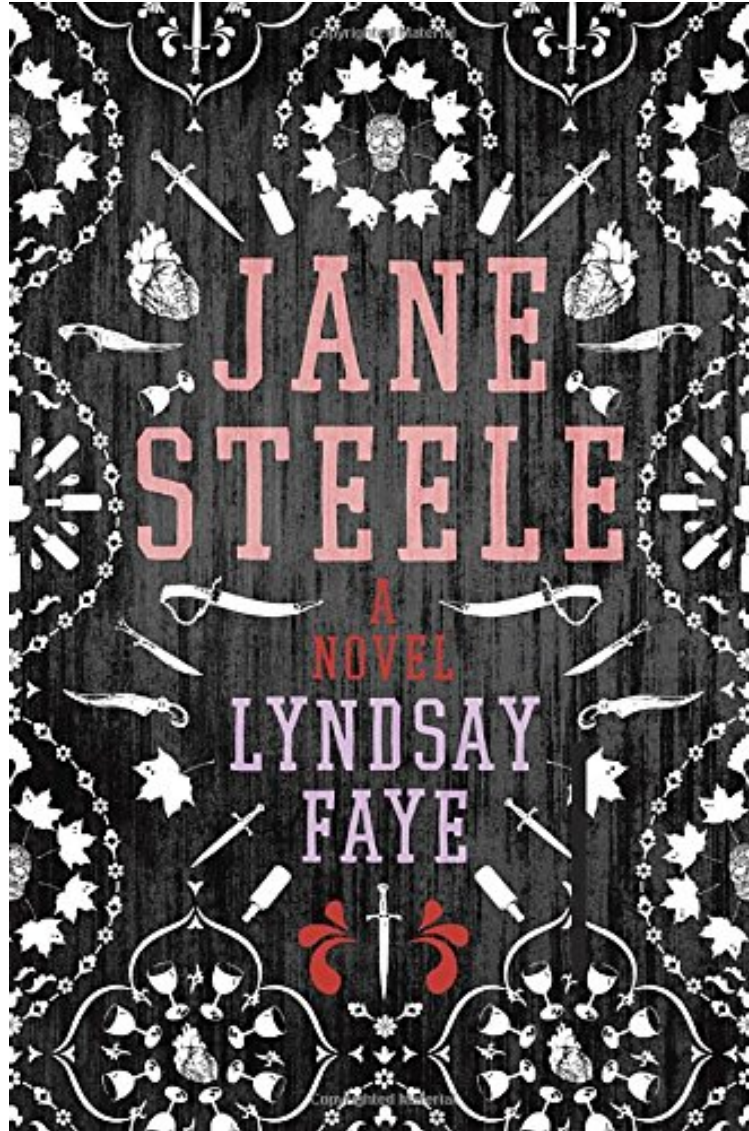


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Jane Steele

Lyndsay Faye

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Lyndsay Faye : Jane Steele before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jane Steele:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great twists! Enjoyed it!By JoyceEnjoyed this book very much. Many twists and turns. The only negative I have is that it refers to Jane Eyre frequently and that I have never read it so was a little confused by the many references at times. I also don't know much about the history of India and it's wars or struggles so that was a bit confusing as well. I would recommend someone to read that before this book, but still liked

this one very much. Good writing and good plot lines. I think you will enjoy it too! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Could have been a 5 star book. By jojoC The writing is very good, but I just could not like "Jane". I never warmed to her throughout the book. Some of the things she did were not necessary and took away from the story. The last part of the book was action packed and intriguing. If I could have liked Jane, this would have been a 5 star book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Best AU Jane Eyre fanfic ever! By Kindle Customer Although the premise of this book (Jane Eyre as a serial killer) was not entirely fulfilled, it is still enormously entertaining from start to finish. The ways in which Faye used the various elements of Jane Eyre to construct this story were exquisite and unexpected. Oh but I love this Jane and her Byronic hero. The banter between them is hilarious. And the twist on Jane's childhood friend was a welcome perspective as were some of the harsher aspects of Jane's childhood at home and school; Bronte may have been too polite to talk about those harsher realities but they do not seem out of place for the era. If you like Jane Eyre or the idea of Jane Eyre as a serial killer or, like me, you will never stop finding "Reader, I murdered him" clever, then pick up this book and read it. If you've never read Jane Eyre (heathen!), you can still enjoy this book; however some elements may go right over your head in terms of how awesome they are.

