



Beastly Things

Donna Leon

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When the body of man is found in a canal, damaged by the tides, carrying no wallet, and wearing only one shoe, Brunetti has little to work with. No local has filed a missing-person report, and no hotel guests have disappeared. Where was the crime scene? And how can Brunetti identify the man when he can't show pictures of his face? The autopsy shows a way forward: it turns out the man was suffering from a rare, disfiguring disease. With Inspector Vianello, Brunetti canvasses shoe stores, and winds up on the mainland in Mestre, outside of his usual sphere. From a shopkeeper, they learn that the man had a kindly way with animals.

At the same time, animal rights and meat consumption are quickly becoming preoccupying issues at the Venice Questura, and in Brunetti's home, where conversation at family meals offer a window into the joys and conflicts of Italian life. Perhaps with the help of Signorina Elettra, Brunetti and Vianello can identify the man and understand why someone wanted him dead. As subtle and engrossing as ever, Leon's *Beastly Things* is immensely enjoyable, intriguing, and ultimately moving.

Beastly Things Details

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Author : Donna Leon

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From Reader Review Beastly Things for online ebook

Gloria Feit says

There usually are three common elements in any Guido Brunetti mystery: The City of Venice plays a central role. Then there is the crime for the Commissario to solve. And, lastly, there is a significant social issue running through the novel. This, the 21st novel in the series, is no exception. A man is fished out of a Venetian canal, having been stabbed in the back. Brunetti sets off to find the murderer, and witnesses corruption on a massive scale among public officials and private business.

Looking at the retrieved body, Brunetti has the feeling that he has seen the man before, recognizing his odd shape. Later, learning the man suffered from a rare disease causing his upper torso to enlarge, the Commissario remembers where he saw the victim, enabling him to identify the man. From this point, the novel essentially becomes a straightforward police procedural.

Sprinkled throughout the story are Brunetti's observations and philosophical musings, giving the book a certain flavor and embellishing his personality. Unlike previous entries in the series, however, it lacks the usual deep look into his taste for food and his wife's ability to provide haute cuisine to a family of four (including recipes at the back of the book). It's unfortunate because such information really spices up the novels. However, any Brunetti mystery is well worth reading, and is recommended.

Kathleen says

Very exciting to go to the library and find the latest Donna Leon novel, set always in Venice. The author chooses a contemporary Italian problem as the nexus of each novel; in this case the safety of the meat industry. Commissario Guido Brunetti will find a way to deliver justice, but maybe not the legal way--in Italy, that could take too long. In this book Brunetti enters the 21st century--when he enters his office, there is a computer on his desk. Usually he relies on Pucetti and Signorina Elettra to gather information for him, but now he begins his own searches. Venice is always the background: the cafes, the tides, the white wine, the vaporetti, and it is always a pleasurable journey toward the solving of the murder. The chapter as Brunetti and Vianello gather information at the slaughterhouse is the foil for Venice, but necessary.

"None of the three men spoke as they passed under the bridge, nor when they passed under the next one and the others, nor when they passed the Basilica, and San Giorgio on the right. What would it be, Brunetti tried to imagine, to see all of this for the first time? Virgin eyes? It came to him that this assault of beauty was the opposite of what had happened in Paganziol (the slaughterhouse), though each experience was overwhelming, each ravishing the viewer in his own way." (160)

Brunetti, his loyal colleagues, his family and Donna Leon all love their city.

Rose says

Donna Leon's "Beastly Things" is one among a long standing series of mysteries revolving around Commissario Guido Brunetti, taking place in the heart of Venice, Italy. It's my first novel in the progressive series, but from what I understand, it's a mystery that's self-contained, so readers who are just joining the series can partake with it without feeling like they've missed anything. For me, I didn't have as intimate a connection with Guido Brunetti as perhaps other readers who've followed the series probably have, but there was enough of a balance between examining Guido's life and the case details to draw me into the story.

The story begins with a body found in the local river, an unidentified man with a very distinct condition. The man is later identified as a veterinarian who had a very complicated personal and professional life, involving quite a few players who could've had a hand in his death. The story toggles between the ongoing mystery and Brunetti's personal life and professional pursuits, with emphasis in the beginning on rounding out Brunetti's character and his routines. There's also special attention paid to atmosphere and political/social climate of the city. I do like the focus on these attributes, though it takes a bit longer for the story to gain momentum (I would say you learn very little about the actual mystery until about 100 pages in). Once the players are introduced as well as the conflicts, the story really takes off and keeps you guessing with some stark revelations. It starts with the illegal slaughtering of animals and develops into a complex intertwining of relationships, betrayal and corruptive practices.

