



## The Revenant

*Sonia Gensler*

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## **The Revenant** Sonia Gensler

When Willie arrives in Indian Territory, she knows only one thing: no one can find out who she really is. To escape a home she doesn't belong in anymore, she assumes the name of a former classmate and accepts a teaching job at the Cherokee Female Seminary.

Nothing prepares her for what she finds there. Her pupils are the daughters of the Cherokee elite—educated and more wealthy than she, and the school is cloaked in mystery. A student drowned in the river last year, and the girls whisper that she was killed by a jealous lover. Willie's room is the very room the dead girl slept in. The students say her spirit haunts it.

Willie doesn't believe in ghosts, but when strange things start happening at the school, she isn't sure anymore. She's also not sure what to make of a boy from the nearby boys' school who has taken an interest in her—his past is cloaked in secrets. Soon, even she has to admit that the revenant may be trying to tell her something. . . .

## **The Revenant Details**

Date : Published June 14th 2011 by Knopf Books for Young Readers

ISBN : 9780375867019

Author : Sonia Gensler

Format : Hardcover 315 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Fantasy, Paranormal, Ghosts, Mystery, Romance

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## From Reader Review The Revenant for online ebook

### Tina (Fantastic Book Review) says

Based on Indian Territory during the late 1800's, THE REVENANT brings mystery and ghostly suspense to the forefront. The setting is unique but has the familiar school setting of clique's and local gossip. The strange incidents shrouded in mystery kept me turning the pages to see what dark secrets would be uncovered behind the walls of the Seminary.

Willie, although brash and full of misconceptions at times, is finding out all about the Cherokee culture first hand. Their belief in spirits or ghosts is shrugged off by Willie as idiocy. Soon, Willie has no choice to rethink the tales surrounding the death of a student whom maybe haunting the school - especially after constant sleepless nights consisting of strange sounds and violent incidents involving students. There were quite a few things I enjoyed about this book. First, Willie's defiance to start a new life under the pretense of lies was enough to keep me wondering if her scam would be exposed. Her fondness for Eli Sevenstar also provided a spark of forbidden romance that kept me wanting more. Finally, the secrets surrounding the haunting death of a student was enough to keep me turning the pages.

THE REVENANT is spooky and entertaining read! This book is another ghostly page turner that you can sink your teeth into. With its lush setting and historical intrigue, I recommend this book to fans of historical fiction who wouldn't mind a dose of paranormal on the side.

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### Liza Wiemer says

The Revenant is a fascinating, beautifully written historical YA novel with crossover appeal to those who enjoy paranormal and romance. Set in 1896-1897, seventeen-year-old Willie sets out for Indian Territory to teach at the Cherokee Female Seminary. Willie is a bold and self-sufficient character who wants to write her own destiny. She struggles with propriety and family issues while doing her best to forge out a new identity that gives her independence. Entering the Cherokee Female Seminary as a teacher gives her this opportunity. Upon her arrival, she's given a beautiful room, one that had once been occupied by a girl who tragically drowned. Or was she murdered? Strange ghostly incidents take place that Willie cannot ignore, which eventually lead her into danger. Who has been haunting Willie? What is this revenant's message? The ghostly tale is intertwined with a delicious love story, sure to please any romantic. I definitely recommend The Revenant for anyone who appreciates a fabulous blend of murder, mystery, and romance set in an interesting historical setting, which was researched extensively by Sonia Gensler. Well done!

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### Karyn Silverman says

Eh. There were two stories here-- three if you count the inevitable romance as its own arc-- and I think either tale might have worked, but together they made the pacing all kinds of uneven and played off each other badly. The outer story (Willie doesn't want to go home to the farm, misses her dead papa whom she worshipped, steals a classmate's teaching certificate and accepts a job in Indian Territory) is where the magic never happened, mostly because Willie is a spoiled bitch. BUT-- the character who comes through when she's actually at the Seminary is much more nuanced and interesting, and it's a little difficult to reconcile both sides of her. The inner story (the Cherokee Nation and a ghost story) was occasionally genuinely creepy, although I did figure out the mystery, such as it was, a little too soon. The concept of the inner story

a death and haunting mixed up with the complexities of the Cherokee Nation in the 1880s) was actually excellent, barring Willie, whose frame story just gets in the way-- why detract from cold rooms and mysterious tapping and girls being injured by a vengeful ghost while also backstabbing and vying for handsome boys with Willie's agony about not being able to get papers graded on time and worrying about discovery/dismissal? The more I think it through the more disappointed I am, not only in the book in front of me (which I finished, so it was obviously not that bad) but by the wasted potential: lots of good stuff and a really original setting mixed up in poor busy plotting. Sigh.

