



BOOK CLUB KIT

FROM BAD

TO

CURSED

LANA HARPER



Dear Reader,

Second books in a series can be very daunting to write. The world exists, your cast of characters is fleshed out, and many of the magical rules are already in place. And given how in love I was with *Payback's a Witch*—how natural the world-building felt to me, and how joyous it was to write a sexy, heartfelt bisexual love story without hinging it on angst—it felt very bittersweet to leave Emmy and Talia behind.

But *From Bad to Cursed* took me by complete surprise, by being just as delightful and even more surprising of a journey.

For one thing, wild child Isidora Avramov was the best kind of whirlwind—the sort of complex, irreverent, and chaotic main character I most enjoy creating. The idea of a thrill-seeking, demon-summoning sorceress who also loves rescuing animals, adores her family, struggles with anxiety and panic, and feels torn about her path in life struck a powerful chord with me. Most people are layered; rarely is someone genuinely just “the cinnamon bun” or the “grumpy one.” When it came to Issa and lawful-good, green-magic healer Rowan Thorn, I wanted to show how intense and sexy it can be to watch a long-standing archnemesis-ship between seeming polar opposites turn into an exploration of the qualities they have in common—and the ways they complement each other against all odds, despite the complicated history between their families.

The darker tint of this book also allowed me to showcase some of the spookier aspects of Thistle Grove and the Grimoire. Issa and Rowan’s story delves into necromantic curses (including hilariously creepy squirrels, magic-leaching hexes, and nightmarish spectral snakes), and is rife with ghosts, shady ancestors, and the Avramovs’ much more sinister magic. Better yet, we get to spend even more time at the Arcane Emporium’s immersive haunted house, as well as The Bitters, the Avramovs’ demesne—two of my not-so-secretly favorite Thistle Grove venues!

We also get to see much more of the Thorns’ beautiful green magic; some of my favorite scenes in the book are set against the enchanted backdrops of Honeycake Orchards. Because, of course, *Cursed* is a springtime romance! I wanted to give readers a chance to experience this magical town outside of fall and Halloween season. Blooming lush with flowers in spring, centered on the fertility festival of Beltane—a celebration of light and life, and an opportunity for readers to explore Lady’s Lake and Hallows Hill at a completely different time of year.

I hope you’ll find Issa and Rowan—and this airier, sunnier version of Thistle Grove—as charming and compelling as I do! (And not to worry; both Emmy and Talia make appearances in *Cursed*!) And thank you, always, for opening your hearts to my only-sometimes-wicked witches and their magical town. None of this would exist without you.

Here’s to toil and trouble, and the happiest of endings—again!

Lana Harper



Beltane

What is Beltane?

Beltane is one of the eight Wheel of the Year holidays—more commonly known as Sabbats in the Wiccan community—celebrated by modern pagans, falling about halfway between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice. It's a fire festival; a celebration of fertility, life, and the return of light, the moment when peak spring tips into summer.

How is it celebrated?

Beltane is also known as May Day and is traditionally celebrated on May 1 with bonfires, dancing around a maypole, and general carousing. Couples are often handfast on Beltane, to celebrate a ritual communion between the Goddess and the God, as ceremonially embodied by the May Queen and the Green Man. (As might be expected, sexy shenanigans abound.)

And what about in Thistle Grove? Because I know that must be lit.

Well, yes. Literally. As we know, Thistle Grove witches can be... shall we say, extra, when it comes to their festivities. So instead of celebrating only on May Day, the witch community celebrates throughout April as well, beginning with:

The Crowning

On April 1, the witch community gathers at Honeycake Orchards for this opening ceremony traditionally hosted by the Thorn family, in which aspiring witches “audition” their most beautiful green-magic spells in an effort to be chosen as this year’s May Queen, with the Victor of the Wreath, Emmy Harlow, acting as judge. The May Queen then selects her own Green Man. (more an excuse for the Thorns to show off their skills than anything else, as the May Queen is typically a Thorn. Also, they never fail to put out a delicious spread for their guests, which occasionally lures even the most spring-averse Avramovs to the ceremony.)

