



Aviva vs. the Dybbuk

Mari Lowe

Levine Querido (Feb 8, 2022)

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In Mari Lowe's engaging novel *Aviva vs. the Dybbuk*, an Orthodox Jewish girl confronts the troublemaking spirit who disturbs her home, while also working with a friend-turned-rival to plan a big event for her class. Along the way, she learns about grief and being part of a community.

Since the death of her father, Aviva lives with her depressed mother in a small apartment above her community *mikvah*. Her mother rarely goes out anymore, and the other girls at school treat Aviva like an outcast. Still, she excels at the ball game *machanayim* and is looking forward to making the school team. But an argument with her former friend Kayla gets them both banned from trying out. As punishment, they're assigned to plan the class Bas Mitzvah Bash together.

Kayla and Aviva rebuild their friendship as they explore the *mikvah* and *shul* after hours. They also deal with the setbacks caused by the *dybbuk*, who often messes things up for them, whether trapping them inside of the baths at night, or trying to ruin their carefully prepared party food. They encounter more malevolent attackers, too, as antisemitic vandalism threatens their small community and opens old wounds.

Aviva is a strong lead, both relatable and flawed. Though she loves her mother, she struggles to manage as her mother's isolation changes how other children see both of them. She has a temper, but also wants her teachers' and classmates' approval. And as she learns more about the true nature of the *dybbuk*, and about the crimes committed against her community, she grows as a person.

It is refreshing to see a story focused on an Orthodox child that renders that world realistically while also dealing with universal struggles. Both Aviva and her story are worth spending time with.

JEFF FLEISCHER (January / February 2022)

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