

Pretend Plumber: An Adventure

Stephanie Barbé Hammer

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In the coming-of-age novel Pretend Plumber, an LGBTQ+ girl learns to navigate her Los Angeles life with authenticity.

In Stephanie Barbé Hammer's new adult novel *Pretend Plumber*, a thirteen-year-old questions how she fits into her family and the world.

In the changing scene of sprawling Los Angeles, Sarassine has both purposeful and accidental adventures. She shares knowledge of her Jewish heritage with others, has questions about gender and sexuality, and even talks to ghosts. She also thinks that she may be able to grow up faster via plumbing: in Sarassine's wealthy home, there are people who come to do every task, yet it seems that no one is very good at plumbing.

When Sarassine and her best friend, Jackie, decide to run away, they only get as far as her grandpa's house. From there, Sarassine is sent to a summer camp for wayward Jewish youths. There, she begins an experiment in becoming Sam, a male-presenting plumber. But she finds herself out of her element. Later, she tries to work out whether she should return home, or whether she can make it on her own. She has crushes on both boys and girls and struggles to find herself within her many identities.

The novel packs two traumatic kidnappings, abandonment, gender and sexual identity, the contemporary effects of the Holocaust, immigration issues, ghosts, and the Israel-Palestine conflict into its short space. All of these story lines could as easily extend to accommodate a book series focused on the heroine; in a single book, they're a lot to navigate. It somewhat helps that Sarassine narrates: it is explained that her thoughts are sporadic due to her dyspraxia, which affects her attention, memory, and balance. Still, she leans into social justice issues, which help to give order to her daily life. She also explores the nuances of her Jewish background, including generational differences, religious practices, and language.

The book includes "fun fact" boxes, some of which have Wikipedia links in them; it is a multimedia, hypertext work. Sarassine's grandmother's *Kabbalah for Schlubs* book is also excerpted, threading through the novel to ground Sarassine's misadventures (which have elements of magical realism to them) and linking her to the family whom she thinks she is escaping. Though she does attempt to learn the basics of plumbing, most of her time is devoted to absorbing the world around her and trying to figure out who truly she is.

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ADDISSYN HOUSE (May 16, 2022)

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