First Dew

Midmonth, the witches of Thistle Grove hold a predawn, candlelit procession to hike up Hallows Hill and gather in a circle at Lady’s Lake. There, the May Queen casts a gorgeous floral spell and gathers up the mysterious, invigorating (and distinctly aphrodisiac) dew that’s only found lakeside on this day. A lot of spring wine is involved as well. Afterward, couples often steal off into the unusually large mountaintop forest and . . . well . . . (See abovementioned shenanigans.)

The Dance of the Maidens

On the night of the full moon, the female-identifying members of the Thistle Grove coven dance their way up the mountain, lit by trailside bonfires, to be met by the male-identifying members and given floral wreaths. Then, everyone goes skinny-dipping in a lake that seems to hold even more star reflections than usual. (As you might expect, more shenanigans abound.)

The Beltane Bonfire

On May Day itself, the witches come full circle—they enjoy the town’s mundane Flower Moon Festival, and then return to the Honeycake Orchards for a spectacular, magical lighting of the bonfire at the ceremonial hearth. And then—you guessed it!—yet more shenanigans, because can there ever really be too many? (No.)

Witch's Vengeance

Directions

MAKE THE PEACH SIMPLE SYRUP:

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, add the peaches, water, and sugar and stir to combine. Stir occasionally as the mixture heats up to dissolve the sugar into the water.
2. Bring the mixture to a brief boil, and then reduce the heat to medium low and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and cover the saucepan to allow the simple syrup to steep while cooling. Once cooled, strain the simple syrup into an airtight jar using a mesh strainer or cheesecloth, and store in the refrigerator.

MAKE THE BOURBON SMASH COCKTAIL:

3. Squeeze the juice of half a lemon into a cocktail shaker. Add fresh mint leaves, peach simple syrup, and your choice of bourbon.
4. Add ice to the shaker and shake to combine.
5. Add crushed ice to a rocks or collins glass, and strain cocktail shaker mixture over the ice. Top with a splash (1 to 2 ounces) of ginger beer, garnish with fresh peach slices (use raven cupcake toppers to spear peaches, if desired) and mint sprigs, and enjoy!

Optional: [Raven cupcake toppers for spearing peach slices](#)

Ingredients

FOR THE PEACH SIMPLE SYRUP:

- 2 ripe peaches, diced
- 1 cup water
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

FOR TWO COCKTAILS:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ fresh lemon
- 6-8 fresh mint leaves
- 4 ounces peach simple syrup
- 4 ounces bourbon
- fresh ice
- 1-2 ounces ginger beer
- peach slices and fresh mint sprigs for garnish





Demon Summoning for Winners!

