

Jillian's Gold

• a • novel • by •
Levi Montgomery

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www.levimontgomery.com

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Other Loves – Four Novellas

Cursing the Cougar

Stubbs and Bernadette

Jillian's Gold

A novel by Levi Montgomery

Jan 2, 2009

Dear Auntie May,

How odd to be writing you a letter. How odd to be writing anyone a letter. If I were to decide to write a "letter" to anyone else I know, it would be a quick note at school, or an email. And I must admit, I first sat down at my computer to write this. I can't promise they will all be handwritten, but it did seem to me that at least this first one must be.

We arrived at our new house two days ago, and what a beautiful little house it is! It's one of those places you drive past in a strange town, on your way to somewhere else, somewhere that matters, and you see it out of just the very corner of your mind. You drive away, not stopping, not slowing, just thinking to yourself "What a great little place that is! I'd love to live there! I would have a grey cat called Absolute, and a terrier-spaniel mix called Ruffian, and big bird-feeders hanging in the elm trees out front. It will be dark and cool inside, the yeasty aroma of my fresh-baked bread seeking every tiny nook and cranny of the house, and I shall wear an apron, crisp white cotton with floury hand-prints."

And then it's gone. You never see it again, and in an hour or so, you can't even feel it anymore, just the memory of having felt it. All you have left is the sight of it, tucked away in your mind. One of those little two-story farmhouses, with a floor plan like a fat cross, with porches in the corners. But it's just a memory, a fading snapshot of something you saw once, and the sobby little catch behind your eyes when you saw it is gone forever.

If you lived there, of course, you'd be standing there in your window watching the big u-Haul go by, wishing your roof didn't

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leak, your toilets worked right, and the stupid elms didn't block quite so much of the sun, and you'd watch the truck drive by, thinking, "Lucky them! A whole new start somewhere. That's what I need."

Well, I can tell you from my own life, a whole new start ain't all it's cracked up to be! I cried like a baby all the way out of town. Poor Daddy! He had no idea what to do. That's always been Mom's job, taking care of me when I get in my moods. For that matter, I had no idea what to do for myself. All I could think of was that I'd never see my home again, never see any of my friends again, never get another one of those forever hugs she used to be so free with and I WILL NOT CRY!

Sorry. Much later now, all cleaned up and smiley. Well, snivelly is what I am, but I'll be quite all right.

Oh, Auntie May! You have no idea how much I miss her already! Well, maybe you do. Of course you do! I'm sorry, I just wasn't thinking. Of course you know how much I miss her. You know how to miss people too, don't you?

The house is great, though, although I've quite wrecked my great-house-telling-about-mood. It was such a cool mood, too.

Up on top of the front porch, the big front porch (as opposed to the little front porch, which is sort of off to one side, and then there's a huge one in the back), but up on top of this one there's a room we think started out life as an open balcony. It's not a very deep room, but it goes all the way across the house. There's a wall all the way around that's sided like the house, and the floor's painted the same scuffed old grey color as the porches, and the wall at the back is sided, too. It's not like normal siding, that sort of tapery stuff? You know what I mean? This is flat, with grooves across it where one board has a gouge out of it so the next one up can sit flat.

Okay, I went down and asked Daddy, and he said to tell you to look up "clapboard," to see what it isn't, and "coved siding," to see what it is. He said to tell you "Hi," too. Hi!

Anyway, the wall behind me is coved siding, all the way up, and the wall around the edge is the same thing up to about my



knees and then it's all glass from there up, these old-fashioned little panes the size of sheets of paper, set three-by-three in frames that slide up from the bottom and down from the top, except some of them don't work all that well, and some of the glass is gone. Some of the places have ripped plastic sheeting over them, a couple have cardboard, and one has nothing at all, just a hole.

It's drafty out here, but even now, with a distinct winter chill in the air, it's not what I'd call cold. The people here may think so – they go around in these big parkas like they're exploring the arctic, and they talk about all the snow they had last week. There's no snow now, though, and it's hard to imagine very much snow going away that fast. Unless it rained a lot, I guess.

I imagine in the summer, it'll get pretty toasty up here. You come out here through a door in the end of the upstairs hall. And I guess you might think the house is cross-shaped, because of what I said, but it's more like a tee. Oh, and it's not "toilets" that don't work right, it's "toilet." Singular. And it does work okay, actually, but I'm not sure how that's supposed to work, a teenage girl sharing a bathroom with her Daddy. That's officially pooppy!

Okay, not much more to tell, except the trees in the front yard. They're huge! I can't even begin to hug them around, and I think that if you and I could try it together, we couldn't get all the way around. They're by far the biggest trees I've ever seen, although I went for a walk yesterday, and every house for blocks around has big trees like that! I think they really are elm trees, although it's pretty tough to tell this time of year. For a city girl, anyway. A homeless, motherless, friendless, transplanted city girl.

