

# **A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT**

By  
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# A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

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A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

*for our sons, Asher and Herschel: you are our light*

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

*A Light in the Night* was commissioned by and received its world premiere at Talespinner Children's Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio in 2023. The Cleveland Critics Circle awarded the production the 2023 Winner of Best New Play by a Local Playwright. It was directed by Margi Zitelli and had the following cast:

Judy.....Cassie White

Lior/Jonathan.....Will Potts

Mom/Simeon.....Tiffany Trapnell

Antiochus/Dad...Stuart Hoffman

Shammes.....Tim Keo

Andy Zicari was the stage manager, costume design was by Jaclyn Vogel, scenic design was by Ren Twardzik, and light design was by Ben Pollizi.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Heather Utsler-Smith and Ren Twardzik of Talespinner Children's Theatre for the opportunity to write something close to our hearts. Thanks to Margi Zitelli, who brought so much great experience and joy to this process. We additionally would like to thank our dramaturg and friend Rachel Lerner-Lay for her feedback. We extend special thanks for dramaturgical and sensitivity feedback to Jessica Schechter.

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

CAST: 5-9 (2-5 Women, 3-5 Men)

|                     |                                              |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| JUDY                | a young girl afraid of change                |
| LIOR                | her older brother                            |
| MOM                 | her mother                                   |
| DAD                 | her father                                   |
| SHAMMES             | A talking menorah                            |
| ANTIOCHUS           | ("Ante-och-es." Can be double-cast with Dad) |
| SIMEON and JONATHAN | (can be double cast with Mom and Lior)       |
| SELEUCID WARRIOR    | (An optional soldier for the battle scene)   |

TIME AND PLACE: A contemporary leafy suburban neighborhood; the Seleucid Empire, 2nd Century BCE; finally, a magical place in between.

# A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

## PROLOGUE – A *Shimazel* and a *Shmendrik*

*The basement of the old house. SHAMMES, a large menorah, sleeps in a box.*

### SHAMMES.

Whoa. Lights up already? I was just getting a *schluff*. You know a little shuteye. Well, I guess we gotta start. We have a *schpiel* to tell- And I gotta tell it well (*If necessary for production:*) So now, *kinderlach*, my children, an intro—(*Insert if necessary intro about sensory, music, exit, bathrooms, etc.*) *Nu*, why are we here, well to see me get lit up! But first, a little story. Many years ago, there were these Jews called Maccabees, and a bad king named Antiochus wouldn't let them celebrate their holidays or religion. So they rose up against him and fought for their freedom, and astonishingly they won. When the Maccabees returned to their temple in Jerusalem, they saw that the king's soldiers had wrecked it and extinguished their holy eternal flame. The Maccabees could only find one jar of oil, barely enough to light it for a single night. But then a miracle happened! The oil lasted for 8 whole nights, long enough to make more oil. That's why we light me for 8 nights on Hanukkah. Oh, who am I you ask?

But you already know me—My name is *Emmanuel Shammes*. But you can call me Manny Shammes. Not to be confused with manishevitz, though I'd take a *shtickle* in a minute if you have it. Well. You may have noticed that I am a candelabra. A menorah, to be perfectly honest. A *Hanukkiah* if you want to be fancy. And I do. And tonight, I fulfill my greatest purpose. But first, a song. Sing it with me if you know it! (*Sings, "Oh Hanukkah."*)

OH HANUKKAH, OH, HANUKKAH  
COME LIGHT THE MENORAH  
LET'S HAVE A PARTY  
WE'LL ALL DANCE THE HORA.  
GATHER 'ROUND THE TABLE

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

WE'LL GIVE YOU A TREAT,  
SEVIVON TO PLAY WITH AND LATKES TO EAT.  
AND WHILE WE ARE PLAYING  
THE CANDLES ARE BURNING LOW.  
ONE FOR EACH NIGHT, THEY SHED A SWEET LIGHT  
TO REMIND US OF DAYS LONG AGO.  
ONE FOR EACH NIGHT, THEY SHED A SWEET LIGHT  
TO REMIND US OF DAYS LONG AGO.

