



## Dismantled

*Jennifer McMahon*

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## **Dismantled** Jennifer McMahon

The New York Times bestselling author of the acclaimed *Island of Lost Girls* and *Promise Not to Tell* returns with a chilling novel in which the secrets of the past come back to haunt a group of friends in terrifying ways.

### Dismantlement = Freedom

Henry, Tess, Winnie, and Suz banded together in college to form a group they called the Compassionate Dismantlers. Following the first rule of their manifesto—"To understand the nature of a thing, it must be taken apart"—these daring misfits spend the summer after graduation in a remote cabin in the Vermont woods committing acts of meaningful vandalism and plotting elaborate, often dangerous, pranks. But everything changes when one particularly twisted experiment ends in Suz's death and the others decide to cover it up.

Nearly a decade later, Henry and Tess are living just an hour's drive from the old cabin. Each is desperate to move on from the summer of the Dismantlers, but their guilt isn't ready to let them go. When a victim of their past pranks commits suicide—apparently triggered by a mysterious Dismantler-style postcard—it sets off a chain of eerie events that threatens to engulf Henry, Tess, and their inquisitive nine-year-old daughter, Emma.

Is there someone who wants to reveal their secrets? Is it possible that Suz did not really die—or has she somehow found a way back to seek revenge?

Full of white-knuckle tension with deeply human characters caught in circumstances beyond their control, Jennifer McMahon's gripping story and spine-tingling plot prove that she is a master at weaving the fear of the supernatural with the stark realities of life.

## Dismantled Details

Date : Published June 16th 2009 by Harper (first published January 1st 2009)

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Author : Jennifer McMahon

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Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Suspense

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## From Reader Review Dismantled for online ebook

### **Heather says**

There's a simple truth about me when it comes to books. If you tell me that something is a lot like The Virgin Suicides or The Secret History, then I'm going to read it. I don't care if the books don't live up to what they may or may not be imitating. I'm just happy to have more books that are a lot like two of my favorites. So, while reading Dismantled, I was pumped about its comparison to The Secret History. Since I haven't read the latter since 2000, I couldn't do a minute-by-minute comparison. Maybe that helped me appreciate Dismantled that much more. This book just had all of the perfect elements for a thriller – a dead body at the bottom of the lake, flashbacks to a somewhat "secret society" of four college friends, a recovered journal, an imaginary friend, & a cabin in the woods. The list of "Bradbury-esque factors" goes on & on, but I refuse to say more. This book is too wickedly delicious for any spoilers. If you're not too jaded to enjoy a thriller that's not profound but is simply damn good, I suggest you check this one out. Upon finishing it, I had that excited feeling that I often felt after finishing a Christopher Pike novel back in the day, except this is no young adult novel. Cheers to that! I can't wait to check out more from Jennifer McMahon. Up next – Promise Not to Tell.

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### **Kelly says**

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that Jennifer McMahon has the most disturbing covers in the book business.....real pictures of creepy children staring out at you. It's like a whole shelf of "Children of the Corn" and "Village of the Damned" at the bookstore. I told you before that I read "Island of Lost Girls" on vacation and did not want to do anything else but read. I was so anxious to read "Dismantled", McMahon's latest. Wow! It did not disappoint!

One of McMahon's strong points is going between time periods throughout her stories. With a less-talented author, this can be extremely jarring. In "Dismantled", the effect is seamless, alternating between the summer when four people formed the Dismantlers and a decade later, when two of them are unhappily married with child. This child, Emma, is desperate to get her parents back together. One seemingly innocent act sets off a chilling chain of events that will answer the questions about the summer of the Dismantlers.

Part murder mystery, part character study, part ghost story, I can easily see this turned into a movie directed by Hitchcock, if he was alive. The spine-tingling ending will make your heart beat out of your chest.

### **MY RATING - 5**

See this review on 1776books.net...

<http://1776books.blogspot.com/2009/07...>

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### **Melisa says**

"Is it possible, Henry wonders, that your fears can take on a life of their own? Is this what ghosts are - things worried into existence, frantic energy manifesting itself in an almost physical way?"

