



Amahl and the Nightvisitors Libretto

ONLY ACT

(A child sits outside a poor shack of a house gazing earnestly at the sky)

HIS MOTHER

(calls from within:)

Amahl! Amahl!

THE SON

(replies absently)

Oh!

HIS MOTHER

(again comes from somewhere inside)

Time to go to bed.

HER SON

(answers)

coming...

(however his words belie his actions. He gazes all the more quizzically at the stars above him)

THE MOTHER

(A third time, calls, her voice a bit terser)

Amahl!

HER SON

(Again, the boy replies)

Coming...

(but otherwise he seems not to have heard)

THE MOTHER

(storms out of the house)

How long must I shout
to make you obey?

SON:

I'm sorry, Mother.

MOTHER

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

AMAHL

(pleads with his mother)

But Mother –
let me stay a little longer.

MOTHER

The wind is cold.

SON

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

MOTHER

The night is dark.

SON

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

MOTHER

The time is late.

SON

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

HIS MOTHER

(cuts 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

(sighs and gives in)

...oh very well...

(The two go inside)

MOTHER

What was keeping you outside?

THE SON

(replies 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?

SON

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.

THE MOTHER

*(bursts into poetry, despite herself, as she
reprimands 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...

SON

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

(insists)

Cross my heart and hope to die...

THE MOTHER

(throws up her hands)

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

*(hating to see his mother distressed, has a story
he is used to telling for this occasion)*

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, SON

(to each other)

Good night.

(They turn in to bed)

*(Three kings stroll through the shadows of the night,
and as they go they comfort themselves with a quiet
song)*

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!

SON

Yes, mother?

MOTHER

Go and see who's knocking at the door.

(Amahl goes over to the door)

AMAHL

(returns excited)

Mother... mother... come with me!

I want to be sure that you see what I see.

THE MOTHER

(has no patience for his son's energy this late at night)

What is the matter with you now?

What is all this fuss about?

Who is it then?

AMAHL

(is unsure how to report the events, and so he hesitates)

Mother.. outside the door... there is...

there is a king with a crown!

MOTHER

(is 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, insistent)

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?

AMAHL

(hangs his head quietly)

Mother, I didn't tell the truth before.

MOTHER

That's a good boy.

SON

There is not a king outside.

MOTHER

I should say not.

SON

There are *two* kings.

MOTHER

(is about to lose her patience altogether)
What shall I do with this boy?
What shall I do? What shall I do?

(She admonishes her son)

Hurry back and see who it is,
and don't you dare make up tales...

AM AHL

*(returns to his mother from the door...
but this time he is worried)*

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.

SON

But you won't believe me.

MOTHER

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

SON

Sure enough, there are not two kings outside.

MOTHER

That is surprising.

SON

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

MOTHER

(Now mother is angry)
Oh what shall I do with this boy.
If you were stronger I'd like to whip you.

SON

I knew it.

MOTHER

(pulls 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

(greet the woman when she opens the door)
Good evening.. good evening...

(The mother gasps quietly)

AM AHL

(behind her, feels a need to remind her)
What did I tell you?

MOTHER

(pushes her son back)
Shhhh...!

*(and then addresses these apparent nobles
who are at her doorstep)*

Noble sires...

*(She is bemused, however, and not sure exactly
what to say)*

THE KINGS

(rescue her from the awkward silence)
May we rest awhile in your house
and warm ourselves by your fireplace?

THE 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!

THE MOTHER

Come in... come in...

(Everybody traipses into the small house)

MELCHIOR

It is nice, here.

THE 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.

THE MOTHER

...your star?

AM AHL

(Again, feels obliged to remind her)
What did I tell you?

(But his mother shushes him)

KINGS

We still have a long way to go.

MOTHER

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

AM AHL

No, mother...

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

AM AHL

Are you a real king?

BALTHAZAR

yes.

AM AHL

Have you regal blood?

BALTHAZAR

Yes.

AM AHL

Can I see it?

BALTHAZAR

(sighs, and says)
it is just like yours.

AM AHL

What's the use of having it then?

BALTHAZAR

(looks at Amahl quizzically and says simply)

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, says)

It has its points.

AMAHL

(turns 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

(says jovially)

Oh truly truly... truly...
yes I am a real king...

(He then turns to his friend for assurance, and asks)

Am I not?

BALTHAZAR

Yes, Kaspar.

AMAHL

*(spots a small animal which Kaspar is carrying
in a cage. He asks)*

What is that?

KASPAR

(as he is wont to do, asks the boy to speak up)

Eh?

*(Amahl repeats his question, and in response,
Kaspar lets him know it's a parrot)*

AMAHL

Does it talk?

(This question somehow takes Kaspar by surprise)

KASPAR

How do I know?

(But there is one last thing which Amahl has to know)

AMAHL

Does it bite?

KASPAR

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 quartern 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...

(Kaspar looks at Amahl with a gleam in his eye)

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

(He then looks around at his friends a bit sheepishly)

In the third drawer I keep...

(Although he himself isn't aware of it, Amahl's mouth has dropped open in anticipation about this surprise



Gian Carlo Menotti

which Kaspar is going to reveal to him. The old king finally blurts it out)

Licorice! Licorice!
Black sweet licorice... black sweet licorice!
Have some.

