

The Schviga

By Elaine Rosenberg Miller

INTERIOR. DAY. RESTAURANT.

AUDREY and RITA are sitting at a table.

AUDREY

(twirling a plastic swizzle stick in her drink)

The first two letters are the same as in the word 'screw.'

RITA

What word, Audrey?

AUDREY

Schviga.

RITA

Schviga? Mother-in-law?

AUDREY

Exactly.

RITA

Um, some people might say that that's Kaballistic.

AUDREY

You into Kaballah now, Rita, are you?

RITA

Oh, it's the rage, everyone is studying it, going to classes.

AUDREY

What for?

RITA

They want to get touch with their inner selves.

AUDREY

And that's a good thing?

Writing Raw

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RITA

Audrey, you've had enough!

AUDREY

(pushing her bangs off her forehead and then patting them
back into place)

I don't understand the connection.

RITA

What do you mean?

AUDREY

Between what I said and Kaballah.

RITA

It has something to do with mysticism. It means that nothing is there by accident.

AUDREY

I could have told you that.

RITA

But you didn't. That's also mystical.

AUDREY

Rita. Stay on track.

RITA

I am. You can't follow me.

AUDREY

I was talking about my mother-in-law.

RITA

Yes?

AUDREY

My schviga.

RITA

Uh-huh.

AUDREY

You know my mother-in-law?

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RITA

Mathilda.

AUDREY

Her.

RITA

You said that screw.... something about screws.

AUDREY

I said that the first two letters in 'screw' and the first two letters in 'schivga' are the same.

RITA

Don't you get it?

AUDREY

No.

RITA

You could have said 'shrew'.

AUDREY

'Shrew' is not the same as 'screw'.

RITA

It sounds more like 'screw' than 'schviga'.

AUDREY

Not when you spell it!

RITA

But that's apples and pears.

AUDREY

Oranges.

RITA

What?

AUDREY

That's apples and oranges.

RITA

Oranges. Apples. What's the difference?

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AUDREY

Don't you know? One's a citrus.

RITA

I know what citrus are. Is.

AUDREY

It makes a big difference.

RITA

I suppose. If you are an apple.

AUDREY

One a ssh sound and one's a ssh... Well, forget the sound and focus on the spelling.

(AUDREY and RITA sip their drinks)

AUDREY

Do you know Mathilda?

RITA

Not really.

AUDREY

(leaning over the table)

Well, when they do open heart surgery on her, if they ever do, they are going to find a large cavity.

RITA

Is she sick?

AUDREY

Not yet.

RITA

(volunteering)

She's in great shape.

AUDREY

(sitting back in her chair)

I know. Not a hair out of place.

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RITA

(smiling)

My mother-in-law invites us to dinner all the time. She's a great cook.

AUDREY

Mathilda's refrigerator is empty.

RITA

It can't be empty.

AUDREY

It's empty. I looked.

RITA

Nothing?

AUDREY

A jar of herring. A small one. In wine sauce.

RITA

Maybe that's how she stays so slim.

AUDREY

(shrugging)

I guess in her day, they didn't know anything about, you know, about...

(AUDREY points to her opened mouth)

RITA

(eyes widened)

What? Do you do that?

AUDREY

And ruin these veneers? Please! Waiter!

(points to her glass)

RITA

Do you think that's a good idea?

AUDREY

Do you have a better one?

RITA

You have to drive!

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AUDREY

I'm far from drunk. That waiter is one of the best-looking things I've ever seen. Those blue eyes. I wonder why he is a waiter.

RITA

Probably to make money.

AUDREY

How old do you think he is?

(RITA turns)

AUDREY

Don't look!

RITA

How can I tell if I don't look?

AUDREY

I can't believe it.

RITA

(tossing her hair, lowering her chin and looking in the direction of THE WAITER as he walks away)

It's hard to tell. He's running around.

AUDREY

(commanding)

Look in the mirror!

RITA

My compact?

AUDREY

No! The mirrored wall!

RITA

Oh.

RITA

(places her finger against her cheek and stares at the ceiling, then looks down and looks at a mirrored wall)

I'd say about twenty-seven.

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AUDREY

How did you fix on twenty-seven?

RITA

I don't know. I'm kind of psychic.

AUDREY

Said who?

RITA

No one tells you. You just know.

AUDREY

Have you ever had a psychic experience?

RITA

Well, yes. I just had one this morning. I called my cousin and she said that she had been on a cruise and I told her that I had just been on a cruise.

AUDREY

That's all?

RITA

No. I told her that I had seen a certain gemstone that is very popular and she told me that she had just bought a six carat ring."

AUDREY

So?

RITA

I guessed it! It was on her mind and I guessed it.

AUDREY

That makes you psychic?"

RITA

Sure. What else is it?

AUDREY

Being psychic involves a little more. Like helping the police find a body.

RITA

That's a criminal psychic. I just do simple things.

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AUDREY

Like jewelry?

RITA

And dishes. My cousin and I have the same stoneware. Can you believe it? We picked it out separately and I saw it in her house.”

AUDREY

Small world.

RITA

I think so.

AUDREY

Have you ever had a vision about violence?

RITA

(stiffening)

No, why should I?

AUDREY

Ever think about a body lying undiscovered for days?

RITA

Not really.

AUDREY

Never?

RITA

No. Anyway, you don't need a psychic for that. The body and the apartment would start to stink after a few days.

AUDREY

Not if there's nothing in the refrigerator and no internal organs.

(AUDREY and RITA sit silently.)

RITA

(softly)

You can't live without internal organs.

AUDREY

Precisely my point.

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RITA

What are you saying, Audrey?

AUDREY

Doesn't Kaballah say something about people living who are not living?

RITA

You have that confused with voodoo.

AUDREY

I do not. Aren't there demons in Judaism?

RITA

I don't know. I'm not a rabbi.

AUDREY

Well there are. And my mother-in-law is one of them.

(ENTER THE WAITER. He places a tall, frosted glass on the table.)

(smiling)

Thank you.

(EXIT THE WAITER.)

RITA

She's a demon?

AUDREY

I have never seen such a cute waiter. What a body. Do you think he works out?

RITA

You are hoping that he works it out on you.

AUDREY

Rita! I didn't think that you had it in you!

RITA

There are a lot of things about me that you don't know.

AUDREY

What are you talking about?

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RITA

Nothing.

AUDREY

Have you ever cheated on Marvin?

RITA

Why would I jeopardize a good thing just for a screw?

AUDREY

(shrieking)

Rita!

RITA

Ssh. Keep your voice down.

AUDREY

Oh, they're used to me here. A screw! I've never heard you talk like that. I've known you for years and you always seemed so ...

RITA

Ditzy?

AUDREY

Rita, I never knew...

RITA

(waiving at THE WAITER)

Waiter. Check, please. We have to go.

AUDREY

(gathering her belongings)

I have to pick up my contacts from the optician.

RITA

Are you sure that you're going to be all right?

AUDREY

Oh, I'm fine. Tell me more about this psychic stuff.

RITA

What do you want to know?

AUDREY

If my mother-in-law was, say, like, ever dumped in the county dump, would they

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be able to find her?

The End

Elaine Rosenberg Miller bio: Elaine Rosenberg Miller is a writer whose work has appeared in JUDISCHE RUNDSCHAU, NEWSMAX, THE BANGLORE REVIEW, THE FORWARD, THE HUFFINGTON POST and in other print and online publications.