

Mazel Tov, Jeremy Finkelstein!

by Gillian Greenbaum

Logline:

A young and ambitious event planner bites off more than she
can chew trying to plan the perfect Shiva.

EXT. FINKELSTEIN HOUSE - DAY

An event planner, CHRISTINE, stands in the driveway of an upper-middle-class suburban house with a small group of people. She is blonde, cheerful, and wearing a short dress that hits right between "professional" and "cocktail party." She holds a clipboard and frantically scribbles down notes as she talks.

CHRISTINE

Okay team, the Finkelsteins need this to be perfect, but more importantly I need this to be perfect. This is how I win the Jewish demographic.

She is surrounded by two caterers (HECTOR and his ASSISTANT), a decorator (KATIE), a DJ (BRETT), and two hype dancers (ANDRE and GINA).

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Katie, are the decorations up?

A short, mousy looking girl in glasses steps forward and nods vigorously.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

And what *color* are they?

KATIE

Blue and white, I promise.

Christine regards her with skepticism, marks something off on her clipboard, and continues her checklist.

CHRISTINE

Hector, the food?

A large Hispanic man smiles and gestures towards the other caterer, who has begun to unload food from the truck.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

And of course, Brett?

BRETT

The DJ booth is up and ready to spin some narsty tunes. I have the Jew dance cued and ready to go.

The 20-something frat star puts on his backwards snapback and a pair of shuttered sunglasses.

CHRISTINE

It's called the Torah, Brett, you can't be disrespectful.

BRETT

(shrugs)

Just doing my best, babe. It's gonna be a killer party either way.

He winks. Christine shoots a scathing look at him.

CHRISTINE

(barely audible)

It was one time. Ugh.

Brett, Gina, and Andre head towards the backyard. The two dancers are dressed in all black, and both are extremely athletic. Gina looks like she might still be in high school, which is a stark contrast to Andre, a 6'5 ripped black man.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Katie, I need your help with these. Apparently they have to have special chairs that are really short. I think the birthday boy is supposed to be the tallest one at the party.

They start unloading and setting up low stools, dragging them through the front door.

EXT. FINKELSTEIN PORCH - DAY

A crowd of somber people dressed in black and whispering quietly walk up to the porch, where blue and white balloons are tied to the railings.

Before anyone reaches for the handle, Christine whips open the door with a smile and a flourish.

CHRISTINE

Hi there, welcome to Jeremy's Shiva! Right this way.

The Jewish mourners look at each other and slowly follow her into the house.

INT. FINKELSTEIN HOME - CONTINUOUS

The stunned family looks around. The house is covered in blue and white streamers, balloons, and signs that say "Congrats Jeremy!" Someone audibly gasps.

Hector and his assistant begin rounding the party with platters of hors d'oeuvres and everyone starts to settle in.

There's quiet chatter amongst the mourners and the occasional sob. Katie sidles up to Christine.

KATIE

Gosh, I figured it would be emotional but I didn't expect *this*.

CHRISTINE

The Jews are a vibrant and expressive people, Katie. We must respect that.

Katie nods solemnly. She starts to mill about, slowly working her way through the house.

INT. FINKELSTEIN PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

She passes into the parlor, invisible. Her ears perk up as a conversation between two elderly Jews catches her attention.

OLD LADY

I just don't understand these Shivas anymore. All the new-age reform stuff? It's not for me.

OLD MAN

(nodding in agreement)

Back in the day, we had the full seven days. And none of this with the decorations and festivities. I don't know what's gotten into Miriam.

OLD LADY

I know. She's usually so traditional. But letting *goyim* plan the Shiva?

She turns, as if sensing Katie watching. Katie jumps behind a wall, breathing heavily. She peeks around the corner to see if the two had noticed her.

They stare back at her like they're watching a play in gibberish. The man leans over to whisper in the woman's ear, and the two slowly back away without taking their eyes off of Katie. Katie ducks out to find Christine.

INT. FINKELSTEIN DEN - CONTINUOUS

KATIE
Psst! Christine!

Christine turns away from Hector and his assistant, tucking her pen behind her ear. She spots Katie, beckoning frantically by the doorway.

CHRISTINE
Yeah? What's the matter, Katie?

She joins her in the doorway.

KATIE
I...I think something's wrong.

CHRISTINE
Did you eat the shrimp puffs? No one's been touching them, I wonder if maybe they're off?

KATIE
No! Not like that. I mean with the party. I don't know what it is, but I don't think this is right.

CHRISTINE
What do you mean? I only had two days to plan it, what else could they want? An ice sculpture of the Star of David? A guest appearance by Adam Sandler?

KATIE
What exactly is a Shiva? Like what does "Shiva" mean?

CHRISTINE
Look, Katie. My second cousin is half Jewish. She went to camp in the Poconos. I know what I'm doing.

There is about a half a second of silence, and then Christine claps her hands.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)
Attention everyone! Could we all gather in the den?

