

*Hanukkah Harriet*

a play for young people (to see and/or do)

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Characters

**Shayna**, a ten-year-old girl in fourth grade, female, Jewish  
**Hanukkah Harriet**, a feisty shtetl woman, has a thick old-school accent like Yiddish or Jewish New York, female, Jewish

*At Home and the Hospital*

**Mom**, Shayna's mom, female, Jewish  
**Dad**, Shayna's dad, male, Jewish  
**Scott**, Shayna's almost-thirteen-year-old brother, male, Jewish  
**Bubby**, Shayna's grandma, female, Jewish  
**Doctor Smith**, any gender, Gentile

*At School and Dance Class*

**George**, Shayna's friend at school, in fourth grade, male, Gentile  
**George's Mom**, female (could be **George's Dad**, male), Gentile  
**George's Mommy**, female (could be **George's Daddy**, male), Gentile  
**Jordan**, Shayna's classmate, in fourth grade, female, Gentile  
**Kaylen**, Shayna's classmate, any gender, Gentile  
**Elliot**, Shayna's classmate, any gender, Gentile  
**Ryan**, Shayna's classmate, any gender, Gentile  
**Lee**, Shayna's classmate, any gender, Gentile  
**Ty**, Shayna's classmate, any gender, Gentile  
**Miss (or Mister) Christiansen**, Shayna's schoolteacher, any gender, Gentile  
**Dance Teacher**, any gender, Gentile

*In Jerusalem*

**Judah Maccabee**, any gender, Jewish  
**A Soldier**, any gender, Jewish  
**Another Soldier**, any gender, Jewish  
**Yet Another Soldier**, any gender, Jewish

*In the Shtetl*

**Young Harriet**, female, Jewish  
**Mameh**, Harriet's mother, female, Jewish  
**Tateh**, Harriet's father, male, Jewish  
**Shlomo**, Harriet's brother, male, Jewish

*At the North Pole*

**Santa Claus**, any gender, Gentile

Setting

The twenty-first century.

Since much of this play takes place in fantasy, feel free to make the staging as elaborate or as minimal as your vision—and your budget!—allows.

### A Note on Casting

This play can be done with a large cast or a small cast.

#### LARGE CAST:

If you opt for a large cast, feel free to flood the stage with Soldiers, Elves, etc. You could even add Reindeer, if you want!

Also, feel free to change the gender of some roles to make the play fit your community's casting needs. The following roles may be played by any gender: Doctor Smith, George's parents, Kaylen, Elliot, Ryan, Lee, Ty, Miss (or Mister) Christiansen, Dance Teacher, Judah Maccabee, A Soldier, Another Soldier, Yet Another Soldier, additional Soldiers, Santa Claus, and the optional Elves and Reindeer. (NOTE: Should you change the gender of George's parents, make sure that they remain a same-gender couple [i.e. two men or two women].)

#### SMALL CAST:

Here are some ideas for doubling:

ACTOR 1 – Shayna

ACTOR 2 – Harriet, Bubby

ACTOR 3 – Mom, George's Mommy, Mameh

ACTOR 4 – Dad, Dance Teacher, Santa Claus, Tateh, other student at school

ACTOR 5 – George, Scott, Judah Maccabee, Shlomo

ACTOR 6 – George's Mom, Miss Christiansen

ACTOR 7 – Jordan, Young Harriet, Dr. Smith

Feel free to decrease the number of students in Shayna's class and reassign or cut lines at the beginning of and throughout Scene One, and also when the classroom comes back in Scene Seven.

### Synopsis

It's December. Shayna, the only Jewish kid in her class, would give anything to not have to celebrate Hanukkah and instead celebrate her favorite thing in the world: Christmas! But this all changes when she is visited by the spirit of a bubby from the Old Country, who takes her on a journey through Jewish history, large and small, and teaches her the value of tradition and of miracles, large and small.

### Run Time

Approximately one hour.

A Glossary of Yiddish Words in *Hanukkah Harriet*

**Alte kaker** – *noun*, an old person, an old geezer

**Alter-Bubby** – *noun*, great-grandmother

**Bubbelah** – *noun*, literally meaning “little grandmother,” it’s a sweet term of endearment usually for someone younger like a child or grandchild.

**Bubby** – *noun*, grandmother

**Chutzpah** – *adjective*, audacity, nerve, brazenness

**Farbissinuh** - *adjective*, stubborn, truculent; grim; dogged; bitter, embittered.

**Kishkas** – *plural noun*, literally meaning innards, guts, intestines, it’s often used in the expression “rushing one’s kishkas off,” which means to go through a great ordeal to get something done quickly.