Nominated for the 2017 Edgar Award for Best Novel 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.

Nominated for a Macavity Award--Sue Feder Memorial Award for Best Historical Novel Part of NPR's Guide to 2016's Great Reads An Best Book of 2016 So Far (June, 2016) "Witty and exquisitely plotted, this is such a delectable treat 'tis a pity it has to end."—People "[Jane Steele's] crimes are wonderfully entertaining."—The New York Times Book "An entertaining riff on Jane Eyre...sheer mayhem meets Victorian propriety."—USA Today "Jane Eyre gets a dose of Dexter. In a story that's equal parts romance, thriller, and satire, the Brontë heroine is made over into a fighter with a shadowy past."—Cosmopolitan "A thrill ride of a novel. A must read for lovers of Jane Eyre, dark humor, and mystery."—PopSugar.com "Delectable...Bronte fans and unfamiliar readers alike will be sucked into Jane's rich story, filled with love and secrets a plenty. This book will take you on a dark and unforgettable journey."—Bustle.com "Jane Steele is the hard-edged Jane Eyre you never knew you wanted...A Jane Eyre for our age, with a heroine who can wield both a knife and a well-placed insult. That her crimes are endearing instead of alienating is both a tribute to Faye's deceptively charming style and to Jane's sturdy yet pliant moral code. Who could begrudge a few casualties when you're having this much fun?"—BN.com "This book scratched all my favorite itches: Victoriana, feminist rage, and excellent, gut-punch sentences. You'll love this Jane just as much as you love the original."—BookRiot.com "Faye's skill at historical mystery was evident in her nineteenth-century New York trilogy, but this slyly satiric stand-alone takes her prowess to new levels. A must for Brontë devotees; wickedly entertaining for all."—Booklist (starred review) "Young Jane Steele's favorite book, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, mirrors her life both too little and too much...In an arresting tale of dark humor and sometimes gory imagination, Faye has produced a heroine worthy of the gothic literature canon but reminiscent of detective fiction."—Library Journal (starred review) "Let's be honest here. When I was sent an advanced readers' copy of JANE STEELE, which was billed as an historical crime novel with a Jane-Eyre-style heroine who becomes a serial killer, I thought someone was pulling my leg. I decided to read ten pages, just to annoy myself as I'm often inclined to do. Also, to show what a good sport I am. I was hooked by page five and read my way through at a merry clip. I loved this book! The language rings true, the period details are correct. Jane Steele is a joy, both plucky and rueful in her assessment of her dark deeds. The plotting is solid and the pacing sublime. If this were a series, this would be the perfect introduction. As a stand-alone, I give it an A+"—Sue Grafton, #1 New York Times–bestselling author "This is a wonderfully wicked book. The deadly first chapter actually made me gasp. Jane Steele is a character you will not soon forget. Great evil fun!" —R.L.

