



George the Gay Lion

Paul Waring

Camilla Ring, Illustrator

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A lion creates a "gay pride" in this vividly illustrated and uplifting story.

For those who recognize the lack of LGBT-themed picture books in the market, *George the Gay Lion* will be welcomed with utter joy. The gorgeously rendered illustrations pair with the emotive language of the text to create a heartwarming story of one young lion's drive to be himself, despite the pressure from his father, the king. *George the Gay Lion* succeeds in offering an engaging, inspiring tale of hope.

The rhythm of the prose is absorbing, especially as the story becomes more involved, though the rhyme scheme is occasionally inconsistent, particularly in the first couple of pages. One line takes a moment to make sense: "George, you must forget this slip," which does not obviously demonstrate the meaning that George's father is ordering him to forget that he let his homosexuality "slip" to the public. In general, however, the language is effective, even evocative; for example: "As George wandered and traveled far, / His father pondered the loss of his star. / He couldn't believe what he had done, / His heart truly ached for his only son." Author Paul Waring does a wonderful job of emotionally connecting with the audience via active language and imaginative turns of phrase, such as, "He stumbled to his room elated, / Packed his trunk, all fears abated."

Similarly, Camilla Ring's illustrations are emotionally expressive and drawn with great skill and rich, atmospheric color. George's big heart is evident in his face; his friends' initial perplexity and eventual joy is revealed through their bobbling eyes and open mouths; and George's father's despondence, regret, and, finally, acceptance is evoked through small details, such as his physical placement on the page—away from the crowd when contemplating the loss of his son—the removal of his crown, and a subtle rain cloud parting to reveal a shining sun. This is just as much George's father's story as it is George's; his father's emotional journey from denial through regret to eventual understanding provides a perspective that offers insight to children as to why parents or other children are hesitant to accept nonconformists.

While the ending is rather abrupt, and a definition of "gay" is never provided—leaving parents to answer their children's questions—*George the Gay Lion* will make an enjoyable read for children unsure how to react to an older sibling or friend coming out, or for those in need of a narrative that offers hope and reconciliation for both the protagonist and the antagonist.

AIMEE JODOIN (November 20, 2014)

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