People amble into the room from adjacent ones with unimpressed looks and whispers.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

I was told it's customary to have a special candle for the guest of honor at one of these, and I thought who better to light it than our hostess, Mrs. Finkelstein!

Christine tries to incite a round of applause to no avail. MRS. FINKELSTEIN, a mid 50s Long Islander with a sharp jaw, instantly pales.

Out of the kitchen, Hector and his assistant wheel a gigantic blue and white cake with thirteen unlit candles stuck in meticulously. In the center is a substantially larger one. Hector produces a lighter from his pocket and hands it ceremoniously to Mrs. Finkelstein, like a knight presenting a sword to the Queen. In a daze, she takes it and freezes. Christine jumps in and helps her light the candles, the largest one last.

It ignites, sending Fourth-of-July sparks and firecrackers popping. One spark hits a lacy curtain and the panic sets in. Screams from the crowd as the curtains slowly go up in festive flames.

Mrs. Finkelstein breaks out of her stupor and runs to the kitchen, reemerging with a fire extinguisher. She blasts the curtains, the recoil of the extinguisher causing her to step backwards.

The cloud of white clears. Wide eyes slowly turn from the curtains to Christine and Katie. No one says a word. Katie looks on the verge of tears, turning to Christine for some sort of guidance.

The numbness wears off, and Christine puts her bright smile back on.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Well that was certainly exciting!
Let's take this party out to the backyard, where we have more surprises in store!

She ushers the guests outside, and most reluctantly oblige. Before she can get out herself, Mrs. Finkelstein grabs Christine, pulling her into the hall.

INT. HALL - CONTINUOUS

As they enter the hall, a toilet flushes in the background and an elderly man exits a powder room.

He shuffles away slowly, and Mrs. Finkelstein hurriedly yanks Christine into the bathroom.

INT. POWDER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christine and Mrs. Finkelstein are face to face, barely six inches between them in a well-decorated beach themed powder room. The mirror is covered with a black shroud.

Suddenly, their faces screw up into masks of disgust. There is a lingering odor alluding to the previous occupant's activities. Both try--and fail--to ignore the emanating stench.

MRS. FINKELSTEIN

You said you knew how to plan a Shiva! What is this?

CHRISTINE

I do...it's when a boy becomes a man..

MRS. FINKELSTEIN

That's a Bar Mitzvah, you idiot!

Christine stiffens in stunned silence.

MRS. FINKELSTEIN (CONT'D)

Have you ever met a Jew?

CHRISTINE

My second cousin is half Jewish!
She went on Birthright!

MRS. FINKELSTEIN

(shaking her head)

Gutten hemel. My father-in-law is barely an hour into the ground and his widow is watching his Shiva literally go up in flames.

CHRISTINE

...I can fix this!

Mrs. Finkelstein makes it clear that she very much doubts that with a sardonic grunt and storms out.

Christine takes a minute. The look of shock on her face turns to determination. She lifts the black shroud covering the mirror. She smoothes her skirt, tightens her ponytail, and adjusts her chicken cutlets. She returns the shroud to its initial position and exits the bathroom with confidence.

EXT. FINKELSTEIN BACKYARD - DAY

A faint smoky haze wafts out of the sliding glass doors from the den. The yard is fenced-in, with a pool and mid-sized patio. The DJ booth is stationed at the far end of the yard.

Christine marches out, trying desperately not to fall on the concrete next to the pool in her high heels. She heads towards the DJ booth, frantically waving her arms in an attempt to catch Brett's attention, but he can't see her through the crowd that has amassed in front of the raised platform he calls a DJ Booth.

It's too late to stop him.

BRETT

Yo yo yo little homies it's ya boi
DJ Brett! It's time to get this
party STARTED!

He spins up a track, the Party Rock Anthem by LMFAO. The dancers release party poppers and attempt to drag the stunned mourners onto the concrete that's serving as a dance floor.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Today we are celebrating a special
someone: Jeremy! Let's hear it for
our man!

There is a hesitant clap from someone in the crowd, which is quickly quelled by embarrassment.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Let's warm up with a classic - the
Cha Cha Slide!

The iconic number starts, DJ Casper's voice mixing with Brett's: "We gonna get funky!"

Christine finally joins him on the platform.

CHRISTINE

(hissing)
Brett!

He follows along with the dance, not hearing through his headphones. Christine yanks them off and starts to dance as well.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Jeremy's dead, we were supposed to
do a shiva!

The song's instructions interject:

DJ CASPER
RIGHT FOOT LET'S STOMP!

BRETT
I thought this IS a shiva?

CHRISTINE
No, Shiva is for dead people, like
the mourning period apparently. We
set up a Bar Mitzvah.

DJ CASPER
SLIDE TO THE LEFT, SLIDE TO THE
RIGHT.

BRETT
What?

CHRISTINE
Jeremy Finkelstein was 83 years old
and died of natural causes in his
sleep.