Stine, author of *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street* Lyndsay Faye pulls off the most elusive feat of historical fiction: to give us a book that reads as though it was unearthed from a perfectly preserved antique chest. Sneakily charming and wildly well written, like Faye's other novels *JANE STEELE* demands attention.—Matthew Pearl, *New York Times*—bestselling author of *The Dante Club* and *The Last Bookaneer* "I've just read the next best thing...Enhanced by truly original and poetic turns of phrase...throughout its compelling narrative, Jane Steele pleas for a comfortable chair, a crackling fireplace, and an ideal adult beverage to guarantee a thoroughly pleasurable winter evening."--Otto Penzler, Owner of *The Mysterious Bookshop*"*JANE STEELE* is lethal good fun! In Jane, Lyndsay Faye has created a heroine unwilling to suffer tyrants or fools. The result is a darkly-humorous, elegantly-crafted story of an "accidental" vigilante. A delicious read."--Suzanne Rindell, author of *The Other Typist* "Enchanting, *JANE STEELE* is beautifully rendered and utterly captivating, from the first cry of "reader, I murdered him" to its final pages. Lyndsay Faye is a masterful storyteller, and this is her finest tale yet." —Maria Konnikova, *New York Times*—bestselling author of *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*"*JANE STEELE* is the book I never knew I always wanted to read. Gripping, twisty, and fiendishly clever, *JANE STEELE* picks you up by the throat and never lets you go, taking you on an exhilaratingly wild ride. I haven't enjoyed a book this much in ages--the only thing it left me wanting was MORE Jane Steele!"—Deanna Raybourn, *New York Times*—bestselling author of *A Curious Beginning*"From the gasp-inducing moment Jane Steele utters the words "reader, I murdered him", you know you are in for a rollicking romp of an adventure that recasts the *Jane Eyre* story in an entirely new light. But mixed in with the verve and vivacity is a story of real heart, exemplary, near-forgotten history, and an utterly unforgettable heroine. Brava to Lyndsay Faye for what's already one of my favorite thrillers of the year." —Sarah Weinman, editor of *Women Crime Writers: Eight Suspense Novels of the 1940s 50s*"Add Jane Steele to that club of unforgettable antiheroes—Tom Ripley, Hannibal Lecter, and Dexter Morgan—who do dreadful things to bad people. Bold, inventive, and charmingly wicked, this instantly addictive novel pays homage to *Jane Eyre* while being wholly original. Lyndsay Faye has created a masterpiece."—Hilary Davidson, Anthony Award–winning author of *Blood Always Tells*"Jane Steele is a bold and imaginative undertaking — wickedly entertaining and exquisitely unique in its execution...With thrills, mystery and romance, the story is striking and imaginative as we see how Brontë's *Jane Eyre* gives meaning to Jane's acts. Dark, satirical humor coupled with sharp dialogue make this a novel that's refreshingly compelling."—USA Today (*Happily Ever After* blog)"Hand to my heart, this book positively made me swoon...*JANE STEELE* is an homage to *Jane Eyre*, yet infinitely better, since Jane Steele is no one's victim; she bends life to her will instead of drifting along according to fate's whimsy...Jane is a thrilling protagonist...I wish that I could read this again for the first time—but I've no doubt it will be just as good when I read it for the third and fourth times."—Crimespree Magazine"Clever thriller"—US Weekly"For anyone who read "*Jane Eyre*" wishing for swifter, more final fates for the cruelest characters, Jane Steele is here to grant your wishes...a fresh and imaginative takeoff on "*Jane Eyre*," and will leave readers with plenty of fodder for discussion." —Minneapolis Star-Tribune "[Faye's] writing crackles with wit, conveying a hip 21st-century sensibility while remaining true to Brontë's vision...and her historical research and thoughtfully drawn characters make "*Jane Steele*" a compelling page-turner."—Pasadena Weekly "Faye hasn't embarked on a retelling of Brontë's masterwork, or anyone else's, for that matter. Her novel pays homage to the greats, yet offers a heroine whose murky past and murderous present remind us that some female behavior in other eras never made it into print...The satisfaction in this novel is its conviction that the self is enriched by an understanding of others, whether their motives are villainous or amicable."