



Janeology

Karen Harrington

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Jane Nelson is a loving mother of two who has drowned her toddler son and is charged with his murder in this powerful examination of love, loss, and family legacy. When a prosecutor decides Jane's husband Tom is partially to blame for the death and charges him with "failure to protect," Tom's attorney proposes a radical defense. He plans to create reasonable doubt about his client's alleged guilt by suggesting that Jane's genetic predispositions contributed to her sudden snap. With the help of a woman gifted with the power of retrocognition-the ability to see past events through objects once owned by the deceased-the defense theory unfolds through an unforgettable journey into the troubled minds and souls of eight of Jane's ancestors. Janeology deftly illustrates the ways nature and nurture weave the fabric of one woman's life, and renders a portrait of one man left in its tragic wake.

Janeology Details

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Author : Karen Harrington

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From Reader Review Janeology for online ebook

Rosemary says

This novel continues to resonate for me as I contemplate patterns of dysfunction, including some in my own family.

Florinda says

Is a tendency toward dysfunctional relationships and violent behavior inherited? Is it learned through what a child experiences and witnesses in the family of origin? Is a dark family history the result of the Biblical edict that the "sins of the fathers (and/or mothers) will be visited upon the children"? Karen Harrington's novel Janeology considers all of these questions...and, to my mind, never definitively answers them or comes down in favor of one explanation over another. I consider this to be one of its strengths.

Literature professor Tom Nelson is summoned home by the police one June day to find that his wife Jane has attempted to drown their twin children; the girl, Sarah, is in critical condition, and the boy, Simon, is dead. Jane has been struggling with depression and has had difficulty dealing with the aftermath of a miscarriage, but the concept of a mother killing her own children is always shocking - not the least for her husband. Jane is tried for the crime, found not guilty by reason of insanity, and committed to a mental hospital; Tom struggles with his own sense of guilt and the raising of his motherless daughter. When the state pursues a follow-up criminal case against Tom for "failure to protect" - implying that he should have been aware his wife posed a danger to his children - his defense attorney proposes a defense based on Jane's family history. The problem is that Tom actually knows very little of her family history - but with the help of his lawyer and a clairvoyant who uses "retrocognition" to bring up memories through people's possessions, and with a fair amount of skepticism, he prepares to find out.

Jane has kept a trunk containing various mementos passed down through both sides of her family, but has never shared its contents or their stories with her husband. As Mariah, the clairvoyant, handles various articles from the trunk and channels their owner's stories to Tom and his lawyer, Dave, they learn about generations of secrets kept and harm done, in one way or another, by parents on to their children. Is it enough to convince a jury that Jane was somehow pre-disposed to commit the act she did, and that Tom could neither have seen it coming or stopped it?

Janeology raises some fascinating questions, and the story is engrossing. Personally, retrocognition falls in with a bunch of other New-Agey stuff I don't buy into, but it was an interesting device for conveying the stories of Jane's ancestors. Harrington skillfully gives each of these characters a distinct voice and presence. The character development is strong throughout the book, with one exception - Jane herself, who we really only know through her husband's eyes. I have the sense that this is a deliberate choice on the writer's part, though, and I think it's effective. However, I was bothered throughout the book by the fact that Tom really had known so little of his wife's background, and had seemed fine with that up to this point - it's probably not unique, but I do find it disturbing. Then again, I find a lot of behavior based on ignorance of history, let alone willful disregard for it, disturbing, so I'm sure that colored my perceptions.

Robert says

I went into this book thinking that I had a straightforward mystery in my hands. By the time I was done, I found that "Janeology" is so much more. This book is a surprise, and a very welcome one.

Harrington takes a story that is all too familiar to us -- the murder of a child by a seemingly ordinary young mother who simply can't do it anymore -- and examines deeper issues of responsibility, the power of regret, and the ongoing deliberation concerning nature versus nurture. What begins as a courtroom drama evolves into a sometimes heartbreaking exploration of one family's past and the threads, both genetic and environmental, that connect us all to the unseen generations before us.

