

A Day in June by Marisa Labozzetta. Toronto and Tonawanda (NY): Guernica Editions and Marisa Labozzetta, 2019. 271 pp.

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The world of fiction urges readers to suspend their disbelief, but this timely novel by Marisa Labozzetta requires no such effort. The events that take place in *A Day in June* are played out by a cast of well-developed contemporary characters, who engage the reader in a philosophical look at how the difficult choices of two individuals come to impact the lives of many others.

The story begins on a January day, when paralegal and would-be writer Ryan Toscano enters a contest for a free wedding, offered by the merchants of Brackton, Vermont. Although her fiancé Jason McDermott has decided to back out of their engagement to join the seminary, Ryan enters the contest in a broken-hearted fantasy. Although she does not expect to be in the running, her entry is actually chosen as the winner.

The lottery is set up by the Chamber of Commerce's Eric Boulanger, a photographer who has returned to Brackton to care for his ailing mother, in an attempt to boost local tourism. If the events of the six months leading up to the June wedding seem predictable at times, what shines in this story is its characters, whose banter highlights the novel's self-reflective undertone.

Labozzetta's winning turn is her depiction of its characters, who actively tease out notions of identity, religion, gender, and age. This effort is especially evident in the interactions of the Chamber members, whom readers come to know as distinct personalities, in not-so-subtle dialogues that beg assumptions and biases—a kind of Greek chorus for newer millennial times. Learning that the names of the selected duo are Ryan and Jason, the committee members bicker aloud about the impact of a presumably gay couple as the contest winners.

““Their first names are both males, so we are just assuming,” Eric says. ‘Actually, we’re thinking trans—he was a flower girl when he

was little.’ ‘Oh my God!’ The mechanic bellows

‘Isn’t that stretching it a bit, Eric?’ the baker asks. ‘I vote we find another couple.’ The mechanic is adamant ‘This is supposed to bring business to Brackton, Eric. What the hell are you doin’, turnin’ this place into Provincetown?’” (p.19).

When Ryan arrives for an initial interview with the Chamber committee, joined by her lesbian roommate, Tiffany, the townspeople are relieved to learn that she is indeed a woman, and her roommate, while gay, is not her supposed fiancé. Ryan knowingly continues her deception, in hopes that Jason will reappear in her life.

Throughout the novel, Ryan makes nostalgic references to her upbringing with both Catholic and Jewish grandparents. While visiting her eighty-seven-year-old Jewish grandmother in a nursing home, she confides in her outspoken elder, who tells Ryan to forget Jason, stay in the contest, and find another fiancé.

“Look, do yourself a favor. Go on the Internet. That’s what all the young girls who work here do. You have a computer. There’s this JDate for Jews. It can’t hurt. I used to tell your mother, ‘Would you just try it?’ about dating a Jewish boy, and she would turn her nose up as though I were offering her gefilte fish that had been sitting in the refrigerator from two Passovers ago. She was like you—always with the gentiles. Always contrary” (p. 45).

Ryan’s contrariness leads her to defer, unsure if Jason will change his mind, and whether she wants him to. When he does return, on a leave from the seminary, a series of plot twists allow other characters to take center stage before the novel gets back to resolving its overriding question: Will the couple resume their engagement? As if to underscore the urgency of this question, each chapter is dated, and the element of time passing enhances the plot. Ryan needs to let the committee—and the reader—know of her own true intent. But first, she must determine if she can reconcile her relationship with Jason’s dedication to a faith she does not fully understand, and is reluctant to challenge.

Labozzetta’s own dedication is directed at allowing her protagonist

agency, despite the pressure of outside forces. The author's attention to this and other issues of our era is provocative, even if the reader may sometimes seek more lingering deliberation of questions raised by the characters' actions or words. Among her earlier works, including *Thieves Never Steal in the Rain* and *At the Copa*, Labozzetta's descriptive talents are well-recognized for developing memorable characters who speak to the reader with strong voices and intent. She continues that tradition in *A Day in June*.

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