—NPR "A beautifully written, thoroughly engaging and brilliantly satirical novel...Jane Steele is an extraordinary, likeable narrator, and Faye's other characters are just as memorable. The sharp and tragic Mr. Thornfield gives Brontë's Mr. Rochester a run for his money. This book, whether you're trying to puzzle out the mysteries or just lapping up Faye's brilliant humor, is an excellent homage to Brontë and simply a treasure on its own."—New York Daily News"A smart satirical gothic romance that plays as much to Charlotte Brontë's fans as Edgar Allan Poe's... Flushed with humour and humors, this novel is a hoot. I laughed not only at Jane's audacity as a character...but also the author's accomplishments skillfully mashing up a modern serial killer novel with a 19th-century novel of manners."—Milwaukee Journal Sentinel *Cosmo.com's 15 Perfect Beach Reads for 2016* *One of New York Post's Must Read Books for the Summer 2016* Selected as one of Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's Best Books of 2016 Selected as one of the Los Angeles Public Library's Best Books of 2016 "Lyndsay Faye give us all the pomp and circumstance of an old English novel, but her murderous twists turn the genre on its head in way that's sarcastic and satisfying."—Southern Living About the Author Lyndsay Faye is the author of five critically acclaimed books: *Dust and Shadow*; *The Gods of Gotham*, which was nominated for an Edgar for Best Novel; *Seven for a Secret*; *The Fatal Flame*; and *Jane Steele*. Faye, a true New Yorker in the sense she was born elsewhere, lives in New York City with her husband, Gabriel. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. ONE "...I wouldn't have her heart for anything. Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney, and fetch you away." Of all my many murders, committed for love and for better reasons, the first was the most important. Already this project proves more difficult than I had ever imagined. Autobiographies depend upon truth; but I have been lying for such a very long, lonesome time. "Jane, will you be my friend again?" Edwin Barbary had asked. My cousin's lips were gnawed

red, his skin gleaming with exertion and desire. When his fleshy mouth next moved, the merest croak emerged. He breathed precisely five more times, the fat folds of his belly shuddering against his torn waistcoat, and then he stilled like a depleted clockwork toy. More of my homicides anon—the astute among you will desire to know why a dyed-in-the-wool villainess takes up pen and foolscap in the first place. I have been reading over and over again the most riveting book titled *Jane Eyre*, and the work inspires me to imitative acts. My new printing features a daring introduction by the author railing against the first edition’s critics. I relate to this story almost as I would a friend or a lover—at times I want to breathe its entire alphabet into my lungs, and at others I should prefer to throw it across the room. Whoever heard of disembodied voices calling to governesses, of all people, as this Jane’s do? Hereby do I avow that I, Jane Steele, in all my days working as a governess, never once heard ethereal cries carried to me upon the brawny shoulders of the North Wind; and had I done, I should have kept silent for fear of being labeled eccentric. Faulting the work for its wild fancies seems petty, however, for there are marvellous moments within. I might myself once have written: Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one’s favour? I left such reflections behind me in childhood, at the bottom of the small ravine where my first cousin drew his final gurgling breaths. Yet I find myself pitying the strange, kindly Jane in the novel whose biography is so weirdly similar; she, too, was as welcome in her aunt’s household as are churchmice in the Communion larder, and was sent to a hell in the guise of a girls’ school. That Jane was unfairly accused of wickedness, however, while I can no better answer my detractors than to thank them for their pains over stating the obvious. It was the boarding school that taught me to act as a wolf in girl’s clothing should: skulking, a greyer shadow within a grey landscape. It was London which formed me into a pale, wide-eyed creature with an errant laugh, a lust for life and for dirty vocabulary, and a knife in her pockets. It was Charles who changed everything, when I fell in love with him under the burdens of a false identity and a blighted conscience. The beginning of a memoir could be made in any of those places, but without my dear cousin Edwin Barbary, none of the rest would have happened at all, so I hereby begin my account with the unembellished truth: Reader, I murdered him.