As a storyteller, Karen Harrington creates believable characters: flawed, fragile, belligerent, and yet ultimately hopeful. Her dialogue, both contemporary and period, rings true. Most refreshingly, Harrington allows her story to avoid obvious paths and easy, instant gratification. When you reach the last pages, you will find yourself in a very different place than you might have anticipated. Different, and deeply satisfying.

Celle Cordero says

I first "met" Karen on MySpace just as she was receiving the first box of printed books from her publisher; I read all of the promos and watched the trailer.

"Ripped from the headlines"... I read the news, I watch TV. I had heard about the horrific times that a parent has hurt a child. As a mom myself, I have shuddered about those moms who "snap" and kill their kids. It was a fascinating premise and I made plans to read the book.

Then ironically in the parkland near my sleepy community a mom drove off of a cliff with her two young children in the car. She died, thankfully the children lived. And the local courts charged the husband with reckless endangerment because his wife had been under psychiatric care. It was a local case and everyone was talking about it, arguing about the charges levied against the husband. Stealing a line from *The King and I*, it was a puzzlement.

And the copy of *Janeology* that I had ordered from Amazon arrived in the mail.

You can't help but THINK after reading a story like *Janeology*. How many times have we looked at our children and seen traits that must have been genetically passed through the generations? How many times have people looked at us and commented on an expression, a habit, or some quirk that they had known in an older relative? What else is programmed into our DNA along with the color of our hair and eyes? How much does our genetic makeup color what we think is free will?

Karen Harrington draws you into the lives of her characters, she makes you question everything -- and she doesn't just give you answers. There is nothing anti-climatic here. Harrington's writing leaves her characters indelibly etched into your mind. Even as you finish the last page, you still ponder over the events as if you had been witness to them in real life. You can't help but feel the husband's pain and despair -- and you are terrified of identifying with his wife. Most of all, you are relieved that you aren't sitting on the jury.

Janeology by Karen Harrington is a book that will be talked about and argued about for a long time to come. You will never again look at yourself so blandly in a mirror, instead you will see the faces of your ancestors. This is a book that makes an impression. This is a book that you need to read.

Laurel-Rain says

When Jane Nelson seemingly spins out of control one day and drowns her son Simon, and attempts to drown his twin sister Sarah, her husband Tom, a professor, is blindsided. And then, once Jane's trial has ended, and she is charged with insanity, Tom faces charges of "failure to protect."

As his attorney prepares Tom for trial, they begin building a defense based on the complexities of nature and nurture, hoping to uncover the precursors to Jane's condition, while at the same time, showing that there was no way that Tom could have foreseen the tragic events, or how anyone could have predicted Jane's behavior.

The title of the book "JANEOLGY" could describe the very process of investigation via retrocognition, in that it deconstructs the genetic/psychological landscape of Jane's ancestry, beginning with her mother, Victoria, who was murdered, leaving Jane motherless at age ten.

This unique exploration into the precursors of Jane's behavior was a fascinating trip via a psychic Mariah, who is a relative of Jane's. Through objects in an old trunk, Mariah takes the reader (and Tom) back, showing us a history of mental illness, abuse, and violence. In Jane's immediate family of origin, she lost her father to divorce early on, and she was left with a sociopathic mother who used men and her daughter to satisfy her own needs. Her mother's murder when she was just ten could have planted the final seeds that led to the tragedy.

But as the attorney has pointed out, many people have terrible childhoods and do not grow up to murder their children. What set Jane apart? Therefore, while examining the many layers of familial history might seem like "overkill," instead they show us that the inbred violence in her history was like a ticking time bomb.

An interesting "epilogue" fast-forwards to give us a glimpse of Sarah's future.

As I closed the final pages of this unique suspense tale, I was reminded of my own history as a social worker who dealt with many of these issues in my daily life. Evaluations by therapists and studies of the family dynamics led us to our conclusions. Harrington's approach is unique and fascinating and makes for an interesting story. There were parts of the historic study that were lengthy and rambling, leading us far astray of the legal situation in which the father found himself. In the end, we were left with as many questions as answers. Four stars.