If you're looking for an action oriented mystery with sharp turns, this isn't the kind of story that will engage you. It's more atmospheric and contemplative than most harrowing mysteries that I've had the opportunity to read. Thus, depending on how you like your mystery and its respective players - this will either be a hit or a miss. Even with that, I found myself enjoying the guesswork and allowing the mystery and its players to settle on me, almost as if I were just taking the details of the collective story as it came across. There are some gruesome descriptions (forewarning to those who love animals) contained in-text, but none to the point where it's out of context with the story progression.

Brunetti himself is a likable character, one I appreciated seeing the bird eye view into his personal as well as his professional life. I think there was only a limited window as to how much I could identify with his character since this was my introduction to him, but I liked his sense of morality and reflections. It does make me curious to see how his character comes across in the progressive series.

I would say this is probably a good novel to take on in and of itself, probably not the best introduction to Brunetti from what I can tell, but certainly worth a read for those who like a more reflective mystery with a likable detective.

Overall score: 3/5

Note: I received this as an ARC from NetGalley, from the publisher Grove/Atlantic Inc.

Alex is The Romance Fox says

This still remains one of my favourite crime/thriller series.
From the 1st line.....I was hooked once again!!

A man lay still, as still as a piece of meat on a slab, as still as death itself.

Beastly Things, the 21st mystery in Donna Leon's Commissario Guido Brunetti Series starts with a body of a man stabbed to death is found floating in one of Venice's canal, whose identity is only revealed half-way

through the story.

Brunetti and his side-kick, Vianello The dead man is identified as a gentle vet, whose part-time job at a slaughter house , was to certify that animals brought for slaughter were free from any disease that could be passed into the food-chain. The investigation leads them to a conspiracy of corruption and crime that is eroding the city of Venice.

“The city grew dirtier, hotels proliferated and rents increased, every available inch of sidewalk space was rented out to someone wanting to sell unusable junk from a portable stall, and still the waves of promises to sweep away all these ills rose up ever new and ever higher,” Brunetti laments

Again, the characters and the Venice setting are what makes this series so special.

A good addition as usual.

Ms.pegasus says

Leon has written a sombre book exploring themes of aging, death, and ethical choices. The sombre note is sounded with a two-page opening which leisurely inspects a nameless corpse in the police morgue. Despite his damaged condition and physical impairments he is viewed with hushed dignity, a mood created by the pronoun 'he' rather than 'it' and the many reminders that this man was recently alive. *“It was cold in the room, the only sound the heavy wheeze of the air conditioning. The man's thick chest did not move up and down, nor did he stir uncomfortably in the cold. He lay there, naked under his sheet, eyes closed. He did not wait, for he was beyond waiting, just as he was beyond being late or being on time. One might be tempted to say that the man simply was. But that would be untrue, for he was no more.”* (p.3)

Leon depicts an aging Commissario Brunetti, caught up with introspective musings about his mother, now bereft of memory, his own anxious bouts of hypochondria, and those innocuous but annoying memory glitches that herald the aging process. There are other hints of time's passage. The seaweed choking the waterways seems to have advanced; the children are adolescents. Brunetti takes on the mentoring of an eager neophyte, Pucetti, while he notes the growing bald spot on his junior officer, Bocchese.

Signorina Elettra has at last managed to secure a computer for Brunetti. His frequent requests had been ignored by his superiors. She, however, has managed to find a loophole by applying for Interpol funds on the pretext that the computer will be used to investigate the counterfeit goods trade. As far as any other purposes the computer might serve — who can predict? Brunetti is not so foolish as to look a gift horse in the mouth. *“Do I detect the voice of a Euro-sceptic, sir?”,* asks the Signorina. *“You do. 'Ah' she whispered; then as if unable to prevent herself from asking, she added, 'But that won't stop you from keeping the computer?' 'In the presence of a trough, it is difficult not to oink,' Brunetti replied.”* (p.36)

Unlike many of the stories, the action is limited to Venice and its outlying precinct of Mestre, an industrial area which reminds Brunetti of Milan. A tangential social thread of animal rights is introduced early. Brunetti's efforts are focused on identifying the corpse in the morgue, and in the process, he collects impressions about the man's life from people who had seen him. He also is confronted with more evidence of the pervasive corruption that plagues Italian society.