~~~ I may always have been wicked, but I was not always universally loathed. For instance, I remember my mother asking me at five years old, “Are you hurt, cherie?” Then as now, I owned a pallid complexion and listlessly curling hair the colour of hazelnut shells. Having just fallen flat on my face in the garden behind our cottage on the outskirts of Highgate House, I considered whether or not to cry. The strawberries I had gathered were crushed under my apron, painting me with sweet gore. I pored over the best stratagems to gain my mother’s undivided attention perennially in those days—back when I believed I might be merely naughty, fit to be punished in the here and not the hereafter. As it happened, my mother had been well all day. We had navigated no weeping, no laudanum, no gnawing at already-bleeding fingernails; she was teasing and coaxing, snatching my hand up as she wondered whether we might cover some biscuits with berries and fresh honey and host an impromptu picnic. Therefore, I saw no need to cry. Instead, I stuck out my tongue at the offending root and gulped down the swelling at the back of my throat. “I’m fine,” I told her, “though my wrist is sore.” Smiling from where she sat on a quilted blanket beneath our cascading willow, she called, “Come here then, and let me see.” My mother was French. She spoke to me often in that language, and I found this flattering; she directed her native tongue at no one else unless she desired to illustrate their ignorance. She seemed to me unpredictable and glimmering as a butterfly, one worthy of being collected and displayed under glass. I was proud of her; I belonged to her. She noticed me when no one else bothered, and I could make her laugh when she could bear no one else. Ma mere studied my wrist, brushed the specks of juice and flesh from my pinafore, and directed a dry look in my eyes. “It is not very serious,” she declared lightly in French. “Not even to a spun-sugar little girl.” “It hurts,” I insisted, thinking it may have been better to cry after all. “Then it is most profoundly serious to me,” she proclaimed, again in French, and proceeded to kiss me until I was helpless with giggling. “And I lost all the berries.” “But consider—there is no harm done. We shall go and gather more. After all, have you anything of consequence to do?” The answer was no; there was nothing of consequence to do, as this garden party took place at midnight under a wan, watchful moon. Having spent my entire life in my mother’s company, I thought nothing amiss herein, though I was vexed I had not seen the root which had tripped me. Surely other little girls donned lace-lined frocks and enjoyed picnics featuring trifle and tea cakes, sitting with their mothers under the jewel-strewn canopy of starlight, never dreaming of sleep until the cold dew threatened and we began to shiver. Do they not? I would anxiously ask myself. It is relevant that my beloved mother, Anne-Laure Steele, was detested throughout our familial estate, and for two sound reasons. First, as I mentioned, she was—tragically and irrevocably—French. Second, my mother was beautiful. I do not mean beautiful in the conventional insipid fashion; I mean that my mother was actually beautiful, bizarrely so, in the ghostly, wide-gazed sense. She possessed a determined square chin, a chin I share, so that she always looked stubborn even when meekness was selling at a premium. Her hair was dark with a brick-red sheen and her almond-shaped eyes were framed beneath by pretty caverns; her wrists had thin scars like pearlescent bracelets which I did not then understand. At times she screamed under the indifferent moon in French for my dead father. At others she refused to budge from the bed until, groaning at the slanting afternoon light, she allowed our combined cook and housemaid, Agatha, to ply her with tea. What’s the matter, Mamma? I would ask softly. Now I am grown, I comprehend her answers far better than I did then. Only that yesterday was so very, very long. Only that

my eyes are tired and nothing in the new novel I thought I'd like so well means as much to me as I imagined it would. Only that I cannot think of a useful occupation, and when I do the task daunts me, and so cannot attempt it anyhow, sweet one. Never could I predict when her smile would blaze forth again, nor earn enough of the feathery kisses she would drop to my brow inexplicably—as if I was worthy of them for no reason at all. In short, my mother and I—two friendly monsters—found each other lovely and hoped daily that others would find us so as well. They did not. ~~~ I shall explain how I embarked upon a life of infamy, but first what my mother told me regarding my inheritance. When I was six years old, my mother announced in French, in