



CHEAPEST
BOOKS

CURSE OF THE STARS



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~ A HISTORICAL HORROR NOVEL ~

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ezgi YÜCEBAŞ was born in 2001 in Izmir, Turkey. She was always interested in fantasy stories which became one of the main aspects that shaped her imagination. Her passion for books led her to start creating worlds out of words. In her debut novel, *Curse of the Stars*, she paints a vivid, fictionalized image of witchcraft.

SYNOPSIS



Magick relies on performance. The ritual must be based on the visuals and tools, as well as the knowledge and ability of the witch. It doesn't matter whether the spiritual forces or demons are involved, the ritual always requires its audience.

So that more people can witness the massacres, screams or chanting gracing the cruel night.

And sacrifices are just a cherry on top. A crimson-colored one, almost as delicious as blood...

In the 1900s London, an ambitious girl Melody Abertfield's desire to have a perfectly normal year in the Darkgrove Academy gets slightly ruined as the ancient devilry in her blood begins to awaken. When her life collides with the Cult members in a stunning chain of rituals, the darkness in her makes her feel safer than the light. She finds herself captivated by the chaos of the stars, bloodthirsty witches, and a young man, Elliot, who haunts her heart more than anything..

CHAPTER 1



May 13, 1903.

Weary moonlight penetrating the circle-shaped window of the Darkgrove Academy was the only source of light illuminating the victim. Amid the ashen night, the sounds of crickets and crows were blended with the sobs of the bleeding boy. Heavenly beams in the sky were absent; even the stars seemed to despise such brutality.

"Crying is pointless; don't waste your last breath doing that," A rough voice, grown raucous with beer, skimmed through the walls of the dungeon, molten by damp.

"Your attitude is making this worse every time, Orlando. Just kill him, or else he is going to wake everyone up!" Beatrice hissed, her knuckles white as marble as she grasped her blade.

"There is nothing wrong with seeking some fun, even in an ancient ritual. But if you still want to play the coward, I'm fine with it."

Beatrice was used to Orlando's greed, even in the inhumane requirements of the cult. She made no answer, except muttering something under her breath; her strawberry blonde bangs barely hid the offended expression on her face.

"You are all ruining the energy — get your asses at work, I don't want to repeat everything!" Elliot exclaimed, the blood dripping from the chalice in his hands leaving new stains on the straw floor.

"I think you are just mad that you didn't get to use your seductive charm when choosing the victim this time." The other girl, Miranda, commented with a mischievous air. With her rainbow-colored ribbons

and handmade ornaments, she looked like a huge cupcake.

“Maybe I should’ve. Because that’s the only part we manage with success—”

Nick, whose hair was the same color as the blood on the altar, sliced the air with his blade. “Just because we are not fond of the rituals doesn’t mean we are not good at them.”

“Then stop talking, and focus for once!”

Four of the students formed a circle around the victim: audacious Beatrice; attractive and devious Elliot; frisky Miranda; and crooked-toothed Nick... Their navy blue uniforms were darkened with blood and wrinkled with worry — and the worst part of a ritual was always trying to get rid of the dirt in their neatly ironed skirts and sweaters, according to Beatrice. No matter how much she tried, the smell of blood would always stick to their clothes like a second layer of perfume.

The tarnished altar started spitting the ashes belonged to a lamb that they tore that evening. Taking the sign, Orlando walked into the center of the circle. His gaze was piercing the victim without the need for a knife.

He kneeled down to look at the boy tied up with rusty chains that were already sucking the life out of his veins. He had stopped trying to escape hours ago when they splashed his abdomen with knives that charred his flesh up to the bone. Still whining silently, despite the dirty cloth in his mouth, he raised his sweaty face to the figure shadowing the dungeon even more.

“I’m going to make it fast this time.”

“Yeah, you better,” Elliot scoffed, his eyes wintry. “Did you remember last year? It took us three days to get rid of the blood on the *ceiling*.”

“I’m repeating this one more time: my knife was working perfectly fine before that girl vomited all over my hands!”

“How many times do I need to tell you all to shut up?” Beatrice whispered with an alarmed expression on her porcelain face.

