

BOOK REVIEW OF *LEAP OF FAITH*

BY DANIELLE STEEL

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Abstract

Leap of Faith is a novel by a famous novelist Danielle Steel. *Leap of Faith* debuted at the New York Times and is listed as the best-selling novel to fifty-two of Danielle Steel. This novel is about a girl from France, she is Marie-Ange Hawkins who lives in a magnificent castle name, Chateau de Marmouton. At the castle, she has childhood like everyone's dream. She has the freedom, security and abundant affection of both parents and her brother. But when Marie-Ange Hawkins is eleven years old, a tragic accident that befell his parents take her happiness. She becomes an orphan and is sent to America to live with a cruel aunt of her father. Alone in a foreign land, Marie-Ange Hawkins becomes slave of agricultural land by her aunt, only her friendship with Billy and her dream to return to the castle of her childhood memories that make Marie-Ange endures. But the magic happens when Marie-Ange is 21 years old. She makes it back to the castle Chateau de Marmouton again and even get a chance to be the hostess which is the new owner of the castle, Comte Bernard de Beauchamp proposed her. But behind his proposal, Comte Bernard de Beauchamp keeps his hidden bad intentions to Marie-Ange Hawkins. In desperation and uncertainty areas around her, Marie-Ange has to find the faith and courage to take her last step to save her love ones and herself. Danielle Steel packed this book with very interesting by a simple writing style and storyline in the 1800s which is different from the usual. This book is quite interesting and deserves to be read as entertainment by teenagers and adults.

Key word: feminism, misery of a girl, marriage's life, a girl's maturity, devastating betrayal, the truth of life, greediness, tragedy, suffering, faith and courage, romance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Writing

Novel is a work of prose fiction and narrative writing, usually in the form of a story. According to Jassin, "The novel is a remarkable occurrence of a

person's life because this occurrence makes conflicts. Conflicts that changed the person's fate." (1985: 78). Novel is longer and more complicated than a short story. Generally, novel tells about a story of the characters and their behavior in everyday life by focusing on the odd side of the narrative.

Leap of Faith is a general novel. It is Danielle Steel's fifty-second bestselling novel. Steel was published this novel on 2001. *Leap of Faith* debuted on the *New York Times* Best Seller list for young adult's chapter books, and garnered *New York Times* number one Hardcover Fiction Bestseller literature.

The writer chooses this novel because of the amazing story about life and how people are not what we expect of them until we truly find out the truth. *Leap of Faith* is a well written novel that has deep and compelling story of devastating betrayal and greediness. This novel really entertains and makes readers sympathize with the main character. This novel touches readers so much by how tragedy is presented, how the lead character become the usual Cinderella and of course, the roman inducing twist at the end. The most important thing about the novel is also the moral value that packed in the story.

1.2 Purpose of the Writing

The writer's purposes of the writing are:

1. To give summary of *Leap of Faith* by Danielle Steel.
2. To review of strengths and weakness of the novel.

1.3 About Danielle Steel and Her Works

The full name of Danielle Steel is Danielle Fernandes Dominique Schuelein-Steel. She is an American novelist and was born on August 14, 1947, in New York city, USA. Steel sold out her novels with over 800 million copies around the world which makes her New York Times bestselling author. She is currently recording as the best seller author alive and the fourth bestselling author of all time. She is also the author of teen and adult romantic fiction *Leap of Faith*.

She is the only child of Norma da Câmara Stone dos Reis and John Schuelein-Steel. Her father was a German Jewish immigrant and her mother which was born in Portugal, was the daughter of a diplomat. Her parents divorced when Steel just was eight years old.

Steel began her career in 1965 when she was 18 years old and married to French-American banker Claude-Eric Lazard. While became a young wife and still attending New York University, Steel began writing for the purpose to complete her first manuscript. After the birth of her first daughter, Beatrix, in 1966, Steel worked for a public relations agency in New York for several years. Her magazine client was highly impressed with her freelance articles and encouraged her to focus on writing and suggested her to write book or novel, which she did.