August, in the shade-dappled garden, “One day you will have everything, chérie, even the main house. It all belonged to your father and will always be yours—there are documents to this effect despite the fact inheritance for girls is always a highly complicated matter. Meanwhile, our cottage may be poor and plain, but you understand the many difficulties.” I did not fully understand the many difficulties, though I assumed my aunt and cousin, who lived in the estate proper, did so because they were haughty and wanted the entire pile of mossy stonework, complete with dour servants and taspentries hanging somber as funeral shrouds, to themselves. Neither did I think our cottage, with its mullioned windows and its roaring fireplaces and its cheery bay windows, was either poor or plain. I did, however, understand particular difficulties, ones regarding how well we got on with our relations. “You see the way your aunt looks at me—you know we cannot live at the main house. Here we are safe and warm and friendly and ourselves,” she added fretfully, worrying at the cuticle upon her left thumb as her eyes pooled. “Je deteste la manse,” I announced. Passing her my ever-ready kerchief, I dried her tears. I plucked wild sorrel to sprinkle over our fish supper and told everyone who would listen—which amounted only to my mother and frayed, friendly Agatha—let us always live just as we please, for I love you both. Such was not to be. ~~~ My aunt Mrs. Patience Barbary, mother of Edwin Barbary, was like my mother a widow. She had been wed to Mr. Richard Barbary; Mr. Richard Barbary was the half-brother of my own father, Jonathan Steele, whose claim to Highgate House was entire and never called into question in my presence. In fact, one of our visits to the main house, shortly after my ninth birthday, centered around just such a discussion. “It is so very kind of you to have us for tea,” Anne-Laure Steele said, her smile glinting subtly. “I have said often to Jane that she should better familiarise herself with the estate—after all, she will live here when she is grown, and mon Dieu, to think what mismanagement could occur if she did not know its...I think, in English, intricacies?” Aunt Patience was a sturdy woman wearing perennial mourning black, though she never otherwise appeared to regret her lack of spouse. Perhaps she was mourning something else entirely: her lost youth, for example, or the heathens in darkest Ethiopie who perished in ignorance of Christ. Certainly my uncle Richard was never mentioned nor seemed he much missed, which I found curious since his portraits were scattered throughout the house—a wedding watercolour from a friend in the drawing room, an oil study of a distinguished man of business in the library. Uncle Richard had owned a set of defined, almost pouting lips, an arched brow with a peaked head of dark hair, and something rakish in his eyes made him seem more dashing than I imagined “men of business” ought to look—ants all walking very fast with their heads down, a row of indistinguishable umbrellas. I thought, had I known him, I should have liked him. I wondered what possessed him to marry Aunt Patience of all people. Thankfully, Patience Barbary was blessed with a face ensuring that conjugal affronts would not happen twice, which did her tremendous credit—or at least, she always threw beauty in the teeth, as it were, of my own Mamma, who smiled frigidly following such ripostes. Aunt Patience had a very wide frog’s visage with a ruddy complexion and lips like a seam in stonemasonry. “So much time passed in our great Empire,” Aunt Patience sighed following my mother’s uncertainty over vocabulary. “And despite that, such a terrible facility with our language. I ask you, is that a proper example to set for the—as you would have it—future mistress of Highgate House?” “It might not be,” my mother replied with snow lacing her tone, “but I am not often invited to practice your tongue.” “Oh!” my aunt mused. “That must be very vexing.” I yearned to leap to my mother’s defense, but sat there helplessly dumb, for my aunt hated me only marginally less than she did my mother. After all, I was awkward and gangly, possessed only of my Mamma’s too-thin neck and too-thoughtful expressions. My eyes were likewise catlike—voluptuous, in truth—but the plainest of ordinary cedar browns in colour. My mother ought to have done better by me, I thought on occasion. Her own eyes were a strange, distant topaz like shards of frozen honey. I never blamed my father, Jonathan Steele, for my shortcomings. I never expected anything of him—not remembering him—and thus could not expect more of him. “Aimes-tu votre gateau?” my mother asked me next. “Ce n’est pas tres bien, Mamma.” Aunt Patience simmered beneath her