**Kvetch** – *verb/noun*, to complain; also can mean someone who complains

**Lokh in kop** – *phrase*, literally means “a hole in the head”

**Maydl** – *noun*, girl

**Mensch** – *noun*, a virtuous, upstanding person

**Meshuginuh** – *noun/adjective*, a lunatic or crazy person; also used to describe a lunatic or crazy person

**Mishegoss** – *noun*, nonsense, madness, craziness

**Oy vey iz mir** – *phrase*, literally means, “Oh woe is me!”

**Pisher** – *noun*, a humorous diminutive for a child or inexperienced person

**Schlep** – *noun/verb*, a long, exhausting journey; or to take a long, exhausting journey

**Schmendrick** – *noun*, a good-for-nothing, contemptible fool or jerk

**Shvitzing** – *verb*, sweating

**Shpiel** – *noun*, literally means “a game or play,” but often used to mean a whole involved presentation or story

**Shtetl** – *noun*, a small town or village, specifically in Eastern Europe or Russia at the turn of the twentieth century where communities of Jewish people lived

**Tsuris** – *noun*, trouble or distress, the kind that could result in a belly ache

*Hanukkah Harriet* / 4.24.20

For my Alter-Bubby Gertie,  
who called me “tateleh.”

*Hanukkah Harriet* was co-commissioned by the Jewish Theatre of Bloomington and Stages  
Bloomington.

**PROLOGUE**  
***with Harriet***

*An empty stage.*

*Hanukkah Harriet comes out.*

**Harriet, to the audience**

Hello!

*(If this play is happening during Hanukkah:)* Happy Hanukkah, if you're observing!

You are about to witness the story of a little girl...some might say she's farbissinuh, but I say she's just sad and misunderstood. Do you know what farbissinuh means? It's Yiddish. It means stubborn, bitter, eager to pick an argument or fight.

Do any of you know any children like this, farbissinuh children who give the grown-ups in their life tsuris?

Tsuris. That's Yiddish for trouble. Like a belly ache.

You'll have to forgive me, I slip into Yiddish from time to time. It's my mother tongue, from the Old Country.

Long story short, you are about to see the story of a sad, misunderstood maydl.

There I go again! A sad, misunderstood *girl*. Maydl, it's Yiddish for girl.

And this sad, misunderstood girl you're about to see...let's just say I know her. I watch over her.

And even though she causes me tsuris—do you all remember what that word means?

*Hanukkah Harriet listens to the audience and responds to them.*

*If they guess right, Harriet says, "Trouble, that's right. Good job listening."  
or, if they guess wrong, Harriet says, "It means trouble, I just told you! You have to pay better attention to the show!"*

**Harriet**

Even though she causes me tsuris, I feel for this girl. You ever heard this expression: hurt people hurt people? Well never before has this been more true than of this little girl.

*A classroom comes to life around Hanukkah Harriet.*

*There's a teacher and a group of students.*

*Prominently featured is Shayna.*

**Harriet**

There she is right now. She's at school. That's her teacher, and those are her classmates.

Alright, I better scram. I don't make my big entrance until Scene Four.

Now don't mind little Shayna. That's her name, Shayna. She'll wind up okay. I'm sure of it.

**SCENE ONE**

**with Shayna, George, Jordan, Kaylen, Elliot, Ryan, Lee, Ty, Miss Christiansen, Mom, and Bubby**

*A classroom,  
resplendent with Christmas decorations.*

*It's free time, so the kids are doing homework, reading, playing, or drawing.  
Shayna is drawing.  
Miss Christiansen is there, sitting at her desk or strolling around the room.  
The kids chat.*

**Jordan**

What do you all want Santa to bring you for Christmas?

**Kaylen**

I wrote Santa a letter asking for a new video game.

**Elliot**

My parents don't allow my brother and me to play video games. They say it'll rot my brain.

**George**

My Mom told me Santa is bringing me light-up sneakers.

**Ryan**

I'm jealous! I want light-up sneakers!

**George**

Maybe Santa will bring them for you too.

**Lee**

It's funny that you want light-up sneakers, George, because I myself requested that Santa bring me wheely sneakers.

**Ty**

I just want to be able to meet Santa one time! Every year, I leave out cookies and milk, and I promise myself I won't go to sleep—I *won't go to sleep, I won't go to sleep, I won't*—but then I always fall asleep somehow, and I wake up in the morning and the cookies are gone and the milk is gone, and, once again, I missed him!

**Jordan**

Shayna, what do you want Santa to bring you for Christmas?

**George**

She doesn't—

**Shayna**, *interrupting George*  
Santa doesn't come to my house.

**Jordan**  
Why not?

**Shayna**  
Because I'm Jewish.

**Jordan**  
Oh yeah. I forgot.

**Shayna**  
I wouldn't want Santa Claus to come to my house anyway. Some creepy old man sneaking down the chimney? No thanks.