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## **Claudia says**

I have never reviewed a book written by a friend and colleague before. I taught with Sonia, and felt like I identified most deeply to Willie's struggles as a teacher. Those self-doubts will resonate with every teacher! But this book is so much more than a book about a teacher.

Willie comes alive from the first page when we discover she's a liar...she has run away from her family who wants her to leave school. She's swiped another girl's teaching certificate and has run away to Oklahoma...to the Cherokee Nation. She soon learns that the Cherokee, are indeed a Civilized Tribe. The Seminary she runs to is home to upwardly-mobile girls whose parents are rich, educated, and ever-so-slightly snobbish about their light skin color. The girls are prairie Mean Girls...especially Fannie. Since Willie is really younger than her students, she lets them intimidate her -- at first, until her friend Olivia takes her under her wing.

There's also a ghost story...the girl who used to live in Willie's room died under mysterious circumstances...was it an accident? Was it murder? Suicide? No one much wants to talk about it. But strange things happen at school...Willie hears tapping on her window, the girls often smell river water, the same river where Ella died. And rooms would suddenly go cold. Olivia believes there's a revenant at the school.

There's also a love story. Eli, oh Eli. They meet on the train, but they're both trapped by Willie's lies. She's younger than Eli, but he thinks she's a teacher, and she must pretend to be something she's not. Eli is charming...seems to be a ne'r-do-well, a failing student with no ambition.

The mystery unravels itself, just as Willie's lies unravel...I loved the way the ghost story resolves itself.

My only frustration is one I often feel with well-crafted YA novels...I wish it was a full-length adult novel. I could tell Sonia knew the entire back story of each character. Olivia, who introduces Willie to revenants, and ouija boards and grading rubrics. Toomey, the stepfather who may not be as evil as Willie first believed. And Miss Crenshaw...oh, how I want to know HER story. So, for me, I want to know more about these characters. I want to watch them interact, to think, to dream. I wanted the story to have that time to develop...I wanted more.

One reviewer compared Sonia to Jennifer Donnelly, and I absolutely agree. Each of them has a sense of place and time that bring the story alive. They know how to craft intelligent, literate, interesting heroines we want to know.

I'm so proud of my friend, and I can't wait to hold MY OWN book in my hand and have her autograph it.

After I read it, I had several of my students read it and they loved it too...they loved the characters, the romance, and they wrote thank you notes to Sonia...this one is a winner!

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## Beth says

A good historical novel about a non-standard place: a Midwestern Cherokee girls' school. Moderately suspenseful Gothic ghost story with a bit of romance. Major characters had at least a bit of three-dimensionality to them that kept them from being entirely stock characters. The plot was somewhat predictable but did have some twists.

One thing I liked about the story was the fascinating and respectful insight into the nature and social structure of middle-class (and to a lesser extent, poor) Native American young women.

That being said, there was nothing about the story that set me on fire. But then, I am a "hard grader" in order to make good use of the distinctions between three, four and five stars or this would have gotten three stars.

Recommended for teen girls who like supernatural stories and/or historical romance.

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## Shannon says

This book was ok. I wanted to read this book for the plot. I love any type of hauntings or mysterious and it got even better when I found out there was people who'd been murdered. I think in general that if there's some type of tragic murder as a backstory it makes things more interesting. This book wasn't at all scary. It was more on the creepy side. There were several instances where I went 'oh sh\*\*!', but nothing that kept me up at night. I liked how the clues unfolded and the scenes about discovering the culprit freaked me out a bit.

