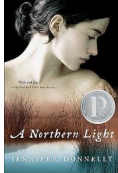


A northern light

Northern Light by Jennifer Donnelly



Grace Brown, a 20 year old skirt factory employee, was murdered in 1906 just outside an Adirondack mountain resort by Chester Gillette. Gillette was arrested soon after Grace's body was recovered in a lake and he was later executed in a New York prison.

This gruesome true story serves as part of the backdrop for the very non-gruesome and excellent young adult novel, *A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly. The main character, Mattie Gokey, receives a bundle of letters from a guest at the resort and makes a promise to burn them. But when Grace's body is later pulled out of the lake, Mattie becomes unsure what the right thing to do. Maybe the letters hold answers?

Mattie is also torn between her duty to her family and her dream of going to college. Her family lives in a rural area and they work extra hard making a living off of the land, made especially difficult since her mother has passed away and there are three younger girls to look after.

Super-hot but super-boring Royal Loomis, a neighbor boy also begins courting Mattie. She finds him attractive and is flattered by his attention but he seems bent on discussing crops, farm animals and the weather. Mattie longs for a boyfriend who can appreciate her love for Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, and the Bronte sisters. Novels, poetry and words are powerful to Mattie, and she is encouraged by a teacher at her school, Miss Wilcox (who has some secrets of her own!). A scholarship to Barnard is possible, but it would mean leaving her family and her engagement to Royal.

Mattie learns that the easy path isn't always easy and the hard path isn't always out of reach. Despite the 1906 setting, some of her choices and the choices of those around still seemed relatable -- even though the details would be different today.

Mattie's voice of both strength and doubt are at the crux of a character I ended up caring a lot about. I would suggest this to fans of historical fiction. Donnelly seems poised to become an author of note as her newest book, *Revolution*, was also a recent Rosie Award nominee.

Posted by sbowman on May 30, 2012

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