



## Julián Is a Mermaid

*Jessica Love*

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**Julián Is a Mermaid** Jessica Love

**In an exuberant picture book, a glimpse of costumed mermaids leaves one boy flooded with wonder and ready to dazzle the world.**

While riding the subway home from the pool with his abuela one day, Julián notices three women spectacularly dressed up. Their hair billows in brilliant hues, their dresses end in fishtails, and their joy fills the train car. When Julián gets home, daydreaming of the magic he's seen, all he can think about is dressing up just like the ladies in his own fabulous mermaid costume: a periwinkle curtain for his tail, the fronds of a potted fern for his headdress. But what will Abuela think about the mess he makes — and even more importantly, what will she think about how Julián sees himself? Mesmerizing and full of heart, Jessica Love's author-illustrator debut is a jubilant picture of self-love and a radiant celebration of individuality.

## Julián Is a Mermaid Details

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Author : Jessica Love

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## From Reader Review Julián Is a Mermaid for online ebook

### carol. says

Julián makes me uncomfortable. I mean, the pictures are adorable and well done, and I would love to have one of him swimming with the stream of fish up in my bathroom. But every time you turn around, Julián is stripping down to his skivvies and putting on lipstick. I'm just not an *au natural* nudist kind of person, you know? But I'm not a glamour-girl either, so add lipstick, and I feel like I'm getting a very mixed message.

He seems to have confused water mermaids with land mermaids, which are two entirely different species. I'm more of the water mermaid demographic.

Julian seems to be undecided, but ultimately picks the land mermaids.

Still, it's a sweet little story, and one that should particularly resonate with those in a NYC kind of setting, where the public street is actually community space.

Drawings and message—despite not choosing the water mermaids—are fabulous. The watercolor is understated, in keeping with the watery theme, but there's lovely pops of color to draw the eye. I love the representation of the curvy, old and wrinkly. Recommended for everyone who supports mermaids.

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### Ran says

Julián and his Abuela are on the train with some mermaids. They get off at their stop while the mermaids continue onto the Coney Island Mermaid Parade. But when Abuela finds Julián pulling up her potted plants and pulling down her drapes to dress up as a mermaid, she gives her mijo a necklace to match. The two set off to join the mermaid parade down near the ocean. The art is just wonderful.

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### Whispering Stories says

Book Reviewed by Stacey on [www.whisperingstories.com](http://www.whisperingstories.com)

There's no getting away from the fact that Julian is a Mermaid is a gorgeous book filled to the brim with amazing watercolour style illustrations that capture what I believe is New York in perfect light.

The books, as you would imagine, is about a little boy called Julian. On his way home from swimming with his Nana they board a train. Onboard is three women dressed as Mermaids. Julian is mesmerised by them. They look so beautiful in their outfits that glisten and hair that swishes. He soon starts to daydream about being a mermaid and is sad when their stop arrives and he has to get off.

Once home with his Nana he decides he's going to be a mermaid too and uses items that he can find (including the curtains) to make his outfit. But what will his Nana think when she sees him?

Now, I've heard a lot of people talk about this being a great book for 'Pride Month' or for the LGBTQ community because Julian dresses up as a mermaid. Whilst I don't disagree with these views, I also feel that it shouldn't just be placed in this category.

Whether being the mother of three boys or being in the UK is the reason I feel differently I'm not sure. What I see is a little boy who just got dressed up like a mermaid. My lads when they were little dressed up as all kinds of people, creatures, characters. Both male, female and robotic.

I feel the book is more to do with the way his Nana reacts to seeing Julian dressed as a mermaid and what she then does about it. It is also about Julian being able to dress as he wishes without people thinking he's strange or telling him he can't be dressed like that because he's a boy. I also feel it is about family and the bond between a grandmother and her Grandson. Different generations.

It's about inclusion and acceptance and also about being yourself. As I have stated it is a wonderful book that I truly enjoyed. There aren't many words to the story, as the pictures tell the majority of it. It is a wonderful book that can be interpreted however you wish to interpret it – that's the beauty of picture books.

