

# Book Review: The Rabbi Who Prayed with Fire

by Carrie Seleman

Rachel Sharona Lewis. *The Rabbi Who Prayed with Fire: A Rabbi Vivian Mystery*. LadiesLadies Press, 2021.

In the wake of Trump's presidency emboldening white supremacy and the slaughter of eleven people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, as well as the wave of Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd, a fictional synagogue in Providence burns down. The question of whether the fire was a fluke or an act of antisemitism breeds arguments dividing every real-life modern day Jewish community.

Following a queer female rabbi who was hired by a Conservative synagogue to engage more young adults and bring the congregation into the modern day, this book falls into the genre of what the literary community lovingly calls a "cozy mystery."

The synagogue suddenly catches fire and Rabbi Vivian is on a mission to figure out whether it was an accident, an act of antisemitism, or something else completely. It's cute, it's entertaining, it's lighthearted, but the B plot is why I recommend this book to all of you.

Embedded within the search for the cause of the fire, the members of the synagogue grapple with their relationship with police as those providing security to the Jewish community in times of rising antisemitism, balanced against the isolation of Jews of color who don't feel comfortable walking into a building surrounded by law enforcement. Conversations between the book's characters are wrought with comparisons of hate against different minorities and which, if any, deserves society's time and attention more than others, conversations which surround us readers every day. There are clear illustrations of the tension we experience between the children of Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren -- the fading survivalist instinct.

The lack of resolution of these issues is at best unsatisfying, but I think that only adds to the value of the story, reflecting the real world. The characters in this book grapple with the same issues with us, and none of them have found a solution yet, either. *The Rabbi Who Prayed with Fire* is a beautiful representation of and reflection on modern American Judaism.

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