

★ **The Secret of Lillian Velvet****Jaclyn Moriarty**

Levine Querido (Sep 12, 2023)

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In Jaclyn Moriarty's kaleidoscopic fantasy novel *The Secret of Lillian Velvet*, a girl armed with a pickle jar full of coins contends with loneliness and otherworldly derring-do.

Ten-year-old Lillian lives in Australia with her stringent grandmother who demands proper manners. Locked at home, she's left to work on her homeschooling, piano, and chores. Suddenly, Lillian is pushed toward brighter realms by an unseen force (each trip costs her a fistful of gold). She meets the Mettlestones in the process; they're a large family of spellbinders who are targeted by shadow mages. But after visiting settings including a foreboding forest, a kingdom where storm damage is repaired using music, and a circus, Lillian returns to her daily life, where almost no time has transpired.

At home, Lillian has always been obedient and isolated. When she enters other realms, though, she learns to be a curious, capable adventurer. Though at first the contrast is striking, she begins to display more gumption at home; the gulf narrows. There are questions regarding what her terse, evasive grandmother knows; the reasons for Lillian's sudden, magical transports, over which she has little control, are veiled in mystery too. The result is an enticing story—one made more so by Lillian's meta-reflections on the nature of storytelling and how ineffectual she feels as a heroine who keeps being whisked away before she's able to perform any true heroics. But as parallel story lines intertwine, the truth is revealed. The Mettlestones reunite and face worrisome storms; Lillian freefalls through revelations concerning her place in their world.

In the nostalgic fantasy novel *The Secret of Lillian Velvet*, a child gains friendships and fresh insights about herself through extraordinary interdimensional travels.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2023)

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