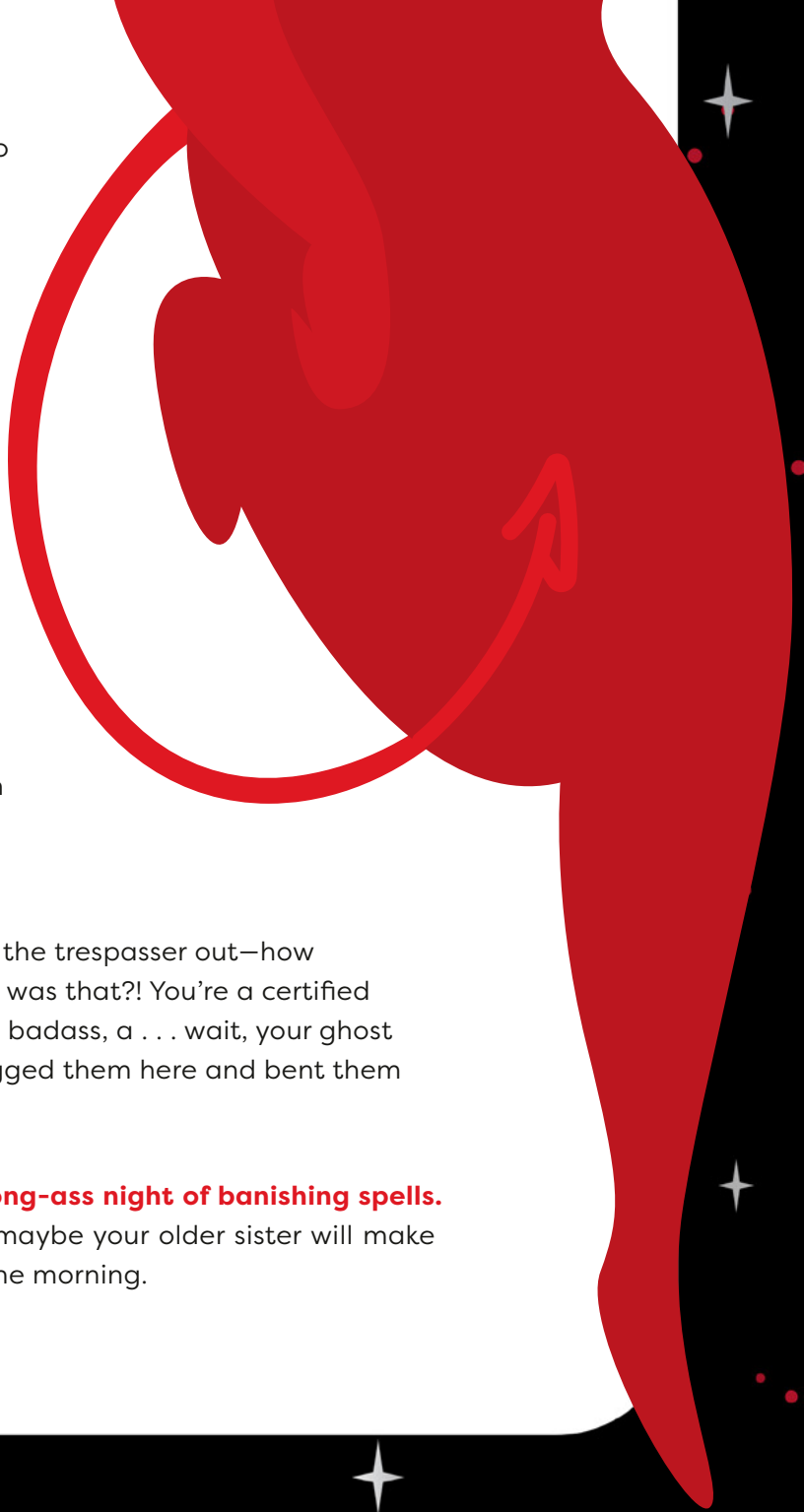
A GUIDE BY ISIDORA AVRAMOV

1. **Pick the right venue.** Ambience is key here; I cannot stress this enough. Zero windows, the most sinister lighting possible, and ideally some centuries-old stone masonry. I tend to prefer my mother's wine cellar in The Bitters for this type of shit, but I get that not everyone has a haunted Victorian mansion with a warren of underground rooms at their disposal. Maybe your best friend has a creepy basement or something! You'll make it work.
2. **Cast a summoning circle like your life depends on it.** Because it does. The ground rules are there for a reason—and that reason is to keep your reckless ass from getting soul-eaten by an unbound daemonfolk. Take it from me, no matter how hard-core you are, you do not want this particular experience.
3. **Know your demon's full name.** How are you going to bind them otherwise?! I mean, really, should you even be doing this? Might I suggest free solo climbing instead? At least that's probably not going to land you in the nether realms for all eternity.
4. **Accept that you will, upon occasion, screw things up very, very badly.** Got a syllable of your demon's name wrong? Forgot a key ingredient of your black salt? Hey, don't beat yourself up, it happens to the best of us! And when it does . . .
5. **Hecate's chilly tits, it is now time to panic!** Okay, you've accidentally summoned a fallen angel instead of the much more manageable third-tier daemonfolk you were expecting.