Willie was alright. She was always blushing, which I found annoying. But I guess girls back in the 1800's had different opinions about what was considered improper or not. I downright hated Fannie, especially towards the end. She was a total biotch and part of me wanted the ghost to smack her in her over-privileged face.

I didn't like the end at all. I liked how the whole mystery of Ella's death was solved and I thought this book was pretty good. But then it goes on for 40 or so more pages about boring housechores and newborn kittens. I was like REALLY? I felt like it should have ended after the whole discovery about the culprit and then maybe take on a few more pages about the complications of Willie's future.

Also, I hated the part of the end with Eli. I liked Willie and his romance. It was cute and a bit innocent. It wasn't anything over-the-top or hoish. It just seemed like two people who had a crush on each other, but then the end crapped all over that. (view spoiler) I just kept thinking to myself, 'really? is this serious?'. First off, Eli and only a handful of interactions. A few of them were really cute and at most they kissed, but the rest of their times were awkward and nothing much was said. I could understand how this could have happened over time because they had chemistry and potential. However, I thought it was a bit ridiculous. While I thought the outcome was a bit forced, I didn't like Willie's answer/reaction to him. (view spoiler)

Aside from what I mentioned I don't really have much to say about this book. It wasn't bad and it wasn't amazing either.

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## Katie says

4 1/2 stars

This book is everything I wanted Sandra Mitchell's *The Vespertine* to be: a well-developed historical with fantasy elements, an intriguing mystery, and inspiring characters.

But the best part of this book was the incredibly unique setting. I have never read a YA book that dealt directly with Native American culture, and this one managed to portray it with historical accuracy and without any stereotyping or judgment. There were so many instances where Gensler could have reverted to college professor syndrome (i.e. looking at history with modern ideals and judging historical persons based on today rather than his or her day). But she didn't. It was so refreshing! There was no scolding of historical politics or persons or cultures. Nothing. She showed how many people didn't trust or like Indians, but she doesn't dwell on that. There's enough talk about it to let us know that it's there, but it wasn't too much that I was rolling my eyes.

Another aspect that I loved was that there was an interracial relationship! (See my rant about the lack of those in YA here.) Instead of Willie falling for a fellow teacher or a rich white boy, she instead finds herself drawn to a Cherokee student from the male seminary. And after he expresses his feelings for her, she worries that he won't respect her because she's not Cherokee, and he worries that she won't like him because he is Cherokee. It was sweet and a wonderful example of realistic tension in a relationship.

The ghost aspect of the book is also pretty creepy but not in a horror story type of way. It was well-balanced with the rest of the story, offering enough suspense to keep you reading but not overwhelming you. I'm not sure I would have been as brave as Willie!

What you won't find in this book:

**1. A love triangle**

Praise the Lord!

**2. A cliffhanger ending**

This is a standalone book, something you don't see much in YA these days

**3. Lackluster prose**

The writing was really impressive, especially for a debut author. I never felt pulled out of the story by slips into modern language. Gensler was descriptive but not too much so that I was bored. The pacing was great, as well.

**4. Flat characters**

Granted, the female characters were better developed, if only because they were given more face-time. But I thought Willie and her friends and the female students were all well-developed. I even loved the headmistress of the seminary! There is a great cast of supporting characters that pushed the plot along.

**5. A lack of theme**

At its core, this book is about growing up. At the beginning of the story, Willie is a bit of a selfish brat, prone to lying, and desperate to escape her stepfather because she's ashamed of him (for no real reason). But as she fakes her way through teaching a year at the seminary, she grows into a responsible young woman who values her family and learns from her mistakes. This is definitely a coming-of-age novel, which is what YA should be.

So, yeah, I loved this book. It is one of my new favorite historical reads. I would have given it five stars,

except I had a few gripes with the romance. Essentially, it wasn't strong enough for me. I loved Willie, but I never saw what she saw in Eli Sevenstar because we didn't get to see enough scenes with him. The romance wasn't really necessary to the story, so I would have preferred Gensler to either cut it out or flesh it out some more. Either way, the change would have made this a five-star read for me.

