

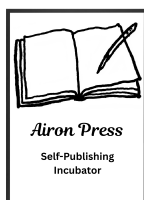
JULIA



J. P. SAN

Julia

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Airon Press

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Be Kind.

About the author

J.P. San, also known as Jimmy, is an American novelist known for weaving suspense, drama, and a touch of the surreal. From a young age, he was deeply attuned to the spiritual world, receiving a profound vision through his grandparents' intercession. This sparked his lifelong journey as a dreamer, seeking hope and guidance through divine signs. Drawing inspiration from everyday moments and human complexities, Jimmy creates emotionally resonant narratives. Outside of writing, he enjoys hiking, coffee, and exploring new places. He currently lives with his family in Rockville, Maryland, USA.



Jimmy San

Foreword

My dear readers,

I am Telel. Some of you have met me before, in other rooms, at other tables. You will not find me at a distance in this one. I am in it from the first page, and I have my reasons, and I am not certain they are good ones.

You will want to know early whether this ends well. Mortals always do. You will start hunting for the moment somebody comes through a door and puts a stop to it, and when you find that moment you will want to hang the whole story on it. Don't. I have filed ten thousand accounts of a child in a locked house, and I can tell you the door is never the point.

Watch this instead: a girl kneeling on splintered boards, saying the same words in the same language into what she is certain is an empty room. Watch what she does when nothing answers. That is the story. Everything else is weather.

I should say one more thing. There were sentences I was not permitted to speak, and there is a night in these pages I did not

attend, and something walked through it that does not report to me. I have made inquiries. I am still waiting.

Professor San has set it down as I gave it to him. Read carefully. She is easy to underestimate, and everyone who came after did.

Now come in. The window is cold, and she is already sitting at it.

—Telel

Julia

The cool night air of Lima came through the cracks around the window frame. Julia had not lit a lamp. She sat with her face close to the glass, eleven years old, the days behind her stacked into something that felt to her like an eternity.

None of us has felt eternity. Not Ikart. Not I. Not Jehovah, who has ended the world and built it again more times than he has told anyone. Only Essence could use the word and mean it, and Essence had already chosen her.

I was not at that window. I cannot be everywhere; that was never given to me. What I have of that night came into me the way all of it comes, by nearness, afterward. I was not given the choosing of which parts.

What reached me of her delighted me, the way my Bubbe once had. Bubbe had soup and a spoon. Julia had grit.

I begin with Julia at this window because it is where she always is when I go back for her. One thick lock of dark hair had fallen loose from its braid and hung over her left eye. She never pushed it back. A half-hidden face draws less attention than a whole one, and she had known that a long time.

She was not frightened, and she was not grieving. *I want to be exact about this, because everyone who came after got it wrong.* She was angry, and she was patient, and at eleven she had already learned that those two things could live in one body without either being compromised.



The eighteenth-century house belonged to Señora Viento. All beds were made before noon. The china dusted on Sundays. Meals prepared her way precisely on schedule. No one ate until she was seated.

The arrangement had been made in February, in the doorway of her father's dirt-floor kitchen in Soto Pampa, by a Limeño, a city man in a clean shirt and polished boots, carrying a folder.

Soto Pampa sat three hours above Uranmarca, nineteen households perched on a shelf of rock, built out of whatever the ridge gave them. The Limeño had walked up from the town below, which impressed everyone. He wore boots. Everyone else in Soto Pampa wore ojotas. He preferred to speak Castellano, but spoke broken Quechua for their sake. He spoke of wages sent home each month. Of girls Julia's age living under the same roof. Of a school six blocks from the door, uniform included.

Her father made him repeat the part about the school in Quechua. He repeated it twice, patiently, and then a third time without being asked, which her father took for honesty.

Julio Quispe was not a man who sold his daughter, and I will not have him read as one. He was a widower with a bad hip, a failing

plot, and a mother-in-law who could no longer climb to the water. He stood in that doorway and was worked on for two hours by a professional.

He asked the right questions. He got the right answers.

This is what corruption looks like when it is done well: nobody is bought, everybody is handled, and the man who agrees is the last person in the room who understands what has happened.

There was no school. There were girls her age. They worked other rooms and other hours, and Julia did not speak to them, except when the work required it. She saw them in the evening line and nowhere else.

Her wages went home for four months and stopped, and no one in Lima was ever asked about it. The only man who noticed was three hours above Uranmarca.

In her first weeks in Señora Viento's service, the Spanish orders came at Julia like bad weather, something that happened around her and to her and offered no handles.

By July, she understood most of what was said to her. By the second summer, she could have answered in Spanish and chose not to. She had worked out that a servant who spoke well was a servant who could be argued with, and an argument was a thing you lost slowly and paid for afterward.

So she kept her Spanish small and her Quechua private and let Señora Viento believe she was simple.

It cost her nothing.

She turned eleven in December. Nobody said anything, and she did not either, and by the following week she was no longer certain of the date.

Her brother Elias was somewhere in this same city. He had come down eight months ahead of her to find work in the tanneries, and he did not know the man with the folder had come to the door, and he did not know she had gone. She held on to the fact of him. Everything else she knew was about the house.

Señora Viento's son Guillermo came and went by the back door at any hour and nobody asked him where. There was mud to the ankle of him most nights and more of it on the floors, and the china was dusted on Sundays and nothing was ever said about the floors, and Julia did them again. She learned the sound of that door the way she learned the boards. It was the only door in the house that was never locked.

The beatings were not events. They were a feature of the evening, like the shutters.

Ten workers lined up for inspection. Shopping, laundry, dishes, windows, the managers. Julia did the floors and the beds and the dusting and saw none of them until the line formed. A large man stood nearby with a switch and leather lash while Señora Viento watched from her lounging chair.

The absence of heat was the part Julia never got used to.

Anger she could have understood.

This was bookkeeping.



The letter came in January. Señora Viento read it at the table with her coffee, did not put it down, and did not hand it over.

"Your grandmother is dead. In November." She folded the paper along its old creases and put it in her skirt pocket. "The parish sent it here."

Julia asked for the letter. She asked in Spanish, which she almost never did, and Señora Viento looked at her with mild interest, as one looks at a dog that has done something novel, and said no.

Then she said the other thing. She said it without cruelty, in the tone of a woman passing on a small sadness, which is how she said everything that mattered.

"Your father knew what the work was. He knew before he signed. They always know." She drank her coffee. "So you see there is nowhere for you to go."

That was a lie, and she told it in January, and it did more damage than every blow she ever landed. Julio Quispe was alive in Soto Pampa with a bad hip and a picture of his daughter and no idea what had been done to her. He had letters written for him and sent to the address he had been given. Four letters. The address was a printing shop on Avenida Grau that had closed before Julia was born.

I could have told her. I want that on the record, since I am the one keeping it. I have stood in that kitchen thousands of times and never once been permitted to say the sentence that would have ended it.

After January, Julia stopped saying the word papá. Not out of anger. She simply had nowhere to put it.