

MY SHIKSA BOYFRIEND

A solo play

By Arielle Beth Klein

MY SHIKSA BOYFRIEND

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for their dramaturgical guidance throughout the play's development:
Martin Moran, Quinn Vogt-Welch, Stephen Singer, and Seth Barrish.*

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

MY SHIKSA BOYFRIEND was first produced by Kervigo Ensemble Theater at The Tank in New York City. Opening night was October 8, 2021. The production was directed by Christine Cirker, stage managed by Glenn Girón, and lighting designed by K.A Rudolph.

On October 23rd, 2022 MY SHIKSA BOYFRIEND was remounted in the United Solo Theater Festival at Theater Row. Producers were Kervigo Ensemble Theater, Betty Jampel, and C. Ryan Miller. This production was directed by Christine Cirker and stage managed by Glenn Girón.

A developmental run of MY SHIKSA BOYFRIEND was produced in 2018 by New Yiddish Rep with direction and dramaturgy by Sidse Ploug Soerensen. The sound engineer was Sean T. McGrath.

In all the above productions the cast was as follows:

ARIELLE

Arielle Beth Klein

CAST:

ARIELLE mid 20s, Jewish woman

Note on casting:

The actor playing Arielle should be actually Jewish.

Notes on Music:

There is a moment where Arielle translates lyrics and then sings along with the song K'shehalev Boche. Please obtain legal rights or record an A Capella version for your production.

Note on Quotes:

Scenes with other characters written like dialogue may be acted out; otherwise, quotes can be delivered in a narrative way.

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Lights up, this is direct address.

ARIELLE. It s a beautiful, sunny Saturday morning in Asheville North Carolina. It s 9:45 am, the wedding starts in fifteen minutes, and I m hiding in the Church bathroom. Just for a second to emotionally recover because moments ago I... I broke the Church. I didn t mean to, I m wearing this fancy paisley jumpsuit that I bought for the sole purpose of this wedding. Wait, sorry, this isn t *my* wedding. I m with My Shiksa Boyfriend at his cousin s wedding. He s waiting for me outside the bathroom, holding my purse like a true *mench*. Wait is speaking Yiddish in a Church offensive? Oh my god, I mean *Jesus*? Oh my Jesus, his Gammy s gonna know I m Jewish. I m very proud of being Jewish but I ve never been to a service in a Church before and *Gammy*, his Grandma, is a devout Catholic and I just want her to approve of me. Which is why I bought this fancy paisley jumpsuit but the problem is that I m not used to wearing jumpsuits so when I walked up the cobblestone stairs to the Church, the heel of my shoe got caught on the pant leg of the jumpsuit, and I tripped for what felt like an entire minute. When I eventually fell down, I saw that the fabric on the heel of my shoe was frayed and the cobblestone lining the last step into the church had chipped. So I m hiding in the church bathroom. Feeling guilty about the chipped step but also somehow I feel guilty just being in a Church with all these crucifixes.... I don t know maybe that was a sign to leave... but my Shiksa Boyfriend and I have been together for two years and this is the first time I m meeting his extended family so I m trying to fit in! But it s getting harder to breathe, I m sweating, and I just feel so guilty about being here. I should just leave, right? Just pretend I m sick and go back to the hotel. But I don t want to make a scene... I couldn t explain what was happening in that moment but it was as if I was having a memory but I couldn t figure out what was triggering it or what the

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memory even was. I recently read a book that helped me figure out what it was but you know, what, before I tell you about that, let me catch you up.

You know those memories that you get when you experience something, or smell or taste something that brings you back to a specific moment in time? Like a sense memory? Yeah! So I get specific flashbacks when I smell fish. Not cooked fish. But like live or recently deceased fish. I'm actually vegan so usually dead animals make me want to vomit but whenever I smell fish I immediately think of my grandma. Or my *Bubbie*. I called her Bubbie, which is grandma in Yiddish. Bubbie didn't smell like fish but we would collectively smell fish together. But only on Fridays. It wasn't weird. My mom would take us to her house in Brooklyn so we could all spend Shabbat together, the Jewish Sabbath holiest-day-of-the-week..

