

## Interview with Jasmine Guillory

[00:00:09] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim half the bookshelf by discussing books by or about women. And today I am talking to Jasmine Guillory, the author of PARTY OF TWO, which is out now from Berkeley. You can find a full transcript of this episode by checking out our show notes or on [readingwomenpodcast.com](http://readingwomenpodcast.com). And make sure you're subscribed, so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:34] **Kendra** Now, as many of you all know—if you follow my social media—I love Jasmine Guillory's books. I read her first book, THE WEDDING DATE, and have read every book since then. I love the audiobooks. And I love the way that her books are just so joyful, and they celebrate these Black women who are finding love, but also, you know, doing great in their careers. Even though, you know, they have challenges, and they overcome those challenges. And these books just are so encouraging, especially right now with everything that's going on. And so, I was so delighted to talk to her. You know, you would think after interviewing authors now for several years that I would be able to keep my fangirling to a minimum and not have that anxious, like fluttery feeling every time that I talk to an author. But I still do. And definitely for Jasmine Guillory. She was such a delight to talk to.

[00:01:29] **Kendra** And I love learning more about romance novels. I am very new to romance novels. So I also talked to Bree Hill, who is our romance specialist. I think she's like our romance correspondent. And she focuses a lot on her experience being a Black woman reading romance and not often seeing herself in romance and promoting, you know, diverse books in the romance genre. And so I talked to her about this. And so she sent over some questions. And, you know, we talked about the book a little bit and just basically gushed over how much we loved Jasmine Guillory and the food in the books, of course. It's very important. So many thanks to Bree. I will include all of Bree's links in the show notes. Definitely go follow her if you don't already. She does an amazing job. And when I am looking for a romance title, she is the person that I go to. She also has an amazing YouTube channel, and I am just in awe of her editing every time I watch them. So definitely go check those out.

[00:02:27] **Kendra** So a little bit about Jasmine Guillory before I start talking to her. She is a New York Times bestselling author of five romance novels, including THE WEDDING DATE and THE PROPOSAL, which we talk about in the interview. And her work has appeared in "O, The Oprah Magazine," "Real Simple," and "The Cosmopolitan." And she lives in Oakland, California, which is also where a lot of her books are set. So without further ado, here is my conversation with the wonderful Jasmine Guillory.

[00:03:00] **Kendra** Jasmine, I'm so excited to talk to you on the podcast today.

[00:03:05] **Jasmine** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:03:07] **Kendra** So we were just talking, before we started recording, about how your book has come out. What has that been like, publishing a book during a pandemic?

[00:03:15] **Jasmine** You know, it's weird. Definitely different. I mean, the hardest thing I think is not being able to celebrate in person with my friends and family and stuff or being able to talk to readers. I really value the conversations that I've been able to have with readers over the past few years at bookstores. But I think it's also helpful. . . . It's nice to

see people being excited about a book and finding ways to celebrate even in the midst of all of this, you know. It's kind of heartwarming to see the ways that we're all figuring out our way through this pandemic.

[00:03:54] **Kendra** Yeah. You know, I think that's just so true. You know, when I pick up one of your books, I know that it's going to be this joyful, lightning reading experience filled with food. And, you know, that's just what we need right now.

[00:04:10] **Jasmine** Well, I'm glad. I'm glad. I hope it brings people some joy in the midst of all of this.

[00:04:14] **Kendra** Yeah. So before we get started, I wanted to just ask you some general questions about becoming a romance author. Our contributor Bree Hill specializes in romance, and she focuses a lot on representation of Black women in romance. So she sent some questions. So many thanks to Bree for that. So her first question that she had is, before you started being a romance writer, you had a totally different career. So what were you doing and how did you come about to become a romance author writing these amazing stories?

[00:04:46] **Jasmine** So I was lawyer. I don't want to put that in the past tense. I am still a lawyer. I feel like once you're a lawyer, you never give that up. But I am currently not practicing anymore. But for a while, I was both practicing as a lawyer and actively writing. And, you know, I started writing mostly because I needed some other creative outlet other than my job. I needed something to come home and, like, take a break from the world. I'd been out of school for a while, and I think I missed the process of learning something new. So that's when I started writing. When I first started writing, it wasn't adult romance. The first thing that I wrote, which was not published, was young adult romance, which I still love. And I still love reading young adult books. And then, you know, it took a few years. I was reading a bunch of romance, but I wasn't really sure if I wanted to write it. And then once I started . . . I was reading a lot of historical romance, which I love. I didn't think I could write it in my voice to really translate. And then I started reading more contemporary romance, and I was like, oh, this would be so much fun to write. So then I just sort of dove in and started writing. And I just loved the process and loved writing it and loved reading it. And so that's kind of how that all happened.