This felt like a real, grown up ghost story for me. I loved the twists and turns - I swore I knew the ending more than once, but nope. Stumped me.

There has to be something said for a thriller that can freeeeeak you out without there being any graphic violence. Just good old creepy eeriness.

This was my first Jennifer McMahon book, but I'll definitely be reading more!

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### **April Thompson says**

What. The. Fuck. That's what I've been asking myself throughout the whole book. The last time (and only time) I've felt mind-blown was while reading Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl. This started out confusing and I almost DNF; however, I picked it back up after setting it down for over a month. The confusion continued for me throughout the book, but the pull of the unknown, the fucked up, made me devour it after I kept going. This was quite the whirl wind of a book. No clue how to classify it - Thriller? Mystery? Psychotic? Even after digesting everything that happened and all was explained, I'm still feeling thoroughly confused. 4/4.5 stars

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### **Kylie says**

I ummed and ahed about what to give this book - it is not a book you read because you love the people in it, or even relate particularly well to the story. But boy oh boy did it grab me and keep me wide-eyed reading till the early hours of the morning.

So what was it that gripped me so tightly in a book of characters that filled me with distaste much of the time?

The basic premise is one of an 'I know what you did last summer' type of story. Suz rides in to town (college) and inflicts herself upon the other art students with her brash, daring style. She sucks them into her world of Compassionate Dismantling - a world where taking things apart becomes a statement. In reality, the things they are taking apart are silly pranks, or manipulative, unkind things Suz constructs to get what she wants.

We know early on that Suz is dead. We do not mourn this as the book progresses. But neither do we support those that seemingly covered up her death.

The story of the compassionate dismantlers is told alongside the present day life of 2 of the group of 4. Henry and Tess have since married, had a child, built a life and are now separated but still sharing the house (in a way). Their child is... interesting. Emma has many quirks, few friends, and wants her parents to fall back in love with each other. She involves her only friend (real life - she has a very intriguing, very real seeming imaginary friend, Danner) in her plotting of a way to convince her parents to be together again. In that cyclical way, Emma's so-called friend is also very manipulative and interested only in her own gratification, and she sets off a chain of events which brings the dark past of the Dismantlers into the present.

There were times that I was glued to this book, not wanting to hear any creaks on the floorboards, and feeling very pleased that I wasn't home alone - the tension created was that disturbing in parts. This, along

with wanting to know what was going to happen meant that you were invested in the ending (sometimes dislikeable characters can meant that you don't care enough to invest in a novel - this was not the case with this book at all). And the ending did not disappoint.

I can see from the reviews that opinion is very divided on this book, and I totally understand that. It would be a hard book to recommend to others because it is such a divisive sort of story. But I ended up loving it, even while I hated aspects of it. Now that is talent!

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### **L.E. Fidler says**

this book can best be summed up as the rough equivalent of maclean's hospital's summer stock re-envisioning of the seminal brat pack flick "the breakfast club."

instead of the jock, the princess, the brain, the beauty, the rebel, and the recluse, mcmahon gives us the bisexual nihilistic arsonist, the borderline-personalitied poet sniper, the philandering closeted obsessive-compulsive frigid-artist-housewife, the extremely fertile yet slightly homicidal alcoholic sculptor, and the possibly schizophrenic, possibly autistic ghostwhispering child.

yup, what we have here is john hughes for the criminally insane.

i don't really know what i expected from this novel. the POV alternates too frequently between Henry, Tess, and Emma to ever emotionally connect to/trust any of them. the character of suz seems so one-dimensional and scary that i had no sympathy for her or her fate. likewise, the perhaps deliberately shallow treatment of winnie/val makes the novel's final moments seem so far-fetched and superficial that i actually resented reading the entire book. in fact, i'd so far as to say that the end, which was ludicrously stupid, ruined any good aspects of this novel for me.

part of the problem here stemmed from the novel's inability to define its genre. imagine, if you will, one of m night shyamalan's newer films, and you'll get what i'm talking about here. for me, this novel was the literary or artistic equivalent of drowning slowly, which considering the premise built on creative destruction may have been intentional. still, i never felt dismantled, only disappointed.

