

Amahl and the Night Visitors

by Gian-Carlo Menotti

Cast

Amahl (boy soprano)
Amahl's Mother (soprano or mezzo-soprano)
King Kaspar (tenor)
King Melchior (baritone)
King Balthazar (bass)
The Page (bass)
The Shepherds

ONLY ACT

Amahl sits outside a poor shack of a house, gazing earnestly at the sky.

MOTHER
(calling from inside the house)
Amahl! Amahl!

AMAHL
(replying absently)
Oh!

MOTHER
(again, coming from somewhere inside)
Time to go to bed.

AMAHL
(answering)
Coming...
(continuing to gaze at the stars above him)

MOTHER
(her voice a bit terser)
Amahl!

AMAHL
(again, the boy replies)
Coming...
(but otherwise he seems not to have heard)

MOTHER
(storming out of the house)
How long must I shout
to make you obey?

AMAHL
I'm sorry, Mother.

MOTHER
Hurry in! It's time to go to bed.

AMAHL
(pleading with his mother)
But Mother –
let me stay a little longer.

MOTHER
The wind is cold.

AMAHL
But my cloak is warm;
let me stay a little longer!

MOTHER
The night is dark.

AMAHL
But the sky is light,
let me stay a little longer!

MOTHER
The time is late.

AM AHL

But the moon hasn't risen yet,
let me stay a little...

MOTHER

(cutting him off curtly)

There won't be any moon tonight.
But there will be a weeping child very soon,
if he doesn't hurry up and obey his mother.

AM AHL

(sighing)

...oh very well...

The two go inside.

MOTHER

What was keeping you outside?

AM AHL

(replying excitedly)

Oh mother! You should go out and see!
There's never been such a sky.
Damp clouds have shined it,
and soft winds have swept it,
as if to make it ready for a king's ball.
All its lanterns are lit,
all its torches are burning,
and its dark floor is shining like crystal.
Hanging over our roof,
there is a star as large as a window;
and the star has a tail, and it moves
across the sky like a chariot on fire.

MOTHER

Oh Amahl!

When will you stop telling lies?
All day long you wander about in a dream.
Here we are with nothing to eat –
not a stick of wood on the fire,
not a drop of oil in the jug,
and all you do is to worry your mother
with fairy tales.
Oh, Amahl... have you forgotten your promise
never, never to lie to your mother again?

AM AHL

Mother darling, I'm not lying.
Please do believe me... please do believe me.

Come outside and let me show you.
See for yourself... see for yourself.

MOTHER

(reprimanding Amahl)

Stop bothering me!

Why should I believe you?

You come with a new one every day!

First it was a leopard with a woman's head.

Then it was a tree branch that shrieked and bled.

Then it was a fish as big as a boat,
with whiskers like a cat, and wings like a bat,
and horns like a goat

and now it is a star as big

as a window (or was it a carriage)?

And if that weren't enough,

the star has a tail and the tail is of fire...

AM AHL

But there is a star... and it has a tail... *this* long.

Well, maybe only this long...

But it's there!

MOTHER

Amahl!

AM AHL

(insisting)

Cross my heart and hope to die...

MOTHER

(throwing up her hands in exasperation)

Hunger has gone to your head.

Dear God, what is a poor widow to do,

when her cupboards

and pockets are empty

and everything sold?

Unless we go begging

how shall we live through tomorrow?

My little son, a beggar!

AM AHL

(trying to comfort his mother)

Don't cry mother dear;

don't worry for me.

If we must go begging,

a good beggar I'll be.

I know sweet tunes to set people dancing.

We'll walk and walk from village to town –

you dressed as a gypsy,
and I as a clown.
We'll walk and walk from village to town.
At noon, we shall eat roast goose
and sweet almonds.
At night we shall sleep with the sheep
and the stars.
I'll play my pipes, you'll sing and you'll shout.
The windows will open and people lean out.
The king will ride by
and hear your loud voice
and throw us some gold to stop all the noise.
At noon we shall eat roast goose and sweet
almonds;
at night we shall sleep with the sheep
and the stars.

MOTHER
Kiss me good night.

MOTHER, AMAHL
(to each other)
Good night.

They both go to bed.

*Three kings stroll through the shadows of the
night on their journey to see the Christ child.*

THREE KINGS
From far away we come and farther we must go.
How far... how far...
my crystal star?
The shepherd dreams inside the fold.
Cold are the sands by the silent sea.
Frozen the incense in our frozen hands,
heavy the gold.
How far... how far...
my crystal star?
By silence-sunken lakes,
the antelope leaps.
In paper-painted oasis,
the drunken gypsy weeps.
The hungry lion wanders,
the cobra sleeps.
How far... how far...
my crystal star?

