

Amahl and The Night Visitors

1985

[CAST OF CHARACTERS]

AMAHL—*a lame shepherd boy*

HIS MOTHER

KASPAR—*king bringing incense*

BALTHAZAR—*king bringing myrrh*

MELCHIOR—*king bringing gold*

PAGE—*the kings' attendant*

SHEPHERD AND SHEPHERDESS

(As the curtain rises. It is night. The crystal-clear winter sky is dotted with stars, the Eastern Star flaming amongst them. Outside the cottage Amahl is playing his shepherd's pipe. Within, the Mother sits.)

MOTHER: Amahl! Amahl! Time to go to bed.

AMAHL: Coming! *(Amahl does not stir.)*

MOTHER: Amahl! How long must I shout to make you obey?

AMAHL: Oh, very well. *(Amahl takes up his crutch and hobbles into the house.)*

MOTHER: What was keeping you outside?

AMAHL: Oh, Mother, you should go out and see! There's never been such a sky! 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.

AMAHL: Mother, I'm not lying. Please do believe me. Come and see for yourself.

MOTHER: Why should I believe you? You come with a new one every day!

AMAHL: But there is a star and it has a long tail.

MOTHER: Amahl!

AMAHL: Cross my heart and hope to die.

MOTHER: Poor Amahl! Hunger has gone to your head. Unless we go begging how shall we live through tomorrow? My little son, a beggar! *(She weeps.)*

AMAHL *(Amahl goes to her)*: Don't cry, Mother, 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. 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 will lean out. The King will ride by and hear your loud voice and throw us some gold to stop all the noise.

MOTHER: My dreamer, good night! You're wasting the light. ^{Tell} ~~Kiss~~ me good night.

AMAHL: Good night.

(Amahl goes to his pallet of straw at one side of the fireplace. The Mother secures the door, then lies down to sleep. The lights die from the room except for a faint glow through the window.)

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR *(The voices of the Three Kings are heard very far away)*: From far away we come and farther we must go. How far, how far, my crystal star? *(Amahl listens with astonishment to the distant singing.)* Frozen the incense in our frozen hands, heavy the gold. How far, how far, my crystal star? *(Leaning on his crutch, Amahl hobbles over to the window. Outside appear the Three Kings: first Melchior bearing the coffer of gold, then Balthazar bearing the chalice of myrrh, and finally Kaspar bearing the urn of incense. All are preceded by the Page, carrying a rich Oriental rug, and an elaborate jeweled box.)*

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: How far, how far, my crystal star? *(The travellers approach the door of the cottage and King Melchior knocks upon the door.)*

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

AMAHL *(Amahl goes to the door)*: Mother, Mother, Mother, come with me. Outside the door there is a King with a crown.

MOTHER: What shall I do with this boy? If you don't learn to tell the truth, I'll have to spank you!

AMAHL: 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!

AMAHL: But you won't believe me.

MOTHER: I'll believe you if you tell me the truth.

AMAHL: The Kings are three and one of them is black.

MOTHER: Oh! What shall I do with this boy? I'm going to the door myself and then, young man, you'll have to reckon with me! *(The Mother moves to the door. As it swings open, she beholds the Three Kings. In utter amazement, she bows to them.)*

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Good evening! Good evening!

BALTHAZAR: May we rest a while in your house and warm ourselves by your fire?

MOTHER: I am a poor widow. A cold fireplace and a bed of straw are all I have to offer you. To these you are welcome.

KASPAR: Oh, thank you!

MOTHER: Come in! Come in! *(The Mother makes way for the Kings to enter first. The Page enters first. Almost immediately King Kaspar proceeds at a stately march to one side of the fireplace. Balthazar enters and proceeds to a place beside him. Melchior is the last to take his place. Amahl watches the procession with growing wonder and excitement.)*

MELCHIOR: It is nice here.

MOTHER: I shall go and gather wood for the fire. *(The Mother goes to the door.)*

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

MOTHER: Your star?

MELCHIOR: We still have a long way to go.

MOTHER: I shall be right back.



AM AHL *(The moment his mother is gone, Amahl goes to Balthazar):*
Are you a real King?

BALTHAZAR: Yes.

AM AHL: Where is your home?

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

AM AHL: I was a shepherd; I had a flock of sheep. But my mother sold them. I had a black goat who gave me warm sweet milk. But she died of old age. But Mother says that now we shall both go begging from door to door. Won't it be fun?

BALTHAZAR: It has its points.

AM AHL *(Pointing at the jewelled box):* And what is this?

KASPAR: This is my box. I never travel without it. 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. In the second drawer I keep my beads. Oh, how I love to play with all kinds of beads. In the third drawer, I keep licorice—black, sweet licorice. Have some. *(Amahl reaches for the candy as his mother enters, bearing a few sticks.)*



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: Yes, Mother. (*Amahl hurries out as fast as his crutch will carry him.*)

MOTHER (*The Mother crosses to the fireplace. Suddenly she sees the coffer of gold and the rich chalices of incense and myrrh*): 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.

MELCHIOR: Have you seen a child the colour of wheat, the colour 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's my child, my son, my darling, my own.

MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Have you seen a Child the colour of earth, the colour of thorn? His eyes are sad, His hands are those of the poor, as poor He was born.

MOTHER: Yes, I know a child the colour of earth, the colour of thorn. His eyes are sad, his hands are those of the poor, as poor he was born. He's my child, my son, my darling, my own.

MELCHIOR: The Child we seek holds the seas and the winds on His palm.

