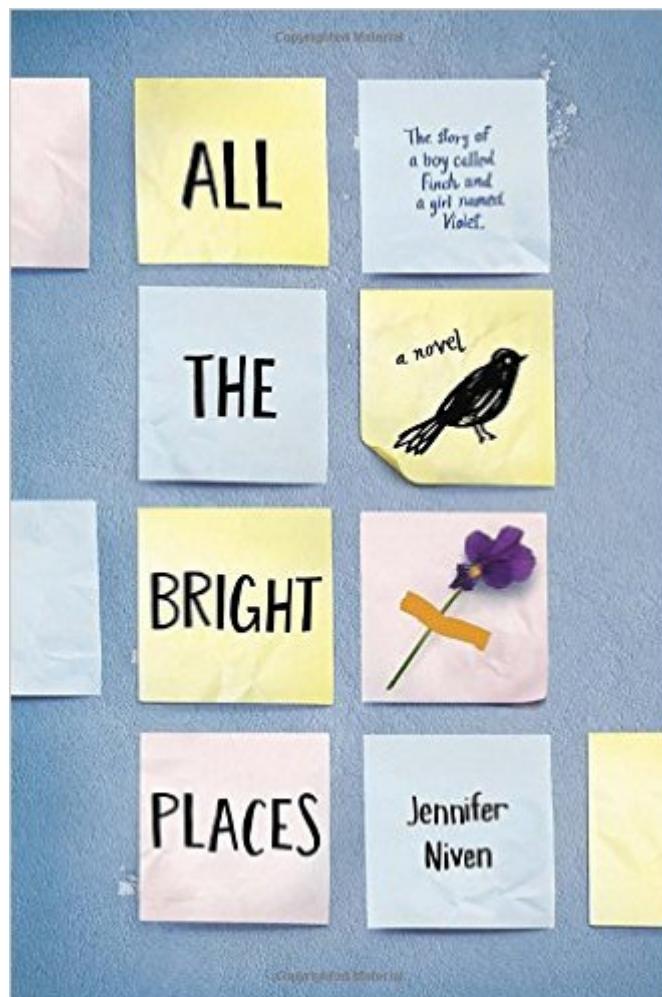


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All The Bright Places



Synopsis

"A do not miss for fans of *Eleanor and Park* and *The Fault in Our Stars*, and basically anyone who can breathe."--*Justine Magazine*
New York Times bestseller
Soon to be a major motion picture
starring Elle Fanning!
A 2016 Zoella Book Club Pick!
Theodore Finch is fascinated by death, and he constantly thinks of ways he might kill himself. But each time, something good, no matter how small, stops him. Violet Markey lives for the future, counting the days until graduation, when she can escape her Indiana town and her aching grief in the wake of her sister's recent death. When Finch and Violet meet on the ledge of the bell tower at school, it's unclear who saves whom. And when they pair up on a project to discover the "natural wonders" of their state, both Finch and Violet make more important discoveries: It's only with Violet that Finch can be himself, "a weird, funny, live-out-loud guy who's not such a freak after all. And it's only with Finch that Violet can forget to count away the days and start living them. But as Violet's world grows, Finch's begins to shrink. This is an intense, gripping novel perfect for fans of Gayle Forman, Jay Asher, Rainbow Rowell, John Green, and Jenny Downham from a talented new voice in YA, Jennifer Niven. "At the heart, "a big one" of "All the Bright Places" lies a charming love story about this unlikely and endearing pair of broken teenagers. " "A " New York Times Book Review "this heartbreakingly love story about two funny, fragile, and wildly damaged high school kids named Violet and Finch is worth reading. Niven is a skillful storyteller who never patronizes her characters or her audience. " " Entertainment Weekly

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Customer Reviews

I've been sitting on this review for a couple of days after finishing the book, chewing the story over and over, trying to digest everything that happened, trying to get over all the heartbreak and emotional pain this book has caused me. I am still working on all that. I honestly don't know how to review this book. It was both exhilarating and sad, inspiring and depressing, hopeful and dark. I got so close to the characters - to Theo in particular - they felt more like friends than just fictional creations. They made me laugh, swoon and then ugly cry (the ugliest cry since The Fault in Our Stars). This book - this story - really hit me hard and I am still trying to get my s*** together. This is a story of a girl saved by the boy who couldn't be saved himself. It's such a beautiful tale. Incredibly honest, gritty, moving and profoundly affecting. Possibly life changing. Probably even life saving. I want to tell you about the plot. About Theo and Violet. About how they met, how their lives began to intertwine with each other, wrapping themselves around one another and creating the most breathtaking symbiosis of all times. I want to tell you about their feelings - for each other, for their families, for the rest of the world. Their fears and struggles and dreams. Their wandering project, all the places they've visited, all the things they left behind, all the post it notes and their meaning. I do want to tell you about it all, but at the same time I don't. I just can't. You need to experience all that by yourself. This book demands it. There's simply no other way. To me, this book is perfect. The more I think about it - and I do think about it a lot - the more I understand. The more I understand, the more I appreciate it. Its gentle beauty, its insightfulness and sensitivity in handling such incredibly difficult subjects, its message - everything about it is perfect. The writing style (so lyrical, so transcendental, so compelling), the literary references, the complexity and all the underlying themes and messages... You don't always see all these things right away, you don't always catch what passes between the lines, but later on, when you go back and think about certain events, the meaning of certain thoughts and conversations, it really hits you hard and renders you speechless. It knocks the air out of you, quite literally. I'm not gonna lie to you, this book sneaked up on me. I wasn't prepared for how much this story would affect me, the pain I felt while reading the final chapters was almost physical. It weighed down on me, making it harder to breathe. I realized where this story was going and I didn't want to get there. It was excruciating. But also oddly beautiful. What more can I tell you? Read it. You really should.

