



# Poisoned Jennifer Donnelly

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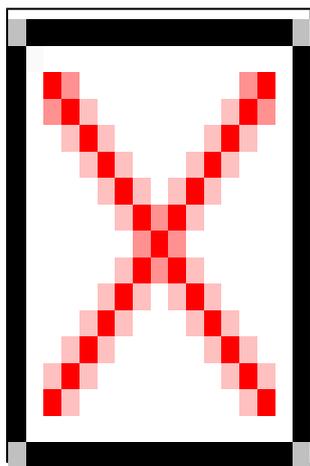
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4



Donnelly's novel is a reimagining of the story of Snow White. Sophie is Princess of the Greenlands. Her stepmother Adelaide is a vicious ruler of those lands, Sophie's father the benign monarch having died. At the age of sixteen Princess Sophie is intended by the monarchic convention to inherit the crown. However, in the opinion of Queen Adelaide Sophie has disqualifications as a potential ruler. She is too kind and too soft hearted. Rulers must be ruthless, says the queen.

The princess must be dealt with. Adelaide instructs her huntsmen to escort Sophie into the perilous Dark Wood and there to cut out her too gentle heart. The queen delivers Sophie's heart to Corvus, another evil soul who is known as the King of Crows. Against all the odds, even with her heart removed Sophie survives. She meets seven men (in this version they are men of average growth) who fashion her a mechanical heart and undertake to care for her.

Even in a fairy tale it transpires that technology may provide only a temporary solution. The mechanical heart will have a limited life. To survive in the long-term Sophie must regain her own natural heart and have it reinserted and rebooted. She must then regain the crown to which she was entitled. The remainder of the novel is a quest narrative describing her attempts to attain these ambitious goals.

The strengths of Donnelly's novel centre first upon the relationships between Sophie and the seven men with their servants. The spider Webber is a particularly striking ally. The second focus of the novel is a powerful feminist message as Sophie gains mental strength and determination from her vicissitudes. Donnelly also makes a serious job of explaining why Queen Adelaide's life experience has led her to become the monster she is. There is however no sign of the wicked queen being redeemed.

In the opinion of this reviewer the novel's one flaw is that in common with many quest stories its pace occasionally flags. There are too many steps along the path to redemption.

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