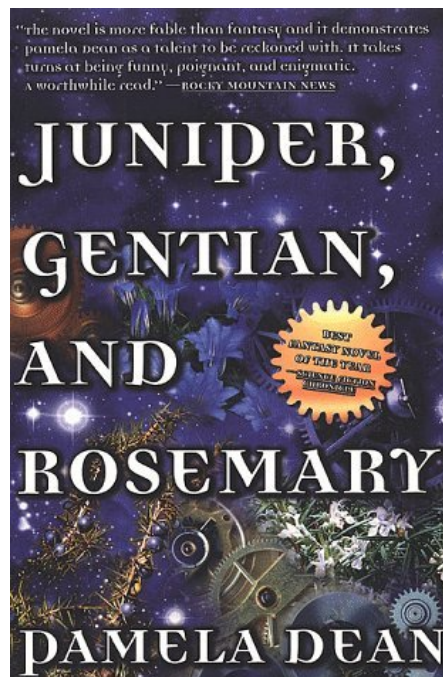




Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary

Pamela Dean

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Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary Pamela Dean

Inspired by a traditional ballad, Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary is the tale of a mysterious young man and three ordinary young girls, of ancient magic and the modern world.

Three sisters live comfortably with their parents: Juniper, 16, who likes cooking and computer chats; Gentian, 13, who likes plays and astronomy; Rosemary, 11, who likes Girl Scouts. Enter Dominic, handsome as the night, quoting poetry, telling riddles, and asking help for a complex and fascinating science project. Gentian isn't interested at first--she has her own life. But gradually her life, and her time, belong more and more to Dominic and his project, and her father begins to fear that the lad may be more than a charmer. . . .

Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary Details

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Author : Pamela Dean

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From Reader Review Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary for online ebook

JSA Lowe says

BEST BOOK OF 2013--which I think mostly indicates what terrible things I've been "reading" all year in my doldrums (with exceptions of Bryher and H.D. and Robert Duncan on H.D.). Still, this was staggeringly perfect and came at a perfect time. I was so ensnared and still so ensnelled when I finished that I immediately went back to the beginning and read all my favourite parts again. As I wrote Moi, who gave the genius recommendation in the first place:

I stayed up till TWO last night finishing *Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary*, which is my new favorite everything. I needed that book SO badly right now, it is so resonant: that feeling of having been in a spell, ensorcelled, in a time loop, while one's female friends wonder where the hell one has gone, and one knows all the while how inadequate one's sexist male companion really is, how inscrutable and unhealthy....yeah. Also, ASTRONOMY, my first love! And a cat.

Where was this book when I was 19? I would've felt a lot less lonely. And dated many fewer handsome jerks, possibly. Possibly maybe. And it links one through to so many other wonderful artists and thinkers (Laurie Anderson! *Weetzie Bat/Witch Baby* shout-out!) that one feels positively embraced and at home in a thickly peopled world of writers and friends.

Cera says

This book is just too complex to save in my head until I'm done with rereading it. And I must say, I just didn't *get* vast chunks of it when I read it 10 years ago, because so much of the story (there is a story there, really!) is so subtle and so obscure that if one doesn't catch the meaning in the quotes and (literal) fortune cookies, then what is going on won't be obvious until the end.

Gentian lives a complex but healthy existence with her sisters and parents, studying astrononmy, going to an awesome unconventional high school, having friends over to spend the night, and generally grappling with the particular difficulties adolescence presents for someone intelligent and rational who resents their reason being interfered with by their emotions. (I am not that person at all, so she reads as an alien to me, but quite an interesting one.) A house is built next door; for Gentian it takes only a few weeks, but others insist that it took half the summer, and that's the first of many little holes in reality scattered throughout the book. Suddenly Gentian's telescope won't work -- it only shows her the house next door. The teenage boy who lives next door shows up; he's named Dominic, and is breathtakingly beautiful, and speaks almost entirely in quotations... because he is, literally, Satan (a Miltonic Satan, mind you, not a B-movie version), and Satan cannot create, he can only imitate or adapt.