widow’s weeds; she supposed the French language a threat and, in retrospect, she may have been correct. “Pauvres petite,” my mother commiserated. Mamma and Aunt Patience embarked upon a resounding and communicative silence, and I felt Cousin Edwin’s eyes on me like a set of hot pinpricks; when the adults abandoned decorum in favour of spitting false compliments and heartfelt censures at one another, he launched his offensive. “I’ve a new archery set I should show you, Jane,” he murmured. For a child’s tones, Edwin’s were weirdly insinuating. The quick bloom of instinctual camaraderie always withered upon the instant I recalled what my cousin was actually like. Meanwhile, I wanted to see a new archery set very much indeed—only sans Edwin or, better still, with a different Edwin altogether. My cousin was four years my elder, thirteen at the time. Our relationship had always been peculiar, but as of 1837, it had begun to take on a darker cast. I do not mean only on his behalf—I alternately ignored and engaged him, and was brought to task for this

capriciousness by every adult in our household. I let them assume me fickle rather than snobbish when actually I was both. Granted, I needed him; he was closer my own age than anyone, and he seemed nigh-drowning for my attention when no one else save my mother noticed that I breathed their castoff air. Edwin, on the other hand, was what his mother considered a model child; he was brown-haired and red-faced and sheepdog-simple. He chewed upon his bottom lip perennially, as if afraid it might go suddenly missing. "Have you seen the new mare yet?" he inquired next. "We might take a drive in the fly-trap tomorrow." I maintained silence. On the last occasion we had shared a drive in the fly-trap, the candied aroma of clover in our noses, Edwin had parted his trouser front and shown me the flesh resting like a grubworm within the cotton, asking whether I knew what it was used for. (I do now; I did not then.) Other than gaping dumbly as he returned the twitching apparatus to its confines, I elected to ignore the incident. Cousin Edwin was approximately as perspicacious as my collection of feathers, which made my own cleverness feel embarrassingly like cheating. It shamed me to disdain him so when he was my elder, and when the thick cords of childhood proximity knotted us so tightly to one another. Just before arriving home, he had asked whether I wished to touch it next time we were in the woods, and I laughed myself insensible as his flushed face darkened to violet. "You are a wicked thing to ignore your own kin so, Jane," Edwin persisted. Kin, kin, kin was ever his anthem: as if we were more than related, as if we were kindred. When I failed to cooperate, he stared as if I were a puzzle to be sorted. My dawning fear was that he might think I was in fact a puzzle—inanimate, insensible. While I no longer presume to have a conscience, I have never once lacked for feelings. "But perhaps you are only glum. I know! Will you play a game with me after tea?" Games were a favourite of my mother's, and of mine—and while I was wary of my cousin, I was not afraid of him. He adored me. "What sort of game?" "Trading Secrets," he rasped. "I've loads and loads. Awful ones. You must have some of your own. It'll be a lark to exchange them." Considering my stockpile of secrets, I found myself reluctant. I tell Agatha every night I'll say my prayers, but ever since I skipped them and nothing happened six months ago, I don't. I tried my mother's laudanum once because she said it made everything better, and I was ill and lied about it. My kitten scratched me and I was so angry that I let it outside, and afterward it never came home and I feel sick in my belly every time I imagine the kitten shivering in the dark, cold woods. I did not want Edwin to know any of these things. "Fiddle! You aren't sharp enough to know any secrets worth having," I scoffed instead, pushing crumbs around my plate. Edwin was painfully aware of his own slowness, and hot blood crawled up his cheeks. I nearly apologized then and there, knowing it was what a good girl would do and feeling magnanimous, but then he rose from the table. The adults, still merrily loathing each other over the gilt-edged lips of their teacups, paid us no mind. "Of course I do," he growled under his breath. "For instance, are you ashamed that your mother is no better than a parasite?" My mouth fell open as I gaped at my cousin. "Oh, yes. Or don't you hear any gossip? Doesn't anyone come to visit you?" This was a cruel blow. "You know that they don't. No one ever does." "Why not, Jane? I've always wondered." "Because we are kept like cattle on our own land!" I cried, smashing my fist heedlessly against a butter plate. When the porcelain flew