

## Review of *Gillespie and I* by Jane Harris Metro

Staying In Book Reviews: Fiction

# She wants to play a game with you



Despite getting off to a deceptively slow start, Jane Harris's follow-up to *The Observations* soon ups its game. Packed with dark deeds and unreliable narrators, it is a cunningly plotted puzzler full of mysteries and ambiguities that satisfies the contemporary taste for Victoriana and Gothic tales.

It straddles two time periods – 1930s Bloomsbury and Glasgow in the late 1880s. In her old age, narrator Harriet Baxter, a well-off, solitary spinster with two caged

**FICTION OF THE WEEK**  
**Gillespie And I** By Jane Harris  
(Faber, £14.99) ★★★★★

birds for company, is writing a memoir of her prized friendship with Ned Gillespie, a Glaswegian artist. Harriet recounts how she insinuated herself into his family's life, where a sinister, possibly psychotic child called Sybil wreaks havoc. In the process, the tone of the novel shifts from dark comedy to chilling tragedy. In the parallel narrative of Harriet's London existence, her suspicions are aroused by the arrival of a new

servant. The overall sense, conveyed via a tone of barely suppressed hysteria, is that nothing in Harriet's life is quite what it seems.

Harris does a wonderful job of making the reader aware that Harriet's overwrought interpretation of events doesn't correspond to reality. Although it seems as if Harris leaves it to the reader to decide whether Harriet is an innocent victim of circumstance or a meddler with sinister intentions, part of the pleasure of this tricky novel comes from knowing we are being – very skilfully – manipulated.

*Tina Jackson*



**Manipulative:** Jane Harris's *Gillespie And I* plays tricks on the reader