The kings knock at the door.

MOTHER
Amahl!

AMAHL
Yes, mother?

MOTHER
Go and see who's knocking at the door.

Amahl goes over to the door.

AMAHL
(returning excitedly)
Mother... Mother... come with me!
I want to be sure that you see what I see.

MOTHER
(having no patience with Amahl)
What is the matter with you now?
What is all this fuss about?
Who is it then?

AMAHL
(unsure how to report the events)
Mother.. outside the door... there is...
there is a king with a crown!

MOTHER
(exasperated)
What shall I do with this boy?
What shall I do... what shall I do?
If you don't learn to tell the truth,
I'll have to spank you!
Go back and see who it is
and ask them what they want...

*After checking the door again, Amahl returns,
more insistent than ever.*

AMAHL
Mother! Mother! Mother, come with me!
I want to be sure that you see what I see.

MOTHER
What is the matter with you now?
What is all this fuss about?

AM AHL

(hanging his head quietly)

Mother, I didn't tell the truth before.

MOTHER

That's a good boy.

AM AHL

There is not a king outside.

MOTHER

I should say not.

AM AHL

There are *two* kings.

MOTHER

(losing her patience altogether)

What shall I do with this boy?

What shall I do? What shall I do?

(admonishing Amahl)

Hurry back and see who it is,

and don't you dare make up tales...

AM AHL

(returning to his mother from the door)

Mother! Mother! Mother come with me.

If I tell you the truth,

I know you won't believe me...

MOTHER

Try it for a change.

AM AHL

But you won't believe me.

MOTHER

I'll believe you, if you tell me the truth...

AM AHL

Sure enough, there are not two kings outside.

MOTHER

That is surprising.

AM AHL

The kings are three, and one of them is black.

MOTHER

(feeling more frustrated with Amahl)

Oh, what shall I do with this boy.

If you were stronger I'd like to whip you.

AM AHL

I knew it.

MOTHER

(pulling herself out of bed)

I'm going to the door myself.

And then, young man,

you'll have to reckon with me!

THE KINGS AND THEIR PAGE

(greeting the Mother courteously)

Good evening. Good evening...

The mother gasps quietly.

AM AHL

(behind her)

What did I tell you?

MOTHER

(pushing her son back)

Shhhh...!

(addressing the kings awkwardly)

Noble sires...

THE KINGS

May we rest awhile in your house

and warm ourselves by your fireplace?

MOTHER

I am a poor widow.

A cold fireplace and

a bed straw are all I have to offer you.

To these, you are welcome.

KASPAR

What did she say?

BALTHAZAR

That we are welcome.

KASPAR

Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!

MOTHER

Come in... come in...

The three kings and page enter the small house.

MELCHIOR

It is nice here.

MOTHER

I shall go and gather wood for the fire.
I've nothing in the house.

KINGS

We can only stay a little while.
We must not lose sight of our star.

MOTHER

...your star?

AMAHL

(feeling obliged to remind her)
What did I tell you?
(hushing Amahl)

KINGS

We still have a long way to go.

MOTHER

(announcing that she will be going out to gather some firewood)
I shall be right back.
And Amahl... don't be a nuisance.

AMAHL

No, mother...

The Mother exits the small creaking doorway into the night air. Amahl, meanwhile, realizes that he must entertain their guests)

AMAHL

Are you a real king?

BALTHAZAR

Yes.

AMAHL

Have you regal blood?

BALTHAZAR

Yes.

AMAHL

Can I see it?

BALTHAZAR

(sighing)
It is just like yours.

AMAHL

What's the use of having it then?

BALTHAZAR

(looking quizzically at Amahl)
No use.

AMAHL

Where is your house?

BALTHAZAR

I live in a black marble palace
full of black panthers and white doves.
And you little boy, what do you do?

AMAHL

I had a flock of sheep.
But my mother sold them... sold them!
Now there are no sheep left.
I had a black goat
who gave me warm sweet milk.
But she died of old age... old age.
Now there is no goat left.
But Mother says that now we shall both go
begging from door to door.
Won't it be fun?

BALTHAZAR

(eyeing the boy closely)
It has its points.

AMAHL

(turning his attention to Kaspar)
Are you a real king, too?