Tony says

If you are looking for a legal thriller that will stop and make you think, "Wow, this could really happen", then you don't have to go any further than Karen Harrington's new book, Janeology. We all are moved beyond words when we see the stories about a mother who kills her children. But what about the husband? Karen takes us into the life of a husband who has experienced the unspeakable when his wife murders one of their young twins. Not only does he walk in an alcohol induced haze as he struggles with the memory of losing a child and trying to make sense of how a wife he loves could commit an act like this, he then has to prepare to defend himself to the legal system and to the world as he has to face the haunting accusation of "failure to protect" his son. The argument: He should have seen the warning signs that led to this tragedy and taken steps to prevent it. If you want a ride that takes you through a plethora of emotions and causes you to

rethink things that until now seems obvious, then let Karen guide you through the fascinating and heart wrenching story she has crafted. Janeology is a book you need to put on your list today for your summer reading.

Malcolm says

Jane Nelson "snaps" and tries to drown her two children in the kitchen sink. Her son Simon dies, her daughter Sarah survives, and Jane is placed in a mental institution after being found not guilty by reason of insanity. However, since society can neither understand nor tolerate flawed motherhood, it will go to great lengths to find extenuating circumstances to explain a mother's crime.

Tom Nelson, the stunned and grieving husband and father, becomes a convenient scapegoat. As high-profile cases in recent years demonstrated, husbands are expected to know whether or not a wife under stress is a clear and present danger to her children. So Tom is charged with failing to protect his family from his wife.

In "Janeology," as in life, Tom and his lawyer Dave take as a given that the evidence used in Jane's trial to demonstrate that she was insane will be brought into Tom's trial and used against him. The prosecution will argue that if Jane was crazy enough to kill her children, Tom should have noticed this fact and done something to keep Simon and Sarah out of harm's way. How could he not have known?

Tom asks himself this question many times even before he is charged. He also wonders what happened to Jane, the loving wife and mother, to bring her to such a point. In her exceptionally well-written, carefully plotted and inventive novel, Karen Harrington considers where blame begins and ends and what, if anything, will bring us closure.

Dave tells Tom that they can mount a stronger defense by going farther into the past than the psychologists who testified about Jane's mental instability at her trial. He introduces Tom to a psychic who will learn through "retro-cognition" what Jane's parents and grandparents were like and whether--through bad genes, psychological imbalance, or criminal activity--they played a part in creating Jane's instability and propensity for murder.

As the psychic explores Jane's family tree in a series of compelling vignettes, the initially skeptical Tom begins to see a multigenerational pattern of behavior that might help him, as well as society, answer the question "why did Jane do it?"

While these vignettes are well handled, astute readers might wonder why Tom didn't ask his lawyer two questions about the information the psychic was finding: (1) How can you present evidence in court that's gathered solely through paranormal means? (2) Is there any legal precedent for using the "sins of the fathers," especially sins nobody knew about at the time of the crime, as viable extenuating circumstances in the same manner as one's own psychological past is traditionally used when presented by experts?

Lacking a stronger clarification from Dave about how the information will be used in court, the psychic's revelations appear, while they're unfolding in the storyline, more as compelling nice-to-know histories than viable facts for a court of law. Dave could have said--with the plot being spoiled--how he intended to get these revelations before the jury. Tom should have asked, and the reader needs to know to keep from thinking that the past, no matter how compelling it is, is unrealistic in a legal drama.

In their consideration of Jane and how she came kill her children, Tom and Dave want to answer the question "why" with something more satisfying than "she just went nuts." Do these answers they find create

reasonable doubt when weighed against the state's charge of "failure to protect"? Maybe yes, maybe no, but even if the answers clear Tom's name, will they also bring the true closure family, friends and society desire?

Harrington puts these questions before the reader in a very engaging novel.

Lisa says

Have you ever seen on the news a story about a mother who killed her own child and wondered 'What would make her do that?' or 'How could she do that to her own child?' In JANEOLGY, these are the very questions that Tom Nelson is asking about his wife, Jane after she drowns one of their toddler twins. Thankfully, the other survived.

It was a day like any other until a policeman showed up at Tom's classroom at the Texas college where he teaches, to tell him he needed to come home with him. That there was some trouble at his house. Not in his wildest imagination could he have perceived what he would discover there.