**Jordan**  
You're just jealous you don't get to celebrate Christmas like the rest of us.

**Shayna**  
I don't care about Christmas! Christmas is a dumb holiday for dumb people!

**Miss Christiansen**  
Shayna and Jordan, that's enough!

**Jordan**  
Shayna started it!

**Shayna**  
*Jordan* started it!

**Miss Christiansen**  
Everyone, clean up. It's time to move on to our next activity.

*All the kids clean up, except for Shayna.*

**Miss Christiansen**  
Shayna, honey, put your coloring away, please.

**Shayna**  
But I'm not done!

**Miss Christiansen**  
Shayna, it's time to put your coloring away.

**Shayna**  
I'm not done!



*Mom and Bubby enter.*

**Miss Christiansen**

Shayna, please.

*Miss Christiansen notices Mom and Bubby.*

**Miss Christiansen**

Everyone, Shayna's mom and grandma have arrived for their demonstration. Let's make a circle.

*The kids in the class, all except Shayna, sit in a circle on the floor.  
Shayna keeps drawing.*

**Mom**

Hi Shayna. All your friends are cleaning up. Do you want to clean up too?

**Shayna**

No.

**Mom**

Shayna, clean up, you're being silly.

**Shayna**

I'm not done, Mom!

**Mom**

Shayna, look: all your friends are sitting in a circle waiting for you.

**Shayna**

Here Mommy—look what I made for you!

*Shayna presents a drawing to Mom.*

**Mom**

What's this supposed to be?

**Shayna**

That's you, that's Dad, that's Scott, that's Bubby, and that's me.

**Mom**

Is that a Christmas tree?

**Bubby**

Is that Santa Claus?

**Shayna**

Uh huh.

**Mom**

But we don't celebrate Christmas, Shayna.

**Bubby**

Why don't we get started?

**Mom**

Shayna go take a seat with your friends.

*Shayna does.*

**Miss Christiansen**

Class, today we have a special treat. Shayna's Mom and grandma—

**Shayna**

Bubby!

**Miss Christiansen**

Huh?

**Shayna**

She's not my grandma. She's my Bubby.

**Bubby**

She calls me Bubby. It's Yiddish for Grandma.

**Miss Christiansen**

Alright! Shayna's Mom and her Booby—

*The class laughs.*

**Shayna**

Not Booby! Bubby!

**Miss Christiansen**

Sorry.

*Miss Christiansen keeps trying to pronounce it and failing.*

**Miss Christiansen**

Bobby?

**Shayna, Mom, and Bubby**

Bubby!

**Miss Christiansen**

Babby?

**Shayna, Mom, and Bubby**  
Bubby!

**Miss Christiansen**  
...Buppy.

**Shayna, Mom, and Bubby**  
NO! BUBBY!

**Miss Christiansen**  
I give up.

Shayna's family has offered to come teach us about the Jewish holiday of (*pronouncing the "ch" like in the word "child" or "church"*) Chanukah.

**Mom**  
It's Hanukkah.

**Miss Christiansen**  
Oh. But isn't it spelled with a C-H?

**Mom**  
It can be. It can be spelled with either a C-H or just an H, but either way it's pronounced like an H. Hanukkah.

**Bubby**  
Or it can be pronounced with a "chhhh" sound. Like you've got phlegm in your throat. (*Pronounced with the perfect Hebrew "ch" sound.*) Chanukah.

**Miss Christiansen**  
Got it. Take it away, you two.

**Mom**  
Thank you, Miss Christiansen. I'm Shayna's Mom.

**Bubby**  
And I'm Shayna's Bubby.

**Mom**  
And we're here today to teach you about a holiday we celebrate, the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. Does anyone know when Hanukkah begins?

*Silence.*

**Mom**  
Hanukkah begins tonight, at sundown! And then it lasts for eight days. Does anyone know what the holiday of Hanukkah is about?

*Jordan raises her hand.*

**Mom**

Jordan?

**Jordan**

Isn't it just like Jewish Christmas?

**Mom**

Kind of! It sometimes falls around the same time as Christmas, but has its own special traditions and its own special story. Does anyone know the story of Hanukkah?

*George raises his hand.*

**Mom**

George?

**George**

Doesn't it have something to do with candles?

**Mom**

Yes, George! That's part of the story. Shayna, why don't you tell your class the story?

**Shayna**

I don't know the story.

**Mom**

Sure you do, Shayna! We have that book about Hanukkah. We read it together the other night.

**Shayna**

I don't remember it.

**Mom**

Well, once long ago in Israel, a group of people named the Maccabees wanted to light a candelabra, called a menorah. Instead of burning candles, this menorah burned oil. They only had enough oil to last one day, but, miraculously, the oil burned for eight days! This is why we celebrate Hanukkah for eight days instead of just one. Every night, we light one more candle to remember that miracle of the burning oil from long ago. And that's also why we cook our delicious Hanukkah treat, latkes, in oil.