BRETT
What old dude is named Jeremy!?!?

DJ CASPER
CHA-CHA REAL SMOOTH.

They briefly cha-cha, the discussion pausing for the dance
break.

BRETT
What do we do?

CHRISTINE
I don't know yet, let me think.

She looks out into the crowd. Andre and Gina are dancing
their hearts out, forcing confused old people to "criss-
cross" and "Charlie Brown." Some kids seem to be enjoying
themselves.

Brett switches the track to the Hora and the dancers start to
close in on a young boy sitting on a stool.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)
Why did you do that?

BRETT
Do they not play this song at every
Jewish event?

CHRISTINE

No Brett! No they do not!

Suddenly, there is a scream from across the pool. The young boy that the dancers had targeted was holding onto his stool for dear life while Andre and Gina tossed him up and down.

Mrs. Finkelstein hip-checks Brett off the DJ stand and grabs the microphone, screeching the music to a halt.

The sudden change causes Gina and Andre to balk and turn, and the boy screeches and loses his balance, falling into the pool.

There are screams and gasps from the mourners, and Andre whips his shirt off to reveal an exquisitely chiseled chest. A nearby woman swoons, and her husband slugs her in the arm. Andre dives into the water, reemerging with a sopping wet boy in a full suit. His *yarmulkah* floats lazily across the pool.

The boy squirms away from Andre.

BOY

Get off, me!

ANDRE

I'm so sorry, Jeremy. We didn't mean to throw you into the pool.

BOY

I'm not Jeremy! I'm Ben. Jeremy is--
-or was--my grandfather.

Gina pipes up.

GINA

So...you're not turning 13?

BEN

(scoffs)

No, I'm sixteen. I'm just a late bloomer, god.

Ben's parents rush over with towels to dry their mortified son.

MRS. FINKELSTEIN

(over the loudspeaker)

I am so sorry you all had to witness this. I was assured this would be a respectful and traditional Shiva -

She shoots a glare at Christine, who can't meet her eyes.

MRS. FINKELSTEIN (CONT'D)

- But this has been salt in the fresh wound of losing our beloved patriarch. Most of all, I'd like to apologize to his widow, my mother-in-law, Ethel Finkelstein.

The crowd of mourners murmurs amongst themselves. Katie bursts into tears, and Hector hands her the edge of his apron. She wipes her eyes and blows her nose into it, earning her a disgusted look and the apron hem yanked away. Christine takes a deep breath and steps onto the platform. Mrs. Finkelstein, none too trusting at this point, begrudgingly hands the microphone to Christine.

CHRISTINE

(clears her throat)

Um. Hi. I'm Christine, the event planner. This is my fault and I should be the one apologizing. I really thought I could prove myself by whipping up a party in two days. But I made an assumption and ruined an important ceremony.

She pauses for a moment, waiting for a hint of sympathy. None is offered.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Mrs. Finkelstein, I'd like to offer you a full refund for your trouble. Just please, if you can find it in your heart, don't sue me for emotional damages.

Shockingly, that got a light laugh from the crowd.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

(slowly gaining confidence)

Ben, I'm sorry we threw you in the pool and thought you were a child. Grandma Finkelstein, I'm sorry we desecrated your late husband's memory. Mr. and Mrs. Finkelstein, I'm sorry we almost lit your house on fire with a roman candle. Hector, Brett, start packing up. We'll leave these people to mourn properly. If there's anything we can do to make up for this, please-

GRANDMA ETHEL

Now wait a minute!

A shrill voice pierces through the crowd. A tiny, frail woman of no less than 90 totters towards the DJ booth. Her walker has a pocket on the front, which is full of tissues, unlabeled candies, and six dinner rolls from Hector's buffet.

GRANDMA ETHEL (CONT'D)

I don't know about you all, but I'm about sick of crying. Jeremy hated pity. These nice people worked so hard to accommodate our traditions, they just chose the wrong ones. And technically, 83 would've been his second bar mitzvah anyway.

She turns to Brett.

GRANDMA ETHEL (CONT'D)

DJ Brett, dear, could you kindly start the music again? I'd like a turn on the chair.

Brett eagerly takes over, spinning up a trap remix of the Hora, and Andre and Gina gingerly hoist Grandma Ethel into the air. The mourners erupt in laughter and join in, holding hands and dancing in a circle around them. Christine breathes a sigh of relief and steps over to console a still sobbing Katie.

Mrs. Finkelstein catches her by the arm.

MRS. FINKELSTEIN

You're one lucky girl, Christine. Make sure Hector keeps the blinis coming.

She harumphs off to her husband, who is now dancing semi-erotically with Gina.

EXT. FINKELSTEIN PORCH - EVENING

The last of the partygoers are leaving. Christine and Katie hand out the party favors to each guest. Grandma Ethel waves warmly out the door to everyone while wearing her own party favor: a t-shirt that reads

"I Survived Jeremy's Shiva"

End.