Violet is the popular girl. Finch is the school freak. Two people who would never so much as look at each other. Until the day they both end up on the same tower, contemplating suicide. And what starts as an ending turns out to be a beginning, but can the darkness be held at

The latter part of this review includes spoilers marked clearly. Theodore Finch has been contemplating death and how he might end his own life for years. But whenever he starts to think really hard about killing himself something good, even a small good thing, makes him reconsider. It's hard to stay present and Awake, but once he surfaces Finch is always willing to try. Violet Markey is counting the days until graduation when she can leave her small Indiana town and the sharp pain of her sister's sudden death behind. When Finch and Violet meet on the ledge of the bell tower at school, it's easy for everyone to believe that Violet saved Finch. But that isn't the truth. After, when they pair up for a school project to explore the wonders of their state, both Finch and Violet realize they might have found exactly who they need in each other. But while Violet begins to embrace life again, Finch finds himself struggling to stay Awake and in the moment in *All the Bright Places* (2015) by Jennifer Niven. *All the Bright Places* is Niven's first novel written for young adults. It was also optioned for a movie before its official release date. *All the Bright Places* is very similar to *The Fault in Our Stars* both thematically and stylistically. It is also poised to be a defining book of 2015 (and possibly also of whatever year the movie adaptation is released if it moves beyond developmental stages) with its appeal and buzz not to mention critical acclaim in the form of several starred reviews. It is also worth noting that this book is beautifully packaged with a lot of great details ranging from the cover colors to the post it note motif and even a special message on the spine of the physical book. Unfortunately, as is often the case with such an anticipated title,

Niven's generally strong writing only serves to underscore the numerous flaws within this incredibly frustrating novel.*****SPOILERS ahead as we delve into deeper discussion . . . *****Despite the fledgling relationship between Finch and Violet, All the Bright Places is not a romance. It is not a heartwarming story. It is a story about mental illness and grieving. While there is recovery here along with moments of optimism, there is no happy ending. Having the novel work linearly from Finch and Violet's first meeting through Violet being left to deal with the aftermath of Finch's death does strange things to the pacing of this novel as the action ebbs and flows in unsatisfying ways while Finch and Violet's relationship begins to feel more and more tenuous.(I maintain that a stronger structure would have been to start the novel with Finch already dead while Violet is finishing the "wandering" that Finch left for her. Within that framework Finch and Violet's initial meeting and building relationship could have become flashbacks within the novel. The story would have then ended with Finch's death.)Before going further it's also worth mentioning that All the Bright Places was at least partly inspired by Niven's own life as a young person who lost "a boy she loved" to suicide as she mentions in the afterword of the novel. Because of Niven's personal experiences, it's difficult to say here what problems come from frustrating plot inventions and what might be reflecting real life experience (however frustrating).A lot of other reviewers are going to talk to you about Finch being a great character. And he is. But he is also so troubled and so broken. Facts which get glossed over in favor of the sweeping nature of his whirlwind romance with Violet.Finch has no support system throughout the novel as he struggles with bipolar disorder. In terms of adult figures, that is a combination of choice on Finch's part (lying to his counselor and fostering his "bad" reputation such as it is around school) and complete and utter incompetence on the part of said adult figures (like the counselor as well as others).Finch's mother is particularly infuriating as she not only does nothing to help Finch but also has no idea what's going on. Absent parents are par for the course in YA at this point but having a mother in a novel published IN 2015 who is only reachable by a land line phone (one that her children get to first to delete messages about absences or other things) stretches plausibility beyond all reason. The lack of communication or a cell phone, particularly given the fact that Finch's mother works as a real estate agent, makes zero sense. That the mother also insists on weekly dinners for the children with her ex-husband and new wife and stepson is also mind boggling given that the father is abusive. Again, maybe this is based on real life but without absolutely no supporting justification in the plot it just makes for another plot hole.In terms of friends and siblings, Finch's lack of support continues to involve incompetence with the added bonus combination of insensitivity and a variety of enablers. Finch's sister covers for Finch's episodes of depression while everyone writes off his manic