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## **Betsy says**

When you walk into another person's home, there's always a distinct smell to the place. Homes absorb the lives of their occupants, and the end result is as much an olfactory experience a visual one. I love it when a friend moves house because when I walk into their new home it smells just like their previous place of occupancy, with just a twinge of difference. It is this experience of walking into a house and being overwhelmed by the sense of the place that I hope for in my picture books. When I enter a character's house I want to almost be able to smell the shampoo in the carpet or the faint aroma of dinner from the night before. Imbuing a book with that kind of realism is beyond difficult, though. You cannot require an illustrator to be able to capture the intangible in their art. That's why I bide my time and wait. And wait. And wait. And then one day, my waiting is rewarded. A book like *Julián Is a Mermaid* comes along and there. I can smell the apartment that Julián shares with his abuela. I'm there because Jessica Love has been granted a very remarkable gift. She can make paint reflect reality. Even when it's a reality that some people refuse to see.

Coming home from the pool with his abuela one day, Julián's subway car is suddenly boarded by three beautiful mermaids. Their gowns flow like tails, their hair moving like it's caught the ocean currents, and everything about them is simply wonderful. In short order Julián begins to imagine himself as a mermaid and when he gets home he starts his own transformation. While abuela showers he turns plant fronds into hair, lacey curtains into a tail, and on his lips goes some lipstick. Caught by his grandmother he's unsure of how to feel. That is, until she leads him by the hand to the Coney Island Mermaid Parade. They join the throng and Julián knows he belongs. With minimal language and an abundance of love, the author/illustrator gives everyone with a mermaid inside of them a tale of sweet, near speechless belonging.

When children's books break taboos it's usually done in fits and starts. A book here, a book there. In this case we're talking about picture books where boys identify with nonconforming ideals of gender identity and beauty. Over the years we've seen this tackled in a number of different ways. There's been *Sparkle Boy* by Leslea Newman, *I Love My Purse* by Belle DeMont, *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* by Christine Baldacchino, *Jacob's New Dress* by Sarah Hoffman, *Big Bob, Little Bob* by James Howe, *10,000 Dresses* by Marcus Ewert, and (of course) *William's Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow. [No word yet on when we'll get this many similar titles for girls, but that's a debate for another day] These books vary considerably in quality from title to title, but they all offer a challenge to society's demand that boys look and act in a very specific way, and woe betide you if you're different. The funny this is that even though *Julián Is a Mermaid* is just the latest in a long line, it feels to me like this is the one I've been waiting for all these years. These other books have specific messages, just like *Julián*, but unlike those books Julián's story is more than just figuring out who you are. It's about realizing that you aren't alone and that there's a great big welcoming community out there, if only you can find it. And sometimes, just sometimes, it's just been around the corner from you all along. If those other books laid the groundwork, Julián is taking the message to the next level. It's like Stephen Sondheim said. "No one is alone."

A picture book is a conversation between pictures and words. Unless it's wordless, of course. Then all bets are off the table. In this book, Love works with watercolor, gouache, and ink, and for her story to work much of the action must feel weightless. In a bit of inspiration Love lets us into Julián's head pretty early on, allowing us to see him and he sees himself in wordless sequences that require no explanation. Interestingly the pictures appear to have been painted on brown paper, which was such an interesting choice. Of course, I got all kinds of distracted by the details Love has hidden along the way. In an early dream sequence, Julián imagines himself receiving a necklace from a large blue fish with white patterned scales. Later in the book, when his grandmother hands him his own necklace, she is wearing a dress made of the same pattern. Now look at the front and back endpapers. At the beginning we see Julián swimming beneath his abuela and her friends in the local pool. At the end of the book he's reimagined them all as mermaids and the blue of the water, which was confined to the pool edges at the story's start, has spilled over to fill the entire page.

