

The Right Thing to Do at the Time

Dov Zeller

Everything Goes Media (Mar 15, 2018)

Softcover \$12.95 (347pp)

978-1-893121-56-0

Ari and Itche have been friends since childhood, when they bonded over their feelings of ill-fittedness at summer camp. Now in their twenties, they'd like to add some sparkle to their lives, and if love is the way, so be it. Possibilities come in the form of a movie star, Talia, who shows up to Shabbat services one night, and her imposing best friend, Helen.

Dov Zeller's book is a sex-positive, LGBTQ-friendly, Jewish, New York City take on *Pride and Prejudice*, with Ari standing in for Elizabeth Bennett and Itche standing in for Jane. Its character developments toe that line fairly closely, if relationships are often jostled in the mix. That's where derivations end, though. Zeller's clever style is all his own.

Ari is trying to find his way in a society that doesn't value bookish musicians or trans men as much as it ought to. He's burdened with family expectations around personal success and fitting in. He doesn't always know what he wants, but he knows who he is—a faithful young Jewish man with strong loyalties who wants to make his Bubbie Pearl proud and find a way to channel his unique inner *nigun*.

There are moments in which the novel gets a bit wrapped up in its own cuteness—discussions of love and affection, particularly early on, have an unrefined element. But more often than not, the story scintillates. Its language and plot turns are charming as hell, and its awed and irreverent takes on the classics—Austen, yes, but also Jewish tradition more broadly—make it absolutely *geshmak*—or, if Ari isn't available to footnote that for you, transcendently delicious.

There's a reason that Austen's tale of misfits elbowing their way into love became beloved; all of the same ingredients are operating here, enlivened by a healthy dose of Yiddish humor.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March/April 2018)

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