**Bubby**

And today, we made latkes for you all to enjoy!

*Bubby gets up.*

**Mom**

Ma, I'll get the latkes.

**Bubby**

I got 'em.

*Bubby goes to get the latkes. (Perhaps she leaves the stage.)*

**Mom**

Are you all excited to try latkes?!

*Silence.*

*Lee raises their hand.*

**Mom**

Yes, Lee.

**Lee**

What is a katluh?

**Elliot**

It's not a katluh, it's a locka!

**Shayna**

It's a LAT-KE!

**Mom**

Latkes are pancakes made of potatoes. They're kind of like French fries.

*The students cheer!*

**Mom**

Mom? Do you need help with the latkes?

*Bubby falls.*

*(If she's offstage, there should be a crashing/falling sound.)*

**Mom**

Mom!

**Shayna**

Bubby!

**Miss Christiansen**

Oh no! Booky fell!

*Mom and Miss Christiansen run to Bubby.*

*Suddenly, music from The Nutcracker blares.*

**SCENE TWO**

**with Shayna, George, Jordan, Dance Teacher, George's Mom, George's Mommy, Santa Claus, and perhaps some more kids**

*A dance studio.*

*Shayna, George, Jordan, and maybe some other kids are rehearsing a dance from The Nutcracker, underscored by Tchaikovsky's "Candy Cane."*

*Their Dance Teacher is coaching them as they dance.*

*The Teacher is saying things like, "Good job! Bigger! Etc."*

*The dance can be ballet or modern or hip-hop or anything really.*

*Shayna is not a very good dancer, and neither is Jordan,*

*but George is spectacular.*

*They finish their dance.*

*The Dance Teacher applauds.*

**Dance Teacher**

Alright, everyone—class is over. That was better. But please please *please* keep rehearsing at home. Our Nutcracker performance is only two weeks away.

*The kids get their things.*

*Some parents have arrived to pick up their children.*

**Jordan**

I think when she says we need to rehearse at home she's not talking about me because I know my part really well.

**Shayna**

I need to rehearse. I suck at this.

**George**

No you don't!

**Shayna**

I suck at dancing! I don't know why my mom keeps signing me up for dance class.

**George**

Don't you have fun moving around to the music?

**Shayna**

I guess.

**George**

And isn't it fun for us to do it together?

**Shayna**

Yeah.

**George**

Maybe you don't have to be an amazing dancer then. Maybe it's nice to just have fun.

**Shayna**

That's easy for you to say! If anyone doesn't need to rehearse, it's you, George. You're the most amazing dancer in our whole group.

**Jordan**

Umm...

**George**

That's not true.

**Shayna**

It is so true! I wish I was a great dancer like you.

**Jordan**

It's pretty weird to see a boy do dance class.

**George**

Says who?

**Jordan**

My mom. Oh there she is. And there are your *two* moms, George.

*Jordan chuckles.*

**Jordan**

Bye!

*Jordan runs off with her mom.*

**Shayna**

I hate her!

**George**

Shh, she might hear you!

**Shayna**

Let her hear me! I don't care! She's mean! She was mean to me at school today, and she was mean to you just now. It's not weird to see a boy in dance class—especially not when he's the best one!

**George**

I think she's just mad that she's not a better dancer.

**Shayna**

Really? It seems like she thinks she's the greatest dancer on the whole planet.

**George**

That's just an act.

**Shayna**

You think?

**George**

Sometimes people act all tough but really they're just scared. That's what my Mom tells me.

**Shayna**

Interesting.

*George's Mom and George's Mommy approach George and Shayna.*

**George's Mom and George's Mommy**

Hi George!

**George**

Hi Mom.

*George hugs his Mom.*

**George**

Hi Mommy.

*George hugs his Mommy.*

**George's Mom and George's Mommy**

Hi Shayna.

**Shayna**

Hi.

**George's Mom**

Are you two getting excited for the big Nutcracker show?

**Shayna**

Jordan said it's weird that George does dance class, because he's a boy, but I don't think there's anything wrong with a boy doing dance class!

**George's Mom**

George, did your teacher hear Jordan say that?

**George**

No.



**Shayna**

She said it just now, after class.

**George's Mom**

Just now?

**Shayna**

And then she laughed about how George has two moms.

**George's Mom**

Where is that teacher? I'm going to give her a piece of my mind.

**George**

Mom, it's not a big deal.

**George's Mom**

And what about Jordan's parents? Where are they? Are they still here? Do you see them? They need to know what their daughter said to our son!

**George**

Mom, stop, you're embarrassing me!

**George's Mommy, to George's Mom**

Honey. Calm down. We'll talk about it later. Who wants a snack?

