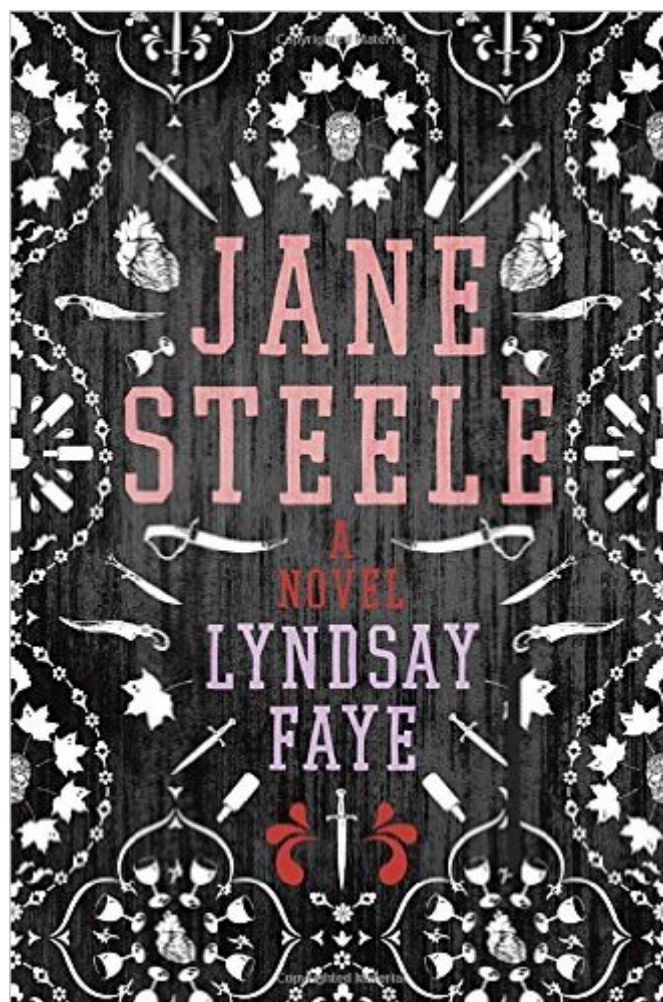


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Jane Steele



Synopsis

The reimagining of Jane Eyre as a gutsy, heroic serial killer that The New York Times Book Review calls "wonderfully entertaining" and USA Today describes as "sheer mayhem meets Victorian propriety." "A thrill ride of a novel. A must read for lovers of Jane Eyre, dark humor, and mystery." PopSugar.com "Reader, I murdered him." A sensitive orphan, Jane Steele suffers first at the hands of her spiteful aunt and predatory cousin, then at a grim school where she fights for her very life until escaping to London, leaving the corpses of her tormentors behind her. After years of hiding from the law while penning macabre "last confessions" of the recently hanged, Jane thrills at discovering an advertisement. Her aunt has died and her childhood home has a new master: Mr. Charles Thornfield, who seeks a governess. Burning to know whether she is in fact the rightful heir, Jane takes the position incognito and learns that Highgate House is full of marvelously strange new residents: "the fascinating but caustic Mr. Thornfield, an army doctor returned from the Sikh Wars, and the gracious Sikh butler Mr. Sardar Singh, whose history with Mr. Thornfield appears far deeper and darker than they pretend. As Jane catches ominous glimpses of the pair's violent history and falls in love with the gruffly tragic Mr. Thornfield, she faces a terrible dilemma: Can she possess him "body, soul, and secrets" without revealing her own murderous past? A satirical romance about identity, guilt, goodness, and the nature of lies, by a writer who Matthew Pearl calls "superstar-caliber" and whose previous works Gillian Flynn declared "spectacular," Jane Steele is a brilliant and deeply absorbing book inspired by Charlotte Brontë's classic Jane Eyre.