Kaspar, being hard of hearing, has to ask Amahl to repeat himself, and Amahl obliges in a loud voice. Finally hearing the boy.

KASPAR

(saying jovially)

Oh truly, truly... truly...

Yes, I am a real king...

(turning to Balthazar for assurance.)

Am I not?

BALTHAZAR

Yes, Kaspar.

AMAHL

(spotting a small animal in a cage)

What is that?

KASPAR

(asking Amahl to speak up)

Eh?

AMAHL

Does it talk?

KASPAR

(pointing to his ear)

How do I know?

AMAHL

Does it bite?

KASPAR

(holding up his bandaged finger.)

Yes.

Amahl points to a decorated wooden box which Kaspar is carrying.

AMAHL

And what is this?

KASPAR

This is my box, this is my box...

I never travel without my box.

In the first drawer I keep my magic stones.

One carnelian against all evil and envy.

One moonstone to make you sleep.

One red coral to heal your wounds.

One lapis lazuli against quart and fever.

One small jasper to help you find water.

One small topaz to soothe your eyes.

One red ruby to protect you from lightning.

This is my box. This is my box

I never travel without my box

In the second drawer, I keep all my beads.

Oh! How I love to play with beads...

all kinds of beads!

This is my box... this is my box...

I never travel without my box.

In the third drawer... in the third drawer...

(looking at Amahl with a gleam in his eye)

Oh, little boy... oh little boy...

(looking around at the other kings a bit sheepishly.)

In the third drawer... I keep...

Licorice! Licorice!

Black sweet licorice... black sweet licorice!

Have some.

Amahl's mother opens the door. Seeing how Amahl has become the center of attention, she admonishes him.

MOTHER

Amahl, I told you not to be a nuisance!

AMAHL

But it isn't my fault;

they kept asking me questions.

MOTHER

I want you to go and call the other shepherds.

Tell them about our visitors,

and ask them to bring whatever they have

in the house, as we have nothing to offer them.

Hurry on!

AMAHL

(heading for the door)

Yes, mother.

MOTHER

(remarking on the pile of gifts)

Oh, these beautiful things, and all that gold!

MELCHIOR

These are the gifts to the child.

MOTHER

The child... which child?

MELCHIOR

We don't know.
But the star will guide us to him.

MOTHER

But, perhaps I know him...
what does he look like?

MELCHIOR

Have you seen a child the color of wheat...
the color of dawn?
His eyes are mild; his hands are those of a king
— as king he was born.
Incense, myrrh, and gold we bring to his side;
and the eastern star is our guide.

MOTHER

Yes, I know a child the color of wheat...
the color of dawn.
His eyes are mild;
his hands are those of a king
as king he was born.
But no one will bring him incense or gold...
though sick and poor and hungry and cold.
He is my child my son, my darling my own.

MELCHIOR

Have you seen a child the color of earth...
the color of thorn?
His eyes are sad; his hands are those of the poor
as poor he was born.
Incense, myrrh, and gold we bring to his side,
and the eastern star is our guide.

MOTHER

Yes, I know a child the color of earth...
the color of thorn.
His eyes are sad;
his hands are those of the poor,
as poor he was born.
But no one will bring him incense or gold...
though sick and poor and hungry and cold.
He is my child, my son, my darling... my own.

MELCHIOR

The child we seek holds the seas
and the winds on his palm.
The child we seek has the moon

and the stars at his feet.
Before him, the eagle is gentle the lion is meek.

THE THREE KINGS

Choirs of angels hover over his roof
and sing him to sleep.
He's warmed by breath.
He's fed by mother
who is both virgin and queen.
Incense, myrrh, and gold we bring to his side,
and the eastern star is our guide.

MOTHER

(thinking of Amahl)
The child I know
on his palm holds my heart.
The child I know at his feet has my life.
He is my child, my son, my darling, my own...
And his name is Amahl.

AM AHL

(peering out the door)
The shepherds are coming...

MELCHIOR

Wake up, Kaspar.

THE SHEPHERDS

(greeting each other as they get closer)
Emily... Emily, Michael, Bartholomew —
how are your children and how are your sheep?
Dorothy... Dorothy, Peter, Evangeline —
give me your hand come along with me.

All the children have mumps.
All the flocks are asleep.
We are going with Amahl...
bringing gifts to the kings.

Benjamin... Benjamin, Lucas, Elizabeth —
how are your children and how are your sheep?
Carolyn, Carolyn, Mathew, Veronica,
give me your hand, come along with me.