One Friday afternoon, Bubbie takes me to this fish market, which is indoors so it's already extremely pungent. We walk in and there's this tub; it's this translucent blue-green color with an open top. It's filled with water and fish. I can sort of see them swimming from the side of the tub but it's kind of cloudy. Then I suddenly feel Bubbie's hands grab me under the armpits and she lifts me up until my hands reach the top of the tank and I'm dangling, looking at all these fish swimming around. We're both laughing and I point to my favorite one and we take it back to her place, and she lets it swim around the bathtub until she's ready to make fresh *gefilte feesh*.

Fish is just *feesh*" in Yiddish. My Mom's family immigrated to Brooklyn, New York when my mom was six so she grew up learning and speaking Yiddish. I only remember a couple of words of Yiddish but I did grow up learning Hebrew when Bubbie and my mom took me to Hebrew School. The first word I learned in Hebrew was my name, *Chaya*, which means "life." And my English name translated, Ari-elle, in Hebrew means "lion of god." Which is rad. But I'm not really as intimidating as a lion. I mean I'm a little bit sassy so I feel like "porcupine of god" maybe makes more sense. I don't know, I'm probably reading too much into it but names are so fascinating. I've always loved naming inanimate objects. Cars,

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plants, pimples...It s a skill. When I was a kid I named my childhood bear, wait for it: *Bear Bear*. Bear Bear originally came with his mouth sewn in a "O" shape like this (*she purses her lips*). But my Bubbie took the thread out and re-sewed a new mouth into a smile. I only know about the "O" shaped mouth because my mom told me about it. I ve only known him with a smile. Bear Bear grew up with me in our house on Staten Island.

We only lived in our Staten Island house until I was six, but I have a lot of memories from this house. Bubbie would come over to babysit after she picked me up from Hebrew school on the weekends. When it was nice out, we would read books on our enclosed porch. When it was cold, we played with my dollhouse, and then we d watch Winnie The Pooh while we ate dinner. I would sit on the floor in my rainbow butterfly pajamas staring at the little square screen, wide-eyed, thinking about if I could ve named Winnie the Pooh I probably would have gone with "Pooh Pooh." And Bubbie would sit on the couch behind me with a bowl of broccoli. I d open my mouth and she d hold one piece at a time and hold it in front of my face. And I d bite off my favorite part, the broccoli tops, and then she d save the bottoms for my mom for when she got home. This became our routine. I d open my mouth... (*she demonstrates opening her mouth wide and mesmerized by the TV, bringing her arm to her mouth as if it s Bubbie*) ...a broccoli would appear, and I d bite off the top. But every once in a while...(*she opens her mouth again, no broccoli appears, after a beat, she turns around to look at Bubbie*) ...Bubbie would just be staring at the TV or something else in the room. I always wondered what she was thinking about. I still wonder a lot of things about Bubbie actually.

One day when I was four, Bubbie and my mom *both* came to pick me and my sister up from Hebrew school. We walked into our Staten Island house from the backdoor which led directly into the kitchen. Bubbie walked towards the counter to start making dinner and my mom was helping my sister off with her coat since she was only two-and-a-half. I was waiting my turn for my mom s help with *my* coat like a dutiful big sister when I saw Bubbie start to sway a little bit. She grabbed hold of the oven door which opened and that made her fall down on her side. I was waiting for

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her to get up but she didn't. What happens next comes from flashes of images of what I remember but I'm pretty sure the order of things was that my mom knelt down on the floor and held Bubbie's head in her hands. Then she told me "Ari go get a pillow and bring it here." I ran to the living room and grabbed two pillows I found on the couch: one is a square back pillow and the other was a round arm pillow. I didn't know which one she wanted so I brought them both to my mom. Then my mom said, "Ari since you still have your jacket on I need you to go wait on the porch for the ambulance. Call me and I will come unlock the door for them." I walked onto the enclosed porch where Bubbie and I used to play. I didn't even look at my toys I just looked out the long rectangular window beside the door. I don't remember how long it took for the ambulance to get there but I remember standing in deafening silence, knowing I was doing something important for my mom.