And then there are the people. My favorite image in the book isn't Julián in his mermaid dream sequence (though it is pretty good). It's not the Mermaid Parade itself or the old ladies in the pool. It's a simpler spread than all of those. Julián is dressed in his mermaid costume, walking down the street with Abuela, holding onto her arm. He asks "Where are we going?" and is about to pass an old man with high socks walking two wiener dogs and two young women, leaning on a brick wall, sipping something cool, mighty cool themselves. The first time I read this book I just stared at this sequence. Every single person in this picture is a real person. If you followed that old man you'd get to see exactly what his life is like. If you stayed with the girls you'd get wrapped up in the fun and confusion of their world. When Jessica Love illustrates a human being, her brush has weight. That person has life. Abuela herself has seen things. Things that have taught her that life is too short not to allow her grandson to grow to be the person he was meant to be. I think she knows exactly all the problems he may face later in life but on this day she's going to give him something he can hold onto for a long long time. Something that will be able to sustain him as he grows up. She's giving him his people. "Like you, mijo", she says. "Let's join them."

I worked in New York City as a children's librarian for eleven years, and now think I'll live in the Midwest for, what I suppose will be, the rest of my life. This means I have a superpower. I am capable of reading a book both as a New Yorker, and as a Midwesterner. You have no idea how useful this power is. Things that I would have taken for granted in one part of the country can be seen as potentially baffling in another. Which brings us to the end of this book. Now I lived in New York long enough to be fully aware of the Mermaid Parade of Coney Island. It takes place once a year to welcome in the summer season. People of all stripes get decked out as mermaids or sea creatures or Neptunes and then parade down the wooden boardwalk, right before throwing fruit into the sea. Honestly, if you want to know anything about it you should read Melanie Hope Greenberg's seminal picture book *Mermaids On Parade*. But I think it's easy for people to forget that not everyone knows about this event. When I showed this book to a colleague they interpreted the ending

differently than I did. For them, the finale was far more metaphor than reality. The boy's abuela has taken him to the people that will understand and accept him so that he can discover himself fully. The fact that there is an actual parade out there with actual mermaids is almost superfluous in that light. Nice to see that the book works on multiple levels then.

I read so many picture books in a given week that they all have a tendency to run together in my brain. Maybe that's why I'm so grateful when something stands out like *Julián Is a Mermaid*. Not simply because of its subject matter. I mean, I think I've shown that this is a road that has been well trod. What stands out here is the art, the characters, and the deeply felt emotions. That moment when Julián has been caught by his grandmother and she leaves him to get dressed is one of the most highly charged instances I've seen of someone waiting to find out whether or not what they feel (and, for that matter, who they are) is going to be embraced or denied. There is nothing about this book that is forgettable. In fact, you may have a hard time not thinking long and hard about it after you put it down. A book for mermaids and boys and girls and parents and teachers and booksellers and librarians and . . . aw, heck. Let's just simplify things and say it's a book for the human race. Lord knows there are some people out there that will need it. Let's hope it finds the ones that need it most.

For ages 4 and up.

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### **Donalyn says**

Gorgeous illustrations and a beautiful message of acceptance and being true to yourself. I think this book should wind up on a lot of Caldecott prediction lists this year.

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### **Danika at The Lesbrary says**

This may be my favourite picture book that I've ever read. The illustrations are absolutely gorgeous. The expressions say so much by themselves. And Julián's abuela's unquestioning acceptance and affirmation makes me want to cry.

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### **David Schaafsma says**

Each year my family reads all the Goodreads-award-nominated picture books, and we have been doing this for years. Everyone rates each book and adds a comment and it may (or may not) affect my overall rating. This is book #1 of 2018, and is one of my favorites of the year, but that view isn't widely shared with the fam.

Tara: 3 stars. Eh. Cute, but who are all the people at the end? Some festival?

Harry (13): 3.5 stars. I like the pictures.

Hank (12): 3.5stars. I like how he got to see the world of the mermaids.

Lyra (11): 4 stars. I like how he BECAME a mermaid. I like the drawings.

Jenn (family friend): 4 stars. I love the gorgeous painted illustrations and all the details. And I appreciate this story of a grandmother's acknowledgement and acceptance.