After Jane's trial, where she was committed to a psychiatric hospital, the prosecutor's office soon began to focus on Tom and he was charged with Failure To Protect. Why hadn't he seen this coming? Didn't he know his wife was unstable? Was he guilty of not protecting his children from their mother? The answers to these questions are the basis for Tom's legal defense.

With the help of his dedicated lawyer, a lot of research and a clairvoyant who has her own interest in the case, they begin a journey into Jane's family history that leads them to startling revelations that at least begin to explain why Jane did the unthinkable.

JANEOLGY is a book that has a dark side and I found myself getting lost in Jane's past as her husband tries to make sense of it all. Karen Harrington draws on the abilities of a clairvoyant in her story to travel through time and look into past lives that have ultimately contributed to one woman committing an unforgivable crime against her own child.

The story is told in the days leading up to Tom's own trial with each chapter introducing a descendant from Jane's family tree, beginning with her mother's genealogy and bringing it full circle with her father's family history. I thought the way in which the story was told was imaginative and brilliant. When telling a story with many family members, it's hard not to get lost or to lose track of who is who. This is not a problem in reading JANEOLGY.

Once I started reading, I had difficulty putting it down. It's the kind of book I enjoy reading the most. Not a lot of fluff or descriptive reading. Just the meat of a good story. Another thing I liked most about it was the ending. I felt completely satisfied and it didn't feel like it was predictable at all. I can't say anymore about it, but I liked the way it ended. I do have one regret and that is that I waited so long to read this book.

Daniel says

was told this one was really good.

Landi says

This book pulled me in from the first page. I couldn't put it down until I finished it. I wanted to find out how this story would unfold. The premise is fascinating.

Molly says

I received this book directly from the author, Karen, who I met in the world of book blogs and I enjoy her blog very much. She has a great gift of writing and insight into her perception of the world around her. I had wanted to read her book for a long time and was eager to get started when it arrived.

It is difficult to be eager to read a story about a mother who drowns her children. But this is not so much a story of the brutality of the murder but rather the brutality of the effect that it has on those who survive. Jane snaps one morning and her husband Tom is rushed home by the authorities when a delivery man finds Jane has drowned her twins in the kitchen sink, laying them out on the floor. The little girl survives while her brother does not. The book delves into Tom's life after his wife has been committed to a mental institution and he is about to go on trial for being libel for his son's death as he should have seen the signs before it was too late. He is also dealing with accusations that he himself may have been the reason she was driven to such a terrible act.

The plot then heads toward the angle of genetic pre-disposition and how much of what we do is inherited behavior and how much is caused by current environment and real choices. I found all of this very interesting and appreciated the different view of the story. We never hear from Jane herself - the story is told through her husband. His life has fallen apart and he struggles with himself and guilt, blame and anger. But he also loves his wife and can't escape the loss he feels. He finds that he never really knew her at all when a medium hired by his attorney shows up to lead them through a "This Is Your Life" version of Jane.

This is where the book lost me completely. In the course of 24 hours this woman, who is a long lost relative of Jane's, picks up objects from a trunk of mementos belonging to Jane and by touching them, is transported back in time into the mind and soul of various relatives from Jane's historical past. Through them they learn first hand all of the skeletons in Jane's family's closet and the horrible incidents that happened along the family tree.

It was a clever plot device to introduce lots of people and information quickly and without the need for overly lengthy character development, but it became unrealistic and I took the book's message much less seriously as a result. I can suspend disbelief to a certain extent but even if I did believe in the power/ability of mediums I don't believe that one would have the energy or success to sit there hour after hour and receive such an effective tapestry of information so quickly. I found it hard to believe that the attorney couldn't just research Jane's past through more traditional, and reliable, channels. And it irritated me that Tom was forever wishing his daughter was there, but never actually doing anything to be with her - shipping her off instead to his mother.

I enjoyed the emotional tug of war presented. How can a man love the wife who murdered his son? Would it be helpful or harmful for the surviving daughter to know the mother who tried to kill her? How much of our actions are caused by genetic trauma? How do you handle survivor's guilt? I disliked the format in revealing the information we needed to learn who Jane really was. Personal taste I suppose.

This is really closer to 3 stars for the writing and subject matter but as of now I lean more towards 2 for the way the medium method took away from the true connection I was feeling for the tale.

