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The Steep And Thorny Way



Synopsis

A thrilling reimagining of Shakespeare's Hamlet, *The Steep and Thorny Way* tells the story of a murder most foul and the mighty power of love and acceptance in a state gone terribly rotten. 1920s Oregon is not a welcoming place for Hanalee Denney, the daughter of a white woman and an African American man. She has almost no rights by law, and the Ku Klux Klan breeds fear and hatred in even Hanalee's oldest friendships. Plus, her father, Hank, died a year ago, hit by a drunk-driving teenager. Now the killer is out of jail and back in town, and he's claiming that Hanalee's father's death wasn't an accident at all. Instead, he says that Hank was poisoned by the doctor who looked after him—who just so happens to be Hanalee's new stepfather. In order to get the answers she needs, Hanalee will have to ask a "haint" wandering the roads at night—her father himself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

****STARRED REVIEW**** "A fast-paced read with multiple twists, the novel delivers a history lesson wrapped inside a murder mystery and ghost story. Winters deftly captures the many injustices faced by marginalized people in the years following World War I as well as a glimmer of hope for the better America to come. A riveting story of survival, determination, love, and friendship."

(Kirkus) ****STARRED REVIEW**** "A powerful, gripping, and exceptionally well-executed glimpse into a little-known corner of U.S. history." (Booklist) ****STARRED REVIEW**** "Setting Hanalee in the backdrop of Prohibition-era Oregon, punched up with bootleggers, a hidden gay relationship, the

public and private face of the Ku Klux Klan, and a dash of the supernatural makes for a delightfully unpredictable page-turner. *VERDICT* Unique and riveting historical fiction that feels anything but dated." (School Library Journal) "History, mystery for To Kill A Mockingbird fans." (Justine Magazine) This is genre-pushing historical fiction that will surprise and enlighten readers. (Horn Book Magazine) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Cat Winters is the author of the critically acclaimed young adult novels *The Steep and Thorny Way*, *The Cure for Dreaming*, and *In the Shadow of Blackbirds*, the latter of which collected three starred reviews and was a William C. Morris Award YA Debut Award finalist. She lives in Portland, Oregon. Visit the author at catwinters.com.

Let me first say that I have liked Ms. Winters previous YA books, however her last adult book didn't awe me as I hoped it would. I pushed it aside and was looking forward to this one. However, when I started reading it I wasn't at all interested in this book and there is one big reason why: There is too much going on. We have a biracial girl, homosexuality, the KKK, prohibition, eugenics, a murder, a ghost, the kitchen sink...did I forget anything? I dunno. The idea of a biracial girl in the 1920s was very interesting to me and if we could deal with maybe the KKK and the murder I would have been fine...but then other things were thrown in, things I just didn't care about. Then we have 18 characters. Ugh, my head is still spinning. The good news is at least there is a summary of them all on the first page. And I'm over the ghost thing. It didn't need to be in the book at all. I plowed through the book until page 160 and then ditched it. This and her previous book failed to catch my attention. Its sad because *Blackbirds* was an outstanding book....simply amazing. Perhaps in this case less is more and some of the topics should have been saved for another book.

See more of my reviews on The YA Kitten! Though the publisher provided me with an eARC for review, my review is of the finished book. I had to buy a print copy because the photographs in the ebook file overwhelmed both my laptop and my Nook. Diversity Rating: 4 *Our World* Racial-Ethnic: 5 (Hanalee is the biracial daughter of a black man and a white woman; her identity is central to the story) *QUILT BAG*: 5 (Joe's identity as a gay man is also central to the story) Disability: 0 (Hanalee's dad has a telltale limp as a ghost, but that's it) Intersectionality: 4 (between them, Hanalee and Joe say a lot about race and sexuality that's still relevant today) I just... What am I supposed

to say? This novel is brilliant! I've been on the outs with YA historical novels lately for a variety of reasons and my history with Cat Winters' YA novels didn't create high expectations, but *The Steep and Thorny Way* completely blew me away! It's what every historical YA novel should be. Let's just get on with it. Winters creates a vivid setting with Elston, Oregon and plants some incredible characters here as well. Hanalee, our Hamlet figure, is a tough young woman and her anger is palpable whether it's due to living in a racist town as a biracial girl or uncovering what really happened to her father. Her partner in crime/investigating Joe is just as well-written and challenges her when she needs it, such as when she needs to learn how much it sucks to be a gay man. The pair work well together as an investigative team trying to solve the mystery of Hanalee's father's real cause of death. If you want a straight retelling of Hamlet, the novel isn't going to give you one. The parallels are clear, but the story is its own creation. It simply builds from Shakespeare's legendary play and becomes its own creature. As fun as straight retellings can be, it's incredible when a book mixes the classic and the original well. Toward the second half of the novel, the story starts treading new territory and only gets better from there. A great deal of YA historical novels are set in Victorian times or during World War II. Those stories are valid but can get a little boring after a while. That's part of the reason *The Steep and Thorny Way* is so wonderful: it takes readers to a time and place they likely knew nothing about before and teaches them about that time/place without being didactic. Instead, it's surprising at every turn and may make a future historian out of some readers. The systemic sterilization of gay men in the prison system, how much influence the Ku Klux Klan had in 1920s Oregon, and more were things I had no idea about and I consider myself a history buff! Basically, if you want to be surprised and presented with something you know nothing about, *The Steep and Thorny Way* is an excellent bet. If all my talk seems rambling and nonsensical, it's because putting words to a book this incredible is difficult. I'd rather shove the book in your face and make you experience the story for yourself. For once, I've kept it short and sweet. Now quit wasting time here and go buy your own copy of *The Steep and Thorny Way*! This is what historical YA novels should aspire to be. Anyone who wants to write such a novel should read this as research, but I'm going to recommend this to anyone. (I recommend getting a print copy, however. Though I got an ebook of it for review, I had to purchase a print copy because the image-heavy ebook kept crashing both my laptop and my Nook. Now I regret nothing.)

Another great novel by Cat Winters, but I believe this is her best historical fiction yet. I absolutely loved this and appreciated the story. I loved the characters and the friendship in the story and the ending of the novel as well. Bravo!

An interesting take on Shakespeare's "Hamlet". I thought the portrayal of the black community in Oregon in the 1920's particularly revealing. I wish the author had adhered to the events of the original story throughout her version. I think it would have made an even greater impact. I wonder if she changed the ending because it was written as a young adult novel.

Great read!!!

This book is a good quick read. It has a lot of excellent detail that transports you back to the 1920's.

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