Brrrr... how cold is the night!
Brrrr... how icy the wind!
Hold me very, very, very tight.
Oh, how warm is your cloak!

Katherine, Katherine, Christopher, Babila —
 How are your children and how are your sheep?
 Josephine, Josephine, Angela, Jeremy —
 Come along with me!

*The shepherds arrive at the door of the cottage
 and peer inside.*

Oh, look! Oh, look!

MOTHER

Come in, come in... What are you afraid of?
 Don't be bashful silly girl.
 Don't be bashful silly boy.
 They won't eat you.
 Show what you brought them.

THE SHEPHERDS

*(stumbling over each other, as they try to force
 their way in the door)*
 Go on...! No, you go on!

*The shepherds present what they've brought the
 kings.*

Olives and quinces, apples and raisins,
 nutmeg and myrtle, medlars and chestnuts.
 This is all we shepherds can offer you.

Citrons and lemon, musk and pomegranates,
 goat cheese and walnuts, figs and cucumbers.
 This is all we shepherds can offer you.

Hazelnuts and chamomile,
 mignonettes and laurel, honeycombs
 and cinnamon, thyme, mint and garlic.
 This is all we shepherds can offer you.

The kings express earnest appreciation.

THE SHEPHERDS

(eagerly pressing the gifts into the kings' arms)
 Take them, take them... you are welcome.
 Take them... eat them... you are welcome, too.

*All of a sudden, a squirrely little girl makes a
 break for the door... and a little boy gets up, also
 thinking through how he will negotiate his way
 through the mass of bodies. Some of the young*

*men pull the two children back. After much
 nudging, the children return into the middle of
 the one-room cottage, somewhat red-faced and
 embarrassed.*

THE SHEPHERDS

*(scolding the children using the same words
 with which the householder mother scolded
 them earlier)*

Don't be bashful, silly girl
 Don't be bashful, silly boy!
 They won't eat you.

*After an interlude of dancing, Balthazar thanks
 the shepherds.*

BALTHAZAR

Thank you, good friends,
 for your dances and your gifts.
 But now we must bid you good night.
 We have little time for sleep,
 and a long journey ahead.

THE SHEPHERDS

(moving towards the door)
 Good night, my good Kings,
 good night and farewell.
 The pale stars foretell
 that dawn is in sight.
 Good night, my good kings.
 Good night and farewell.
 The night wind foretells
 the day will be bright.

*As the shepherds leave, Amahl goes over to
 Kaspar.*

AM AHL

Excuse me, sir...
 amongst your magic stones, is there...
 is there one that could cure
 a crippled boy?

KASPAR

Eh?

AM AHL

(looking down dejectedly)

Never mind... good night.
(shuffling off to his his bed)

THE SHEPHERDS

(outside, they can still be heard as they disperse to their own houses and fields.)

Good night, good night...
 the dawn is in sight... good night, farewell...
 good night... good night...

Amahl listens intently as the shepherds bid each other good night throughout the small village. The mother tucks Amahl into bed and then turns to look at the kings.)

MOTHER

(thinking to herself)
 All that gold! All that gold!
 I wonder if rich people know
 what to do with their gold?
 Do they know how a child could be fed?
 Do rich people know?
 Do they know that a house
 can be kept warm all day with burning logs?
 Do rich people know?
 Do they know how to roast sweet corn
 on the fire?
 Do they know do they know how to fill
 a courtyard with doves?
 Do they know... do they know?
 Do they know how to milk a clover fed goat?
 Do they know?
 Do they know how to spice hot wine
 on cold winter nights?
 Do they know... do they know?
 All that gold... all that gold!
 Oh what I could do
 for my child with that gold!
 Why should it all go to a child
 they don't even know?
 They are asleep.
 Do I dare? If I take some,
 they'll never miss it...
(moving towards the boxes of gold...)
 ...for my child for my child...
 for my child... for my child...

THE PAGE

(seeing a shadow moving near the pile of gifts, he awakens)

Thief! Thief!

(One of the kings stirs.)

KING

What is it?

THE PAGE

(shouting)

I've seen her steal some of the gold.
 She's a thief! Don't let her go!
 She's stolen the gold.

THE THREE KINGS

(joining the ruckus with loud voices)

Shame, shame!

PAGE

Give it back, or I'll tear it out of you!
 Give it back, or I'll tear it out of you.
 Give it back...give it back.

Amahl has, by this time, been awakened by the ruckus and is peering over towards the argument in the center of the room. Then, seeing his mother involved in a struggle, he leaps out of bed and tries to intervene. This is a side of Amahl the kings haven't seen yet.)