Despite his acquisition of modern technology, it is old-fashioned human interaction that aids Brunetti in solving his case. He obtains a photograph of the victim when he remembers a recent protest covered by the media. Identification is achieved when the photograph is circulated within the police station. Brunetti learns about the currents in the canal where the body was found from a police vaporetto pilot named Foa. He obtains additional information from face-to-face interviews, and of course, his own shrewd instincts about the truthfulness of these interviewees.

The structure of this book is nearly perfect. The closing chapter is a bookend to the opening chapter — a moving reiteration of the humanity of the murder victim. The writing is beautiful and powerful.

Although each book Leon writes can stand alone, readers new to the series should start with some of the earlier books. Those familiar with the series will have greater appreciation for the serious tone of **BEASTLY THINGS**.

Lewis Weinstein says

As she often does, Donna Leon raises issues of social and personal responsibility in a way that supports her exciting story and gives the reader much to think about. The political corruption and governmental incompetence strikes close to home for American readers.

All people are weak some times, and Leon positions those who love them to choose whether to accept/forgive that aspect of humanity or whether the offense is egregious enough to end the relationship. There are consequences.

For the faint-hearted, the slaughterhouse scene is rather graphic, but it's only a couple of pages. The background of Venice is, as always, marvelous.

Laura says

I received this book as a digital ARC from the publisher through Net Galley in return for an honest review.

Publication date: April 17, 2012.

This is the first book I read by Donna Leon and I really liked it.

The plot is about a murder investigation when the body of a man is found in a canal without any kind of identification.

Commissario Brunetti is in charge of this crime and the police takes at least two days in order to find the true identify of the unknown victim since nobody claims for his disappearance even if he has a very rare disease, the Marlung disease.

After have found his true identity, the pace of the narrative accelerates. The reader is wrong to think that it is a simple case of a murder investigation because other developments of the story emerge as the search for the killers deepens.

I must confess that I was reluctant to read books of this author because I thought it was only the most best-selling author not realizing that it was more a master of crime fiction.

A very interesting aspect of this book and the author portrays the Commissioner Brunetti as a normal human being and not as a detective gifted with supernatural powers to solve a murder case.

Another very interesting aspect of this book is that the author throughout the narrative portraying aspects of contemporary daily life in Venice reporting, for example, how an old woman complains of the unwanted presence of tourists in her city but does not behave in a civilized way in this regard.

LJ says

First Sentence: A man lay still, as still as a piece of meat on a slab, as still as death itself.

It starts with a body found in a canal; stabbed to death, no wallet and wearing only one shoe. His physical structure should make him fairly easy to identify, and does. A man who loves animals and is separated from his wife who seems not to particularly care that her husband is dead. But it is the man's secondary profession which raises questions, not only about the murder, but about the politics and ethics of being Italian.

Let's start with the fact that I love the map on the inside covers. Maps are wonderful things. They accentuate the sense of place and allow you to "walk" with the characters.

Now let's talk about Leon and how wonderful is her style and voice. "If a man who always lies tells someone he is a liar, is he telling the truth? If no one is alive in a room, is the room empty?" it is not only Leon's narrative that is compelling, but her dialogue, which has a natural flow and intelligence particularly, in this book between Brunetti and Signorina Elettra, one of the most intriguing character currently being written. Brunetti is a true Venetian. He loves his city, his family and his food. He doesn't understand how people can stand living where they need cars. He recognizes the pervasive dishonesty in the ways things are done, even in himself.

Usually, the descriptions of food usually leave the reader hungry. However, in this book rather than compelling you to the kitchen, it could forever change what you eat. There is an extensive scene which may leave readers extremely uncomfortable, however, it is factual and shows how easily greed can dominate ethics.

The story is, as always, extremely well written. Because of the focus on social issues, which were interesting and important, I did feel the plot taking an occasional second seat.

"Beastly Things" is not my favorite of Leon's books, but saying it was very good, is comparable to lesser authors being excellent. I did appreciate that, in this book, justice is served.