Steel choose to write novels because she is more interest into the novel than book. Two years later Steel published her first novel *Going Home* in 1972. In her personal life, Steel had married until fifth time and have nine children. Steel's novels have been translated into 28 languages and can be found in 47 countries across the globe. Her novels often described as "formulaic" which is tend to involve the characters in a crisis of some sort which threatens the relationship.

Leap of Faith is Steel's fifty-second general fiction bestselling novel. It was published on 2001. Steel often wrote it at night. While she wrote *Leap of Faith*, she did it with only four hours of sleep. She made it at night so that she could be with her children during the bright day.

Steel is a really productive or prolific author. She is often releasing several novels in a year. Each novel takes two and half years to complete. With this capability, Steel has developed an ability to juggle up to five projects at once. She can release her several novels by researching one novel while outlining another and then writing also editing additional novels. She is a hard worker, strong single mother and doing it for her 9 children. Although she is a successful author but she is an introvert person especially for her personal life. The press, of course, always wonders about her divorce which is until fifth time.

Leap of Faith explores the world of the rich and frequently deal with serious life issues, mental illness of shopaholic and greediness, death, loss, family crises and relationships. Also, there are claims that Steel popular story lines are based on the events of her life like having five ex-husbands and another is having

family & relationship crisis events which make she still kept hidden from the public.

To avoid comparisons to her previous novels, Steel does not and never write sequels. She always writes novels with different storyline and character in each novel which makes her unique author. Twenty-two of her novels have been adapted for television, including two that have received Golden Globe Nominations. After *Leap of Faith*, Danielle Steel wrote more than forty novels such as *The Kiss*, *The Cottages*, *Dating Game*, *Safe Harbour*, *Ransom*, etc.

2. Summary of *Leap of Faith*

This novel tells story about a girl names Marie-Ange Hawkins. Marie-Ange Hawkins has everything that every young girl dream of when she was children. She is a very privilege daughter who lives in Paris with her lovely parents, John and Francoise and brother, Robert. She has all happiness childhood which is love, freedom and security by her parents in their beautiful old French château. But when Marie-Ange Hawkins is just eleven years old, tragically fate takes control and turns her life upside down. A tragic car accident takes her parents and brother's life and marks the end of her idyllic life.

After a tragic car accident that takes the lives of all of her family she is left with her elderly housekeeper, Sophie, who unfortunately is unable to take care for the little girl. Marie-Ange Hawkins doesn't have any relative family except her aunt who lives in America, so she is sent there to live with her old cold-hearted aunt, Carole Collins. It seems that she has lost everything when her loving parents and brother tragically die.

Orphaned and alone, Marie-Ange Hawkins must leave her lovely city, Paris, to live with her cruel aunt on a farm in Iowa. Aunt Carole really resents her deeply because of bad memory and relationship between her aunt and her father, John, seems not good. Aunt Carole cuts her day off from all she has ever loved as children especially her friendship. Bitterly resented by the old woman, cut off from everything she has known and loved, Marie-Ange is forced to work tirelessly on the farm, dreaming only of the day she can return to her beloved Château de Marmouton.

In Marie-Ange's lonely existence, only the friendship with a local farm boy, Billy Parker, offers comfort and hope for her. Marie-Ange and Billy have special bond of friendship since they are children. Here she learns about mean spiritedness but also love from her best friend Billy until they are grow up together.

Although some suffer and misery with her aunt, all this time her wish is only to gain comfort and escape back to her home. Then just after her twenty-first birthday, an unexpected visitor brings startling news and an extraordinary gift, the freedom to return to France, to Chateau de Marmouton. She finds out that her dad has left her thirty millions in his will. By this money she decides to go back to France. So through some good fortune, after living with her aunt for several years, she is able to move back to her beloved France.