KASPAR: The Child we seek has the moon and the stars at His feet.

BALTHAZAR: Before Him the eagle is gentle, the lion is meek.

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Choirs of angels hover over His roof and sing Him to sleep. He's fed by a Mother who is both Virgin and Queen. Incense, myrrh and gold we bring to His side, and the Eastern Star is our guide.

MOTHER: The child I know on his palm holds my heart. The child I know at his feet has my life. He's my child, my son, my darling, my own, and his name is Amahl!

MOTHER (*The call of the shepherds falls sharp and clear on the air*): The shepherds are coming!



SHEPHERDS: All the flocks are asleep. We are going with Amahl, bringing gifts to the Kings. (*The shepherds stop in the door, struck dumb by the sight of the Kings. Amahl, however, slips in to take his place beside his mother.*)

SHEPHERDS: Oh, look! Oh, look!

MOTHER: Come in, come in! What are you afraid of? Show what you brought them.

SHEPHERD (*The shepherd boldly marches forward and lays his gift before the Kings, then, bowing shyly, he retreats to his place*): Olives and quinces, apples and raisins, nutmeg and myrtle, medlars and chestnuts, this is all we shepherds can offer you.

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Thank you kindly.

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SHEPHERD: Citrons and lemons, musk and pomegranates, goat cheese and walnuts, figs and cucumbers, this is all we shepherds can offer you.

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Thank you kindly.

AMH SHEPHERDS: Take them, eat them, you are welcome.

BALTHAZAR (*Balthazar rises*): Thank you, good friends. But now we must bid you good night. We have little time for sleep and a long journey ahead.

SHEPHERDS (*The shepherds pass before the Kings, bowing as they depart*): Good night, my good Kings, good night and farewell. The pale stars foretell that dawn is in sight. The night winds foretell the day will be bright. (*Having closed the door, Amahl, and his mother bid the Kings good night. While the Mother prepares herself a pallet of sheepskins on the floor, Amahl seizes his opportunity to speak to King Kaspar.*)

AM AHL: Excuse me, sir. Amongst your magic stones is there . . . is there one that could cure a crippled boy? (*Kaspar does not answer. Amahl goes sadly to his pallet.*) Never mind. Good night. . . (*The Mother and Amahl have lain down. The Kings are still sitting on the rude bench. They settle themselves to sleep leaning against each other. The Page lies at their feet, beside the rich gifts.*)

MOTHER (*The Mother cannot take her eyes from the treasure guarded by the Page*): All that gold! I wonder if rich people know what to do with their gold! Do they know that a house can be kept warm all day with burning logs? 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 will never miss it. They won't miss it. (*Slowly she creeps across the floor.*) For my child . . . for my child. (*As the Mother touches the gold, the Page is aroused. He seizes her arm, crying out.*)

PAGE: Thief! Thief!

MELCHIOR: What is it?

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

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Shame!

PAGE: Give it back or I'll tear it from you!

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Give it back! Give it back!



AM AHL (*Amahl awakens. When he sees his mother in the hands of the Page, he helps himself up with his crutch and awkwardly hurls himself upon the Page*): Don't you dare! Don't you dare, ugly man, hurt my mother! I'll smash in your face! I'll knock out your teeth! (*Rushing to King Kaspar.*) Oh, Mister 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! (*At a sign from Kaspar, the Page releases the Mother. Amahl staggers toward her, sobbing.*)

MELCHIOR: 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 of His city belong to the poor. (*Turning to the other Kings*) Let us leave, my friends.

MOTHER (*Freeing herself from Amahl's embrace, the Mother rushes after the Kings.*) 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: But, Mother, let me send him my crutch. Who knows, he may need one and this I made myself. (*The Mother moves to stop him as he starts to raise the crutch. Amahl lifts the crutch. He takes one step toward the Kings, then realizes he has moved without the help of his crutch.*)

MOTHER: But you can't, you can't!

AMAHL: I walk, Mother. I walk, Mother!

BALTHAZAR, MELCHIOR, KASPAR: He walks!

MOTHER: He walks, he walks, he walks!

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: He walks! It is a sign from the Holy Child. We must give praise to the newborn King. We must praise Him. That is a sign from God. (*Having placed the crutch in the outstretched hands of the King Kaspar, Amahl moves uncertainly. With growing confidence, Amahl begins to jump and caper about the room.*)

AMAHL: Look, Mother, I can dance, I can jump, I can run! (*Amahl stumbles.*)

MOTHER (*She lifts Amahl from the floor*): Please, my darling, be careful now. You must take care not to hurt yourself.

MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: Oh, good woman, you must not be afraid. For he is loved by the Son of God. Oh, blessed child, may I touch you? (*One by one, the Kings pass before Amahl and lay their hands upon him. Then each with his gift to the Child begins to depart.*)

AMAHL: Oh, Mother, let me go with the Kings! I want to take the crutch to the Child myself.

KASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR: 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: Do you really want to go?

AMAHL: Yes, Mother.

MOTHER: Yes, I think you should go, and bring thanks to the Child yourself. What can you do with your crutch?

AMAHL: You can tie it to my back.

MOTHER: So, my darling, goodbye! I shall miss you very much. Wash your ears!

AMAHL: Yes, I promise.

MOTHER: Don't tell lies!

AMAHL: No, I promise.

MOTHER: I shall miss you very much.

AMAHL: I shall miss you very much.

MELCHIOR: Are you ready?

AMAHL: Yes, I'm ready. *I can't wait to see the Holy child.*