Finally, Orlando placed the knife in the boy’s throat. Stricken by a maddening panic, he started screaming like a choked frog. For a second, sweat followed his hairline, plump drops of tears cleansing the dirt in his

sunken cheeks. He was sobbing, begging for mercy. Yet Orlando wasn't even hearing him. Dim chambers in his mind were swelling with a mist, dazing and deceiving. That wasn't much to his surprise. Thickened with dust, gnawed by moths; such dungeons were the emptiness where unnamed souls slept in. They would wait for such nights for the ritual blood to envelope their disembodied desires like wine.

Swiftly and almost gently, Orlando drew the knife across the boy's throat; a torrent of dark, mesmerizing crimson rushed to cover the aged straw and muck laying upon the cracks of the floor. An uncanny chanting filled the restless silence in the room, accompanied by a stream of energy collecting around the bloody hands of the cult members.

"Dark was never this light,

Yet the shadows were seldom right.

In filthy, earthly waters, let us find the whole, our eternal shore."

Their sacred words for the dead touched the air, swallowing the silent Spirits waiting in their headspace.

With a nervous grin forming in his reddening lips, Elliot gathered the remaining blood on the altar into a small bottle. The May Rituals had always been the most important ones in a year, but before they started the academy, they would use someone from the town. Even though the pockmarked peasants were always an easy catch, their blood status was only as valuable as a pig.

Their mentor had always said, *"Better the blood, better the purification."*

It was usually challenging to pick a student to hallow the altar because of the investigations that took place afterwards. But this year's victim was going to be under the line of *'the missing child'* in the newspaper again. Nick was right, just because they were not fond of killing that much, that did not mean they were bad at it.

Furthermore, the Darkgrove Academy had hundreds of students, coming from not only in England but everywhere around the world.

Using one of them each year was fair enough.

The castle's moss covered towers would overlook the enormous courtyard, a forest woven with oak trees and dew-washed meadows. Crows and owls would never stop descending on its windows and chanting strange rhythms into the gloomy air. Such medieval castles were perfect places for shedding some blood and getting away with it easily.

"It's happening," Beatrice whispered, looking at the mist of sudden cold visiting them in the dungeon.

The candlelight trembled in their torches. Ebbing and flowing, a massive haze passed along the window, through the narrow cell, up the fences, and into the hungry ritual fire. A silvery surge of sparks surrounded the limp, dead body. It wasn't clear what kind of spirit had just lurked in the place, but its rotten smell was telling them how unfriendly it was.

"I think we're done here," Orlando said. Suddenly, his voice didn't sound that confident.

"I couldn't agree more." Miranda threw her bag over her shoulder.

They were going to come back at dawn to burn the body after the spirit was done with it. But for now, the ritual is over.

After a minute, the group was scampering in the dimly lit halls of the Academy. Breaths heavy and minds still possessed, they climbed the stairs that led to the dormitories. Everyone was still under the wings of a peaceful slumber. No one felt the wavering light of a breath, the heat of Hell churning the dungeon, or the otherworldly darkness visiting the chambers, except the five students.

A sudden wind trembled the tree branches outside, carrying the heavy odour into the depths of the night. An owl shrieked, and the Moon hid herself in a piece of cloud as if she didn't like what had just happened.

* * *

As ludic as woodland fauns, wild branches clutched the sparrows that were on their way to catch some idle worms. The balmy breeze lifted the

curtains of the house. In between the rose bushes and verdant ponds, and with carpet-coated interior stairs, it was classical Victorian architecture. Thanks to the maids, various thorny herbs and velvet flowers grace the gardens each season. The smell of apple pie and lemon tea filled the air, and the weather was ideal for a stroll, but Melody Abertfield was preoccupied with something else this afternoon.

She sat on the couch hastily, clasping the fancy letter in her hands. Her excited fingers traced every single word before finally stopping at the seal symbolizing the boarding school she wanted to go to.

The Darkgrove Academy.

It was a pretentious academy that accepted only students who could pass the test. Although her parents were not so fond of her going to a boarding school, it was her granddad who encouraged her every time.

Absolem Abertfield had gone there too. When he was a brilliant young man who had just reached his twenties, his sole purpose was to get accepted to the Academy; and he would always entertain Melody with stories he gathered from his school years.

She was now thinking how proud her granddad would be of her, if only his bones hadn't turned to dust, though.

The sunlight entering through the window was warming her ivory skin underneath the lacy blouse, revealing the dust particles in the room. A robin bird flew around her window like a red-colored whirlpool. The rosy sky was twisting into a deep lilac tone, and she could hear the jingling coming from the kitchen. Soon the maid was going to knock on her door to tell supper was ready.