Dave: 5 stars. A kind of allegory, maybe in part about gender choices, but not necessarily so, which I like. Julian goes swimming at the Y with his Abuela every Saturday. One day on the subway they see three women dressed as mermaids. Julian is intrigued, goes home, makes up a costume so he could dress up as one. Abuela walks in to see him; that moment--the adult seeing the boy "dress up as a woman"---what do you do? What does Abuela do? She helps him accessorize! She lends him her pearls and takes him to the ocean where there seem to me many colorfully-dressed mermaids and lots of otherwise colorfully-dressed and happy people. Julian's people! That's what you do, as an adult, you help a kid find who he wants to be, not just what you want him or her to be! Lovely watercolor (or is it chalk?) illustrations.

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### **Fabian says**

Beautiful book in every aspect!

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### **Christine says**

I had not yet reviewed this fabulous children's book, which I read in June 2018, other than to rate it a fantastic five stars. However, I recently read a review by a goodreads acquaintance, that seems to have completely missed the point of the book, viewing little Julián as "disturbing." This upset me. We live in a troubling world, and I live in the current Trump Bigotocracy. I stand for equality for ALL. Period. No exceptions, no caveats. I wish that many of my friends and acquaintances, both online and in person, who voice their beliefs about equality, would follow through on that claim. This includes equality for all children, including the right of a child to express herself or himself. As an educator with real life experience of this issue, I can say that yes, for example, it can be difficult to balance the needs of that one little kindergarten boy in a tutu, against the concerns of "certain" parents of the other kiddos. However, it CAN be done with love and diplomacy and patience: and the help of an AMAZING school guidance counselor. As the parent of a transgender teen, I also have years of experience with my own child's need to express himself howEVER he chooses.

Wearing both of those hats, I will acknowledge that this book is certainly meant to be funny, cute, joyous, silly, and full of self-expression. I will also point out, though, because I'm up on my soap-box now, that the author clearly has an underlying message that any kind of self-expression should be supported, REGARDLESS OF THE CHILD'S GENDER. IE: this book is NOT about mermaids; this book is about Julián. Below is my reply to my goodreads acquaintance's review, which can now serve as my basic review:

"I love Julián, and recommend this book to anyone who supports \*kids\* at all. As an educator who feels strongly that kids should always be allowed to express themselves, and as a parent of a transgender kid, I read a different message in this book: I think it's possible that, without using terms like "gender diversity" or "gender expression," the author is gently, joyously, and humorously supporting the right of a child to express himself any way he chooses. And yes, it's silly to see him outdoors in his undies, but to me it was more important to see his supportive grandmother, sharing her lipstick, loving him just as he is. The book blurb ends by describing this story as 'a jubilant picture of self love and a radiant celebration of individuality.' I think that says it all. :)"

I normally do not become this impassioned about my deepest personal views, on goodreads, nor do I "rant."

This is the first time I have "publicly" said here that I'm the parent of a transgender kid. I fully expect that I'll have lost a dozen or more goodreads friends by tomorrow, because, sadly, I have a lot of experience with bigotry related to this topic. That's fine. However, I also fully expect to receive some positive comments to this review, because I KNOW that most readers are open-minded people, who are interested in views beyond their own, and read especially to explore the wider world. I encourage you to read Julián is a Mermaid. I encourage you to let your child read it. If you're the parent of a transgender or gender-diverse kid, I wholeheartedly recommend this book. Happy Reading!!

\* edited for typos and layout issue, 8/18/18

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### **Miriam says**

Really nice. Great illustrations.

Parent caveat: your kids will probably feel like making costumes out of household items after reading this. Keep an eye on the drapes.

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### **Jamila says**

This is one of the most beautiful picture books I have ever read. It is affirming and joyful. It is pretty and awe-inspiring. It is quiet and loud. It has movement and is loving. It is Black and Latinx and New York and Queer and intergenerational and wonderful. It is also funny and heartfelt. Enjoy!

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### **Beth says**

Prediction: 2019 Caldecott winner

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### **Monica Edinger says**

What Betsy said. <http://blogs.slj.com/afuse8production...> (Can't imagine anything beating this for the 2019 Caldecott.)

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### **Calista says**

Unconditional Love within. Julian feels like a mermaid so his abuela takes him to a place to be around other mermaids.

I do love the art and the simple story of wanting to be who you are. This is so much fun and has the energy of Carnival to it.

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The kids had fun with this book.

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**Kai says**

this is the most wholesome book I've read all year

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