BEASTLY THINGS (Pol. Proc-Comm. Guido Brunetti-Venice, Italy-Contemp) – VG
Leon, Donna – 21st in series

Robert says

I put these Commissario Brunetti novels in the same category as I do the TV series "Midsomer Murders" - a kind of comfort food for the mind. In neither case, nothing outstanding - just gentle humour and human kindness in a beautiful setting contrasted with the ugliness of real life. This is No. 21 in the Brunetti books I own, and as usual, Donna Leon did not let me down.

Once again, Brunetti pursues in his rather casual way his major interests: family, food and meting out justice (in that order). Once again, Venetian and Italian politics on general are treated to scathing comments, while Brunetti, ably supported by his friend and colleague Vianello and the cunning Signorina Elettra despite being fiendishly hindered by his venial superiors, brings another murderer to justice while the bad boys in the background once again get away with it. At least this time, Brunetti manages to give one of them a bad scare.

If your thing is braincell by braincell forensics or fast car chases, I'm afraid Commissario di Polizia Guido Brunetti is not for you, but I have enjoyed every single book and can only hope that Ms Leon keeps on writing.

(For some strange reason, the Atlantic Press edition I bought omits one of the previously published works: "Acqua Alta (1996) also published as "Death at High Water")

Tony says

BEASTLY THINGS. (2012). Donna Leon. ****.

When you hear the name Donna Leon or the title of one of her mysteries, what's the first thing you think of? VENICE! Close, but that's not it – even though all her mysteries are set in that city and presided over by Commissario Guido Brunetti. Another try? How about his wife and her superb cooking? That's it. It is common for Italian men to make their way back to their home to have lunch with their family. We're not talking peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but culinary efforts that have been passed down from mother to daughter for generations. Having guessed almost correctly, you should know that the theme of this mystery is food – processed food, like beef. Food processors are overseen by a variety of bureaus in Europe, but mostly by organizations that follow the rules for food safety set up by the European Union groups based in Brussels. In this case, we find that beef on the hoof is not being processed according to the rules set down for safety. It all starts out when a man's body is found floating in one of the canals. Through astute police procedure, Brunetti manages to ultimately find out that the body belongs to a man who works in a beef processing plant. That opens up the way for Brunetti to find out more about the food industry in the beautiful region of Venice. Along the way, we do manage to follow him home for lunch so we can find out what is on the bill of fare served up by his wife. This is an especially good novel from Ms. Leon. Read it.

booksofAhu says

This series is one of the books I read time to time. Though they are under the category of mystery/crime, I see these books more like fiction novels.

I like how author presents the social and emotional sides of each event. It is not just solving the crime, it is reasons, effects, before and afterwards.

* Though I like meat a lot, I am seriously considering going vegan.

* At the end the funeral, so touching..

Toni Osborne says

Book 21 in the Commissario Brunetti series

The appeal in this series has been the leisurely approach Commissario Brunetti has in solving crimes, it was refreshing to see him pick up the pace and exert himself with a lot more hands on action this time. The structure has not change a whole lot, we still experience Venice through the eyes of Brunetti and of course his wonderful family and their customs always play an important part in the staging of the mystery. This novel explores the dark side of Italy's meat industry and covers the widespread corruption that drives it.

The mystery opens when a body of a man is discovered in a canal without any usual source of identification on him. It is his distinct medical condition that enables Brunetti and his team to eventually identify him. He is a veterinarian, separated from his wife and known to moonlight at times at a slaughterhouse. With the help of the devious Signorina Elettra, a hardened hacker, the team finds themselves slowly infiltrating the world of veterinarians and abattoirs. They soon realize there is an organised criminal side driven by human greed that may have something to do with the murder.

After reading this novel you may think twice about the food you eat and may even turn you into a vegetarian. As a counterbalance, the author adds her usual colour to the story by describing Brunetti's leisurely lunches prepared for him by his lovely wife, pastries and pasta seems to be an Italian favourite. Ms. Leon's characters are well developed and very believable and her plot doesn't shy away from dealing with social issues. The story is atmospheric and develops into a complex intertwining of relationships, betrayal and corrupt practices. I enjoyed the guesswork including the gruesome descriptions that came across in some of the chapters.

This is another captivating tale with Italy as a backdrop, the author's speciality.