[00:06:09] **Kendra** I really love stories about writers discovering their passion. You know, they have this career and then all of a sudden, they discover writing. And they find this joy in writing. And so I always love those stories. Another question that Bree had is she focuses a lot of her work on representation of Black women in romance. And so, you know, she has talked a lot about her experience of first seeing herself in romance novels and how important that was to her. So she asks, when was the first time that you saw yourself as a Black woman in a romance novel? And what was that like for you?

[00:06:47] **Jasmine** I think the first romance novel by a Black woman I read was a book by Beverly Jenkins, whose books I adore. And that was because I was reading a lot of historical romance. And so I started reading her books, and I just loved them. And so that was really revolutionary for me. And it was just wonderful to read and see the wonderful, positive representation of Black women in those books. And then I started looking for and finding more contemporary romances by Black women. And so that was really wonderful as well. And so, you know, so much in society portrays Black women in such a different, kind of terrible way and not the way that I see myself or that I see other Black women I

know. And so it was wonderful to dive into a world of romance novels where I see women being portrayed as the romantic and strong and accomplished women that we really are.

[00:07:52] **Kendra** Yeah, and I really love that about your heroines, is that they are all so different. And they're all very vibrant characters, and they all do a wide range of different things. And you can definitely see that passion for romance novels and having Black women as heroines in your novels. And that's one of the reasons why I love them. You have women from all different kinds of age groups and backgrounds. Like, I read ROYAL HOLIDAY and PARTY OF TWO back to back because I was just like, Okay, I'm just going through these. And I really love how you go from one love story where it's this woman who has been, you know, a Black woman who's a single mom. And she's done that thing. And now her child has grown and found love in the previous book. And then she finds love, you know, in her like 50s. And it brings so much joy in that. And the last question that Bree sent over was about that joy, was about how during this really difficult time with everything going on, your books celebrate Black joy and these women's experiences like that. So for you, could you talk a little bit about why it's so important to illustrate joy in books and why all of that is really important to you?

[00:09:10] **Jasmine** Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, it has been a hard few years to be Black in America. And especially right now, there's so much coming straight at us about, you know, racism and police and violence. And that is not our lives. Like, my whole life is not spent in struggle and in pain. And, yes, that can be a part of it, especially in times like right now. But there's so much joy in being a Black woman and in, you know, hanging out with my friends and my big, wild, loud, fun family and falling in love and so many other great things. And so I wanted. . . . I'd like to write about that. You know, I think that it's fun for me to write about, fun for me to read about, and I think fun for other people—especially other Black women—to see that kind of representation and to see, you know, to be able to experience that joy on a page as well.

[00:10:15] **Kendra** That is amazing, and I really appreciate how each of your books, these women, they find that joy. And that's something that we all love about romance novels. But I want to talk about your current book, the one that has just come out. I've read all of your books in the series, and it's one of my favorites. I'm not sure if I'm supposed to say that, but.

[00:10:38] **Jasmine** Thank you.

[00:10:39] **Kendra** I love secret romances. So this was like just the thing. So you've written a wide range of heroines and heroes and different kinds of relationships in different professions. In your latest book, PARTY OF TWO, you have a whole new story. So can you talk a little bit about that book and why you wanted to tell this story next?

[00:11:00] **Jasmine** Yes. So Olivia, the heroine of PARTY OF TWO, is the sister of Alexa, who is the heroine in my first book, THE WEDDING DATE. And at the beginning of PARTY OF TWO, she's just moved back to California. She's moved to Los Angeles to start a law firm with one of her best friends. And she's sitting at her hotel bar. She hasn't moved into her new house yet. And she gets into a conversation with the charming stranger at the bar. She's all suspicious of him. He jumps into her conversation with the bartender, but she chats with him anyway. They talk for a while, and then she goes back to her hotel room and turns on the news and realizes that the guy that she's been chatting with is a senator. Which she thought he looked vaguely familiar, but she's in L.A. Lots of people look vaguely familiar there. And then they run into each other again a few weeks later. And then

he starts pursuing her and trying to get her to go out with him. And so she finally says yes. They start a relationship, but they have to keep it a little bit of a secret, I think mostly because he has a pretty high profile job. Neither of them want the attention on her that would go together with that, especially if they don't really know where they stand yet. And so a lot of the book, they're keeping their relationship a secret from the general public and from most of their friends as well.