2 stars for the uber-creepy doll and the precocious girl who used the word ungulate correctly.

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### **Christie says**

I was so excited to be given this book which had arrived at the bookstore where I used to work. The manager there knew I was a huge fan of McMahon's novel *Promise Not to Tell*, and so she passed this along.

*Dismantled* is the story of the Compassionate Dismantlers, four art students: Tess, Henry, Winnie and the charismatic Suz. The Compassionate Dismantlers believe that "to understand the nature of a thing you have to take it apart." What they really believe, it seems, is that you can ruin someone's career and set fires and manipulate lives for your own personal gain. At the end of their post-graduation summer in a cabin by the lake, Suz is dead and the remaining Dismantlers go their separate ways. Flash forward ten years. Henry and Tess are unhappily married and have a 10 year old daughter, Emma. Winnie has had her own struggles with

mental illness. A simple act by Emma sets off a chain of events with far reaching consequences.

*Dismantled* was a big disappointment for me and it truly pains me to say that because I loved *Promise Not To Tell* and encouraged everyone I know to read it. For me, there was just too much going on. Was *Dismantled* a novel about a failing marriage, infidelity, the nature of art, childhood fears, imaginary friends, ghosts – real and imagined? Was it a mystery? Was it a ghost story? Was it a novel about revenge?

Honestly, I really struggled to finish *Dismantled* and only kept going because I thought maybe the end would justify the rest. I didn't like any of the characters and worse, I didn't care about any of them.

Read *Promise Not to Tell* instead.

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## Max says

Oh goodness. I feel like *Dismantled* is intrinsically flawed. Which is sort of a shame, because it's a strong concept, with much potential for strong commentary on art, guilt, youth, sexual fluidity. Unfortunately, the novel reads one-dimensionally, as if the characters and plot live only to serve McMahon's themes. Four college friends ten years ago created an anarchic secret society (the "Compassionate Dismantlers"), which blew up in all their faces when their charismatic but dangerous leader Suz died. Now, she might be haunting two of the original members in the form of their daughter's imaginary friend. All this sounded hokey and contrived to me; I can't imagine any youthful anarchist naming their group so lamely-- indeed, the name of the group seems more an excuse for the novel's title and the group's manifesto, which gives name to the novel's six sections.

McMahon's pacing is not to be faulted. Somewhere around the halfway point, the story really takes off, indebted (like most contemporary genre fiction) more to the Hollywood thriller than classic literature. Chapters play out in quick five-page bursts, trading off between parallel scenarios with well-placed cliffhangers. But ultimately, I didn't buy it.

Suz is supposed to be this amazingly charismatic, enigmatic wunderkind with whom everyone falls in love, but her actions are made up of the worst kind of rote, art-school cliches. She's never believable as a character, and the rest of the cast tend to follow suit. Tess is sexually and socially repressed. Henry is a guilt-ridden alcoholic, and their daughter is a "precocious, wise beyond her years" type, ridden with heavy-handed OCD tendencies. They all have very obvious arcs, and never feel like anything more than humorless inventions, serving plot mechanics and the seriously heavy-handed theme of art as destruction vs. art as creation.

It's all rather ridiculous, of course, but the whole thing is treated with serious importance, so that the writing comes off as sophomoric, much like the work of the sort of pretentious college-age, liberal-arts-studying libertines the novel seems to romanticize. Creepy flashes of intrigue and the fact that the whole thing ends economically and strangely are no salvation for a pervasive awareness of the novel's contrivances.

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## Jenny says

Holy cow... I had no clue what I was getting into when I started this book!! *Dismantled* was such an enthralling and utterly absorbing read! I absolutely loved this book and spent every free moment I could find reading more. Despite its 422 pages, it's likely one that could be read in a sitting (or a day) because of the way the story hooks the reader; (unfortunately, I literally don't have the time right now to read that much in one go so it still took me a couple days.)