And now, *kinderlach*, the moment you've all been waiting for—It's the first night of Hanukkah, so LIGHT ME! (*Shammes waits. Nothing happens.*) Let's try that again—and now, the moment I get lit up! (*He waits. Bupkis.*) Well, that's strange. That's never happened before. How does it work again? Oh, someone comes to light me. That's right.

Hello? Anybody here?

Hmm. Well, that's weird.

Usually someone just lights me right up.

It kinda seems like no one is home.

Now that you mention it, I'm in the basement. Usually, I get kinda a nicer dig. You know, by the window, or at least over the fireplace or something. Weird.

Ha! I know just the thing. (*He returns with an enormous match. He attempts to light himself with it. No go. He tries again.*)

*Nu*, we only have one option left. I need oil! So I have to call upon the Great Door of Return. There's oil on the other side, and I can use it to light me!

Now, the Great Door doesn't get open excepting in the case of emergencies. Of which this is. Without light, we will be left in darkness. No music, no presents, no crispy potato latkes!

To open the Great Door of Return you must say with me three times the magic words that are written on every dreidel, a spinning top from the Hanukkah game.

*Nes. Gadol. Hayah. Sham.*

A Great Miracle Happened There.

Now. Say it with me (*encouraging the audience to say it with him:*)

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

*A Great  
Miracle  
Happened  
There.*

*A Great Miracle Happened There.*

*A Great Miracle Happened There!*

Well, that's weird, nothing at all, I don't know— (*Suddenly there is a great light and a whirring of ancient wind and—flashbam!—The Great Door of Return appears.*) Ha! I didn't think it would actually work. Now since no one here will light me, we just go in and find the oil and light me up. It should really be simple when—(*Suddenly, the Great Door of Return flings open, and ANTIOCHUS, a hulking dude with a Greek laurel wreath, a toga, and a sword—maybe he rides an elephant?—appears.*)

**ANTIOCHUS.** Whoa. What is this place?

**SHAMMES.** Oh no. It's you.

**ANTIOCHUS.** Of course it's me! King Antiochus! General purveyor of badness. Let me hear you all say boo!

**AUDIENCE.** Boo!

**ANTIOCHUS.** Boo!

**AUDIENCE.** Boo!

**ANTIOCHUS.** Aw, I love it.

**SHAMMES.** It's the future, Antiochus. A few thousand years after you *lose* your war against the Maccabees.

**ANTIOCHUS.** Wait, I lose? How can I lose? The Maccabees with their Jewish traditions and their little spinny tops? I don't like those holidays. They're weird and different. Why can't they just do things the way I do them? Wear togas, wrestle, pose for statues. And that dreidel game they play? Why not play Go Fish instead? That's a good game. As my father's father's father always said, same is good. Different is bad. How could I lose against the Maccabees?

**SHAMMES.** You're scared of what's different, that's what! You lose, and I'm the proof! As a menorah, I shine eight bright nights. One for every day after the Maccabees beat you and reclaimed the temple.

**ANTIOCHUS.** Well, we're gonna have to do something about that.



## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**SHAMMES.** I don't see what you could do I mean, I'm a menorah and here I am with my 9 candleholders and—(*Antiochus reaches over and rips both arms of candelabra off of Shammes, leaving him just a single candle stick.*) Hey, what are you doing? Give those back! Those are mine!

**ANTIOCHUS.** Finders keepers, brosef! I can't let you win because Antiochus is the best! I'm baddicaaallllllll (*rhymes with "radical"*) That's my catchphrase!