*George's Mommy takes snacks out of her bag.  
George and Shayna both partake.*

**Shayna**

Where's my mom?

**George's Mommy**

Your mom actually asked us to pick you up and drive you to the hospital to see your grandma.

**Shayna**

You mean my Bubby, is my Bubby okay?

**George's Mommy**

Your mom said the doctors are taking good care of her.

**George's Mom**

Who's getting excited for Christmas? I know I am.

**George's Mommy**

Me too!

**George**

Shayna doesn't—

**Shayna**, *cutting off George*

I don't celebrate Christmas.

**George's Mom**

Oh right, of course. Are you excited for Hanukkah, Shayna?

**George**

Hanukkah begins tonight. That's what Shayna's mom and Bubby taught us at school today.

**George's Mommy**

How wonderful! Does your family have any fun Hanukkah traditions?

**Shayna**

We just light the stupid candles and say the stupid prayers.

**George's Mom**

I bet you get presents!

**Shayna**

Yeah but I only get to open one of them a night. When I have my bat-mitzvah, that's when I'll get lots of presents. My brother's bar-mitzvah is in a few months. He's going to get a lot of presents.

**George's Mom**

I've never been to a bar-mitzvah.

**George's Mommy**

You don't hear of too many bar-mitzvahs happening around here.

**Shayna**

Bar- and bat-mitzvahs are a lot of work. My brother has to study his torah portion for a long time every night, and my parents have to drive him to a town an hour away to go to lessons at a synagogue. What about your family—do you have any fun Christmas traditions?

**George's Mom**

Well, we have everyone over to our house.

**George's Mommy**

George's grandparents, and George's aunt and uncles, and lots of cousins.

**George**

The adults make a lot of yummy food and I get to play with my cousins. We watch Christmas movies and sing Christmas songs and, when it's ready, we eat all the food the adults made.

*Music from The Nutcracker is heard.  
Shayna stands as George talks  
and pantomimes the story he's telling her,  
dreaming about being there herself.*

*Santa Claus appears.*

**George**

On Christmas morning, we wake up to a note from Santa Claus and we see all the presents he left for us.

**Santa Claus**

Ho Ho Ho!

**George**

We cheer because there are so many presents! And then...we open them. We open so many presents that there's wrapping paper everywhere and we pretend that the wrapping paper is quicksand.

**Santa Claus**

Ho ho—oh no!

**Everyone**

Oh no!

*Shayna, George, George's Mom, George's Mommy, and Santa Claus pretend that they're falling into quicksand.*

**Everyone**

We're falling into quicksand!

*George, George's Mom, George's Mommy, and Santa Claus disappear. Shayna just slinks down to the floor.*

**SCENE THREE**

**with Shayna, Mom, Dad, Scott, and Dr. Smith**

*A waiting room in a hospital.*

*Shayna sits on the floor, doing her homework.*

*Mom, Dad, and Shayna's older brother Scott sit in chairs.*

*Mom and Dad are waiting, restless.*

*Scott, wearing headphones, is practicing his haftarah portion for his bar-mitzvah, chanting it rather loudly.*

*He's not a great singer, and he keeps messing up and restarting.*

*As her brother practices, Shayna grows more and more annoyed.*

**Scott, chanting**

Ve-lo-oh sham-oo-oooh ve-lo hit-oo-oo-oo-oooh et-oz-na-am.\*

*Scott messes up and stops.*

*Shayna huffs, puffs, or otherwise expresses her annoyance.*

**Mom**

Good job, Scott.

**Scott, chanting**

Ve-lo-oh sham-oo-oooh ve-lo hit-oo-oo-oo-oooh et-oz-na-am.

*Scott messes up and stops.*

*Shayna huff, puffs, grunts even more.*

**Dad**

You got it, Scott. Sounds great.

**Scott, chanting**

Ve-lo-oh sham-oo-oooh ve-lo hit-oo-oo-oo-oooh—

**Shayna**

CUT IT OUT!

*Scott takes off his headphones and stops practicing.*

**Shayna**

Mom! Dad! Make him stop! I can't do my homework while he's doing that!

**Mom**

Shayna, your brother has to practice. It's for his bar-mitzvah.

---

\* This is taken from Jeremiah 7:26, which is part of the haftarah portion for Tzav, the twenty-fifth weekly Torah portion in the annual cycle of Torah reading. If you wish to have Scott practice a different haftarah portion, though, feel free!

**Shayna**

So? I don't care.

**Dad**

Come on, Shayna. Don't you want your brother to be ready for his bar-mitzvah? It's a very important day.

**Shayna**

Why is his bar-mitzvah more important than my homework?

**Dad**

Nobody's saying that, honey.

**Scott**

Why do you have to be such a jerk?

**Shayna**

I'm not a jerk! Mom! Dad! Scott called me a jerk!

**Mom**

Here we go.