When she arrives in France, Marie-Ange realizes that the chateau has new owner. He is Comte Bernard de Beauchamp, a 40 years old dashing widower Count who invites her into his home. When Marie-Ange stays in chateau with Bernard, here she learns that he invites her into his heart too. She falls in love too with a Count and shares her inheritance with him very quickly although she knows nothing about him. Their life together, soon seem happy includes marriage, have two children and beautiful homes in the chateau. After view months married with Bernard, the situation seem getting awkward. Here she finds out that her husband has shopaholic madness in buying expensive thing. It is getting strange because her husband always owes money in a huge amount to Marie-Ange and said that he would soon paid it off, but in fact he didn't. However, Marie-Ange closes her eyes on this situation.

It is just the beginning of her horrible marriage. It takes really horrific moment when a strange woman, Louise, calls to tell Marie-Ange a very strange, shocking and scary story. One so chilling, she doesn't want to believe it which is Count is not what he seems. Louise claims that she is Bernard ex-wife and explains and shows Count's dark side which is huge liar, greediness and even murdering for money. She tells Marie-Ange to be careful of him especially for her

children lives. Marie-Ange is really devastating, but again she refuses to believe Louise's story. Marie-Ange even thought that Louise is a crazy woman.

Turns out Marie-Ange's lives goes wrong which indeed she discovers that Count has a very dark sinister side to him which nearly costs Marie-Ange and her two children lives. And it is true that her prince charming never pays his bills and has mental illness about money and shopaholic. Moreover, the Count ever tried to kill a little boy which is Louis's son because of his money greediness.

Marie-Ange Hawkins has been full betrayed by a man she thought she knew and loved from the first time they met. She finds out that Count, her husband just wants and tries to spend all her money. Count doesn't mind spending her money excessively. When she tries to resist, she finds out that Bernard tortures her physically and this may be a murderer for her and her children. Marie-Ange is very devastating but she finally must face the truth. She must strive to save not only herself but her children as well.

Not even her old best friend Billy can help her now as she is thousands of miles away of him. Marie-Ange somehow has to find courage and faith to survive. After all as the darkness gathers around her, Marie-Ange must find the faith and courage to take one last desperate step to save her love ones and herself. Marie-Ange, somehow, can release from her husband and also escape from Bernard's crime plan. Fortunately, there is a happy ending for Marie-Ange, but with a hard lesson learn about trust and love. Finally, Marie-Ange feels relieve and so much happy because of her meeting again with her special best friend, Billy.

3. Review of *Leap of Faith*

3.1 Analysis of the Novel

In her fifty-second bestselling novel, Danielle Steel creates a compelling story of the power of lies, the misuse of trust and of one woman's triumph over a devastating betrayal. The concept of the novel is a short novel that has the right mix of a hasty Cinderella story, romance, "growing up" young adult themes and mystery.

The hasty Cinderella story element is that when Marie-Ange Hawkins goes from a most people dream of childhood to an orphaned because of her parents and brother are killed in a terrible accident. The emotions of loneliness are deeply explored in Danielle Steele's *Leap of Faith*.

“As far as Sophie knows, there is no one on both sides, and she assumed Marie-Ange literally don't have anyone in this world right now. For herself, Marie-Ange also feel that way, and when the future without both parents, and Robert, she felt an eerie swallowing her and drown her. Worse, she would never meet again with her both parents and Robert. Her comfort life, sheltered and affectionate that she knew, had been end in a sudden, as herself die with them.” (2001:26).

It explains that Marie-Ange Hawkins had a princess life in a chateau in France, but an event one day took her royal-like life away from her. It is becoming a Cinderella story. Marie-Ange who has Cinderella childhood suddenly has to face the truth left by her parents in accident and being orphaned. Then it is become unpredictable and very sad. Danielle Steel's writing style is unique to say the least, it was very factual and deep. It is written in a really simplistic way to get readers's sympathy to Marie-Ange.