My dad must have come home sometime during this because the next thing I remember is sitting on the staircase landing upstairs looking down through the wooden posts at Bubbie leaving on a stretcher. I heard Bubbie making some moaning sounds but I tried not to listen. My mom went with Bubbie to the hospital and a few days later my sister and I learned what a stroke is and we learn what dying is. I didn't get to see Bubbie after she left in the ambulance. And I always wondered about what happened at the hospital but I didn't get to talk to my mom about that until the year I started dating My Shiksa Boyfriend.

After Bubbie died it was just my mom who took me to Hebrew school on the weekends. And Hebrew school was actually really fun because I got to be around other Jewish kids and sing Jewish songs and learn Hebrew. Because during the week, I was the only Jew in Kindergarten. My two best friends in Kindergarten, Natalie and Julia, were twins and their family was Catholic.

One day during recess, me and Natalie and Julia climb this huge tree that lives outside our school. Okay, it was probably just a large bush in reality but from my Kindergarten-sized memory, it was a castle. We run outside, open the branches up, and climb through this maze of a tree probably a

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hundred feet into the air. Up here we were mermaids! Wizards!
Veterinarians!

But today, we are elves and we are making toys for Santa Clause. And I'm like "wow I'm so on board with this new game what a creative concept." But Natalie and Julia both seem to already know everything about Santa Clause but I just think "ok they're twins, they've probably played this game before." So I say "yes and" and I'm making a toy out of twigs and leaves and acorns and I accidentally dropped it down a hundred feet to the ground.

ARIELLE. Hehe, oops!

Natalia and Julia were fraternal but in that moment, scolded me identically
NATALIE/JULIA. Oooh, Santa's gonna be mad at you! You're going on the naughty list!

ARIELLE. Um, Okay!?

So I run home crying because I'm afraid of getting in trouble and I say,

"Mom, I broke Santa's toys!" And my mom's like, "Okay Ari calm down. Listen to me. Santa Clause isn't real but don't tell your friends. He can't be mad at you; because you're Jewish. And he doesn't exist."

I do wish she had taken one more second to tell me that Reindeer, however... those are real animals. I didn't learn that one until I was twenty-three years old when I got lost in the Museum of Natural History and found myself in the North American Mammals exhibit.

I didn't have to worry about keeping the Santa Clause secret for too long though because right before I started second grade, my family moves from Staten Island, New York to Maplewood, New Jersey. We move so my sister and I can attend a Jewish day School, where we both did go through High School graduation. This school was like Hebrew school times a million! It had all of the normal classes that you have in public school but we also had a whole Jewish curriculum so that's like Hebrew language, Bible Study, Jewish Law, and a prayer period. Literally, for ten years straight, I began my school day in "T fillah," a morning prayer. It lasts about an hour. It's like a religious homeroom. Maybe? I don't know, I have

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no idea what that is. Honestly couldn't tell you what happens in a homeroom.

But in *T fillah* the only way to socialize or get your crush to notice you is to volunteer to lead the service together or just pray really hard and loud and hope that your beautiful chanting voice catches their attention from across the room.

In sixth grade, I had a crush on this boy in my class named Yoni. I couldn't say actual words to him because I was extremely shy, but during *T fillah*, I had a plan to get him to notice me. A lot of the prayers are call and response so I would sit next to Yoni and each time we were supposed to say "Amen" I would say it in his direction. Then I would look to see if he heard me. He didn't. Then the next time I would *Amen*, louder in his direction and look to see if he heard me. He didn't. I wasn't discouraged though; Yoni was clearly my soulmate and not at all a dumb pre-teen who was too popular to notice me. So I came up with another plan. Because that's how you get the best boys, with a solid plan.

One morning in sixth grade, we begin our usual morning service with a prayer called "Modeh Ani". There are a lot of different chanting tunes but the one we used was,

(Sings)

"Modeh Ani l fanecha melech chai v kayam, sh hechezarti bi nishmati bchemla,
raba emunatecha."