**Dad**

Buddy, can you maybe practice a little more quietly?

**Mom**

Steve! No! He does not have to practice quietly. Practice as loud and proud as you can, Scott. Your sister can deal with it. Scott's bar-mitzvah *is* more important than your homework, Shayna, because a bar-mitzvah is the most important moment of Jewish kid's life. Especially where we live, where there aren't many other Jews. We need to embrace our traditions and be proud of them! And when it's time for your bat-mitzvah, Shayna, all of us will put up with all the loud, annoying practicing you're going to have to do too.

**Scott**

You think my practicing is loud and annoying?

**Mom**

Of course not, sweetheart! That's not what I meant!

**Shayna**

I don't want a bat-mitzvah.

**Mom**

Don't be ridiculous.

**Shayna**

I'm not being ridiculous.

**Mom**

You're being a brat. You're having a bat-mitzvah and that's that.

**Scott**

I don't want a bar-mitzvah either.

**Dad**

YOU'RE HAVING A BAR-MITZVAH, MISTER! We've already paid for the caterer and the venue and everything!

**Scott**

It's hard to learn all this stuff!

**Mom**

Yeah, well sometimes things in life are hard!

**Dad**

Why don't we all just relax? We've had a stressful day.

*Dr. Smith comes in.*

**Dr. Smith**

Hi everyone.

**Dad**

Shayna, get off the floor. The doctor's here.

**Shayna**

I like the floor.

**Mom**

Not now.

*Shayna gets up off the floor.*

**Dr. Smith**

How are you all doing?

**Mom**

We're alright.

**Dr. Smith, to Shayna and Scott**

Hello, you two. What are your names?

**Scott**

I'm Scott.

*They wait for Shayna to introduce herself.*

**Mom**

Go on, Shayna. Tell the nice doctor your name.

**Shayna**

I don't want to!

**Dad**

Don't mind her.

**Dr. Smith**

Shayna, Scott, I'm Doctor Smith. I'm taking care of your grandma.

**Mom**

How's she doing?

**Dr. Smith**

She's okay. All she needs now is time and rest.

**Mom**

And we just wait for her to wake up?

**Dr. Smith**

Yes. And I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure she does. Merry Christmas, everyone.

**Shayna**

Merry Christmas!

*Dr. Smith leaves.*

**Mom**

Why does everyone insist on going around saying Merry Christmas? *We* don't celebrate Christmas.

**Dad**

I think he was just being nice.

**Shayna**

Why is grandma here? Because she fell at school?

**Dad**

Her body needs to rest in order to get better, so she's just sleeping for a little bit.

**Shayna**

When is she going to wake up?

**Mom**

We hope soon.

**Scott**

She might not wake up.

**Dad**

That's enough, Scott.

**Scott**

What'd I say?

**Mom**

Will you look at that? The sun is setting on the first night of Hanukkah and we're at a hospital without a menorah.

**Dad**

Did someone say menorah?

*Dad pulls an electric menorah out of a bag.*

**Mom**

Steve! Kids, Daddy brought our electric menorah from home!

*Dad also pulls two wrapped gifts out of the bag.*

**Dad**

And I brought your gifts, Shayna and Scott. I had a feeling we might be here past sunset.

**Mom**

Oh, Steve. Thank you. I needed this.

*Dad plugs in the electric menorah and turns on two candles,  
the center candle (the shamash) and the furthest candle to one side.*

**Mom**

Shayna and Scott, remember this—home is made up of two simple things: family and traditions. Even though we're in a hospital, because we have this menorah, and because we have each other, we're home.

**Dad**

Let's all say the Hanukkah prayer together.

**Mom, Dad, and Scott**

Baruch atah Adonai—

**Mom**

Shayna, say the prayer with us please.

**Shayna**

I don't remember it.



**Mom, Dad, and Scott**

Eloheinu melech ha'olam—

**Scott**, *whispered*

You do so.

**Shayna**, *whispered*

Leave me alone!

**Mom, Dad, and Scott**

Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu, l'hadlik ner, shel, Hanukkah.

**Mom**

Want to unwrap your gifts, kids?

*Shayna and Scott unwrap their gifts: a dreidel for each of them.*

**Scott**

A dreidel! Cool!

**Shayna**

I want to open all my other presents too.

**Mom**

Shayna, you know we only open one every night.

**Shayna**

On Christmas they open all their presents in one day.

**Mom**

Good for them.

**Dad**

Who wants to play dreidel?

**Scott**

Me!

**Dad**

Come on, Shayna. Play with us.

**Shayna**

Fine.

**Dad**

Who remembers what happens when you land on each of the letters?

**Scott**

I do! If it lands on the hey, you get half of what's in the pot. If it lands on gimmel, you get everything in the pot. Shin, you put one of your pieces back in the pot, and nun means you get nothing. Right?