**SHAMMES.** That's a terrible catchphrase.

**ANTIOCHUS.** It's a work in progress. Later, single candle holder! (*He goes back in the Great Door of Return, and it closes just as soon as it was opened.*)

**SHAMMES.** Oh, no. I think I made a boo-boo.

### **SCENE 1 – Serious Tsuris**

*The new house. Boxes are everywhere. JUDY sits in her new bedroom, pouting.*

**DAD.** (*Off:*) JUDY.? Judyyyy. JJ? You in here? (*Judy shifts away from the voice. Dad knocks.*)

**MOM.** (*Off:*) Did you knock?

**DAD.** (*Off:*) I think I knocked. Did I knock?

**MOM.** (*Off:*) I'm asking you if you knocked, what do I know—

**JUDY.** You knocked, Dad! You knocked.

**MOM.** (*Off:*) JJ, We're very concerned about you.

**DAD.** (*Off:*) Very concerned.

**MOM.** (*Off:*) Well, don't just agree with me. Say something!

**DAD.** (*Off:*) Honey?

Honeeyyyyy?

HONEY!

**JUDY.** I hear you Dad!

**DAD.** (*Off:*) Honey, we're very concerned.

**JUDY.** Just—come in! (*They enter. They all stare at each other.*) I'm fine—I'm fine, I just want to go back home is all. I don't want to go to a

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

new school, I don't want to make new friends. I want my old room back.  
(*Mom and Dad collapse on her.*)

**MOM.** Oh, JJ!

**DAD.** Oh, honey!

**JUDY.** Ok. Ok. Don't get too upset. I just—

**MOM.** —JJ, it's ok to be scared.

**JUDY.** I'm not scared! I just—

**DAD.** —It's okay to not like change.

**JUDY.** Ugh. That's not it.

**DAD.** We made this move so that we can have a better life.

**MOM.** We're near a park.

**DAD.** There are more kids around here.

**MOM.** And I really like the new school.

**LIOR.** (*Off:*) Where is my Switch?

**DAD.** (*Calling to offstage:*) We called them "Nintendos" in my day.

**LIOR.** (*Still off:*) What? I just want to play my game!

**DAD.** BRB! Later gator. How does that sound when I say that?

**LIOR.**

**DAD.**

(*Off:*) Not cool.

So cool! (*Dad exits.*)

**JUDY.** So weird.

**MOM.** I know you miss the old house, JJ. And I know you're scared to be in a new place, with a new school, make new friends, and have to—

**JUDY.** —I'm not scared.

**MOM.** Ok, JJ.

**JUDY.** I'm not scared!

**MOM.** Ok.

**JUDY.** It's just...hard to move, I guess. But, at least it's the first night of Hanukkah. That's something I know. We do the same thing every year. It makes me feel at home.

**MOM.** Good, okay. Let's find the menorah.

**JUDY.** (*Perking up:*) And we can make so many latkes that the whole block smells like oil and salt, and then we can open presents! Can I light the first candle tonight?

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**MOM.** (*Digging through a box:*) Sure, honey. That's a good idea. But, I don't see the menorah. It should be right in this box.

**JUDY.** It's not here! Where is it? (*She's upset.*)

**MOM.** I'm sure we packed it. I'm sorry. But we might have left it at the old house with the boxes that didn't fit in the moving truck. We can get it tomorrow. It's getting dark, and there's a storm coming.

**JUDY.** Tomorrow? What are we going to do tonight? Can we at least make latkes?

**MOM.** Yes, of course... if we can find some oil.

**JUDY.** We don't have any oil?

**MOM.** Or a pan. I think we left some of the cooking stuff behind with the menorah, so everything would be packed and ready for tonight.... Except I forgot the box. I'm so sorry. (*Dad reenters.*)

**DAD.** Crisis averted—we found the Nintendo. (*LIOR enters.*)

**LIOR.** It's a Switch. (*To all:*) 'Sup.

**JUDY.** So you packed Lior's Switch, but not our family's menorah?

**MOM.** Okay, that's it. There is a store down the street. We will bring home a pan.

**DAD.** And oil! And potatoes.

**JUDY.** What *did* you bring?

**DAD.** We remembered to bring *you!* You're welcome! (*Beat.*) Cut your Mom some slack. We've been unpacking all day and we're tired.

**MOM.** Grab your coat, David. Let's go.

**MOM.** (*To Judy and Lior:*) I do not want you to go outside. It's getting dark and you don't know the neighborhood yet.