Book Information

Hardcover: 432 pages

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons (March 22, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0399169490

ISBN-13: 978-0399169496

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.3 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars "See all reviews" (169 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #46,426 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Humor > Lawyers & Criminals #515 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense >

Thrillers & Suspense > Crime > Serial Killers #1447 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense >

Customer Reviews

I said in my review of Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* that there are books whose premise invites the reader not to take them seriously. The high-concept pitch for *Jane Steele*-- *Jane Eyre* reimagined as a serial killer, with the inevitable "Reader, I murdered him"-- makes it sound like a trifle, an absurdity; the author acknowledges in an afterword that "it would be disingenuous of me to suggest that this book isn't rather ridiculous." But then again, the plot of *Jane Eyre* itself is rather ridiculous, a lurid blend of the Gothic and Romanticism, and we still manage to take that book seriously. To dismiss *Jane Steele* entirely is to deny yourself a thoughtful period suspense novel that is both a delight in itself and a fresh take on the radicalism of Charlotte Brontë's original. To be clear, this novel is not a retelling of *Jane Eyre* with added homicide, but an original story with many broad parallels to that novel. In fact, *Jane Steele* the character has read *Jane Eyre* the novel and comments on the uncanny similarities between their stories. *Steele* too faces a childhood among uncaring relations, a cruel and dangerous education, and a post as governess to a broodingly handsome man with an unusual sense of humor and a shadowed past. But unlike *Jane Eyre*, who spoke harshly but never acted on her strong beliefs, *Jane Steele* carries a hidden knife, and is not above using it when the situation demands. Even if she unravels the mystery of Charles Thornfield's past, could he ever love a multiple murderess?

Of all my many murders, committed for love and for better reasons, the first was the most important. So begins the novel, which initially leads the reader through the basic structure of *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Steele*, however, Lyndsay Faye has created a one of a kind heroine, unafraid to stand up for her convictions and even murder if she must. After her mother commits suicide, Jane is left with only her hateful aunt and repugnant cousin, Edwin. Due to the first of many unfortunate incidents, which molds Jane into the woman she becomes, she is forced to take matters into her own hands in relation to her cousin and leave her estate. On her own, it is her steely reserve that gets her through the horrors that are inflicted upon the students at the School for Governesses, by its maniacal headmaster. After another unfortunate incident makes her an outlaw, Jane escapes to London and makes her living writing last confessions of criminals. Years pass and Jane reads that her aunt has died and that her childhood home has a new master in need of a governess. Jane hopes that she can finally find closure and learn if she may be the rightful heir. Using a different name and forged references, Jane finds the new inhabitants both unexpected but rejuvenating, after

years of trials and tribulations. The household includes her endearing 9 year old charge, their Sikh butler Mr. Sardar Singh and Mr. Thornfield, an army doctor and the new owner. As any reader knows, who has read Jane Eyre, it is the grief-stricken Mr. Thornfield who wins her heart, however, leaves her wondering if he will castigate her past. It is risky business basing a novel on the retelling of a classic. I can happily report that Jane Steele is up for the challenge as a page turning dynamo.

Young Jane Steele's favourite book is Jane Eyre and she sees some parallels between her own life and her heroine's. Not yet an orphan when we first meet her, the suicide of her drug-addled mother soon allows her to achieve that status. Jane has been led to believe that Highgate House should be hers, left to her by her father. But her aunt is living there now and shows no intention of giving it up. And her cousin Edwin is a nasty piece of work who is sexually harassing her. So she kills him. Then she goes off to a school chosen by her wicked and now grieving aunt – a school much like Dickens' Dotheboys Hall, but with added sexual harassment. While there, she kills a man, but he deserves it, so that's okay. Then she goes off to London, where she meets with all kinds of men practising different forms of abuse or sexual harassment, so she kills them. I'm afraid I just don't get what it is that other people are liking about this book. It's a simple stream of man-hate – if the genders were reversed I'm pretty sure there would be howls of outrage from some of the same people who are praising it. Every man who appears (up to the 44% mark when I abandoned it with huge relief) is some kind of sexual predator, paedophile or wife-beater, and it is therefore shown as amusing, even admirable, that they should be murdered. It's supposed to be funny, I think, but the humour wears very thin after the same premise is used several times – man appears, man abuses girl/woman, man is murdered. But assuming that for some reason our society is okay with denigrating men on a wholesale basis, that still wouldn't excuse the writing.

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