*Dismantled* is a superbly written and well-plotted story about a 9-year-old girl, Emma, her parents, Henry and Tess, and a big secret from their past. More so, it's about Emma's childhood innocence, her efforts to keep her parents together, a chain of events seemingly started with a suicide, about family, guilt, fear, and a little bit of a ghost story too. Without giving anything away (won't tell more than what's on the back cover), Henry and Tess were once part of a group of 4 in college called The Compassionate Dismantlers. Initiated and led by their friend, Suz, the radical group embarked on missions to "stick it to the man" (my words, not in the book) -- to "dismantle" things because per their motto, "To understand the nature of a thing, it must be taken apart." Their acts of vandalism and other pranks transitioned from innocent to dangerous and, ultimately, Suz dies. Her death is hidden by the other members of the group and they all drift apart.

Ten years later, the story focuses on Henry, Tess, and their daughter, Emma. Something happens which I won't reveal, a former acquaintance commits suicide, and it sets off the events and tension that continue for the rest of the novel.

There were so many things I loved about this book! First, I wasn't quite sure how I'd like the ghost story aspect since I'm not all that into supernatural things. But the author did a spectacular job of including this element but leaving it subtle; she managed to simultaneously add it to the story while keeping the reader guessing about it which was fun and spooky at the same time! There were moments when I was a bit scared to go to sleep after reading... I used it as an excuse to continue on to the next chapter even though it was past time for bed just in case I could reach a good stopping point when I wasn't so spooked. ;)

The character development was also fantastic. The author excelled at showing the character, allowing the reader to learn about the characters through their actions, rather than telling the reader what to think. In that sense, Suz, the leader of the Compassionate Dismantlers, could be considered the main character. Though she's deceased, the memories of her are a large part of this book because of the long-lasting effects she has on the remaining group members. And although I despised her character, it's possible that others may see a different side of her because, again, the author doesn't tell the reader what to think. And seriously, what a strong, intense character she is.

Ironies of all kind consumed the book, increasing the tension. And the pacing was perfect. Though the story continued to progress, I had the opportunities to savor the writing and characters too. I can't fail to mention how significant the character of the daughter, Emma, was to the story. Her innocence and desire to be liked by her cool friend, Mel, play a large part in the craziness of the story! And she plays a part in the ironies I mentioned!

The ending surprised and gripped me, and suspense filled the last 50 or so pages of the book. I laughed at myself when my jaw dropped during one of the revelations near the end because of the sheer unexpected and cunning qualities that moment possessed. I'll admit the last couple pages just slightly disappointed me, but then making up for it, the last paragraph was the perfect ending and answered the one question I feared would go unanswered. And I loved the answer.

In many ways, *Dismantled*, was a portrait of a family, their struggles, and the child's efforts to keep it together. As you can tell, this book completely enraptured me! On a somewhat different note, I was able to have a copy of this book signed by the author, Jennifer McMahan, at BEA (after I had already signed on for this blog tour) and I wish I had read this book before that so I could have let her know in person how much I enjoyed this book!

Taken from my blog at [www.takemeawayreading.com](http://www.takemeawayreading.com)

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### **Amanda says**

This book has a complicated plot. The story keeps you guessing until the end, which I appreciate in books but when I got to the end of this one, I felt a sense of *deja vu*. Between the ages of 13-16 I was obsessed with *Fear Street* books...R.L. Stine was by far my favorite author and I couldn't get enough of his creepy stories. This book felt like a grown up version of a *Fear Street* book. There are a lot of twists and turns and just when you think you have it all figured out, the author turns it around for one last shocking moment.

I loved the first 1/3 of the book, the plot was fresh and different and the author only revealed a little bit of the mystery, enough to keep the pages turning. Things began to get slow and dragged a bit somewhere in the middle and my interest started to wane. Suz, the character the book focuses on, had the kind of personality that rubs me the wrong way...very overbearing and controlling...I tired of her very quickly.

It's possible that this book had too many twists and turns (another reason it felt like a *Fear Street* book to me). I feel like it could have benefited from more editing...the story felt a bit too long and I was just glad to have finished it. Overall, a decent book but certainly not my favorite.

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### **Katherine says**

***"We will change the world by taking it apart, dismantling it piece by piece. Break it down. Tear it up. Only then can we be truly free."***

**Synopsis:** What would happen if the Losers Club grew up to be privileged, anarchist college students who want nothing more than to watch the world burn? You'll find your answers here.