As is, however, this is still an amazing book, especially for a debut novel. It was original (which is hard to achieve these days) and interesting and really just a great read. I would recommend it to anyone but especially those who enjoy historical with a pinch of fantasy. Wonderful!

\*On a side note, I fear that this book won't get much hype because it's a historical novel. But it SHOULD! This is an amazing read!

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### **Sesana says**

A generally solid historical murder mystery with ghosts, dragged down a bit by a main character I really, really disliked. Willie would have entirely ruined this book for me, except that it was quite obvious that I was meant to think she was sort of awful, and the other characters all responded to her various awful things in accurate and reasonable ways. She's selfish, racist in an historically appropriate way, lazy, and utterly incapable of considering that other people might have feelings, much less contemplate how she could avoid hurting them. Example: very, very late in the book, she realizes that her mother seemed strict and nagging because her father drank away all the family's money, and then made a sport of avoiding work with her. Her response? To wonder why her mother let them be selfish. That her thinly developed and unconvincing romance is actually allowed to come to fruition is my greatest disappointment in this book.

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### **Paula says**

I should start this review by saying that I know the author. And while I was intrigued by the synopsis, I had never read anything she'd written. I was hoping it would be a pleasant enough read to be able to find some nice things to say about it.

How delightful to be able to say, with all honesty, that I was completely sucked in and mesmerized by this book!

The book's writing style starts out as an intriguing merging of the styles of Jane Austen and Lucy Maude Montgomery. It does a good job of being accurate to the mores of the period of the story. But, as a fan of those authors, I definitely noticed the love for them in her writing style and character interactions. (I'm not sure if that's what she intended, but that's how it came across to me.)

But as the story unfolds, either because the author's own style emerges or I'd just gotten to know the characters so well, the style seemed to not be so noticeable to me. And I was completely entranced by the story.

Lots of interesting characters. A fascinating look at life in the Indian Territory at that time. And an even more fascinating supernatural mystery. Well done!

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## **jesse says**

[to borrow lucy's words: "*i'm sickened by this 'love at first sight' nonsense --it's all shine and no substance.*"  
[57%] (hide spoiler)]

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## **Melanie says**

Interesting premises on this book: girl murdered by drowning haunts Cherokee National Female Seminary in the mid-19th century.

Wilhelmina Hammond is summoned home from school to help tend the family farm. Resentful of the summons, "Willie" assumes a classmates identity and takes off for Indian Territory (Oklahoma) to be a teacher at the Cherokee National Female Seminary. She immediately begins to have problems with a trio of cousins who are too big for their britches. On top of dealing with difficult students, there are rumors of a ghost that is haunting the building. When strange things begin happening throughout the building, Willie begins to wonder.

So, I have quite a few issues with this book:

- 1) The author gives away the ending far too quickly.
- 2) The climax of the book is much too early in the book.
- 3) This author obviously has a love affair with The Anne of Green Gables series because there are far too many similarities to ignore. For example, the repeated use of "kindred spirits," the difficulties with a girls-only classroom, problems with several students from one family, putting on a play, having the same love of literature and the theater, a kinship with one particular student who is often picked on by others...

I kept finding myself wanting to tell this author to find her own story and write it.

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## **Christy Dorrity says**

Twists and turns in The Revenant kept me reading until 1 am one night. I had no idea what would happen next and I loved every minute of it. The Revenant is a haunting ghost story with historical fiction and a good dose of hopeless romance thrown in.

Food to eat while reading: Sevenstar Gingerbread ([www.dearestdreams.com](http://www.dearestdreams.com)).

Much of the book resonated with Anne of Avonlea and since I am a huge fan of Anne, I felt very much at home between the pages of the book.

Paranormal elements blended naturally with the historical aspects of the story. Set in the 1800's at a female seminary for Cherokee girls, the book is rich in setting and background. In fact, I wished that Gensler had included more of the politics and difficulties that were prevalent for the Cherokee at that time period.

Seventeen-year old Willie grows from impulsive to responsible as you follow her story. She falls in love

with Eli Sevenstar, a handsome boy who shows interest in her. The only problem is, she is a teacher and not allowed to fraternize with students. How can a reader resist the forbidden romance?