AM AHL

Don't you dare, ugly man
 hurt my mother!
 I'll smash in your face; I'll knock out your teeth.
 I you dare! Don't you dare!
 Don't you dare... ugly man...
 hurt my mother!
 Oh, Mr. king,
 don't let him hurt my mother.
 My mother is good.
 She cannot do anything wrong.
 I'm the one who lies; I'm the one who steals.
 Don't you dare...
 I'll break all your bones;
 I'll bash in your head.
 Don't you dare... ugly man...
 hurt my mother.

MELCHIOR

(seeing what has erupted)

Oh, good woman, you may keep the gold.
The child we seek doesn't need our gold.
On love, on love alone
he will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no scepter.
His haloed head will wear no crown.
His might will not be built on your toil.
Swifter than lightning,
he will soon walk among us.
He will bring us new life,
and receive our death,
and the keys to his city belong to the poor.
Let us leave, my friends.

MOTHER

Oh, no! Wait! Take back your gold!
For such a king I've waited all my life...
and if I weren't so poor
I would send a gift of my own to such a child.

AMAHL

(pipes up)

But, Mother, let me send him my crutch.
Who knows, he may need one,
and this, I made myself.

MOTHER

(drawing in a breath sharply)

But that you can't, you can't!

Suddenly, Amahl begins to walk without his crutch.

AMAHL

I walk, Mother. I walk, Mother.

KINGS

He walks! It is a sign from the holy child.
We must give praise to the newborn king.
We must praise him.
This is a sign from God.
Truly, he can dance, he can jump,
he can run! Ah!

MOTHER

(admonishing Amahl)

Please, my darling, be careful now.

You must take care not to hurt yourself.

Something has crystallized in the kings' minds as they have watched this whole event play out. They realize that they must admonish the mother to treat her child differently.

THE KINGS

Oh good woman,
you must not be afraid,
for he is loved by the son of God.
(playing along with the boy's ruse)
Oh, blessed child, may I touch you?

AMAHL

(Seeming confused, he looks at the Page with a sharp gaze.)

Well, I don't know
if I'm going to let you touch me...

MOTHER

(admonishing Amahl sharply)

Amahl!

AMAHL

(thinking better of his reticence)

Oh, all right... but just once.

AMAHL

(showing off his new ability)

Look, Mother, I can fight,
I can work, I can play.
Oh, mother, let me go with the kings.
I want to take the crutch to the child, myself.

THE THREE KINGS

(eagerly entreating the mother)

Yes, good woman, let him come with us.
We'll take good care of him.
We'll bring him back on a camel's back.

MOTHER

(turning to Amahl)

Do you really want to go?

AMAHL

Yes, Mother.

MOTHER

Are you sure, sure, sure?

AMAHL

I'm sure.

MOTHER

(pausing for a moment)

Yes, I think you should go...
and bring thanks to the child yourself.

AMAHL

(parrotting her query)

Are you sure, sure, sure?

MOTHER

Go on... get ready.

KASPAR

(not really hearing what is going on)

What did she say?

BALTHAZAR

(bending over and speaking loudly in Kaspar's ear)

She said he can come.

KASPAR

(unable to contain his enthusiasm)

Oh, lovely, lovely, lo...

BALTHAZAR

(cutting him off curtly)

Kaspar!

MOTHER

(preparing Amahl for his journey.)

What to do with your crutch?

AMAHL

You can tie it to my back.

MOTHER

Don't forget to wear your hat!

AMAHL

I shall always wear my hat.

TOGETHER

So, my darling goodbye!
I shall miss you very much.

MOTHER

Wash your ears.

AMAHL

Yes, I promise.

MOTHER

Don't tell lies.

AMAHL

No, I promise.

TOGETHER

I shall miss you very much.

AMAHL

Feed my bird.

MOTHER

Yes, I promise.

AMAHL

Watch the cat.

MOTHER

Yes, I promise.

TOGETHER

I shall miss you very much.

Amahl finishes his preparations.

MELCHIOR

(checking with Amahl)

Are you ready?

AMAHL

Yes, I'm ready.

MELCHIOR

Let's go, then.

Amahl and the kings set out across the darkened prairies. And as they trek, they hear the sounds of the shepherds singing the songs of the morning in their fields and homes.

THE SHEPHERDS

Shepherds, arise!

Come, oh shepherds, come outside!

All the stars have left the sky.

Sweet dawn — oh dawn of peace.

Curtain