**DAD.** We'll be back with all the fixings for a Hanukkah party in no time! Just wait here. (*Exits.*)

**LIOR.** (*Calling off:*) Can you get some chips too? (*They're gone.*)

**JUDY.** --They're gone. (*Beat.*)

**LIOR.** 'Sup.

**JUDY.** I'm getting that menorah.

**LIOR.** But that's like, across town.

**JUDY.** I have my bike.

**LIOR.** Uh, Mom and Dad totally said no.

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**JUDY.** I'll be back before they know I'm gone.

**LIOR.** No way. We can make one, with like, uh, maybe we could draw a menorah. Do we still have that old Lite Brite?

**JUDY.** I think we left it at the old house.

**LIOR.** Maybe we could burn some matches or something. Or like, eight cell phone lights!

**JUDY.** You only light one light on the first night. Besides, we don't have eight cell phones.

**LIOR.** *(Not listening.)* Great idea! Let's look for eight cell phones! *(He leaves. Judy hesitates. She grabs a jacket and her backpack. She leaves. Beat. Lior returns.)*

**LIOR.** Oh man, we totally do not have eight cell phones. Uh, Judy? Judyyyyyy? JJ? You in here? Dude.

### **SCENE 2 – The Great Door of Return**

*The basement of the old house. Shammes is as we left him, pouting and bereft of his accompanying candelabra.*

**JUDY.** *(Off:)* Hello? Is anyone here? *(We hear some keys. Shammes, alarmed, hides under some boxes. The door opens. Judy enters, wet from the rain.)*

**JUDY.** Hello? I thought I heard a noise. Is that just the storm? Is anyone here? This used to be my house! So if you're a ghost, please be one of those friendly, "I'm here to help you" ghosts and not one of those "I'm going to freak you out" kinds. *(She hears a movement in the boxes and sees it moving. Scared, she runs under the crawl space. It is quiet. We hear the storm outside. Suddenly, there is a loud clap of thunder and the lights go out completely.)*

**JUDY.**

Oh no, the lights went out.

I hate that!

*(Backs to each other, they suspiciously inch closer, searching the walls.)*

What was that?

**SHAMMES.**

Oy vey, the lights went out.

I hate that?

What was that?



## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**SHAMMES.** I know. I've got a great voice.

**JUDY.** I'm talking to a candlestick.

**SHAMMES.** Does it show?

**JUDY.** That I'm talking to a candlestick?

**SHAMMES.** That my eight branches were brutally stolen.

**JUDY.** Who would do that?

**SHAMMES.** I cannot say his name.

**JUDY.** This is all a dream. This is all a dream.

**SHAMMES.** (*Whispers:*) Antiochus.

**JUDY.** What?

**SHAMMES.** Antiochus!

**ANTIOCHUS.** (*Off, as a distant voice, as in an echo:*) Whoa, badical, badical, badical....

**SHAMMES.** He can speak to us now from the past—which he's trying to change. He's gotten more powerful now that he knows the future.

**JUDY.** Ok. So my family menorah—which I missed very much and returned here to find--

**SHAMMES.** —Thank you, but you can address me directly-

**JUDY.** —Not only all of the sudden talks—

**SHAMMES.** —I could always talk I'm really just kind of an introvert who—

**JUDY.** —And now it tells me that Antiochus—

**ANTIOCHUS.** (*Off:*) Baddical, Baddical, Baddical!

**JUDY.** —Ok. We get it! Like the actual King from the Hanukkah story in ancient Israel—

**SHAMMES.** —Seleucid Empire, 2nd Century BCE—

**JUDY.** -Whatever. Came and stole his arms—

**SHAMMES.** —Candlesticks—

**JUDY.** Okay—I need a minute.

**SHAMMES.** Sure, sure. Except we really don't have a minute. Maybe you could panic later? After we save the world.

**JUDY.** Okay, I'll panic later. But just so we're clear, are all objects alive? Like, my TV, sofa, kitchen table? Are you all like, hanging out and talking after people leave the room?