Okay, bye now, Auntie May. Gotta go cry some more.

All my love and kisses and a tiny little sad-face,
Jillybaby

Friday, 2 Jan 09

Well, this has got to be the stupidest thing I've ever been made to do. This is so stupid it's useless. It's beyond useless! It's embarrassing! It's humiliating! Like that's any big surprise. Every single one of the stupid things they've made me do for five years now have been useless and embarrassing and humiliating! Scream therapy. That was pretty stupid. Pounding on that stupid "punching bag". This isn't any stupider than that. At least they said they weren't going to read it. Although, if they were going to, it might actually have been a little bit more fun, at least:

Dear Dr Butt wrench;
Kiss my butt.
Sincerely,
Royal

OK, OK, I'm calm. I'm calm. I pumped some iron, and I did all my breathing things, and I'm calm. Let's assume there's some rationale for this pointless charade. Let's assume it will make itself known at some point. OK, then, let's be rational.

My name is Royal (I swear to you I am not making this up) Greene.

No, I do not have a sister named Kelly, and no, my parents didn't forget their last name wasn't Blue, and yes, I've heard those both before. My mother assures me they had no idea people would hear my name and think of "Royal Blue."

I do have a sister, and she has it even worse. Scarlett. With two T's. Scarlett Greene. Try living that down in middle school. I call her Scary. She calls me Pain. As in - yeah, you get it.

I'm 18 years old, as I sit here writing this. I'm a senior in high school. My birthday is 14 Oct 90. School starts back up on Monday.

There are some things we need to get clear, you and I, whoever you are.

First off, this isn't a diary. We don't need no stinkin' diaries! This is a journal. Lots of famous men kept journals. OK, right now, I can't think of any. Teddy Roosevelt. I bet he kept one. JFK. Lots of men. Stop making fun of me. It's not a diary.

Anyway, I don't have a choice. Well, I do, but it wouldn't be an easy choice. There's basically one person left in the world that doesn't hate me, one person left that I have any feeling at all for, and if I don't do what Dr Buttrich says, it'll break her heart, and that'd be more than I could stand.

So this is for you, Mom. This is all for you.

Well, I guess that's not true. The part about not feeling anything. There's a couple of girls at school I have some feelings for, but I'm not sure what those feelings are. (I sure hope they were serious about not reading this thing)

There's this one girl at school. Her name is *Geena*. There's a couple others, but I'll use her for an example. Everybody at the whole school knows *Geena*, and everybody knows she's hot. She has a very well-made body, and if I look at her body, if I start to think about her body, I start to go a little funny around the gills. But just watching her move, listening to her talk, watching her be herself, it's like there's nothing else there. If I could have her (which I can't - there's a couple of guys that would kill me if I even tried) I'm afraid it would only be for the bragging rights.

So that's not hatred. I don't know what it is, actually, but I'm pretty sure it's not hatred.

Then there's this other girl, not a girl at school. She goes to a private school somewhere. Her name is *Zillah*. I kid you not. Biblical, I'm told. Anyway, *Zillie*'s skinny as a rail, her face is thin, her mouth is at least twice as wide as her face, and her eyes are like saucers. She has nine really dark, small freckles along her jaw on one side, and none on the other side. Her hair's as straight

as water poured from a pitcher, and her hands are long and bony and cold. She's got this habit where as soon as she sits down, her feet come out of her shoes and go up under her pointy little butt so she's sort of kneeling in the chair.

Every time I'm in the same room with her, I go funny around the gills. No need to concentrate on her non-existent boobs (well, almost non-existent) no need to think anything in particular. She makes me go all funny. It started sometime during the summer.

So what's up with that? That's not hatred either.

Oh, and to add insult to injury, she's like 9 or something. No, not really - she's a friend of Scary's, which would make her about 14, which I guess wouldn't be all that bad, but certainly bad enough. If I was 28 and she was 24, nobody'd think a thing. I think I'll look elsewhere, anyway.

Except she does have this strange witching power. I go through the dining room, where they're huddled up, giggling over some movie magazine that's apparently all the homework they have. My heart's pounding a little, and my hands feel like they're ten sizes too big. I reach out and give Scary's braided hair a swift jerk, hard enough to make her yelp, but only so that I can tug Zillie's hair in a pretense of fairness. I don't tug as hard, and Zillie only giggles, and I go on into the kitchen for a glass of water I didn't want, barely breathing, her giggle tinkling like silver down my spine. All I wanted was the memory of her hair in my fingertips.

She eats with us sometimes, and I stare at my plate, listening to her talk. She and Scary gang up on Mom and my step-father, teasing them with a barrage of one-liners rooted in everything from Shakespeare to Clancy. (That's if Dork-butt's not eating in the living room, watching TV, which he won't let anyone else do) Mom's pretty bright, but Dork-face is really dumb, and neither of them are what you could call quick-witted, and they squawk and giggle, fumbling their replies until everybody's laughing except me. Well, I laugh, but I'm afraid to look up, afraid of what will be branded into my forehead if I do, afraid of what they might see in my eyes.

