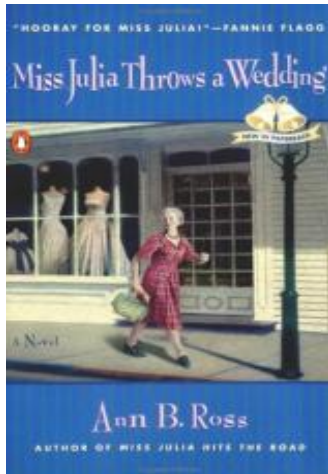


Miss Julia Throws a Wedding

by Ann B. Ross



About the Book

Whether this is your first introduction to Julia Springer or she's already a familiar acquaintance, you're in for a treat. Miss Julia, as she is known to friends and family, is a well-to-do Southern woman of a certain age whose life took an unexpected turn when she found her husband, Wesley Lloyd Springer, slumped over the steering wheel of his new Buick Park Avenue, dead as a doornail. Although during her long marriage, Julia had taken pride in supporting her husband, keeping a perfect house, and attending church whenever the doors opened, she quickly learns that her comfortable, though unexciting, life had been built upon an illusion. Wesley Lloyd had not been just a good provider, he had also been a sharp businessman who, to Julia's amazement, owned half of the county. Furthermore, he had not been the unassailable church elder who demanded of himself and others a rigid adherence to the rules; he had led a secret life that is revealed when Hazel Marie Puckett and a nine-year-old boy who is the spitting image of Wesley Lloyd show up on Julia's front porch.

Stunned though she is, and humiliated that many including her pastor had known or suspected what had been going on, Julia determines to hold her head up high, face down the gossips, and publicly show what real Christian charity is, even if it kills her. She takes Hazel Marie and Little Lloyd into her home for all the wrong reasons, but gradually comes to value them for who they are themselves.

When we meet Miss Julia in Ann B. Ross's third novel, she is despairing over the fact that Hazel Marie is preparing to move in with J. D. Pickens, P.I., without the benefit of marriage. To make matters worse, her tenant, Deputy Coleman Bates, and her lawyer, Binkie Enloe, have been carrying on for some time now with no legalization of their relationship in sight.

Julia is, therefore overjoyed when Binkie and Coleman announce that they're going to run down to the courthouse next weekend and finally tie the knot that, to Julia's way of thinking, has been left dangling for too long. But she can't permit such a hurried and unblessed event to take place without more fanfare. They must have a real wedding in her home so

they will have memories to look back on and pictures for their photograph album.

Julia's determination, energy, and out-and-out bossiness are brought into clear relief as she plans Binkie's wedding. From a reluctant (and pregnant) bride and a no-show pastor, to a crowd-drawing miracle that appears at the Presbyterian Church across the street from her house, Julia bounces from catastrophe to catastrophe, fixing matters on the fly and learning important life lessons each step of the way. Miss Julia grows a little smarter every time she comes into contact with people and situations that don't fit into her view of How Things Should Be Done. Whether she's trying on the form-fitting dress Binkie has chosen for her to wear to the wedding or convincing herself that her non-English-speaking gardener, Ramon (whom she calls Raymond), understands everything she says to him, Julia is perched precariously between the world of the enlightened and the sheltered. It is to her great credit (as well as to Ross's) that Julia manages to accept, if not condone, the actions of those who think differently from her. She also discovers the joys of generosity and tolerance, allowing Little Lloyd to take over the management of the trailer park she owns; accepting, even embracing, the African American minister who fills in at the last minute; and inviting a crowd of strangers into her home to take part in the wedding feast.

Miss Julia may have come a long way since her husband's death, but she still has a lot to learn. She remains vulnerable to the cloying righteousness of Pastor Leadbetter and his irritating wife; she is willfully ignorant of the plight of many of those who are less fortunate than she; and she's still trying to come to terms with her amorous feelings for Sam Murdoch, the only person in their small town who seems to know how to handle her. Even though she's no spring chicken, Julia Springer continues to grow emotionally and spiritually with each novel. That's no small feat for an old-fashioned widow living in small town America, especially one as proud as Miss Julia. Where her next adventure will take her, we can only guess, but there's no doubt she'll emerge smarter, sassier, and more likable than ever.

Discussion Guide

1. Pastor Petree is reluctant to marry Binkie and Coleman without first counseling the couple about marriage. Do you, along with Miss Julia, agree that the young pastor has no business passing judgment as to whether the marriage is "within God's will" or do you think that, as a religious authority, the Pastor is a de facto representative of what constitutes a worthy marriage in the eyes of God and the church?
2. Miss Julia tells Binkie, "A bride deserves a big church wedding, a dress with a long train and bridesmaids and flowers and all your friends celebrating with you. Queen for a day" (p.11). Do you agree? If you are married, compare your wedding day with the one Miss Julia evokes in this passage. What is the down side of being "Queen for a day"?
3. "As far as I was concerned," thinks Miss Julia, "a wedding was supposed to be a ceremonial rite of tradition and high intent. But most of all, it was supposed to be a sedate and formal act, conducted with the utmost seriousness." How does the wedding that does eventually take place differ from this description? Was Miss Julia more help or hindrance in planning the event? Would Binkie and Coleman have been as happy with the small, civil ceremony they had originally planned?
4. How does Ann B. Ross make Little Lloyd's character come to life? Judging from his words and actions in this novel, what kind of adult do you think he'll grow up to be?

5. Ross pokes fun at "prayer chains" in the novel. How does Emma Sue's proclivity for these kinds of groups contradict the idea of prayer itself? If you've ever taken part in a prayer circle, how has your experience been similar to or different from the kind held by Emma Sue?
6. "I declare," says Julia to her friend and sometime beau, Sam, "You are so blessed tolerant that you're going to wake up one morning and find that you don't stand for anything" (p. 95). This is a lighthearted poke at a complaint many people have against liberals. Do you know anyone so tolerant that they don't stand for anything? What's the difference between tolerance and apathy?
7. Does Sam come off as being wishy-washy when it comes to Miss Julia? Do you think they make a good romantic match?
8. Do you agree with Sam when he says, "More lives have been ruined by getting married than by not getting married"? Or do you agree with Miss Julia that Binkie's pregnancy is reason enough to get married, even if neither the bride or groom are certain that marriage is right for them?
9. Before she finally agrees to the wedding, Binkie gives all sorts of reasons for not getting married, including that her life is fine just the way it is. Do you think her reasons were at all valid? Did you ever think that she might decide not to marry Coleman after all?
10. Julia never admits to seeing the image of the Virgin Mary on the wall of the church's new building. Is she the kind of woman to believe in such miracles? How important is it to figure out what really caused the image to appear?
11. How does Ann B. Ross use the apparition on the side of the church's community center to tie together the novel's various stories?

Author Bio

Ann B. Ross holds a doctorate in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and has taught literature at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She is the author of fifteen previous novels featuring the popular southern heroine Miss Julia, as well as *ETTA MAE'S WORST BAD-LUCK DAY*, a novel about one of Abbotsville's other most outspoken residents: Etta Mae Wiggins. Ann Ross lives in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

Photo Credit: Sarah Sneeden

Critical Praise

"The third Miss Julia is just as fun as the first two.... You can count on Miss Julia to conquer adversity, one way or another, and you can count on thoroughly enjoying yourself while you read how she does it."

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