[00:12:30] **Kendra** Which is always delightful because, you know, sneaking in and out. . . . I don't know what it is about, like, secretly dating a celebrity. Haven't we all imagined that? Olivia is a lawyer, and you've returned to a profession that you're very familiar with. Was there something special about writing a woman who is also a lawyer for you?

[00:12:52] **Jasmine** There was a bit. It's funny because, you know, Olivia is a very different kind of lawyer than I was. And so I had to do a lot of research on that. I talked to a bunch of women who have started their own law firms to kind of find out why they made that decision, how it worked, what their struggles were, what was fun about it, what they loved about it. And so, all of that really helped me build the character of Olivia.

[00:13:19] **Kendra** And that's something that I really love is that in addition to the romance happening in these women's lives, they're always very professional. They have all of these different goals that they're wanting to achieve. And in this particular one, you know, Olivia has started her own law firm, and she's experienced a lot of sexism in the past working. Can you talk a little bit about that and why it's important to talk about women in the workplace—especially Black women in the workplace—trying to make a career and, you know, make a name for themselves in that way.

[00:13:53] **Jasmine** Yeah. I mean, early in the book, you know, Olivia talks about how one of the reasons she finally made the decision to leave her old law firm was because, you know, she had more experience and more seniority, but there were white men who people were paying attention to more than her, listening to. . . . They would, you know, do that thing that I think a lot of women are familiar with, which is repeat what she said in a meeting. And then everyone says, oh, great idea, Jeff. And didn't pay attention to that Olivia had already said it. You know, those are things that I think so many people have experienced, so many women I know have experienced over and over again. And so, you know, I wanted to make it seem real to people. These are stories that we have all experienced in our lives and have told other people. And this is why Olivia finally just cracked and was like, I'm going out on my own. I can't deal with these people anymore.

[00:14:51] **Kendra** So the hero of this book is a senator. And did you do some research for that job? Because I'm going to be honest and say I have no idea what the day-to-day lives of a senator would look like.

[00:15:02] **Jasmine** I did do some research, actually, a long time ago. I worked in a senator's office. So some of it from that. But also, that was a while ago. So I had to do some research just to see if some of that's still accurate. You know, how often do they come home? I think most people do come home like every week. So that's a lot of back-to-back, coast-to-coast flights. You know how their office is set up, where they live. And, you know, lots of senators and members of the House of Representatives do have roommates. Max, in this book, has a roommate in his apartment in D.C., which is often true for especially in the early years because they have to keep two households up. And a lot of people don't want to have, you know, a whole big house that they live in in D.C. by

themselves. So there's a lot of people who, like, bunk up with other members of Congress. So that was fun to kind of do that research and talk to people and read articles about.

[00:16:01] **Kendra** It is always interesting to see the new jobs in your romance novels because I'm a bookish person. I've only worked in one kind of field. And every time I open one of your books, I feel like I'm just living with this person in their day-to-day lives, which I think is something really special that you've done in all of your books.

[00:16:23] **Jasmine** Oh, that's wonderful. Thank you so much.

[00:16:26] **Kendra** And the thing with your books as well is that a lot of them have interracial relationships in the romance. And there's a lot of different things that they have to work through in their relationship. You know, it's not just all like, you know, swooning and people sweeping each other off their feet and different things. So can you talk a little bit about the circumstances that arise in this book and why it was important to portray relationships and all the difficulties that come with them?

[00:16:57] **Jasmine** Yeah. I mean, you know, Olivia and Max have had very different life experiences. And some of that . . . some of their experiences they share. They both work very hard, you know, throughout their lives. But Olivia has had to prove herself in a way that Max really hasn't. And so, you know, they talk about that in some of the experiences that they've had with work, with the criminal justice system, with friends and relationships. You know, some of that is in common. But some of it is very different. And so they talk through a lot of what in their background has made them who they are and what is different about them and how race has played a role in that. But they have those conversations—at least I hope they do—in a natural way, in a way that I have had conversations like this in my life with friends and family members and romantic partners as we kind of get to know each other and figure out what has shaped us throughout our lives.