So Dominic moves in next door and sets about ruining everything he can touch; by 1/3 of the way through the book he's already put the sisters even more at odds than usual, and has brought up the race card between Gentian & her friend Alma in an attempt to upset their relationship. Gentian's telescope only works when her friend Becky is present, so she's feeling part of her identity as an astronomer threatened by her inability to star-gaze. Mrs. Zimmerman, the only other person who realises how quickly the new house was built, identifies Dominic without realising it, saying that he spends each night "walking up and down, and to and fro" on the street in front of the house. Dominic hates humans, all humans; he's a Miltonian Satan, after

all, and he can't forgive humanity for the grace they receive; there's a great scene in which he tells Gentian (in quotations, of course) how he hates the entire human species and she completely fails to get it.

Reading this book earlier today I felt like it was just so-so, but now that I'm putting it all down I think it might actually be amazing in its exploration of what real evil is and how it manifests. Gentian is sympathetic and yet she keeps making these tiny sacrifices of her self; she is enamoured with Dominic and so when Alma reveals the terrible things he was almost-saying (but not ever outright; not subtle enough that way) she is outraged and yet she doesn't want it to be true so she lets it go.

The remainder of the book develops in much the same way; Dominic subtly enthralls Gentian and both of her sisters, and finally puts them to work building a time machine for him in their attic. First Rosemary and then Juniper realise that Dominic is taking advantage of them and break away, leaving Gentian still obsessively working in the attic, unaware that she is losing months of her life in what seems to her to be an endless January. Even once she becomes aware of how much time she's lost, she continues working on the time machine, easily convinced by Dominic's argument that only by finishing it can she repair the damage she's done to her relationships and schoolwork. It isn't until Dominic demands the two objects most central to her identity -- her telescope, and a poem written by her best friend -- that she finally refuses him, and in doing so finally breaks his hold over her.

Despite all of the wonderful things in this book, I still find myself unsatisfied with the ending. Why didn't Gentian's friends intervene to help her? Why did her parents let her lose 10 months of her life to Dominic? The book suggests a combination of his time-magic and their belief that she has to solve her own problems, but this seems like a harsh way to treat one's 14-yr-old daughter. If Gentian was presented as having really learned something from being left alone to grapple with the consequences of her poor decisions I might be happier, but she's left resentful and confused, although relieved that her best friend hasn't given up on her. I really, really wanted another chapter or so of processing on her part, so I could see how she's been changed by all of this, and get some assurance that she's not permanently damaged. Without that resolution I find myself uncomfortable and sad, worried about Gentian's ability to reconnect with the ordinary world, and intensely angry with her parents for showing so little concern. I am still fond of the book, and glad I read it, but I'm not sure when I'll read it again; the ending is just too painful for me.

19 dec 2012: Just pulled it down to look for a quote, and ended up rereading bits. I think my real problem with the book is that there is neither catharsis nor eucatastrophe.

Miriam says

The plot here is a bit thin, but the writing and characterization are so well-done that they carry the book, although the ending left me dissatisfied. Lots of excellent conversation between intelligent characters considering interesting questions and ideas. Like most of Dean's work, heavily laced with poetry and literary allusions.

Melki says

"Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."
Arthur Conan Doyle

Ah, if only more YA novels were like this one, a book peopled with smart, intelligent teen girls who enjoy

spending time with their parents (I did mention this is a *fantasy*, didn't I?) Girls who discuss philosophy, literature, religion, and science instead of boys . . . until one particular boy shows up: a freakishly intelligent dreamboat of a boy who speaks mostly in quotations, and . . .

It was odd that he should have read so many of the things her family and friends had.

He subtly worms his way into the good graces of three sisters, Juniper, Gentian, and Rosemary, though thirteen-year-old Gentian seems most vulnerable to the boy's wiles. She helps him build a time machine in the family's attic, discovering too late that there are many ways to travel through time.

This is an odd read that has mesmerized me twice now. I almost never reread books unless I've assigned them five stars, yet this one was, and still is, only a four star tale for me. And, yet . . . I'll undoubtedly read it again.