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I have to find one my own age that makes me feel that way.

And Scary. I guess I have a feeling for Scary that isn't hatred. She's an all-right sort of a little sister, if you have to have a little sister at all.

OK, they said to write a lot. Well, "they" isn't quite right. It's just Butt wrench. He and my Mom, I guess is what I mean by "they." They said they're going to be checking for the amount written between appointments and that's all, but they said they wanted me to write a lot, so here I am writing a lot. Just not about what they thought I'd write about. Well, they said to write about my feelings. Wrong feelings, is all.

They said to write about how angry I felt, punching the wall, but all I felt punching the wall was

Sunday, 4 Jan 09

School again tomorrow. No school since before Christmas.

Shadow. That's what Zillah means in Hebrew, according to this place on the internet. Well, according to a lot of places. I was pretty thorough. Also, I started a conversation with, oh, just whoever happened to be sitting around, ho hum, about ages and birthdays, and she's 14, but barely, born 17 Dec 94. She chews her fingernails. Also her hair. She has that silly foot thing, and she giggles a lot.

And I have no idea what any of this has to do with the price of turkey poop. Anger, they said to write about. Write down all the things you're angry about.

I'm angry that they think I'm angry. I'm angry that they think I have an anger problem. Why is it that you either keep it all bottled up and go around like you have a ramrod so far up your butt you can't move your lips, or you "have an anger problem"?

OK, so I did punch a hole in the wall once. Big deal. Every body punches a hole in a wall once in their life. Well, I did it twice, I guess, but still. Well, I don't remember the first time, but there wasn't anybody else it could have been. The people around me are all so frustrating! They're so stupid it drives me nuts! I don't have an anger problem — I have a surrounded-by-stupid-people problem.

Tyson Clarke, at school, won't leave me alone about my clothes. Well, none of them do, but he's like the ringleader or something. I swear, at least once a day, he has to say something about "the man in black". What is it to him if I wear black? What is it to him if I won't tell him why? Well, it's a lot to him, apparently, but I don't know why. THAT's frustrating.

Melany (or however you spell it) won't leave me alone about "helping her with her algebra." I helped her once. She kept wanting it to be about something else, and I didn't want it to be about that, cause she's pudgy and stupid and desperate, and now I won't help her again, and she keeps after me about it. And I don't think it has anything to do with algebra. THAT's frustrating.

My (oh, they'd better not read this!) (well, he knows how I feel, anyway) STUPID step-father is the single most frustrating person on earth! He works like two weeks in six months, because "I'm a Master Plumber (and OH! you can hear those capitals when he says that!) and I don't work for the kind of peanut pay that's all you can get in this little podunk town!" So we live off my Mom's waitress job, and she works extra shifts to make

OK, calm again. I'm fine now. I even benched, and you're not supposed to do that alone. I left the collars off, so I'll be OK if anything goes wrong, but still, you're not supposed to do that.

My Mom works 48 hours a week, minimum, because she needs the overtime, and he sits here on his fat butt and does nothing. Well, OK, he's not fat. When she married him, he pretty much took over all my gym stuff in the garage. He was pretty buff even then, and he said this way, he wouldn't have to set his stuff up in their bedroom, but now all I have is this stuff I got to put in my bedroom. I tried to share, to use it when he wasn't in there, but he got ticked off if I left the weights on MY bench, that I PAID FOR, set the way I'd used them last! And he got all coachly about how much I was lifting and how often, and what moves I was using, and it just wasn't worth it. So I got some more stuff. Except the heavy bag. I still go in there and hit that, when he's not around. When he's off with his friends, drinking. Then he's the bag, and I go in there and beat him up.

And it's not true that he does nothing. He reads the sports section, and he watches TV all day. That's not nothing. And he watches movies. We all have to watch the movies he wants to watch.

One time, I was doing hammer curls in my bedroom, and then when I went out into the living room, he was sitting there on the couch with his back to me, and my hands and arms could still feel the weight of the dumbbells, going up and down like hammers, and I felt the same wave of buzzing greyness that makes me hit things, and I could just feel that 35 pound dumbbell caving in the back of his head.

Jan 8, 2009

Dear Auntie May,

I'm back in school now, and every day, when I get home, I want to run next door and sit in your kitchen, doing my homework, watching you bake or sew or knit or whatever you're doing. We'll sit there in your kitchen, listening to the traffic in the street below, and wait for Mom to get home from work. You'll feed me hot, moist cookies and cold, cold milk, and I'll tell you all about my day at school. And then I remember I can't run next door anymore.