The other element is that when heroine Marie-Ange Hawkins goes to a loveless upbringing kid also farm worker in Iowa with her uncaring aunt she never knew after being orphaned in her parent tragic accident.

“From now on, as soon as you wake up, you have to make your bed, then come here and prepare breakfast for both of us, as I already show you. We all work here, and you too. Otherwise,” She added (Aunt Carole Collins) staring Marie-Ange seriously, "There is no reason for you to be here, and you can stay in state orphanage. There was one in Fort Dodge. But it would be much better for you here, so you do not think that you can escape yourself from your work, or to work for me. You cannot, if you want to stay here.” (2001:43).

Danielle Steel's was at her best when writing a hasty Cinderella story *Leap of Faith*. She has written a wonderful book. The main character, Marie-Ange, is likeable from page one. The reader is guaranteed to feel her joy and pain as she feels them. Marie-Ange is faced with tragedy at the young age of eleven. She is

forced to leave her home country and live with a relative who doesn't really show any emotion except hate of everyone and everything. Steel takes readers of the horrible things that happened to Marie-Ange when she went to live with her aunt. It has a good story line and moves at a good fast pace.

Danielle Steel makes the readers shock and cry as she touches the heart with tenderness and accuracy. Marie-Ange is faced with an unexpected events that neither thought possible and with a choice that provides her considerable brave challenges for not being blind or realize and grown up at the same time. Realizing a fake charming ideal husband who lies in every single day of their first meeting and their marriage life and at the same time Marie-Ange needs to be strong and becomes grown-up adult for her children.

In this devastating betrayal, there is also moral value that packed in this relationship story. It is who do you choose? a country boy like Billy, honest and caring or Comte Bernard who was polished, attractive yet greedy and selfish ? Marry someone like Billy, a simple honest poor man perhaps a little bit naive but maybe enough for Marie-Ange to get comfort and happiness without lies. The first time witness the relationship between Marie and Billy develop, it's like imagine naive love story. Readers discover themselves engage in the story from the beginning until the end.

Afterwards the relationship between Marie-Ange and Bernard start develop. Then Marie-Ange realizes who the man she's married truly was, it feels like readers get education movie about relationship and life that is been so much true. These pages have a deep impression in reading experience. Here are some examples of the sentences that contain deep impression shocking plot of Marie-Ange's marriage life.

"I finally declared to Bernard that I could no longer pay his bills. He must responsible his bills for himself, and he became angry. Later I found out he has a debt of several million dollars, and to avoid scandal, secretly I pay it off." (Steel, 2001:188-189).

"On one night, there is a fire, a great fire. I ran to find my children in the room. Once I got there, I saw Bernard ..." her voice became hoarse," lock Charles's bedroom from the outside." (Steel, 2001:189).

"I myself believe that the fire was deliberately lit by Bernard." (Steel, 2001:193).

“Marie-Ange gripped by fear. Although she did not want to believe it, if the story turns out to be true, it means that Bernard is a vicious killer, who has revoked the life of a child as if with his own hands for the sake of money.” (Steel, 2001:194).

Steel presents a devastating betrayal tragedy in which the plot and themes of the novel are how Marie-Ange Hawkins being pulled into a place where nothing is what it seems. It is about wanting to believe the lies until the moment comes in one blinding instant tragic event, when survival and salvation depend on a final *Leap of Faith* the only path to freedom and life.

In spite of the confusion and obstacles all around her, finally she is blissfully happy because she can escape from all of it. But at a time in her live when she least expect to feel that way, she not only feels grieve but also blessed. Some philosophical lessons are exposed in the novel, a motivation for everyone to do better in life. This is perhaps the biggest motivation behind readers picking up this novel.

3.2 The Strengths and the Weaknesses of the Novel

3.2.1 The Strengths of *Leap of Faith*

The strong point of the novel is the plot. There is a certain plot that change and unpredictable plot that particularly sad, enjoyable, Cinderella story like and mystery. The novel keeps moving at a good pace and speed.