Weird . . .

skein says

An hour to read 50 pages of a young adult novel - this is not like me. If I could stop giggling over the asides and finally decide whether or not I'm annoyed by so many references and usually-not-framed quotations ("There's a boy called Jamie Barrows." "And he almost deserved it.") ...

I read the short story as a child and loved it - although even then the plot was confusing, meandering, and altogether queer. This book was published a decade after the story came out. I could look on it as post-modernism, I suppose - except that it isn't -

Jenne says

This book has perfectly captured exactly the kind of person I was in junior high school, (and the kind of friends I WISHED I had!) and what it's like to realize you're growing up and there's nothing you can do to stop it. From the book:

"...Everything's changing so much. I don't even know how tall I am or what size bra I wear, and when I had that cold last week I got out a Goosebumps book to read, and it was so bad I wondered if somebody had taken the inside away and substituted a different one. "

Trin says

Speaking of YMMV authors...man, are there few others who both delight and frustrate me as much as Pamela Dean! As usual, when it comes to the day-to-day minutiae of life—school, eating, interpersonal relations—Dean can be incredibly, incredibly compelling. But when it comes to actual plot, well...

As with Tam Lin, this novel's pacing is oddly backloaded; the same thing happens where the supernatural element doesn't emerge until almost the end. I was actually warned me about this, although I didn't find it "perfectly appropriate"—again, I felt that the book may have in fact been stronger were it not a fantasy at all. Dean actually has some amusing meta-commentary on this criticism in JGR, so it's something she's

obviously aware of; however, I still couldn't shake the feeling that the metaphor underlying the novel's conclusion and its fantasy element was much stronger than what actually, on a tangible level, occurred. It's like...you know how on the early seasons of *Buffy*, the MotW would often be used to address some metaphorical concern about high school? Like, the girl who felt invisible would actually *become* invisible? In Dean's case, the metaphorical message of the book—sometimes friendships fracture and the various parties drift apart and you don't realize it's happened until after it's over (especially when BOYS are involved)—would have I think worked better if they'd just literally been allowed to happen, rather than been attached to a fantasy plotline that, in my opinion, didn't really hold up. Though it would have been cool if the fantasy elements had just *worked better*, too.

All in all, I prefer Tam Lin, which has more rewards for lesser levels of frustration.

John Burt says

I have read a lot (like, a metric gollyton) of books where the author tried to blend the realistic and the magical seamlessly together. Pamela Dean goes a good deal farther: she blends the realistic and lifelike with the *mythic*.

Gentian and her sisters Juniper and Rosemary are leading busy lives, the lives of intelligent children of intelligent parents, pursuing their various interests (cooking, poetry, Scouting, astronomy). It's a very attractive slice of life in a family you would love to have living next door, or to have been born into. Dean could have simply described a busy year in this family's life and had a first-rate modern version of an E. Nesbit book. Instead, she reached a bit deeper, and when I say deeper, I mean she pulled aside the curtain to show forces at work beyond our knowledge -- but not entirely beyond our control.

Gentian is young, but she knows that young romance is a flirtation with dangerous forces, and that it puts her in danger of getting her heart broken. She knows that having Dominic in her life might cost her. She just has no idea, in Dominic's case, what those powers are, or how dangerous they are, or what it might cost her.

Gentian does survive, at a cost. She just doesn't know what that cost will turn out to be, either.

I would recommend this book to any reader, but especially to intelligent 13-year-old girls, or their parents.

Julia says

When a new house suddenly goes up in the vacant lot next door, Gentian and her sisters Juniper and Rosemary are naturally intrigued. Though the three are initially excited that something interesting is happening in their Minneapolis neighborhood, they're gradually disillusioned as the only person to emerge from the house is Dominic, a weirdly off-putting teenage boy, who chooses to speak only in literary quotes. To make matters worse, Gentian's treasured attic telescope begins to malfunction, displaying images of the house next door rather than the heavens.

