jeans before he finishes his spin. Within a handful of heartbeats, the wallet is back in the man’s pocket.

Grabbing my tarot deck and selenite, I leave the tent, turning the OPEN sign at the entrance to CLOSED as I go, even though I’m about to miss another reading or two as another woman closes in

on the tent with a twenty-dollar bill clutched between her fingers. I catch the brief flash of disappointment on her face, but Baz never leaves my field of vision. And I don’t leave his. We pass each other as I head in the direction of my RV. I barely feel it, only noticing because I know to expect it. A slight brush of a touch at my hip.

When I enter my motor home, I pull the license from my pocket. *Matthew Cranwell*. I open my phone and check his address on the map of Nebraska. Twenty miles away, close to Elmsdale, the next town over. One with a bigger grocery store than Hartford. Maybe more hope of finding a good quality pineapple. I run my thumb over the photo of Matt’s weathered face. With a faint grin etched across my lips, I change into my leather pants and tank top, slipping his driver’s license into the interior pocket of my motorcycle jacket.

It’s the first evening of performances here in Hartford, and the big top is packed with locals who have come from the surrounding network of towns to see the show. And Silveria Circus prides itself on a great show. I watch from behind the curtain as José Silveria introduces each performer. The clowns, with their miniature cars and their juggling act and their slapstick comedy routine. Santiago the Surreal, a magician who wows the audience with a series of tricks that he keeps as a closely guarded secret. Baz helps with the routine, always an eager apprentice, the only person Santiago trusts with his secrets. There are trapeze artists and aerial silk acrobats, Baz’s mother, Zofia, the lead performer of their group. The only animals we have are Cheryl’s troop of trained poodles, and they always delight the kids, especially when she calls for volunteers from the audience. And last up, the final act, is always me and the twins, Adrian and Alin. The Globe of Death. The scent of the