The other strong element plot is about romance when Marie-Ange meets charming Count Comte Bernard and falls in love with him. This girl Marie-Ange makes some very insane decisions in whole of the book, the concept that parentless kids do not know what is good for them and the heroin Marie-Ange takes this concept to a whole new level. It is mean true that she had no parents but for the love of everything, it is better to use the common sense, which Marie-Ange does not have and realize it in her love to Bernard.

This story is become up side down since the events move very fast and readers will want to know what happens next. The shocking plot was Marie Ange's total cluelessness about the wealthy Count Bernard. This is the example.

“All of the wells has essentially," said Louise with a simple, "and if yours is dry, he will leave you. But before he does that, he will try to snatch all that can still be obtained. If there is more that can be gained by your death, he will also try to get it. He is really greedy and evil." Bernard was even worse than that. In Louise's eyes, he is also a murderer.” (2001:195).

Danielle Steel shows to readers the unpredictable plot which is Marie-Ange Hawkins has been betrayed by a man she thought she knew and loved. Here she finds out that Count Bernard, her husband is a greedy and evil man and will do anything for money include murdering his own family.

The themes of the story are also very strong. First theme is perserverance because Marie-Ange has the ability to keep her head up throughout all of the misfortune in her life. Even though bad luck seems to follow her wherever she goes, she still keeps going and hoping for the best. A good example of this is when Marie-Ange's entire family dies in a severe car accident. Even though she is sad a depressed, Marie-Ange still functions. She goes to school and makes the best of life. That is what true perserverance is.

Second theme is courage because Both billy and Marie-Ange display great courage in this novel. Billy shows courage when he has to continuously tell his best friend that she is making huge life threatening mistakes. Even though he knows it may hurt her or even their friendship, Billy is willing to risk that if it will prevent Marie-Ange from being in danger.

Another example of when Marie-Ange displays great courage is when she decides to leap from the window into the firemen's net. There is a big fire in the château which the fire ignited by Bernard and also by his cruelty, Bernard locked his family inside the room. Marie-Ange has to save herself and her children by jumping from the window. These are the examples.

“Jump in, Marie-Ange! Now!" Upon hearing these words, Marie-Ange finally jumps out of the window.” (2001:217).

“She knew that if she did not jump, the fate of her children will be in the hands of her husband, and only God who knows what will Bernard done on them to seize their inheritance.” (2001:215).

Marie-Ange is very scared to trust that the net would catch both her and her children, but she knew that she had to take that risk. If Marie-Ange would not have jumped, her and her children would probably be dead.

Another theme of the story is relationship and romance. The strong relationships in this story are friendship and romantic relationship. Friendship between Marie-Ange and Billy Parker is deep and confusing. They become instant friends when they are eleven years old. They have a special bond that nothing seems to be able to break.

Their relationship transforms into a romantic relationship which they never realize until the end of the book. On the other hand, Marie-Ange also has a strong relationship with her childhood home which she wants to go back to it. It makes her relationship with Billy must be delayed and they become very best friend only or brother sister since her departure. It becomes an interesting part when their romance relationship becomes impossible when Marie-Ange met Count Bernard and Billy himself engaged to another woman although the relationship between Marie-Ange and Billy developed better in the end of the story.

“Without saying a word, Marie-Ange handing flowers, and Billy take it and staring at her for a long time. Afterwards he hugged tightly Marie-Ange, and feels the softness of Marie-Ange’s hair on his cheeks, as usual. Hugging moment like that, they both as equals as go home. They were very best friend who owned one another, and even after two years of separation, their relationship remains intimate, warm, and reassuring. That’s the way things ought to be two people who love each other, even though not all couples are lucky enough to experience it.” (2001:238-239).

For that, we learn about the moral value that is packed in their relationship story. Like this question example, who do you choose to be married? a country boy like Billy, honest and caring or Comte Bernard who was polished, attractive yet greedy and selfish? It makes the relationship between Billy, Marie-Ange and Bernard becomes the best part of the book and the most believable look at young love.