She placed the letter in the cream envelope and rushed to go down the stairs.

With all the downpour of anticipation and merriment washing over her mind, the dining room seemed awfully quiet to Melody. Shadows were creeping into the family portraits and paintings adorning the walls. Disturbed by the fireplace spitting sparks onto the burgundy carpet,

their spaniel dashed to the marble stairs as much as his small feet allowed him to. Servants carrying the plates to the mahogany table were causing the smell of roasted partridge to travel around the room. Melody sat still, elbows off the table, while glancing at her mashed potatoes. Her father's blue eyes landed on her behind his monocle.

"Have you finished reading about martial arts? If you did, I can immediately find a teacher for you to finally practice fencing." Lawrence Abertfield took a sip of his pumpkin soup.

"Actually, that will not be necessary, father. I'm sure the Darkgrove Academy will supply me with a great deal of practice in any kind of art." She replied, taking the envelope from her pocket. A smile formed on her naturally pink lips.

The candle-lit dining room suddenly got quiet. Melting away behind the closed windows, the wind stopped groaning.

Elizabeth Abertfield took the envelope with her long nails and arched her eyebrows. Her cheeks were colored slightly with the wine, and candlelight was dancing on her sapphire crystals. She had always wanted her daughter to continue her education in France, but apparently that would not be the case anymore.

"That's convenient, you've always wanted to go there." Her father finally commented with a joyous air. Each scar on his face told a different war story; he was the embodiment of strength and perseverance, but it was all too easy for him to become molten butter on a knife for the sake of his loved ones' happiness.

"I agree. But I hope you can survive the exams. I heard they can be quite deadly." Her brother, Edgar, commented, pointing his fork at her.

"It cannot be that bad."

"You will see," Edgar replied.

"Well, I have to express my discomfort with that academy. Haven't you seen the newspaper? There was an entire article about a student going missing in its courtyard." Elizabeth took a small bite of the cornbread. Her honey-hued eyes were examining Melody's brown ones.

"Nothing bad will happen, mother. I'm sure that castle is even safer

than our house," she gave her a small smile, "I will be fine."

Although she didn't get the reaction she wanted from her family, when she went to bed that night, excitement was radiating from every part of her. Once September arrived, her new journey as a Darkgrove Academy student was going to begin.

I can handle change, and challenge of the exams, she thought when drifting into sleep under the lavender-scented sheets.

Although a little different from what she was thinking, change and challenge, both equal rivals, were waiting hidden in the *heart* of the castle.

CHAPTER 2



Bleak, roaring clouds had wrapped England's sky in a violent mist. Autumn was showing itself in the scarlet hues of the trees and the leaf-laden, wet sidewalks. Within the multitude of chocolate browns, the gold buds were shining through the trees with the southerly wind. Melody listened to the rhythmic sounds that the plump raindrops were making behind the windows. For the crooked roofs and the muddy streets; it was another afternoon that the gloomy weather was drenching everywhere it touched with generous, sappy splashes. But the small teahouse in the town was lively with hasty customers; the smell of carrot cakes was strolling in the warm air as if wanting to make the furious rain jealous.

Melody drew her eyes from the ladies wearing fanciful hats and florid skirts to take a sip of her tea. The peppermint scented beverage was steaming her glasses; she gripped a cookie from the plate and turned her eyes to her best friend.

Rosalie Heywood fixed her hat before speaking, her soft dark braids were sparkling under the orange-hued lights in the teahouse. "Soon we will both leave this place. I'm very much excited about starting the Academy, but I'm more happy to know that we're leaving everything behind, at least for a while." she said; her gloved hands were occupied with a sketchbook. Rosalie was the most skilled painter Melody had ever known. It was effortless for her to catch the cyan hues dancing in the lake or the pink satin threads in a gown.

But nature or clothes were not her *favourite* things to draw.

Melody bit her lip, sliding her hand into Rosalie's. "You know, you can come visit me again before we start the Academy. I don't want you to still stay in that house knowing how much it hurts you."

"I always knew that." She cracked a small smile. Melody was the only

person in the world that recognized her pain and showed love to her. They'd spent hours baking strawberry pies, writing poetry, attending house parties, or just creating scenarios about burning Rosalie's stepdad in the fireplace. After her mother's second marriage, everything seemed to go upside down for her. Whenever she remembered those dreadful times of that man trying to get dangerously close to her skin, Melody was the one who soothed her.