"I am grateful to You, living, enduring King, for restoring my soul to me in compassion."

And I know I should be focusing on praying but I can't help but look over to the person sitting next to me and think: if *my* soul is being restored to me each morning in compassion, then Yoni's soul is also being restored to *him* each morning in compassion and we should be compassionate together. So I get the courage to execute my plan! There is a pencil on my desk, that I placed there earlier, very close to the edge. I shift a little in my seat, knocking the pencil to the ground. It falls under my desk and I kick it ever so slightly so it rolls toward Yoni's feet. This is my moment. I lean

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over and say, Yoni can you grab my pencil?” He looks at me, looks down, picks it up, and hands it to me. And just as I am about to say “thank you” my teacher comes over and says, SHEKET! ANACHNU LO MEDABREEM ACHSHAV- “ *[Hebrew translation for the reader/actor but not to be translated during the performance: Quiet! We are not talking right now!]*

So I start flipping through my Siddur, my prayer book, but I m just pretending to pray. Thinking about how my plan had worked and Yoni *definitely* noticed me, when I get to the back of the book and I find these passages. One reads,

Approximately 500 people were crowded into a chamber measuring 125 square feet. Parents carried their children in the vain hope of saving them from death. They were pushed and beaten with rifle butts and gas pipes. Dogs were set on them, barking, biting, and tearing them. To escape the blows and the dogs, the crowd rushed to its death, pushing into the chamber. Between ten and twelve thousand people were gassed daily.”

These stories are in this book but we never read these out loud in T fillah. I kept on pretending to pray almost every day in school.

A few months later into sixth grade I did have to pray for real during my Bat Mitzvah though. My Bat Mitzvah was a weird time for everyone involved I think. It was weird for me because I was a really shy and anxious, prepubescent Jew. And it seemed to be weird for my parents because my mom got really into religion after Bubbie died, and my dad s an atheist. My bat mitzvah day starts out with me listening to my mom convince my dad that he has to wear a Kippah during the service. A Kippah is a head covering that you wear inside a Temple as a sign of respect. My dad was like “but I don't care”, and my mom was like “it s the right thing to do”, and I was like...”uuuh?” Long story short, he wore it and they are now happily divorced.

You know what, I m getting a *head* of myself - ha- okay that was a dad pun, please don t leave. Just want to include a quick translation, to clarify in case anyone is like “a Bat what?” A Bat Mitzvah is a coming-of-age ceremony for Jewish tweens. For a boy, it s when you re thirteen and for a

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girl, it's when you're twelve. You basically have to lead a whole Shabbat Shacharit morning service by yourself in front of your congregation. It's this huge religious milestone and you practice for hours a day for months leading up to it. You go to synagogue after school to meet with your Bat Mitzvah tutor. Which is like an SAT tutor but for praying. Because when you lead your Bat Mitzvah service, it's also the first time that you get to read out of the Torah in front of your congregation. For me, it was very stressful because I seemed to get the longest Torah portion in the history of Torah portions! You have to memorize the tune and chant it alone while your family, your Rabbi, and classmates you've invited, yes including Yoni, stare at you. I really didn't pay much attention to the words I was saying during my Bat Mitzvah but I did somehow feel a similar sense of importance that I felt when I was waiting for the ambulance for my mom. I knew this was important even if I didn't have the words to explain why yet.

I was only personally invested in one aspect of my Bat mitzvah. It's customary for the tween having a Bat Mitzvah to also take on what's called a "Bat Mitzvah Project." Mitzvah in Hebrew means a good deed or commandment. In Judaism, there are 613 Mitzvah's that God tells us to do. But any type of good deed that's in service of your neighbor or community we call Mitzvahs too. It's an umbrella term. Since I love animals, for my Bat Mitzvah Project I decide to volunteer at Mount Pleasant Animal Shelter. I'm only allowed to wash dishes and socialize the cats because I'm a minor but I love it. And I don't want to brag, but I'm a rule follower and I'm afraid of authority so I was a very trusted volunteer.

