

LEATHER & LARK

BRYNNE WEAVER



PIATKUS

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CONTENT & TRIGGER WARNINGS

As much as *Leather & Lark* 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 but not eye sockets, so you're welcome
- Teeth and tooth byproducts
- I might have ruined pizza and beer. Also smoothies.
Still not sorry
- Snow globes
- Autocannibalism . . . ? Welcome to a debate you never thought you'd have
- Numerous weapons and sharp objects, including darts, scissors, guns, saws, knives, grinders, an edger, and a little implement called an enucleation spoon
- Severed fingers
- You might have new thoughts about crafting with epoxy resin
- Vehicular collisions
- Drowning in various forms

- Terminal illness of a loved one
- Detailed sex scenes, which include (but are not limited to) adult toys, choking, rough sex, mild degradation, sexual acts in public, pegging, praise kink
- References to parental neglect and child abuse (not depicted)
- References to child sexual assault (not depicted)
- Religious references/trauma
- Explicit and colorful language, including a lot of “blasphemy.” Don’t say I didn’t warn you!
- Injured dog (cause of injury not depicted, and he’s okay, I promise!)
- There is a lot of death . . . it’s a book about a contract killer and a serial killer falling in love, so I feel like that’s probably a given

For those of you who came here after the *B&B*
ice cream and just read the *L&L* triggers and thought,
“She’s not really serious about the pizza . . . right . . . ?”
This one’s for you.

PROLOGUE

IGNITE

Lark

“This is called the consequences of your actions, sweetie,” I say as I unravel the fuse to the fireworks strapped between Andrew’s thighs.

His cries reach a fever pitch only to die in the tape strapped across his mouth.

You wouldn’t look at me and think it, but it’s true . . .

I love the sound of his distress.

Andrew sobs and thrashes in his chair. I give him a bright grin and continue backing away through the meadow and toward the tree line, close enough that I can see the fear in his eyes, just far enough that I’ll be protected by thick trunks when I leave him alone in the clearing. His muffled pleas are desperate. His rapid breaths billow from his nose in plumes of fog that reach toward the starlit sky.

“Do you know why you’re there with fireworks strapped to your dick and I’m over here with a fuse?” I shout.

He shakes his head, then nods as though he can't decide which answer will stop this torture. The truth is, it doesn't matter what answer he lands on.

"If I ripped that tape off your mouth, you'd probably tell me you're *oh-so-very-sorry* about fucking Savannah in our bed while I was away, wouldn't you?"

He nods wildly, his predictable bullshit caught in the glue. *I'm sorry, so fucking sorry, I'll never do it again, I love you I swear . . .* blah, blah, blah.

"I'm afraid that's not really why we're here."

Andrew blinks at me, trying to decipher what I might mean as my grin turns feral, and when it does, his true panic sets in. Maybe it's my words, or perhaps it's the delighted gleam in my eyes. Maybe it's the way I watch him, unblinking. Or maybe it's the way I laugh as my thumb strikes the flint wheel of the lighter clutched in my hand. Maybe it's all of these things combined that make him piss himself. The urine shines in moonlit rivulets as it streams down his naked, shivering legs.

"That's right, sweetie. I know your secrets. *All of them.*"

My eyes stay locked on Andrew's as I slowly bring the fire closer to the fuse.

"Oh fuck—I almost forgot." I let the flame extinguish. Andrew's body sags with hope and relief.

Hope. It's cute, really.

I guess I can't judge so harshly—I had hope once too. Hope for *us*.

But I was naive to think Andrew was right for me with his hint of a bad boy edge. Those two well-placed tattoos seemed hot. That perpetually disheveled hair gave off a *no-shits-given* attitude.



Even his inability to stick to a job seemed legit, though I don't know why. Somehow, I'd convinced myself that he was a real-deal rebel.

Then he fucked our friend Savannah while I was out of town and I realized, he's not a rebel.

He's a loser.

And not only that. Once I discovered he'd cheated, I stole his phone, and I learned just how wrong I'd been all along about my so-called boyfriend. I found messages to girls, some of whom were too young to know better than to trust a hot drummer who called them beautiful and promised them all his attention. I found more than just a bad boy.

I found a fucking predator.

One who had slipped right under my defenses. And years ago, I promised myself one thing:

Never again.