The river becomes a character in the book, adding a layer to the already gripping storyline. The climax of the book is intense and brings all of the elements of the book together. After the gripping climax, the story slows way down. At first I wanted the pace to speed back up, but I enjoyed the leisurely catharsis to the end.

Watch for Gensler's book to come out in June of 2011.

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## **P.J. says**

Book 17 for 2011.

There are so many things I loved about this book!

I loved the setting of the girls' boarding school in Indian country.

I loved the feel of the novel as it was so Libba Bray in the language.

I loved the romance as it gave just enough to keep me wanting more.

And most of all, I loved that the main character had a subplot of her own that made her so much deeper of a character. The novel could have been an exceptional ghost story with a murder mystery twist. But instead, it was an exceptional ghost story with a murder mystery twist with a main character who had a BIG SECRET! Loved that. It was written masterfully and convincingly. It's really a book you don't want to miss!

Recommended for girls sixth grade and up.

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## **Princess Bookie says**

My Thoughts: We are introduced to Willie who doesn't want to return home. She doesn't want to go back to her families home. It took her a while to get out, and she despises going back. She wants to lead her own life. She ends up taking a teaching job on Indian Territory.

The catch, it isn't really "her" job and she's living in a dead girl's room who is said to haunt the place. Of course to Willie, it is gibberish and ghosts don't exist. Until she starts to witness events that are a little too "coincidental."

Throughout her stay, she meets students, teachers, and boys who are a mystery to her.

Honestly, I'm not big into anything historical. I just can't find myself drawn into them. It doesn't matter if its adult historical or young adult historical. I just have trouble getting into them so if you ever see a 5 star rating on a historical from me, it must be beyond amazing.

I wouldn't say The Revenant was a bad book, it wasn't. It just wasn't for me. The best part was the scenes involving Eli, but there wasn't enough to keep me entertained.

The Revenant would be a good story for someone who likes historical and/or ghosts stories.

Overall: It was just "okay." If I was more into historical, I probably would have enjoyed it more.

Cover: I actually do like the cover. Its pretty.

What I'd Give It: 3/5 Cupcakes

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Review Based On Hardcover

Taken From Princess Bookie  
[www.princessbookie.com](http://www.princessbookie.com)

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## **Kate says**

I finished reading Sonia Gensler's *THE REVENANT* last night and closed it with a sigh. You know the feeling of finishing a book that's just so good you worry that you won't find another one you love as much for a long time? It's one of those books, and while I couldn't put it down to make it last longer, I was so sad to be finished.

*THE REVENANT* is a delicious blend of historical fiction, mystery, and ghost story set at a Cherokee boarding school near the turn of the century. When 17-year-old Willemina Hammond arrives to take a teaching position, it's under false pretenses, but her phony identity soon becomes the least of her concerns when she's assigned to the bedroom of a former student who might have been murdered. The students are convinced her ghost haunts the school, and it seems to be growing ever more violent. As she struggles to carry out her role as teacher and gain the respect of her students, Willie is pulled deeper and deeper into the mystery until her very life is at stake.

There is so much to love in this story – characters who are complex and multi-faceted, especially the main character, Willie, who is at once strong, spirited, and flawed. Her coming-of-age through the trials of this ghost story/mystery is believable and poignant, and at the same time, the story sacrifices nothing in terms of its harrowing plot. I was turning pages as fast as I could at one point, then found myself going back to appreciate the gorgeous prose once I'd found out what happened.

The writing in this book reminds me of the very best of Jennifer Donnelly's work – stunning and seemingly effortless. In fact, I was bewildered when my cell phone rang while I was reading yesterday. It took me a minute to remember that I wasn't actually curled up in the library of a 19th century boarding school. I took the book with me when I went to rescue my husband, whose car had died, just in case there were any red lights along the way.

Teachers, give this one to Donnelly fans, for sure, but I think it will also appeal to your supernatural romance readers and will be a perfect transition for those who have read their fill of Twilight-esque titles and are looking for something more.

You won't want to miss this book – due out in June from Knopf.

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