I remember how your iron would slide back and forth like it was a machine, and your face never wavered. Auntie May, I never told you this, but I used to try to shock you so badly that your iron would hesitate in its path, just for a second. It was like trying to score in some game. I'd tell you every sordid detail from my weird sex-laden dreams, and you'd iron away, listening, and then you'd tell me how dreams work. I'd tell you about the things some girl at school had said, using all the words she'd used, and you'd just keep stroking, stroking, stroking, set the old iron up on its tail, shift the shirt or skirt or blouse around a little, stroke, stroke, stroke, and then when I was done, you'd tell me why those words don't work as well as others.

I'd watch your eyes, watching for the flicker of umbrage there, and I never saw it. I'd watch your hands, looking for a single hesitation.

Do you know what would have happened if I'd asked my mother what Gabby meant when she told me the thing I asked you about before Christmas? Daddy, I could have asked. Maybe it has something to do with the way you were raised, I don't know. He

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would have just answered me, like you'd do, but there's no way I could ever have asked him that.

Mom, no way. She might have slapped me. Well, she wouldn't have slapped me, but she might have washed my mouth out with soap. Actually, I don't know what she would have done, because I never asked her things like that. Mom was different. She loved me with all she had, but she wasn't like you and Daddy. I wonder what they ever saw in each other that made them even think they could build a life together, much less what there was that made them actually able to do it.

And they did! You know how much they loved each other. All the way here, we took turns starting the crying. Every couple hours, one or the other of us would start to sniffle, and then we'd start to cry, and then sometimes, we'd have to pull over. Four days of that. I'd never seen Daddy cry before that.

Now I come home from school, and there's no one home at my place, and there's no Auntie May in the next apartment, and I come up here to my little sun-room. Well, it's not mine, but I think of it that way. I don't think Daddy's ever come up here. I really wish he'd come up here with me, some of these fine sunset evenings. The house faces almost due west, and I guess there's a lot of dust or something, because the sunsets can get pretty dramatic. I wish he'd come up here and sit with me and just watch, hot steaming mugs of something in our hands, and the clouds drifting by. So odd to look west and not see any water at all.

We had this thing we had to do at school, a writing assignment, where we had fifteen minutes to write about "The Most Important Thing I've Ever Seen," which is pretty stupid if you ask me. Most of them wrote about "The Most Important Thing I Ever Saw Was When I Saw the Mayor," or "The Important Night That I Saw Britney Spears in Concert!" I wrote about watching the sun melt into the ocean at Ocean Shores, about how, in those last few moments, it melts into liquid gold on the waves, and skitters away, circling around behind you for tomorrow's sunrise, and then I had to read it, and when I was done, there was this silence for a few seconds.

"Can you really look out over the ocean and not see land at all?" this boy dressed all in black asked me, and I think they'd think I was crazy if I told them that what's really weird is looking out over the land and not seeing ocean at all.

I put cardboard up in all the broken places that didn't have any, and now it gets good and warm up here in the afternoons. We put all the furniture from the deck in here, for now at least, and since it's that really dark brown resin we all hated so much, it sits here in the sun and gets all warm, and then I come up here, and I sit and watch the people go by outside, and I do my homework. I don't think it'll be too bad in summer, actually, because of the trees. Also, the higher sun will mean the overhangs above the glass will give more shade. I'll open the windows on each side, and it'll be cool and shady out here. There'll be no homework, and I'll sit here in the afternoons, reading Clarke and Heinlein and Marsh, turning the musty pages so slowly, savoring every word.

It's later, now. I got too sniffley. Sniffly? I'll have to get a dictionary up here. Snuffle-up-a-gus, is what I got. I seem to cry a lot more here than I ever did in the old place. Maybe it's something in the air. Maybe the smell of old paint. There was a wooden chair up here, just that and nothing more, when I came up here that first day, and it was so perfectly sad that I couldn't sit in it. I sat on the floor, against the wall, and I watched the dust dance in the sunbeams, and the sunbeams move across the wide grey boards, and I got my knees all wet from crying, pressing my knees into my eye sockets and just BAWLING!

The girls at school are different than the girls at my old school. They seem to be fastened down, somehow, rooted, planted. They wear jeans that look like they might last at least a few more weeks, and they don't gather in the restrooms in big honking flocks, squabbling like gulls over the mirrors and sinks. They pay attention in class, and they get good grades (or not, but if they don't, it's not because "my crew don' do homework").

I've met some people, now. I wouldn't call any of them friends, yet, but I'm meeting people.

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Oh, Auntie May! I wish we hadn't had to move! I know why he wanted to, though. I can see his point. They'd lived in one city their whole lives, and every single thing he was ever going to see was going to remind him of her. I can see that, but it's just so hard.

Okay, gotta go. I need to get my homework done.

Hugs and kisses and little pouty-faces,
Jillybaby