"At least we are going together," she replied, her hazel eyes aimed at the empty coffee mug.

"Exactly. This was what we'd always dreamed of, wasn't it?" Melody exclaimed, changing the topic. "Also, you can get more drawing courses this way."

Rosalie nodded with a smile, not wanting to tell her she could still practice drawing *her* no matter where they were.

They had known each other since they were in middle school. Most people used to say they looked alike, but this was only true until they reached their twenties. Rosalie had decided to explore fashionable styles after her visit to Rome; now it was almost impossible to see her without a shiny brooch with a necklace on her new taffeta blouse and her plump lips would always be tinged in pink. Melody had insisted to her so many times how she must stop wearing her suede boots, because this way she was looking taller than her.

Well, most of the people looked taller than Melody, though.

She had a petite appearance; her wavy auburn hair flowing in her shoulders, dimples gracing her soft smiles accompanied by her passion for books were the reason she was being labelled as cute almost immediately. She would always wear a purple velvet rope around her neck with a little golden ornament on it; it was the only thing her grandad left for her.

"I think I'm going to get another almond cake. Do you want me to get some for you too?" Melody got up from her seat.

"Maybe a slice of blueberry pie." Rosalie added, with a smile, "Are you sure that you will manage to carry all of it?"

“I’m not *that* clumsy.” She laughed and walked towards the counter.

She gave her order and joined the queue, observing the place. The gold colored autumn decorations were adorning the seats; children carrying packages walked past her, causing the smell of pumpkin pies and pomegranate tea to tickle her nose. Even the sounds of the vehement rain and carriages were inaudible because of the chattering surrounding the cozy teahouse.

“Here is your order, ma’am,” The man behind the counter put the desserts on a tray as she handed him a few pounds.

“Thank you!”

She turned around, and the last thing she saw was someone’s chest covering her eyesight. The tray escaped from her hands and fell to the floor with an awfully loud sound. Although the plates stayed as one piece, the pies turned to crumbs in between the cracks in the floor.

“I’m so sorry! Oh God, I didn’t even notice you were behind me—” As Melody kept babbling on, the boy she ran into was just staring.

When he was slowly picking up the tray from the floor, Melody couldn’t help but acknowledge how good-looking he was. His greyish-blue eyes looked exactly like two little frozen lakes, yet hot enough to melt everyone under his stare. In his black sweater, his soft golden hair was falling on his eyes, and his broad shoulders and hard chest drew attention.

“I am sorry *again*.” Melody repeated when he didn’t bother to reply.

“It’s alright.” His deep voice suited his appearance. Their eyes locked for the first time and stayed like that. She let him hold his gaze for a moment, then realized quickly that he was absorbing every detail of her face. The ghost of a strange evaluation loomed in the middle of his brows. His eyes were deep-set and intense, definitely difficult to read. An unexpected restlessness followed her senses when she realized she could feel his sandalwood scent silencing all the other things in the crowded teahouse.

“That’s on me.”

“No — No, this is not necessary at all. I don’t want anyone to pay for my

mistake.” Melody persisted, despite her burning cheeks.

He made no answer, instead he went to the counter and ordered the same almond cake and blueberry pie.

While carrying the tray back to her, the corner of his mouth formed a slight grin, like a flicker of light across a knife.

“Here is your order. Do you want me to carry it to your table?”

Completely annoyed by his attitude, Melody ignored his rhetorical question, “I don’t remember asking you to pay it, I told you it wasn’t necessary.”

He raised his eyebrows with a theatrical expression, “You don’t have to be offended by such a small occurrence. I just wanted to help.”

“Yeah,” she took the tray halfheartedly, “Thanks.”

Melody walked past him, at least tried to, before she was stopped by him again in the next step, “But if you insist, you can still pay me sometime.”

She took a deep breath in disgust and decided he wouldn’t be worth her time anyway. Instead of replying to him, she quickly headed towards the table where Rosalie was sitting. Unfortunately, it was on the other end of the teahouse.

She could almost feel his eyes and smirk behind her.

The boy laughed under his breath and went to his table after getting a coffee for himself. His friends were sipping their tea quietly, but the moment he sat in his seat, the whispers started.

“Why did it take you so long to get this dreadful coffee?”