She's admittedly very hot, but make no mistake—THIS IS TERRIBLE AF. You will, most likely, suffer a heinous death. Worse yet, your mother is going to judge you so hard for this mortifying failure to handle your demonic business. But wait . . .

- 6. Think outside the box!** There is always an alternative solution, if you're creative and clever enough. Once your emergency banishing spells fail, you might consider calling up all the ghostly shades who haunt your family demesne (or your friend's creepy basement), like an impromptu militia... and then sic them on the demon! Hells yeah!
- 7. Pat yourself on the back!** Woo-hoo, you did it! Your haunts drove the trespasser out—how cool and creative are you? And how fun was that?! You're a certified demon-summoning baller, a stone-cold badass, a . . . wait, your ghost militia is now extremely pissed you dragged them here and bent them to your will. Well, shit.
- 8. Buckle up . . . 'cause it's gonna be a long-ass night of banishing spells.** If you're lucky—and still alive by then—maybe your older sister will make you chocolate challah French toast in the morning.





Discussion Questions

1. When we first meet Isidora Avramov, she's summoning a relatively benign demon—who turns out to be a lot more than she bargained for! We discover that Issa often does risky magic of this nature just to blow off some steam. What do you think of the morality of an outlet that may or may not put others in danger? Did it influence your perception of Issa right off the bat, one way or the other?
2. Issa is deeply conflicted about her position as creative director of the Arcane Emporium's haunted house—a role she once loved, but has since outgrown in favor of other professional aspirations. Can you identify with Issa's guilt and fear of sharing these new desires and goals with her family?
3. Issa and Elena, her mother and the Avramov matriarch, are very close, yet it's also clear that much goes unsaid between them. What did you think of their relationship? Could you identify with the way they relate to each other, or does it mystify you?
4. Issa and Rowan have a somewhat silly "archnemesis-ship," but it's one they both take very seriously. What do you think of the way things went down between them at the animal shelter, and how they both contributed to that conflict? Who do you think was more at fault, if anyone?
5. The Thorns and the Avramovs have a long and complicated family history. Do you think they're truly as at odds with one another as they seem? Do you think some of their polar opposite qualities actually intensify Issa's and Rowan's attraction to each other, and why?
6. Issa is a powerful necromantic sorceress, even stronger than her older sister. Which of her spells did you find most impressive? Which, if any, did you find the most unnerving? What do you think of her necromancy, as it compares to Rowan's green magic and healing?

7. The Thorns have very different family dynamics than the Avramovs, but both families consider themselves tight-knit and devoted to one another. Compare the bonds between Rowan and his cousin Holly and younger sister, Lark, to Issa's relationship with her cousin Letha and the way she interacts with her siblings at the revelry. What differences and similarities do you see?
8. Issa has a history of anxiety and panic attacks, which she does her best to quell and hide from even her closest friends and family. What do you think of the way she chooses to handle her anxiety, and the way Rowan approaches it?
9. What do you think of the way the Thorn family reacts to repeated attacks against their own—especially ones that seem to be of such trademark Avramov magic? Do you appreciate their restraint, or do you think you might have been more aggressive in their shoes?
10. What do you think of Issa's decision to process her complex feelings by incorporating her unfolding story with Rowan and the mystery of the curse into her new narrative for the haunted house? Was this hitting below the belt, or a legitimate source of inspiration?
11. Talia has a surprising role to play in the mystery of the poltergeist haunting, The Bitters, and the attacks against the Thorns. Were you surprised to discover her connection with Valentina Avramov? Do you think Issa, and even Emmy, are right to blame themselves in not having noticed something awry with Talia? Why do you think they didn't?
12. What lessons on misplaced family values, individual ambition, and even perceptions of misogyny can you draw from Valentina's possession? Do you think she was downright evil... or did she occasionally have a valid point to make? By the end of the book, what differences could you see between the way Valentina and Issa relate to the Thorns, and to their own family legacy?