One weekend we were short on staff members so one of my supervisors - who at the time I thought was an adult but in retrospect, she might have been seventeen- asked me to go give water to the cats in the quarantine room. The cats back there have been to the shelter vet but still, need to be kept separate from the other cats. I've swept that room and cleaned the cages but I'm not really *supposed* to go back there. But I go into the kitchen, grab a silver metal bowl, fill it up with water and walk to the back of the shelter. I open one of the cages slightly and slip this water bowl in

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very carefully and just as I m taking my arm back out of the cage, the cat lunges forward and bites me right here (*gesture to somewhere on arm*). I walk back to the kitchen and I m like, “does anyone have a bandaid?” Panic ensues, I end up at the ER, get a shot and then the doctor leaves me a piece of paper and asks me to write down the name of the shelter and the cat because they want to put it down since it attacked me.” I turned to my mom and said “Mom, please, I can t let them kill this cat. It wasn t his fault!” To my surprise, my mom said, “okay let s go!” And we just ran out without filling out that piece of paper.

I attribute my moral compass to my mother. She taught me to always be kind and compassionate and to never act out of spite. Turns out my mom credits those attributes to her mom, my Bubbie. On the day of my Bat Mitzvah my mom kept saying, “I wish Bubbie was here with us.”

Unrelated to the rabies situation, after my bat mitzvah I was kind of over the religious aspects of Judaism. I still do mitzvahs just not for cats anymore.

After my Bat Mitzvah, I convinced my mom to let me stay home from synagogue most weekends. The deal was that I only had to go on High Holidays a few times a year. My atheist dad who never came with us to synagogue, definitely had some influence in securing that arrangement. I m not proud of that. I m sure my mom felt outnumbered. But I just couldn t stand sitting through a service for three hours every Saturday that I didn t quite connect to, no matter how hard I tried to follow along and *feel* the words of the prayers. And I really tried. I would bring the book really close to my face, smell the pages, and whisper to myself these holy words that people around me seemed to be so passionate about. Even on the High Holidays I d bring a Babysitter Club book, and read during synagogue in protest.

The only part of the service that I paid attention to was called the “D var Torah”. After the reading of the weekly portion of the Torah, the Rabbi talks directly to the congregation in their own words, in English, about what we just read. The Rabbi relates the text to our current world, modernizing the stories of the Bible. And the stories always interested me!

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And even though I didn't really care about celebrating most holidays, I always got pretty hype on Passover, because man that is a wild story. I think people know about Passover but just so we're on the same page, here's a spark-notes version: This holiday is about the Jews' exodus and escaping slavery from the ancient Egyptians. God sends Moses to Pharaoh (he's the guy in charge) and Moses is all "let my people go" and Pharaoh is like "nah." So then God sends these ten plagues on the Egyptians, they finally crack, and Moses parts the red sea with this staff God gave him, the Jews escape, and proceed to wander the desert for 40 years to the land of Israel. Riveting story.

Starting from the ages of ten and twelve, my sister and I start telling this story by writing parody plays that we called Passover Plays. We would spend a whole day writing and then performing them for our mom and anyone who was invited over for Passover. We used our dog wrapped in a scarf to portray baby Moses who was sent in a basket down the Nile river by his mom so that he wouldn't be killed by the Egyptians. One year we did a spoof on that old show *Who's Line is it Anyway?* We wrote a whole parody episode called *Who's people are they anyway?* with games such as

"Things not to build Pyramids with" and we even had commercial breaks that were Passover-themed! One of us took our baby Moses dog and drifted it down the river while the other demonstrated a product we made up called "Extendo-Arm": (*In a commercial voice*) If you see a baby floating in a basket down a river that's a little too far to reach, just grab your extendo-arm! It folds to fit in your pocket, because who knows when you'll need to save the next baby Moses?

As we got older we started writing Passover-themed songs heavily inspired by Broadway. Our Mama Mia year was a highlight, (*sung to the tune of Money Money*) "They work all night they work all day and to Pharaoh they must obey. Ain't it sad?"

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