Grady says

Nature versus Nurture; The Complexities of Understanding Human Behavior

First time novelist Karen Harrington's JANEOLGY is a reading experience so thoughtfully conceived and written that accepting the fact that this is a first novel flirts with disbelief. Not only is Harrington a masterful conjurer of a suspenseful thriller, but she is also a wordsmith able to maintain the reader's attention and involvement in her masterful exploration of the science of psychology, genetics, and the fascination with the concept of retrocognition, all the while unraveling a mystery not unlike decoding a strand of DNA. If, indeed, this is a first novel, then we are in the presence of a gifted artist with a bright and solid future.

In a Prologue, Harrington sets the stage for the drama that will unfold in the course of her novel, just as in the Epilogue she manages to tie her tale together in as surprising a fashion as the method in which she relates her story. Jane Nelson is jailed for the drowning murder of her young son Simon and the attempted drowning of Simon's twin sister Sarah. What lead to this horrid act is the theme of the story. That, and the fact that Jane's husband Tom is implicated for not recognizing the mental deterioration and signs of behavior alteration that, had he been more mentally and physically present in the family, could have prevented the tragedy. Tom is supported by his friend and lawyer Dave who is hired to defend Tom in the charges of child endangerment and neglect. Dave, Tom, and 'spiritualist/agent of retrocognition skills' Mariah slowly unravel the events that served as signals to Jane's ability to murder her children. This investigation is done through visits to Jane's past - startling discoveries of familial traits of mental instability as well as repeated incidents of abuse and desertion and brutally faulty mothering and interfamily secrets - that give rise to the question of whether Jane's illness is genetically determined or the product of cruel, inappropriate nurturing.

Throughout these sessions before Tom's trial as a 'co-conspirator' we find Tom's initial love for Jane, his life with her and his twins, and the history of episodes involving Tom and Jane that could have prompted Tom to see Jane for the complete person she is rather than the perception of a wife as he elected to see her with blinders in place. 'The mask of self-control is a powerful antidote to the chaos that rages within us all.' In reflecting on Jane's torrid familial history Mariah states 'Children aren't born practical...Life makes them that way when they are forced to constantly make the best of every situation.' But Harrington's revisiting Jane's genealogy is peppered with many keenly observed ideas: '...time plus tragedy always equal comedy.' and '...pre-death purgatory may look like for the modern man, a place where you are forced to shore up the rationales for your behavior, a waiting room where you must sort out the misdeeds of your mother.' and 'Drugs are often the substitute for multiple generations of parenting support.' and 'I've heard that your mind runs its own tapes, tapes you play over and over again until you banish them through therapy, drugs or religion, or all of those things at once, until you replace them with new thoughts you can live with.'

Tom, in preparing for his trial while Jane is held in custody in jail, absorbs all of the 'ancestral time travel' consequences he has witnessed with Dave and Mariah. '...we three had begun this odyssey looking for traits foretelling danger and we had found them. We found evidence that supported how Jane could have been the inheritor of characteristics that perhaps predisposed her to a personality ill-suited for parenting, its mounting pressures and the daily treadmill of maternal monotony.' And the trial for Tom Nelson pulls all these threads together in a manner that leaves much of the verdict to the reader.

Karen Harrington is such an accomplished writer that it seemed to this reader more important to offer a few pearls of her gift with words and ideas than with a direct recounting of the story within the covers of this

strange puzzle of a tale. And that is not to say the story is not revealed with expertise and brilliance: few new writers have the kind of skill Harrington owns in creating a wholly satisfying reading experience. This is a fine book, a unique book, and a book that makes us plead for another by Karen Harrington. Grady Harp

Rebecca says

Janeology by Karen Harrington is a book that draws you in from the first page and you can't stop reading until you know what happens. The story follows Tom Nelson through a thorny criminal trial in which he is accused of having not paid attention to the signs of post-partum depression in his wife that led her to commit infanticide, killing their two-year-old son and nearly drowning his twin, two-year-old Sarah.