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**SHAMMES.** No, of course not. Only sacred objects. Kiddish Cup for wine, challah cover of course—sometimes she flies around the room like the cape of a superhero, cracks us all up. Shofar is a hoot, he can be an attention hog though—‘*Tekiaaaaaaaaaaah*’ until he’s red in the face. You get it.

**JUDY.** *(No response; Mouth open, baffled.)*

**SHAMMES.** Okay — this seems like a lot. *(Snaps fingers at her.)* Earth to Judy. Talking menorah needs your help over here.

**JUDY.** —And, wait a sec. How did Antioch—

**SHAMMMES.** Sh. You can’t say his name. Or else he does his dumb catchphrase. From across time. It really is a neat trick.

**JUDY.** Antio—

**SHAMMES.** Sh.

**JUDY.** Uh ... Pansy-ochus?

**SHAMMES.** That’ll work.

**JUDY.** How did Pansy-ochus get here anyway?

**SHAMMES.** What?

**JUDY.** Well, he’s not from now, and you say he knows the future now so he’s rewriting—

**SHAMMES.** —Trying to rewrite—

**JUDY.** —Trying to rewrite the past. So, how did he get here?

**SHAMMES.** Well. Um. He... maybe you should panic now.

**JUDY.** *You* didn’t make it so he could come, did you?

**SHAMMES.** Me, ha ha ha. NO! Not me. It was, um, it was—him! Yeah. He’s so bad. He figured out how to open the Great Door of Return.

**JUDY.** What the what?

**SHAMMES.** The Great Door of Return. You know, the Winding Bridge to the Past. *Teshuva*. The Long Line of Lineage?

**JUDY.** Uhhhhh...Is this like a Dungeons and Dragons type of thing?

**SHAMMES.** At special times in the year a portal—the Great Door—can be opened. Within you, within everyone, is the ability to remember, to connect back to the past. To their ancestors. Even the very long ago past.

**JUDY.** Whoa.

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**SHAMMES.** Yeah so *Pantsyochus* must have figured out how to reverse the doorway. Even though that's never been done before and is really impossible but let's just forget about that—it was (*sotto:*) Antiochus—who opened the Great Door of Return!

Not me.

And now we have to go back and get my candlesticks—and restore the timeline of history to save Hanukkah.

**JUDY.** Uh-huh. Well. Um. So, I'm not really sure. I just moved to a new house, I have a lot on my plate. I'm still unpacking boxes, haven't found my Lite Brite yet. So, I'm gonna go. Maybe the shofar and challah cover can be your sidekicks on this terrifying mission. And time travel? Isn't that dangerous?

**SHAMMES.** Ha ha! No. The worst that could possibly happen is that your particles are completely dissolved and can never be rejoined. And you will spend eternity in limbo as a floating cloud of dust. But you know, that's *the worst* that can happen.

**JUDY.** You're not in sales, are you?

**SHAMMES.** Now that Dancey-ochus—

**JUDY.** —I like that one.

**SHAMMES.** Thanks! Now that he knows the future, *he can change the past*. Hanukkah might not even happen!

**JUDY.** You've got to be kidding me.

**SHAMMES.** No dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, I made you out of clay.

**JUDY.** None whatsoever?

**SHAMMES.** Nope. And no *sufganiot*.

**JUDY.** Ah, I'm not a big fan of jelly doughnuts.

**SHAMMES.** Well, there would be doughnuts- but they would just be empty with a hole in the middle, like the hearts of all the disappointed children. No filling at all.

**JUDY.** Those sad kids.

**SHAMMES.** No lights, no presents. No days off of school and work.

**JUDY.** Oh, public schools and offices don't usually close for Hanukkah.

**SHAMMES.** They don't?

**JUDY.** Yeah, they only close for Christmas.



## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**SHAMMES.** That can't be right.