through the air and shattered to smithereens upon the hardwood, my cousin's face reflected stupid dismay. My mother's was equally startled, but approving; I had only been repeating something she slurred once during a very bad night indeed. Aunt Patience's face practically split with the immensity of her delight, as it is no unpleasant thing when an enemy proves one's own point gratis. "I invite you for tea and this is the way your...your inexcusable daughter behaves?" she protested shrilly. "I should beat the temper out of her if I were you, and lose no time about it. There is nothing like a stout piece of hickory for the prevention of unseemly habits." My mother stood and smoothed her light cotton dress down as if she had pressing obligations elsewhere. "My inexcusable daughter is bright and high-spirited." "No, she is a coy little minx whose sly ways will lead her to a bad end if you fail to correct her." "And what is your child?" Mrs. Steele hissed, throwing down her napkin. "An overfed dunce? Jane does not suffer by comparison, I assure you. We will not trouble you here again." "You will not be welcome here again," Aunt Patience spat. "I must offer you my congratulations, Anne-Laure. To so completely cut yourself off from polite society, and then to offend the one person who graciously allows you to sit at the same table—what an extraordinary effort on your part. Very well, I shall oblige both our tastes. If you cannot control that harpy you call a daughter, do keep entirely to your residence in future. I certainly shall to mine." My mother's defiance crumbled, leaving a wistful look. Aunt Patience's plodding nature would have been forgivable had she been clever or kind, I decided; but as she was common and gloating, I hated her and would hate her forever. Mamma softly pulled her fingers into small fists. "Please in future recall my daughter's rights, all of her rights, or you will regret it," Mrs. Steele ordered, giving the table a single nod. She departed without a glance behind her. Mamma often stormed away so, however—ferocious exists were decidedly her style, so I remained to assess what damage we had wrought this time. Aunt Patience, though purple and fairly vibrating with rage, managed to say, "Would you care for more cake, Edwin and Jane?" "I goaded her, Mummy. I'm sorry for what I said before," Edwin added to me, his tooth clenching his lip. He wore a stiff collar that afternoon, I recall, above a brown waistcoat and maroon jacket, and his neck bulged obscenely from its confines. "That's all right, Edwin. Thank you for tea, Aunt Patience." Like most children, I loathed nothing more than embarrassing myself, and the sight of the fragmented china was making me physically ill. I rose from the table. "I had better...goodbye, then." Aunt Patience's eyes burned into me as I departed. I went to the stables that evening, where I could visit the docile mares and peer into soft liquid eyes, and I could stop

thinking about my cousin. Thinking about Edwin was a private class in self-loathing: I hated myself for indulging his mulish attraction, yet it had been a tidal pull for me over years of reluctant camaraderie. Flattery, I have found, is a great treat for those born innately selfish. For the hundredth time, the thousandth time, I stood listening to soft whinnies like lullabies, pressing my cheek against sinewy necks; whether the horses at Highgate House liked me or my sugar cubes I have no notion, but they never glowered, nor warned me I teetered upon the paper-thin tightrope of eternal damnation. Smelling sweet hay and their rich bristled coats always calmed me—and I calmed them in turn, for a particularly fidgety colt often stilled in my presence. My thoughts drifted from the the horses to the uses I might make of them. I daydreamed of riding to an apple-blossom meadow where my mother and I should do nothing save eat and laugh; I envisioned charging into war, the heads of Aunt Patience and Edwin lying neatly chopped at my feet. Mamma and I never took more than a light supper in the springtime, and following a departure as precipitous as the one she had just executed, I knew that she would lock herself away with her novels and tonics, and thus I stayed out until the wind began to nip through the slats in the great stable door and the horses' snuffles quieted under my caresses...never realising until the following day, in fact, that I had been left entirely, permanently alone. The ominous liquorice aroma of strong tonic drenched our cottage when I arrived home at eight o'clock. I was told my mother had retired to bed at seven, which was unfortunate timing, as I never saw her again. Our servant Agatha found her the next morning, still and cold in her bed, marble eyes directed at the window.