He grimaced at Orlando’s quarrelsome manner, “I helped someone, she accidentally dropped everything because of me.”

“Yeah. We have more important stuff to do than playing the hero of little girls.” Beatrice looked up at him behind her eyelashes.

“I know, how could I forget?”

Elliot took out a book from his bag; the little table they were sitting on

was already filled with different notes, time-worn papers and calculations including shapes and symbols. Even though the May Ritual was over, they had creatures to Summon, Moon Water to collect and gifts to offer to the Lower Devils. Elliot made himself comfortable in his seat and leaned back, the fabric of his sweater was tightening around his biceps.

“We were talking about the construction of the new passage to Magefall.” Nicolas –Nick– lowered his voice, “As far as I heard it is going to be somewhere under Birmingham; everybody was helping to create the spells needed. A few days ago, I was there to Seal the sounds to prevent the upper folk from hearing anything, and the tricksters only paid me with a pair of ferret guts as crumpled as Sorcerer Terrowin’s balls!”

Orlando let out a sinister chuckle. “I should’ve come too. I know every type of witch village all around the world.” His eyes shone like burning coals when he tightening his grip on his mug. “It is not that hard to find them, though. They are like a hole in a flawlessly tailored suit, or a swamp between the flowers — just another mark in the ground, that reminds us of our forced solitude.”

“We were always unwanted. Whatever we say will not change history.” Miranda spoke while devouring a sticky pear pie, she had a soft spot for desserts, and food in general. Although her skirts and dresses were becoming insufficient in hiding her new curves, that was the last thing she would ponder about. “Let’s forget about this for a second — Nick! Did you bring me anything from there?”

Nick shook his head in disbelief at her before grabbing his bag carefully. But no one was paying attention to their table; the customers were all busy with their own chatterings and cucumber sandwiches. He took out a small, dark blue bottle and handed it to Miranda’s awaiting palms.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!” A soft smile lit up her face while examining the mixture foaming inside the bottle. “This is going to help me so much—”

“I have something for you too, Elliot.” Nick turned to him abruptly,

checking out his bag again.

Elliot looked at the pile of dried herbs wrapped up in paper: horseradish, hawthorn, and chamomile caught his eye.

“I heard they are really effective for making poison.” Nick raised his eyebrows, “Also, the witch selling these seemed really interested when I mentioned your name. I suppose she was your latest gem from Magefall visits.”

“What was her name?”

“Aria.”

Elliot hid his grin. “I really can not remember. I must check my list.”

The smell of thyme and seaweed rose to the air suddenly: Miranda was trying to open the lid of the bottle with great difficulty.

“Miranda, you can not change the fact that animals do not want to be turned into a spell by you. I don’t blame them though.” Beatrice observed with a disapproving expression and straightened in her seat; her strawberry-blond ponytail was flowing onto her pearl white blouse.

“I do not wish to frighten them! But whenever I try to get some blood from a rabbit or a weasel they always end up turning into nothing but blood and bone. And it is only because they are prone to reacting to high energies, I just need to calm my senses before creating a spell.”

“You are so cruel, Miranda. All those animals approach you with the help of some food in their little hearts, but you use them for your gruesome, wicked deeds. I can’t imagine their pain.” Orlando grimaced theatrically.

“Shut it, Orlando. At least I don’t bathe with Changeling kidneys.”

“I’ve never done that! There was only one time when one leper sold me a really high-quality package of it and I thought it would also help cleanse the energy—”

Beatrice smashed a book into the table and hissed, “Save these conversations for Asdiel’s mansion.”

A moment of heavy silence followed her words, and they all focused on sipping their tea with an artificial decency.

The rain outside was soaking the windows heavily. Another stormy night was on its way, but the teahouse was like a combination of coziness, warmth, and cinnamon aromas. Nick put his empty mug on the table and brought up another topic completely unrelated to witchcraft. However, Elliot wasn't listening at all. He was having a hard time trying to focus on what his friends were talking about. His gaze was unintentionally drifting back to that girl with glasses, who was sitting with her braided friend.

Melody allowed herself to glance up at him for a moment, and was surprised to see him looking too. There was something about him that could make you uneasy if you stared at him too long. His piercing gaze, which could be dark and cold, his self-assured grin, and the way he spoke all indicated that he was not a man to be tempted by. That there was something under the surface, something powerful but dark.