episodes as yet more weird behavior. Even Violet, when she does try to help, does so with a complete lack of followup as she asks her parents to intervene. They leave a voicemail for Finch's mother (which is again deleted before she hears it). Niven mentions, fairly, that mental illness is often accompanied by a stigma and that people don't want to talk about it. But when everyone knows that Finch is in free fall wouldn't some degree of follow up beyond initial calls from the counselor and Violet's parents have made sense? Not to these characters. An appropriate alternative title would have been All of the People Who Failed Theodore Finch. (I am not exaggerating when I say that the person who did the most to help Finch during the novel is a supposed mean girl character Amanda Monk.) This lack of support is compounded in All the Bright Places as Finch's character is framed as too special to be in this world for long. On page 378 of my advance copy Violet describes Finch as "burning brightly" and also as someone who "cannot, will not, die like everyone else" and instead leaves a lingering legend and legacy. While this is a beautiful sentiment it also casts Finch in such a way that suggests treatment never would have helped--that suicide might have been the inevitable conclusion for someone like Finch. Whether intentional or not, that is a deeply problematic idea for any novel. Violet has the potential to be a great character but she suffers greatly for being in Finch's shadow and also for being, for lack of a better term, written poorly. In the beginning of the novel Violet is consumed by grief for her sister. In the middle third she is consumed by feelings for Finch and their relationship. In the end, as she moves past yet more grief to come into her own, we might finally have a sense of the real Violet who is trying to start a new web magazine for girls. Except that is when the novel ends. When Violet and Finch begin dating, they also sleep together. Which is fine and often appropriate for a YA novel. Unfortunately instead of being handled well, Niven's treatment of Violet's sexuality is appalling. Early in the novel (page 47 of my advance copy) Violet describes a friend talking about sex as having a slutty voice which "goes sluttier" as the conversation continues. Aside from having literally no meaning in any sense, this description suggests that even talking about sex does . . . what exactly? Makes a girl promiscuous? Less than? It's not even clear. Later in the novel (248 in my arc) after Finch and Violet have slept together Violet is somewhat relieved to hear from a mutual friend that Finch isn't going to go around and brag about it. As Violet says, guys do talk. She goes on to say that while having sex with Finch felt right in the moment, she now feels "a little slutty, but also kind of grown up." So to review having sex with her boyfriend, is being equated here with being a slut. Again aside from making no sense this theme continues to be awful. At the same time it is worth mentioning that Violet remembers in a flashback to a sleepover with mean girl Amanda Monk that boys operate on a double standard for girls where girls who do have sex are "sluts" while those who

do not are "teases" and the girls at the sleepover realize the catch-22 nature of this binary. Perhaps Niven is making some grander point about internalized misogyny here by having these self-aware thoughts about sexuality. Perhaps she might even have made that point successfully. Except that Violet is the one having these thoughts and enacting the internalized misogyny again and again. (Later in the novel Violet sneaks out--without permission from her parents--to see Finch and she wonders what they'd think knowing she was not driving to visit a friend but sneaking out to have sex with her boyfriend which yet again equates her sexuality as being something wrong and something about which she needs to lie). There is never any payoff at the end of the novel with Violet coming to some great realization about all of this. Violet mentions wanting a sex life column for the magazine she is starting but we never see or hear what that will look like. We never see what could be called a positive attitude about sex in any way. Instead all we have is weak and frustrating writing. Aside from Violet and Finch all of the characters All the Bright Places are thinly drawn ranging from vague descriptions--mean girl Amanda Monk, all-American popular guy Ryan Cross--to unsatisfying stereotypes. Finch's friends, such as they are, include Brenda who is a heavier girl who hates anyone who is less than a size twelve. Finch's best friend Charlie is black (but not, as the book points out, the CW kind--again whatever that means) and doesn't want to go into sports (although of course he could because he's fantastically athletic) because he doesn't want to become a black stereotype. Instead of making any of these characters feel well-realized these pat descriptions sit on the page without much foundation. Niven's writing is often well done but it is also incredibly frustrating as the novel varies wildly between twee, whimsical moments and the seriously heartbreakingly failings that lead to Finch's death. All the Bright Places will find its place among readers who seek out novels about grief or tragic romances. It might even add to the conversation surrounding mental illness in some meaningful ways. Unfortunately, capitalizing on the Zeitgeist isn't enough to erase numerous plot holes or an egregious treatment of the main character's sexuality among other lesser flaws.

Possible Pairings: Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher, Finding Mr. Brightside by Jay Clark, Can't Look Away by Donna Cooner, The 39 Deaths of Adam Strand by Gregory Galloway, The Fault in Our Stars by John Green, The After Girls by Leah Konen, The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl by Barry Lyga, Falling Through Darkness by Carolyn MacCullough, This Song Will Save Your Life by Leila Sales, The Edge of Falling by Rebecca A. Serle, How to Say Goodbye in Robot by Natalie Standiford

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