

## The Bitterwine Oath

**Hannah West**

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The sleepy streets of a small Texas town bleed more than just Southern charm in *The Bitterwine Oath*, a feminist coming-of-age story with a supernatural twist.

Nat just wants to enjoy her last summer before she and her friends scatter for college. She wants to hang out with her best friend, Lindsey, and finally put her crush on Levi—the boy who kissed her once before breaking her heart with an ambivalent farewell letter—behind her. Though anxious about leaving the familiar faces of her small town behind, Nat looks forward to escaping the whispers and rumors of San Solano, where two heinous crimes amounting to twenty-four deaths remain unsolved.

A hundred years ago, Nat's ancestor was part of a cult that was suspected of murdering twelve men using magic; fifty years ago, another similar crime occurred. With the next fifty-year anniversary approaching, strange occurrences begin to plague the town again. Nat discovers that the sisterhood—and their magic—is just as real as the mark that claims Levi as one of the next victims. But are the Wardens truly responsible for the crimes, or is something darker circling in the shadows of the woods?

Nat is engaging whether she's wrestling against a blood oath or over analyzing her every move around Levi. Lindsey rises to co-captain much of the novel, stealing scenes with her determination and nimble replies to Nat's snark. Their friendship emphasizes the larger theme of solidarity among women—"a candle burning on its own will get snuffed out"—and the two remain loyal to one another even when secrets threaten to tear them apart.

Witches and spells blend with everyday anxieties in this supernatural murder mystery centering on a powerful group of women who claim their strength.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (November / December 2020)

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