There were a number of things that irritated me about this book. Foremost, though they attend a "progressive" school and Gentian's parents are admittedly somewhat offbeat, the profound behavior, interests, internal monologues, and conversations of this collection of kids in their early teens require a serious suspension of disbelief. Also disorienting was the author's writing style and choice of phrase, which felt foreign (British?) though the author, like me, hails from Minnesota (to be fair, perhaps she isn't a native). Ultimately, very little of interest occurred until the final 50 pages of the story, and even then the "twist" ending was weird, vague and unsatisfactory.

Interestingly, I experienced a case of synchronicity or what I've decided to call Literary Baader-Meinhof

Phenomena while reading this book: Though published in 1998, on page 187 Gently makes a reference to the 2017 solar eclipse, and I just so happened to read that page just four days after observing the 2017 eclipse myself.

Monica says

This was brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

Vendela says

This book is an endless conversation about books. And about religion and right or wrong and about friendship and family. Oh, and there's magic. Not much happens, but I love it dearly.

Kerith says

Not as wonderful as the beloved TAM LIN, which I've read countless times, but quite a bit of fun. This one was mainly about Gently and her handful of loyal friends (banded together, they call themselves the Giant Ants), though her two sisters pop up quite often. This is a wonderful family, as they all five sit around and read Shakespeare together -- the parents read science fiction, and all of them are readers, which is easily noted by their glib way of discussing things and dropping quotes (a classic Pamela Dean thing, I've noticed). Gently is an astronomer who becomes oddly enamored with the new kid on the block -- who speaks ONLY in quotes, ye gods -- and who just happens to live in the strange house next door that appeared practically overnight.

I especially enjoyed Gently's camaraderie with her friends. They were all readers, scholarly, with their minds on things of importance to them, which were usually NOT the typical preteen conformity. On the other hand, I wish I could say I had been like that at 13.

Laura Gurrin says

This is one of those books you love (if you love it) for the feel of it, not so much for the plot. It's a modern retelling of an old Scottish folk ballad, involving either the devil or a fine young man, and a marriage or a trap, but either way a set of riddles which the heroine of the ballad needs to solve in order to win his heart/escape. You see how it's already a bit confusing.

In this story, it's 1990's Milwaukee, and the plants of the title are three sisters, with Gently, the middle at 13, our teller of the tale. These three girls are smart, almost painfully so, with witty parents and lackadaisical schooling, though of course they are all self-educated and hard working little smarties, who can quote Shakespeare, Keats, and historical astronomers with equal panache. The devil lies in the form of Dominic, a beautiful, mysterious boy who moves in next door and speaks entirely in epigrams, which fortunately annoys Gently as much as they do the reader, so it's not so bad.

Gently, her equally precious friends, and her erudite family, come together in a very specific kind of world, which I admit I am not quite smart enough to completely follow. The book walks a very fine line between

being engaging and obnoxious, and occasionally tips over onto the wrong side. However, Gentian is practical enough to be engaging, and by and large, the book makes me wish that when I was a smart young girl (as we all know I was), I had friends and family as indulgent and eccentric as Gentian's own. This is why the book is one I love and read over and over - because despite the essentially confusing and pointless plot, the characters and world they inhabit is fascinating to me. If you read widely, considered yourself an outsider kid, and wished you had a telescope dome in your attic so you could stay up all night and watch the stars (and had parents and a school that didn't mind if you didn't make it to class on time, or at all), then this book will probably enchant you. Otherwise, you may want to punch it in the nose, which is a pretty reasonable option as well.

Maureen E says

I enjoyed Dean's retelling of Tam Lin quite a bit, so I decided to try another of her books. I liked it, especially the book bits, and Becky. I suppose, very much especially Becky. I was startled, though, by how little space the sort of action of the story took up. It was all very slow and philosophical—which isn't a complaint, necessarily. In general, I loved the way it was so much about friendship, and sisterhood. [March 2011]

Linda says

I found this book more annoying than anything. It was too mundane for fantasy, and too fantastic for good fiction. I certainly can't imagine recommending it to any young person that I know, nor would I consider it for most adults. Sorry. Just not my cup of tea, obviously.