### **Biblio-Babble**

\* Jennifer McMahon is the author of two of my favorite books, *The Winter People* and *The Night Sister*. But this is a rare misfire from her. Four friends who made up an anarchist college group disband when one of their members disappears. Now more than ten years later, they are all brought back together again by the reigniting of memories of the single event that broke them up in the first place. The pacing was wonderful, but the actions of the characters were reprehensible. It's one thing to write about characters who are the anti-hero of the story. It's another thing to write about characters that are so utterly despicable that you don't really care if they get their happy ending. Or worse, get a happy ending at all. The whole premise was preposterous and the supernatural elements that McMahon usually masters were uncharacteristically silly.

\* One professional reviewer praised the feeling of constant dread that hangs over the book, and in that respect, they were right. From the very beginning when all the events are set into motion, you just get the

feeling that something is going to go horribly, terribly wrong. McMahon nails settings, and this book is no exception.

\* What the hell was the point of the Compassionate Dismantlers? Supposedly, they were a group of four college aged friends who were raging against the system (society, order, etc.) by tearing it apart and putting it back together again. And while they excelled at the tearing apart aspect, we saw none of the putting it back together. They directly contradicted everything that they stood for, or which they said they stood for. It was actually pretty sickening and gave me little to no sympathy for anything that could happen to them and everything that did happen to them. They were just five fucked up, selfish individuals who didn't really care about the lives of others or everything that was being offered to them.

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There's no denying that McMahon is a talented writer, but this rare misfire from her shows that even the best writers can write uncharacteristically bad books. Her mastery of writing the atmosphere of the story is overshadowed by unlikable characters, preposterous plot points, and an unsatisfying ending. For her best work, try the two novels mentioned above or *Island of Lost Girls*. While it doesn't have the supernatural elements of the three listed novels, the same feeling of dread is there and the contemporary mystery is done much more sophisticatedly.

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### **Amity-noël says**

I am not completely done with this book but I am going to review it. I HATE it. And this isn't hate in the way I hated seeing Mila Kunis's butt in whatever that stupid movie was. This is hate as in this women has written five books, yes five now and as much as I enjoy her writing I would rate this as number six because whatever she writes next cannot POSSIBLY be this bad. I don't write out the plot of books because newsflash if you are interested and you want to know the plot you are already online there is Amazon who is more than happy to give you the plot along with Goodreads who also has the back of the book typed up for you. I read Promise Not To Tell when I was seventeen and I loved it. I read The Island of Lost Girls and it wasn't my favorite but I had to get to the end everything was twisting and turning I had to find out who did it. I just finished Don't Breathe a Word and The One I Left Behind and those were great this this is just wrong weird and I feel like a failed attempt. I mean we all have creative dull patches, this is hers. Don't Breathe a Word will have you up into the night same with The One I Left Behind. This just makes we sick. I don't know I just read it and it is NOT something that I CAN'T put down. It is not something I have to learn the end of before I can fall asleep. Frankly I don't care I am in this state of, "Well heck, the end isn't going to change over night, it can wait."

Now if you would excuse me I have to finish the last part of this so I can be done with it for good.

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### **Cassidy says**

This book really irritated me. Suz was one of the most generic bad girl art student. Everything she said and everything she did was reminiscent of all the other bad girl art students. Suz does pranks and she inspires everyone to do what she does and thus they are liberated and so on and so on. This character has been written before. She is a pure cliche. Her friends are equally boring. Winnie is the self mutilated with no self esteem or self worth. Tess and Henry are average at best. They get married after Suz disappears. Fast forward and they have a daughter Emma. This books misery lies in what happened to Suz. We know she is dead. My problem with Emma is not that she is dull. Maybe the only non cliche character but I feel the child had