**JUDY.** Okay, let's not get too political here.

**SHAMMES.** No latkes.

**JUDY.** What!?

**SHAMMES.** Nope. No more. Bupkis. Not a fried potato pancake in sight.

**JUDY.** That villain!

**SHAMMES.** That's right!

**JUDY.** We have to do something!

**SHAMMES.** Well, I can't.

**JUDY.** Why not?!

**SHAMMES.** I mean, I'm really just a menorah. Plus I lost my branches.

**JUDY.** Well, what do we do?

**SHAMMES.** *You* can do something.

**JUDY.** Me?

**SHAMMES.** Yes, come back with me. I'll show you how. We can stop Dancy-ochus.

**JUDY.** But I'm just a kid.

**SHAMMES.** A kid who got an A+ on her spelling test and scored the winning goal for her soccer team!

**JUDY.** It was an A-. And an assist off my face.

**SHAMMES.** A kid who loves her Mom and Dad and brother.

**JUDY.** He's annoying.

**SHAMMES.** You know, your great-grandparents escaped grave danger in Eastern Europe, walking all night wearing only the clothes on their backs and carrying *this* menorah. Me. I was there. I remember. They dedicated the rest of their lives to saving refugees who had to flee their countries to live in safety. That is the stock you come from. You are stronger and tougher than you realize.

**JUDY.** My great-grandparents were tough. And I do love Hanukkah.

**SHAMMES.** So we have to save it.

**JUDY.** I don't know if I can.

**SHAMMES.** *Az me muz, ken men.* "If you must, you can."

**JUDY.** If I must, I can.

And you'll come with me?

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**SHAMMES.** *Zikher, kinderlach. (She looks at him.)* That means “of course.”

**JUDY.** Ok. Ok. So let’s do it. How do we get there?

**SHAMMES.** *(To audience:)* Do you remember how to get there? Let’s help Judy! Repeat after me: *(Judy also starts to repeat as audience gets into it, etc.)*

*Nes. Gadol. Hayah. Sham.*

A Great Miracle Happened There.

Now. Say it with me

*A Great Miracle Happened There.*

*A Great Miracle Happened There.*

*A Great Miracle Happened There! (The Great Door of Return appears.*

*Judy hesitates. Shammes gestures inside. She determines to go. They enter, and the Great Door of Return disappears.)*

### **SCENE 3 – To the Mitzvahmobile!**

*The new house. Lior is playing video games. Mom and Dad enter wearing raincoats, carrying grocery bags and gifts.*

**MOM.** We braved the storm and returned with goodies. Happy Hanukkah!

**DAD.** Hanukkah Harry is here! *(Lior does not move from his game. Beat.)*

**LIOR.** ‘Sup.

**DAD.** No, nothing?

**LIOR.** Uh, did you bring back chips?

**DAD.** Hanukkah Harry? It’s from Saturday Night Live. And we brought, preseennttssssssssss!

**LIOR.** Cool. Uh, thanks.

**DAD.** And potatoes and a pan.

**LIOR.** And chips?

**DAD.** Yes, chips. But they were strangely out of oil.

**MOM.** You’ll have to get that later.

**DAD.** I will not fail in my oil mission!

**MOM.** Where’s your sister?

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

**LIOR.** Uh—I think maybe she rode her bike back to the old house.

**MOM.** Wait, what?

**LIOR.** Yeah, she like, said she didn't want to be here. And I think she like, rode off. Her bike's gone.

**DAD.** In this weather? Why didn't you call?

**LIOR.** I was gonna, but I guess I forgot.

**MOM.** You forgot?

**LIOR.** I was playing *Legend of Zelda*. Uh. Sorry?

**MOM.** We've got to get out and find her. (*To Dad:*) Get your coat, you're coming too!

**DAD.** The power is out all over the city. I'll grab flashlights. To the Batmobile!

**LIOR.** (*Looks up at the Batman reference. In a Batman voice*) "The night is darkest just before the dawn. And I promise you, the dawn is coming."  
(*Dad looks at him quizzically.*)

Batman, Dad. It's from Batman!

**DAD.** Oh, right! (*Dad and Lior high five and grab Lior's raincoat and flashlights.*)

**MOM.** Let's go! (*They leave.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—  
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