

## The Black Bird of Chernobyl

**Ann McMan**

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In Ann McMan's romance novel *The Black Bird of Chernobyl*, a misanthropic mortician meets her match in her new bubbly community outreach colleague.

Lilah runs her family's mortuary and prefers to stay in the morgue over interacting with other humans. This changes when her father hires Sparkle, an enthusiastic baker and social media manager, to help liven up the business. Sparkle accomplishes the goal of getting the community more involved in funerary practices while annoying Lilah at every encounter. But Lilah is not as immune to Sparkle's charm as she tells herself.

When a social media post of Lilah looking extra menacing and gothic earns her the nickname Black Bird of Chernobyl along with internet fame, she is invited to give speeches, promote her ecological views on the death industry, and sell the family business. With Sparkle at her side, she navigates interviews and conventions, befuddled at the newfound attention but trying to use it for the best.

Highjinks at a morticians' convention and mishaps at the funeral home result in comedy, and the other employees at the mortuary are in the book's colorful backdrop. They include the cranky accountant, who's in her seventies and keeps a hidden alcohol stash, and handyman brothers with X-rated nicknames. But when Lilah faces death in a more intimate way than ever before, losing someone close to her, it threatens her sense of self and her plans. As a lifelong adherent to the loner lifestyle who is proud of being prickly and detached, Lilah has to decide if the joy that Sparkle brings to her life—and her business—is worth keeping.

At times raunchy and exuberant, *The Black Bird of Chernobyl* is a playful romance novel that vivifies those who tend to the dead as their life's work.

JEANA JORGENSEN (July / August 2024)

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