problems that were far past her being a unique child. As I read this I kept thinking this little girl needed help. Her OCD was so severe her parents ignorance was frustrating. Her imaginary friend was into levels that was unhealthy. This child had some underlying mental illness. It was like the author wanted to have a messed up little girl but it became to big to just ignore. Another thing that was unrealistic is all of the women in this book are either gay or bisexual. All of them. I have no problem with gay characters but I didn't understand why the author felt it was realistic for every female character to be gay or bisexual. The two male characters were straight. This just made no sense. Finally we have our climax. Suz is revealed to be alive (not really we are just meant to believe it briefly) We find out what happened to Suz ( which was very dull) then we find out Suz is really still dead. I finished the book because I was hoping for a valuable reward of what happened but I was disappointed. I have heard great things about this author but with this book it just flopped. I am reluctant to give her other books a shot because I was just very disappointed in this effort. Also if I have to read where someone says "baby cakes" a million times in each chapter I think I will give up before the end. (the last part will be understood for readers of this book. So one star just not worth the time.

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### **Mauojenn ~ \*Mouthy Jenn\* ~ says**

I'm all for a good prank, but when someone dies because of it. You. Went. To. Far. This was a crazy story of friends who like to pull dangerous pranks until something horrible goes wrong. My father would have whipped my ass if I pulled anything like they had regardless of age! If he could catch me.

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### **karen says**

i have been trying to write this review for almost an hour. in between i have eaten peanut-butter and jelly on english muffins (and now on space bar and several letters) and have drifted off-topic numerous times, and erased tons of irrelevant crap. much irrelevance remains, but the short version of this review is:

i enjoyed reading this book, but it is not good.

this is a perfect rebound book for proust - after a long relationship, you just want to have a silly fling with someone stupid - to just have *fun* - to have something that feels exactly opposite from what you have had for such a long time. and this book was nothing at all like proust.

it was stupid in about nine different ways.

this review does a great job with both plot summary and reactions to plot, so catch up and then i can talk about meeee some more.

first of all, i am at the age where reading about college-age artists at a hampshire-type school without rules or grades who band together with a manifesto and use petty acts of vandalism to open people's eyes to society's ills makes me more likely to guffaw than to feel a connection with them and say "yeah, go on protagonists - i am with you!!".

i have no problem with people having ambitions or goals, or criticizing society, but how pretentious do you

have to be to develop a written manifesto about dismantling the world when you go around performing petty crimes like some small town kids playing mailbox baseball and feeling so proud and revolutionary. sure, there is criminal escalation, but even then, most of the characters are still treating it as a big joke, or mindlessly following their cookie-cutter evil mastermind because they want her vagina. using the word manifesto automatically makes you an asshole, it sounds so pompous, like a correct pronunciation of "gyro".

am i too old to see these characters as "cool"?? the girl at the center, to whom all these characters are drawn, is just a sleazy loudmouth parody of what is supposed to be transgressive or sexy (and if i had to read her verbal tic, "babycakes", one more time...) henry is a spineless drone, tess a shrill frigid harpy, winnie a suggestible tabula rasa (see, i can use art terms, too), and that kid...

as a writer, are you sure you want to give a nine-year-old girl ocd *and* olfactory and visual hallucinations *and* seizures? she is just a collection of tics and idiosyncrasies and she's not nicolas cage's daughter or anything, she is of two unafflicted parents, but she's a neurotic mess.

but i am drifting.

this is another *secret history* kind of book, and another one which fails. donna tartt could write a character, these are all echoes and shadows of characters - almost entirely one-dimensional. and i read *secret history* when i was about twenty, so it could be that i am just running on heart-fumes here, and if i were to read it again, it would fall short, but there has to be something to it, or there wouldn't be so many attempts to recreate it, would there?

this is going to sound facetious, but you know who could have pulled off a story like this?? besides donna tartt?? christopher pike. back in the good old days of me being 11-13 (all 1,095 of them) i read a ton of christopher pike books. and he was usually able to write very convincing mysteries where all the loose ends were tied up and the supernatural red herrings explained. this novel backtracks and can't decide whether it wants to give a supernatural nod or not. the ending is ridonkulous. ree-donk-you-luss. wigs and switching and life-sized dolls and deceptions-within-deceptions...

but for all that, it was a fun read. i genuinely wanted to know what was happening and how everything would be resolved and it may not be proust, but it was fun and every book has something to offer, right?? this one is pure, end-of-summer, escapist fun.

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