Beverly Swerling says

I adore Leon's Brunetti series for the writing, the superb characterization, and the exquisite evocation of beautiful Venice. If her stories display cracks it is in the area of plot, and in Beastly Things that fissure is a bit wider than usual. It isn't that the events that create incident in BT are illogical or forced - sometimes what we mean when we talk of a less than wonderful plot. The problem here is predictability. Everything fits too well.

Leon writes with no foreshadowing, that's part of her technique and it creates the immediacy that is one of

the great pleasures of her novels, but surprise is one of the linchpins of the mystery and there is none here. As the story unfolds we see the lives of the characters spread out on the page - happening in real time as it were. We sink into them sighing with pleasure as we too make our way through the crowds of tourists and struggle to find a place on the vaporetto. In the course of the passing days we make an immediate guess at the murderer. From there on it's a straight line until all is revealed.

I loved reading this nonetheless. I expect other pleasures from Donna Leon and those she delivers here as always, but I wish she would free her imagination and allow us the moment of astonishment at writerly cleverness.

Noora says

Nopealukainen ja ihan ok Brunetti-kirja, jossa tällä kertaa keskityttiin enemmän juoneen kuin Brunettin perheen tai ruoan kuvamiseen. Näitä lukee aina mielellään, vaikkei näissä sen syvällisempää monesti olekaan. Tämänkin kirjan eläinsuojelullinen anti jää aika ohueksi.

Jeanette says

WHEW, the funeral at the very ending gave it the 5th star. A Mass with the creatures honoring their doctor. This is a shock- my giving a Donna Leon Brunetti (#21 in the series on top of it) a 5 star. But this one meshed. Totally.

It's early to mid spring and Venice and its canals, the tides which carry a body, the columns and the water gates-all are cored completely into the story. Patta, Elettra, Vianello- and all of the Brunettis become defined in such dialogue! From literary asides of comparison to ethical decisions on each delicious plate- all of these issues come together within this case and within these spaces. Better than any of her others.

There was so much that could be quoted! If I had not held a Kindle read, I would have copied and pasted an entire list of Paola or Guido comments in this review. And the descriptions were sublime. But essentially this one grabbed the core of Guido and his work subordinate, far more than any other of this series. Life, death of humans and animals. Fairness. Corruption in each hierarchy. The spot in married life when the spouse CAN NOT be properly attended to with any fraction of a "listen". Covered all. And where does the illegal activities of breaking into private and governmental databases that Elettra does routinely fall within these "ethics" scale or fairness quotients? Guido speculates, but orders it.

And pertinent to our times! Sons and daughters after 9 years of higher education sitting home at computers with no jobs and living in the spare closet or back room. The Italian "family" icon ideal and tradition held in such modes of memory immemorial; is it just that- a memory? Or truly 20 plus years or 2 generations in larger context gone- the timeline depending upon your Italia location and the power of your Nona's Rosary. And how much bad news, dire scientific outcomes predicted and served with a side order of guilt, or over emphasized celeb or politico "dilemma" media hype can common humans continue to take without gaining a hand tremble or a habit for anti-depressive or relaxation medications. And where does it end all this "becoming aware" and judgmentally enlightened?

And all of this conjuncture weaves the case. Which concerns the beasts.

The beasts that are our pets. The beasts we eat. The human beasts who eat us- because they do not care for other than their own purposes and living style. Those without a conscience and who kill for the 2000 Euros a month profit gain if getting rid of the "trouble" that prevents that 25% cut.

And Dr. Nava- sick himself and "a good dog" vet. He who tried to be the "good dog" and keep his people from harm.

Paola also gets to play a type of Borgia role at work in her cunning to get a non-ethical professor tossed and denied tenure. Can you believe he cuts pages out of library books?

Water gates, mainland farms and a slaughterhouse feature too. And the monstrosity in the harbor to keep the Veneto above the waves. But is that never finished or operating in stability steel obstruction as faulty as the tenets from Brussels are for majority of Italians?

This review could be longer. Vianello TRULY knows women- how they think and exactly what the widow regrets. He is a superb under character. Foa isn't shabby in this one either. So Italian to have him given the assignment of boating with his fiance and working at the same time. BY Guido's direction.

Regardless of all. I still know Guido is going to be eating veal chops at some point in book #29.