3.2.2 The Weaknesses *Leap of Faith*

Over all, the book is good and has an interesting idea. However, in Indonesia, *Leap of Faith* seeks a mature audience, because there is mature love

relationship and evil mystery happening in the story. There is storyline reveal the intimate love activity. This novel also contains some storyline that tell how to make love. Here are some examples of the sentences that contain intimate kiss and sexual activity.

“After dancing with him all night, Bernard leaned toward her and kissed her lips with passion.” (Steel, 2001:126).

“They continued kissing, and Bernard’s love was so eager to make Marie-Ange felt like being in the clouds. Finally in November, just a little over a month since their first meeting, Bernard and Marie-Ange made love for the first time.” (Steel, 2001:142).

“They walked home, holding hands and they make love for hours that afternoon, and the next day, Bernard called the priest and set everything.” (Steel, 2001:145).

“Bernard release Marie-Ange’s wedding dress while stripping his clothes, and he made love to her that night,” (Steel, 2001:151).

The atmosphere of the romance, the kiss and make love before married created emotionally which is not proper to read by Indonesian teenagers. Moreover, there are sexual activity situations which described really specific, like open clothes before sex which is not appropriate for Indonesian teenagers.

Looking at the summary plot, the story actually is sound very interesting. However what the readers don’t know is this novel contains a view flaw of concept writing. Danielle Steel’s word or sentence repetition is not enjoying and maybe weird. There are the dislike point of the way Danielle Steel keep repeating a view of the words and sentences. These are the examples.

“She felt scared and alone. She felt lonely.” (Steel, 2001:29).

“She loved the way he worried about her, and wanted to protect her ... she loved the protection he offered, his obvious concern. She was totally in love with him.” (Steel, 2001:122).

It feels like it has some major reading disability and needed someone to spell it out in writing to get any emotion for the text. Even though, Danielle Steel needs readers to feel deep impression of their emotions, but it feels like *Leap of Faith* have a little bit a view overstatement of sentence and word. The plot and themes of the story itself have deep emotions, so overstatement word or sentence is not necessary in the writing concept of the novel.

4. Conclusion

Based on the review of *Leap of Faith*, the novel is good to be read. This novel tells about Marie-Ange Hawkins, a girl who must find the faith and courage to take one last desperate step to save her love and herself. The character in the story is happy in the beginning but incredibly sad in the middle and ending. Marie-Ange's life contains of terrible events. She is orphaned and grown up with her bitter-aunt on a farm in Iowa because of her death parents. There are seduce and devastating betrayal around her within the story giving the readers the feel of reality and emotional connection to believable characters.

This novel is the same as any other book. It has strengths and weakness. The strengths include the theme and the plot. The theme is about perserverance, courage, relationship and romance of a girl, Marie-Ange who has the ability to keep her head up throughout all of the misfortune in her life.

Then at some points, there is a certain plot change and unpredictable story that particularly sad, enjoyable and mysterious, but this is part of what makes the book so interesting and it is become the strengths also. The set-up of Marie-Ange's past helps to understand her as an orphaned character. Her friendship with Billy and relationship between Marie-Ange, Bernard and Billy was especially touchingly written.

Beside, the unique concept of writing is to say that the novel is very factual and deep. It is written in a really simplistic way to get readers's simpathy to Marie-Ange.

As for the weakness this book contains a lot of intimate mature love relationship, sexual activity situations and mysterious murder which reveal in some storyline which is not appropriate to be read by Indonesian teenagers. There is also a view flaw of concept writing. *Leap of Faith's* word or sentence repetition is not enjoying. There are the dislike point of the way Danielle Steel keep repeating a view of the words and sentences.

However, by the end of the novel, it is clear as to what is going on. Overall, *Leap of Faith* is very enjoyable, interesting and has a lot of good moral values to be read by Indonesian adults and American teenagers and adults.

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