While Tom is still reeling from the death of his son, and young Sarah is confused about losing her twin and her mother, the state of Texas is looking for someone to blame for the deaths since the mother is found to be mentally ill at trial and is sentenced to a mental institution. As the story unfolds, Tom's attorney takes an unorthodox defense of his client, saying Tom's wife, Jane, was pre-disposed to this life because of her genes. They then go through the lives of past generations from Jane's family, with the help of a clairvoyant, and discover the unsavory details of her genealogy.

While the clairvoyant may be a bit of a stretch for some readers it actually seemed to be just a quick way for Harrington to get this story out. It would have been far less effective to have Tom and his lawyer digging through old newspaper articles for the entirety of the book as they unearth the details of Jane's family. The story moves at a quick pace, with each chapter leading into the next and making it impossible to put down.

I thought this was an interesting look at a subject that seems to be in the news more and more these days (very Jodi Picoult-esque), as well as at how blame gets pushed around in the legal system. There was also an interesting underlying theme of how objects in our lives can keep us connected to pasts and memories we may wish to forget. And it will get you wondering how much of you is made up of your ancestors.

This book was also published by Kunati, an independent book publisher, so if you're interested in debut authors and independent booksellers you might check them out.

Maria says

Jane Nelson a young mother of twins, murders her toddler son. When it is found that Jane was suffering from mental issues at the time, her husband is taken to court for failure to protect his children from her. The book centres around Tom Nelson's fight to clear his name amidst his feelings of guilt over what happened to his son. I found the first part of the book a little long-winded and was wondering where it would go as it seemed a bit repetitive going over and over Tom's lawyer's proposed defence that Jane's genetic make-up was responsible for her actions and that, therefore, she had a latent tendency towards violence which no-one could have foreseen unless they knew all about her family history. Then there is an unexpected turn of events when a psychic, Mariah, is brought into the story to try to make contact with Jane's dead ancestors by handling family heirlooms, items which once belonged to the deceased. This is where the story becomes interesting and will have you hooked. Karen Harrington writes well and has created an intriguing story which weaves the lives of Jane's ancestors into a tapestry showing how their behaviour affected the family line eventually leading to Jane's violent tendencies. I did find the part of the story involving Mariah was a little

far-fetched as we were supposed to believe that Tom, his lawyer and the psychic would all be lucid and able to think straight after staying awake for over 24 hours. I couldn't help thinking that there would have been some hallucinations going on then!! However, that aside, 'Janeology' is a good read with a plot which could be turned into a made-for-tv movie. It kept me interested and the ending is also rather unexpected and a nice twist.

Cheryl says

5 stars!

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Fiction; Legal thriller; Paranormal

Janeology is a mesmerizing read!

Janeology is a unique and captivating blend of legal drama and paranormal suspense. Jane and Tom Nelson represent an average American family, with twins Simon and Sarah, and the family dog. But one incomprehensible act forever changes their lives: Jane attempts to drown her children and the dog—and only one survives.

What follows is unexpected. Instead of the courtroom drama with Jane in the hot-seat, we're taken to a time when she is already committed to a psychiatric hospital, and Tom now stands trial in his own fight—the battle to prove that he was not responsible for his wife's actions, that the charges of “failure to protect” will see him as innocent.

Starting off as a legal thriller, the novel takes an interesting detour when a psychic with family ties is brought in to provide an unusual and compelling genealogical defense—that Jane inherited her indifference and unmotherly qualities from generations of ancestors.

I found the flashbacks into Jane's ancestors' lives very intriguing, and some of the complexly drawn characters still linger in my mind. Karen Harrington expertly paints her characters with multiple layers, and with vivid imagery that quickly carries the reader through the pages. You won't want to put it down.

Perhaps the author has touched upon a truth here. Having actually known and befriended a woman who, years after I'd lost touch with her, had abused, imprisoned and starved her young son to death, I have asked myself many of the same questions that Tom asked. What makes a mother kill her own child? Why didn't I recognize the signs?

Janeology is a novel you won't soon forget. I know I won't. It delves into a highly sensitive topic that is sadly ripped from the headlines in nearly any given month and is never discussed in such detail. All in all, Janeology is a mesmerizing read! I can't recommend this novel enough!

~ Cheryl Kaye Tardif,
author of Whale Song