When I lift my gaze to the night sky, it's not really this moment that I'm seeing. It's not even memories of the anger and disgust I felt when I looked through Andrew's phone. It's a memory of the gray stone spires of the prestigious Ashborne Collegiate Institute, their copper-capped points taking aim at the stars. Even now, years later, I can still summon the sense of dread that lurked beneath every breath I took there. It was a palace of shadowed rooms and sickening secrets. A castle of regret.

Predators like Andrew abound on this beautiful earth like a fucking locust invasion. Sometimes it seems like no place is free of infestation, even fortresses that are meant to be sacred, like Ashborne. Beautiful and grand. Secluded. *Safe*. Just like in nature, the prettiest things are often the most poisonous.

And Mr. Laurent Verdon, the artistic director of Ashborne? Well, he made some very pretty promises.

Regret washes over me. Regret about the death of Mr. Verdon. But not in the way you might think.

I should have been the one to kill him.

And now my best friend, Sloane, will carry that burden and its repercussions on her shoulders for the rest of her life.

I see glittering flecks of white light as I press my eyes closed, tighter and tighter. When I open them again, the past is safely stored away. Back then I had no power. But things are different now.

Predators might make beautiful promises, but mine is simple and unfussy.

Never.

Again.

It might not make for a pretty vow, but I do my best to make the execution of my promise fucking *spectacular*.

I take a deep, cleansing breath of the autumn air. Then I grin at Andrew and rummage in my bag until I find the portable speaker and connect my phone.

“Atmosphere is so important in these moments, don’t you think?” I ask as I bring up “Firework” by Katy Perry and turn it up to full volume.

Predictable? Yes.

Perfection? Also yes.

I sing along and don’t bother to hide my broad smile. There might be no chance for Andrew like Katy suggests, but he’s definitely gonna have a spark inside.



“Well, I guess it’s time to get this show on the road. And you know what you did. So do I. We both know I can’t let you go. Like I said, baby,” I call to him over the music with a shrug. “Consequences.”

I light the fuse to the sound of Andrew’s renewed desperation.

“Ciao, sweetie. It’s been . . . something,” I call over my shoulder as I duck into the safety of the forest.

Andrew’s screams are a delightful harmony to the crescendo of music and the percussion of fireworks that crack and burst in the night. His suffering is a grand show of colorful sparks, a salvo of bright light and thunderous sound. Honestly, it’s more majestic of an exit than he deserves. Everyone should be so lucky.

It’s fucking magnificent.

I can’t be sure when Andrew’s wailing stops, not once the Triple Whistler bottle rockets start to go off. Those things are *loud*.

When the eruption dies and the last sparks are little more than falling stars, I step into the clearing. The scent of saltpeter and sulfur and singed flesh wafts from the blackened, smoking form in the center of the meadow.

With careful steps, I walk over to him. I can’t tell if he’s still breathing, and I’m not about to check for a pulse. It won’t make a difference for him anyway. Even so, I watch for a long moment, music still blaring behind us from where I left the speaker in the tall grass. Maybe I’m looking for signs of life. Or maybe I’m waiting for signs of life in me. A normal person would feel guilt or sadness, wouldn’t they? I mean, I loved him for two years. I thought I did, anyway. But the only regret I feel is that I didn’t see the real Andrew sooner.

Even that tinge of remorse is dulled beneath a feeling of accomplishment. One of relief. There's power in finding secrets and blowing them up in a beautiful, bright light. And I've kept my promise. No one else suffers but the ones who deserve it. I took care of it myself. If a soul will be marked for this life taken, no one will carry that mark but me.

Never again.

A low moan pierces through the music. At first, I don't believe it, but then it rises again in a puff of smoke.

"Holy shit, baby," I say on the heels of an incredulous laugh. My heart sings beneath my bones. "I can't believe you're still alive."

Andrew doesn't answer. I don't know if he can even hear me. His eyes are sealed shut, his skin charred and raw, blood seeping from warped edges of seared flesh. I don't take my eyes from the fog that spills from his parted lips as I rummage in the depths of my bag until I find what I'm looking for.

"I hope you enjoyed the show. It was a great performance," I say as I unholster the gun and press the muzzle to his forehead. Another quiet moan escapes into the night. "But I didn't bring enough fireworks for an encore, so you'll just have to use your imagination."

I squeeze the trigger, and with a final explosion, there's one less locust in the world.

And there's only one thing I feel.

Fucking invincible.

