



Julián at the Wedding

Written and illustrated by Jessica Love
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“A wedding is a party for love,” states the narrator in Jessica Love’s latest picturebook, *Julián at the Wedding*, set in New York City. Afro-Latinx Julián and his cousin Marisol are participants in a family wedding. As their abuelas greet each other, one trades Marisol’s baseball cap for a flower garland and the other straightens Julián’s tie. At the

reception, the pair gets bored and wanders off to play. Marisol’s dress is ruined Julián gallantly lends her his shirt and tie while he dons her garland. When the grandmothers finally find them, they smile and watch the two play. When Marisol explains, obviously, that her dress got dirty, her grandmother merely replies, “Yes, mija but now you have wings.” The family returns to the wedding party where the brides are delighted to see them, then everyone dances together, shoes off in the grass.

The text tells a simple story, yet the author/illustrator uses watercolor on brown paper to create a warm, inviting world, one which is accepting of others’ differences. Weddings are joyous occasions yet they also require the strictest social conventions. Love cleverly nods to those conventions when she shows Marisol’s grandmother trading her baseball cap for the flower garland but on the next page, we are introduced to the brides in the wedding. This dramatic tension between social convention and living one’s most authentic life ebbs as Marisol and Julián play outside. The milk chocolate background seems to represent the conventional world whereas the bright, vibrant colors of the characters’ clothing represent joy and acceptance. As the story progresses, the watercolor brushstrokes and dots create a three-dimensional fairy world of weeping willows and lace at one point, the pair fly with newly created fairy wings. It could be a world of their imagination, yet their grandmothers see the wings too.

This book quietly celebrates acceptance, and can be read and understood by elementary students. It can be paired with Love’s previous book *Julián is a Mermaid*, a Stonewall Book Award winner as well as a Klaus Plugge Prize winner, not only for lush, vibrant illustrations but also for the portrayal of a transgender child. Julián sees beautiful women dressed as mermaids, and he wants to be a mermaid too. His grandmother helps him dress up and takes him to Coney Island’s famous Mermaid Parade. Other children’s books which celebrate gender expansive, transgender and non-binary children are *Red: A Crayon’s Story*, by Michael Hall (2015), *George*, by Alex Gino (2015), and *Gracefully Grayson*, by Ami Polonsky (2014).

This is the second book by Jessica Love, an actress and Juilliard School graduate, which stars Julián. Love spent five years writing her first book. She has stated that she was inspired by a

trans friend to write Juli n’s story, “I wanted to give kids who identify with Juli n a chance to see themselves reflected, but I also wanted kids who don’t identify with him a chance to get inside his experience and feel what it might be like” (Mombian, 2019). She has also said that she grew up with her aunt and her wife, “I never knew a world without strong, gay role models and I’ve seen the impact that has on the second generation of my family” (Flood, 2019).

References

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