[00:17:56] **Kendra** For me, I think it's really interesting to see that, in a lot of cases, the thing that may keep them apart is just their life circumstances, which I feel like is very much how everyday people fall in love and have relationships. But this one is a little special because he is a senator. So like, he's very well known. So there are outside factors. And one of the things I found interesting is, you know, this is a romance novel, and we know eventually people find out about them. Did you do some research or background into, like, what it might be like to have your relationship, a very high profile relationship, go public like that?

[00:18:39] **Jasmine** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I read a little bit about, you know, other relationships like that with either people in politics or celebrities and things like that . . . and to see how did that happen? What was the press like? To try to think about what the background was and how they made that decision. And so some of it, you know, some of what's in the book kind of came from that research. And then some of it, I just sort of thought might be fun to include. So I hope it all makes sense and seems fun for you too.

[00:19:14] **Kendra** Oh, it definitely was. You also include a lot of food in your books, which might sound tangential, but it's not because they're very important to the story. And whenever I recommend your books, I'm always like, "I love these romance novels. Also, there's food." And so, you also feature different kinds of cuisine. This one, there's a lot of baked goods, a lot of cakes and pastries and different things. Is that something that you plan out? Or is that just something that happens organically? Because I've talked to a lot of people, and it's also one of their favorite things about your books as well.

[00:19:49] **Jasmine** Well, that's delightful. It usually actually happens organically. You know, in this one, I kind of first thought about when Max is wooing Olivia, he sends her a cake to try to get her to go out with him because when they had been at the bar, they'd had conversations about cake. And I kind of thought of that, like, that would be a fun thing. Instead of sending someone flowers or something else, like, what if you sent her a cake? And so then it kind of happened organically as they talk about, you know, baked goods do play a role in their relationship. But it's more about what they like and are trying to listen to one another because, you know, Max sends her that cake because they had been having conversation, and he remembered what she had said. And so that was something that was kind of key to her, that he was really paying attention to what they talked about and thought about it weeks later. And so I think, you know, food is often important in relationships because it's often something that's really important to you. You know what your favorite cake is. If someone else remembers that that's your favorite, that really means that they've been thinking about you and really care about what you like and what you want. And I like to reflect that in my book.

[00:21:01] **Kendra** I still remember there's a scene in the proposal where they go to like a taco truck, I think, and they just sit down. And I love really spicy food. And so I just still think about that scene. And I think adding the food, maybe . . . maybe it's because I'm just obsessed with food, but aren't we all?

[00:21:22] **Jasmine** Aren't we all? Yeah.

[00:21:22] **Kendra** Yeah. I just think that it brings so much vibrance to it. And it's sort of like if Food Network had a romance novel, and it's just naturally part of the book. So anyway, I'm gushing about the food, but it really is something we're all very excited about in your books.

[00:21:42] **Jasmine** Well, thank you so much.

[00:21:42] **Kendra** You've written . . . is it five books now?

[00:21:44] **Jasmine** This is the Fifth. Yeah.

[00:21:45] **Kendra** Yeah. So you started with THE WEDDING DATE, which I remember when it came out. And it made quite a splash. And you've come out with many since then. How has your writing process changed since you published THE WEDDING DATE? And how do you keep coming up with these new situations and new stories to keep telling stories about all of these amazing women?

[00:22:10] **Jasmine** You know, my writing process . . . like certain things have stayed the same. I still, when I'm working on a draft, I try to work on it every day, mostly just to keep the characters and story in my head the whole time and for me to stay alive in that world that I am creating and experiencing. I do try to outline in advance, but a lot of things change in between when I draft the outline and when I draft the story. And so I try to kind of roll with the punches a little bit and see if I have a new idea . . . if that changes the story, okay, I'll just go with it. Sometimes that means, you know, I'll write a scene and think, "Nope, that doesn't work. Going back to the drawing board." And then sometimes it really works. And I have to scrap something from what I had had an idea for the end and create something new. And so I've just tried to stay in that world of creativity and then, if I'm

struggling, reach out to my friends who are writers and other people to get inspiration or to bounce things off of them and things like that, which has also been incredibly helpful.