(A draft fills the house as Amahl's mother opens the door. She has found what she needed outside. Seeing how Amahl has become the center of attention, she admonishes him)

MOTHER

Amahl, I told you not to be a nuisance!

AMAHL

(replies plaintively)
But it isn't my fault;
they kept asking me questions.

MOTHER

(announces that she has a mission for Amahl)
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!

AM AHL

(decides to cooperate, and heads for the door)
Yes, mother.

THE MOTHER

(remarks on the packages the kings have been carrying)
Oh these beautiful things, and all that gold!

MELCHIOR

These are the gifts to the child.

THE MOTHER

Hmmm the child... which child?

MELCHIOR

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

THE 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.

THE 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.

THE 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 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.

ALL THE KINGS

(join in a chorus)
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.

THE MOTHER

(And at the same time, the mother sings about her own son)

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.

(peers out the door)

The shepherds are coming...

MELCHIOR

Wake up, Kaspar.

THE SHEPHERDS

(greet each other as they stroll towards each other on the prairie)

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.

Brrr... how cold is the night!
Brr... 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.
They peer inside, being struck with awe)*

Oh look, oh look!

THE 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

(stumble over each other, as they try to force their way in the door all at once)

Go on...! No, you go on!

(The shepherds tell of what they've brought)

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.

Azelnuts and camomile,
mignonettes and laurel, honeycombs

and cinnamon, thyme, mint and garlic.
This is all we shepherds
can offer you.

*(The kings express earnest appreciation as
the shepherds recite the list of their gifts)*

THE SHEPHERDS

(eagerly press 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

*(scold 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 announces)

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

(agree, and move 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 exeunt, Amahl seizes the
opportunity in the shuffle to ask Kaspar a question)*

AMAHL

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

(Unfortunately, again, Kaspar's hearing fails him)

KASPAR

Eh?

AMAHL

(Amahl looks down dejectedly)
Never mind.. good night.

(and shuffles off to his corner of the room to his bed)

THE SHEPHERDS

*(Outside, 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 these folks bid each other
good night throughout the small streets of his
village. After the mother tucks her son into bed... she*

turns to see that the kings have ceased their bedtime mumbling, and at least one has begun to snore)

THE MOTHER

(thinks 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...

*(She prods herself on as her hand moves
towards the boxes of gold... she thinks)*

...for my child for my child...
for my child... for my child...

THE PAGE

*(stirs, because he has seen a shadow moving
overs the pile of gifts)*
Thief! Thief!

(One of the kings stirs)

KING

What is it?

THE PAGE

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

THE KINGS

(join the hubbub 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

*(He has, by this time, been awoken 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)*
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 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.

THE 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.

AM AHL

(pipes up)

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

HIS MOTHER

(draws in a breath sharply)

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

(But then a wondrous thing happens)

AM AHL

(announces)

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!

THE MOTHER

(admonishes 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, the kings ask)

Oh blessed child, may I touch you?

AM AHL

(seems betwixt and between. Peering over at Melchior with a sharp gaze)

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



Adoration of the Magi

Hieronymus Bosch

Mr. Menotti had not finished the score in November and the live production was set for Christmas Eve. By chance he visited the Metropolitan Museum and came upon Bosch's *Adoration* and the song of the three kings came out from the blue hills of the painting to him.

HIS MOTHER

(says sharply)

Amahl!

(And so Amahl thinks better of his reticence)

AMAHL

Oh all right... but just once.

AMAHL

(goes on to announce in song)

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 KINGS

(eagerly entreat 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.

THE MOTHER

Do you really want to go?

AMAHL

Yes, mother.

MOTHER

Are you sure sure sure?

SON

I'm sure.

THE MOTHER

(pauses a moment, reflecting. Then she concedes)

Yes, I think you should go...

and bring thanks to the child yourself.

AM AHL

(parrots her query)

Are you sure sure sure?

MOTHER

Go on... get ready.

KASPAR

(wanting to be kept abreast of all the events, asks)

What did she say?

BALTHAZAR

(bends over and speaks loudly in Kaspar's ear)

She said he can come.

KASPAR

(can't contain his enthusiasm)

Oh lovely lovely lo...

BALTHAZAR

(cuts him off, curtly)

Kaspar!

MOTHER

(and son prepare Amahl for his journey. She asks)

What to do with your crutch?

AM AHL

(suggests)

You can tie it to my back.

(Amahl and his mother then say their goodbyes to each other)

MOTHER

Don't forget to wear your hat!

SON

I shall always wear my hat.

TOGETHER

So, my darling goodbye!

I shall miss you very much.

MOTHER

Wash your ears.

SON

Yes, I promise.

MOTHER

Don't tell lies.

SON

No, I promise.

TOGETHER

I shall miss you very much.

SON

Feed my bird.

MOTHER

Yes, I promise.

SON

Watch the cat.

MOTHER

Yes I promise.

TOGETHER

I shall miss you very much.

(Amahl finishes his preparations)

MELCHIOR

(asks Amahl)
Are you ready?

AM AHL
Yes, I'm ready.

MELCHIOR
Let's go then.

(Amahl and his newfound friends 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.

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