**Dad**

Exactly right! I'm impressed, Scott!

**Scott**

What should we use for the pot?

**Dad**

I have some change.

*Dad takes some coins from his pocket and puts it on the floor in front of them.*

**Scott**

I'll go first.

*Scott spins the dreidel.*

*It lands on nun.*

**Scott**

Aw, nun! I don't get anything. Go on, Shayna. You try.

*Shayna tries to spin her dreidel.*

*She's not good at spinning, and it lands on the floor with a thud.*

**Shayna**

I can't spin it.

**Dad**

Sure you can. Try again.

*Shayna tries to spin the dreidel.*

*Once again, it lands on the floor with a thud.*

**Shayna**

I give up! I can't do it!

**Dad**

Here, let Daddy help you. You hold it at the top here with your thumb and your middle finger, and you twist it really fast like this, right as you let it go, so when it lands on the floor, it spins.

*The dreidel spins beautifully.*

**Dad**

See? Now you try.

*Shayna takes the dreidel in her fingers, preparing to spin it.*

**Dad**

Hold it between your fingers just like that, that's good. Now, twist it really fast!

*Shayna tries, but, once again, fails.*

**Shayna**

I give up! I hate Hanukkah! I want to celebrate Christmas!

**Dad**

Oh, Shayna. We can't celebrate Christmas.

**Shayna**

Why not?

**Mom**

Because we're Jewish.

**Dad**

Only Christians celebrate Christmas.

**Shayna**

Then I want to be Christian!

**Mom**

I'm sorry, but that's not possible. You're Jewish.

**Shayna**

I could convert!

**Dad**

What do you know about converting?

**Shayna**

It's when you change your religion. I'm not stupid.

**Dad**

I don't think you're stupid.

**Shayna**

I'm ten years old. Ten-year-olds know things.

**Mom**

Shayna, do you know what all those Hebrew letters on the sides of the dreidel mean?

**Shayna**

No.

**Mom**

Nun, gimmel, hey, and shin. They stand for the phrase “nes gadol hayah sham.” In English that means, “A great miracle happened there.” *There* is Jerusalem. It’s referring to the Hanukkah miracle of the temple oil. And a miracle is what we need right now, for Bubby.

**Shayna**

I know, you talked about this at school today. It’s boring.

**Mom**

Shayna, do you know who loved to play dreidel? *My* Bubby. That’s your *great*-grandmother. She came over here from the Old Country. Hanukkah was her favorite holiday. On every first night of Hanukkah, she would play dreidel with us. She used to spin the dreidel so perfectly, my eyes would cross. The dreidel would just spin and spin and spin. It seemed like the dreidel spun forever.

*Mom, Scott, and Dad continue playing dreidel.*

*Shayna sits and watches, unhappy.*

*Santa Claus walks through the hospital room.*

*Perhaps he is flanked by Elves.*

*Santa comes across as cool and smooth.*

*Mom, Dad, and Scott can’t see Santa.*

**Shayna**

Santa!

**Santa Claus**

Shayna, I’m sorry but I don’t have time to talk right now. It’s my busiest time of the year. Christmas is right around the corner. I have to make my naughty list, I have to make my nice list, and I have to check them both twice. Considering how many children there are in the world, that’s a lot of work.

**Shayna**

Am I on the nice list or the naughty list?

**Santa Claus**

You’re not on either of my lists.

**Shayna**

So whose list am I on?

**Santa Claus**

I’m not sure, Shayna. But I gotta run.

*Santa Claus disappears.*

**SCENE FOUR**

**with Shayna, Scott, Mom, Dad, and Harriet**

*Shayna's bedroom.*

*Dad and Mom are attempting to put Shayna to bed.*

**Shayna**

I want Santa Claus to come to our house.

**Mom**

It's time for bed, Shayna.

**Shayna**

I want to celebrate Christmas. I want a Christmas tree! I want a Christmas tree like they have in The Nutcracker!

**Mom**

Great. The Nutcracker. I knew we shouldn't have signed her up for that show.

**Dad**

Let's all get some sleep and discuss this in the morning.

**Mom**

No! There will not be a discussion, ever! We're not celebrating Christmas! We're not getting a Christmas tree! A Jewish girl does not need a Christmas tree!

**Shayna**

I don't want to be Jewish anyway!

**Mom**

Enough! I can't take this anymore! Your Bubby is sick, Shayna. Can you not think of anyone but yourself? Your Bubby is my mommy. That means my mommy is sick. Think about how that makes me feel. I'm hurting. You're being very selfish.

**Shayna**

I wish *you'd* get sick so you could leave me alone!

*Silence.*

**Mom**

Goodnight, Shayna. I hope you wake up a nicer little girl in the morning.