[00:23:23] **Kendra** How do you choose what side character—oftentimes it's a side character—that you're going to focus on next? I mean, do you plan that out while you're writing the previous book where they're mentioned? Or is that just something like, hey, I really loved writing this character. Let me write a book about their story.

[00:23:39] **Jasmine** Definitely the latter. I mean. . . . But it's also more than that. It's you know. . . . It's that I really loved writing about them, and I want to write their story. But then I also need to have an idea for what that story would be. For instance, in *THE PROPOSAL* (my second book), I really loved writing about Carlos in *THE WEDDING DATE*. He was Drew's—the hero in *THE WEDDING DATE*—his best friend in that book. But for a long time, you know, I hadn't planned to write a book about Carlos because I didn't have the right idea for him. I had brainstormed a few things, and none of them really worked. And so I was thinking about writing something else for the next book. And then I had the idea, and then it was perfect. And I went with Carlos. And so. . . . But I think that it just. . . . you know, I have to have a character that I really want to write about and know that I have a story that I want to tell for them. And so those two things have to go together because there are certain characters that I've written in the past that I would love to write a book about. But I don't really have the right story for them just yet.

[00:24:42] **Kendra** I really love that you went with Carlos because he was one of my favorite characters in *THE WEDDING DATE*, and I was overjoyed when I picked up *THE PROPOSAL*. And one of the fun things that I like is picking up in the next in your books and like, Okay, who is she going to pick for this one? And there's like that anticipation of what character will appear in the next book, which is really fun. And one of the things I think is great about romance novels is oftentimes there are—if you read a lot of them—there are recurring setups or tropes. And in that, are there any of your favorite tropes or setups that you haven't covered yet that you would really like to cover in the future?

[00:25:24] **Jasmine** Oh, that's a great question. Not quite yet. You know, I haven't really. . . . I love fake dating, obviously, which is why my first book, *THE WEDDING DATE*, was about fake dating. So I think I could easily go back to that at some point. But there are few really fun tropes out there that I haven't gotten to yet. But I'm not quite sure what will be next.

[00:25:51] **Kendra** I, like I've mentioned, love secret dating. And one of my favorites is the couple that's already married. And they have to. . . . They fall back in love with each other, essentially.

[00:26:03] **Jasmine** Yes, that is a fun one.

[00:26:04] **Kendra** So if you ever did that, I mean, no pressure or anything. . . . Well, I could talk about your books forever, but I don't want to keep you. But before I let you go, what books would you recommend to our listeners? They can be anything you're reading right now. Or maybe other romance novels you recommend. Or really the sky's the limit.

[00:26:28] **Jasmine** Um, let's see. Well, there are a few great ones that are already out this summer or that are coming out. I love *THE BOYFRIEND PROJECT* by Farrah Rochon. That book was so much fun and had really great stuff about Black women in the workplace and also female friendships, which is something that I love reading books

about. Vanessa Riley has a book out this summer called *A DUKE, THE LADY, AND A BABY*, which is a historical romance that is also so much fun. *ONE TO WATCH* comes out in July, which is about a basically a plus-sized blogger who goes on what's basically "The Bachelorette." And that is a delightful book to read. I also loved . . . Alexis Daria has a new book coming later this summer called, *YOU HAD ME AT HOLA*. That one is great. It's about two people who are co-stars and then fall in love. So that's a handful of delightful ones that you can reach and you can find.

[00:27:36] **Kendra** Well, those sound wonderful. I'll definitely be adding them to my list. But thank you so much for coming on the podcast, Jasmine, and talking with me about your books. They just bring me so much joy. And thank you so much for putting them out into the world.

[00:27:49] **Jasmine** Oh, my goodness. It was my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

[00:27:53] **Kendra** I'd like to thank Jasmine Guillory for talking with me about her latest novel, *PARTY OF TWO*, which is out now from Berkeley. You can find her on Twitter (@thebestjasmine) and on her website, [jasmineguillory.com](http://jasmineguillory.com). And, of course, all of her information will be linked in our show notes. I'd also like to say a special thank you to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. You can find Reading Women at [readingwomenpodcast.com](http://readingwomenpodcast.com) and on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). And you can find me (@kdwinchester). And thanks so much for listening.