*Mom and Dad leave the room.*

*Shayna fumes in her bed,*

*mad at her parents, mad at the world.*

**Shayna**

I want a tree! I want a big, green, lush, beautiful tree! With twinkling lights! And tinsel! And presents underneath it that I don't have to spread out over eight days! Presents that produce so much wrapping paper I can pretend it's quicksand! I don't want to say prayers in a weird old language. Baruch Adonai elo—blech!

*She sings.*

**Shayna**

DREIDEL, DREIDEL, DREIDEL  
IS SUCH A BORING GAME,  
AND, WHEN I HAVE TO PLAY IT,  
IT MAKES ME WANT TO BARF!

I want

RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER!

And

FROSTY THE SNOWMAN!

And Santa Claus! I want to be on his nice list! Or his naughty list! I'd be happy to be on any list at all! I hate Hanukkah! I hate being Jewish!

*There's a loud noise—and maybe some special effects—  
and a feisty old woman, Hanukkah Harriet, appears,  
dusty, wearing a house dress and a babushka around her head.*

**Shayna**

AHHHHHH!!!!

**Harriet**

Oy vey, what a schlep it was to get here! I mean, a *schlep*!

**Shayna**

Mommy! Daddy! There's a stranger in my room!

**Harriet**

You think your parents are gonna come help you? Gimme a break! They need you like a lokh in kop.

**Shayna**

What's a lokh in kop?

**Harriet**

Lokh in kop. Means hole in the head. It's Yiddish.

**Shayna**

Mommy! Daddy!

**Harriet**

Keep crying for your parents, little pisher, but I guarantee you they're out in the living room, drinking a big hot cup of Sleepytime tea, watching Shark Tank, thanking their lucky stars they don't have to listen to their whiny little girl kvetch for one more second today.

**Shayna**

You're mean!

**Harriet**

I think the pot is calling the kettle black!

**Shayna**

Mommy! Daddy! Someone!

**Harriet**

Oh stop. I'm not gonna hurt you. I'm here to help you.

**Shayna**

I don't need any help. It's bedtime. I'm tired.

*Shayna fakes a yawn.*

**Shayna**

Goodnight.

*Shayna pretends to be asleep, makes snoring noises.*

**Harriet**

Your little tricks won't work with me, Shayna.

**Shayna**

Wait—how do you know my name?

**Harriet**

Wouldn't you like to know. My name is Harriet. Pleasure—so to speak—to meet you. So. What can I do ya for, Shay Shay? May I call you Shay Shay?

**Shayna**

...sure.

**Harriet**

Go on, squeal. What's bothering you? What's ruffling your feathers? Your feathers seem quite ruffled, Shay Shay.

**Shayna**

Well, I hate Hanukkah, and I want to celebrate Christmas—I want a tree—

**Harriet**, *undone*

Whoa whoa whoa—you...hate...Hanukkah?

**Shayna**

Yeah! It's boring!

**Harriet**

I'm sorry, I just—this is a lot for me to hear. You see, my first name is Hanukkah.

**Shayna**

You said your name is Harriet.

**Harriet**

Harriet is my last name. My first name is Hanukkah. I love Hanukkah. I love Hanukkah so much it became my name. Hanukkah Harriet, that's my name. But I find I go around telling people my name's Hanukkah they look at me like I'm nuts. So I go with Harriet. It's easier.

**Shayna**

You're weird.

**Harriet**, *such a compliment!*

Thank you so much!

**Shayna**

You're welcome?

**Harriet**

Back up. What don't you like about Hanukkah? Go 'head, vent. I'll listen.

**Shayna**

Well, first of all, nobody else around here celebrates Hanukkah. Nobody around here even knows what Hanukkah is! My mom, my dad, my brother, my Bubby, and I, we're the only people who celebrate it. I'm the only Jewish kid in my class. My teacher Miss Christiansen couldn't pronounce the *word* Hanukkah. She couldn't even pronounce my Bubby's name!

**Harriet**

Yeah, I saw that. It was painful.

**Shayna**

You saw that?

**Harriet**

Sure I did. I watch over you, kiddo.



**Shayna**

What do you mean you watch over me? Like a guardian angel?

**Harriet**

Kinda. I keep tabs on you. I see everything that happens to you. I'm all-knowing.

**Shayna**

...creepy.

**Harriet**

Tell me the story of Hanukkah.

**Shayna**

What? Why?

**Harriet**

Just humor me.

**Shayna**

They only had enough oil to last like eight minutes but it lasted like eight days.

**Harriet**

No! They had enough oil to last one day, not eight minutes!

**Shayna**

Close enough!

**Harriet**

And “*they* only had enough oil...?” Who’s “they?”

**Shayna**

The...Jewish people?

**Harriet**

You clearly don't know the story of Hanukkah.

*Harriet snaps her fingers  
and transports them to...*