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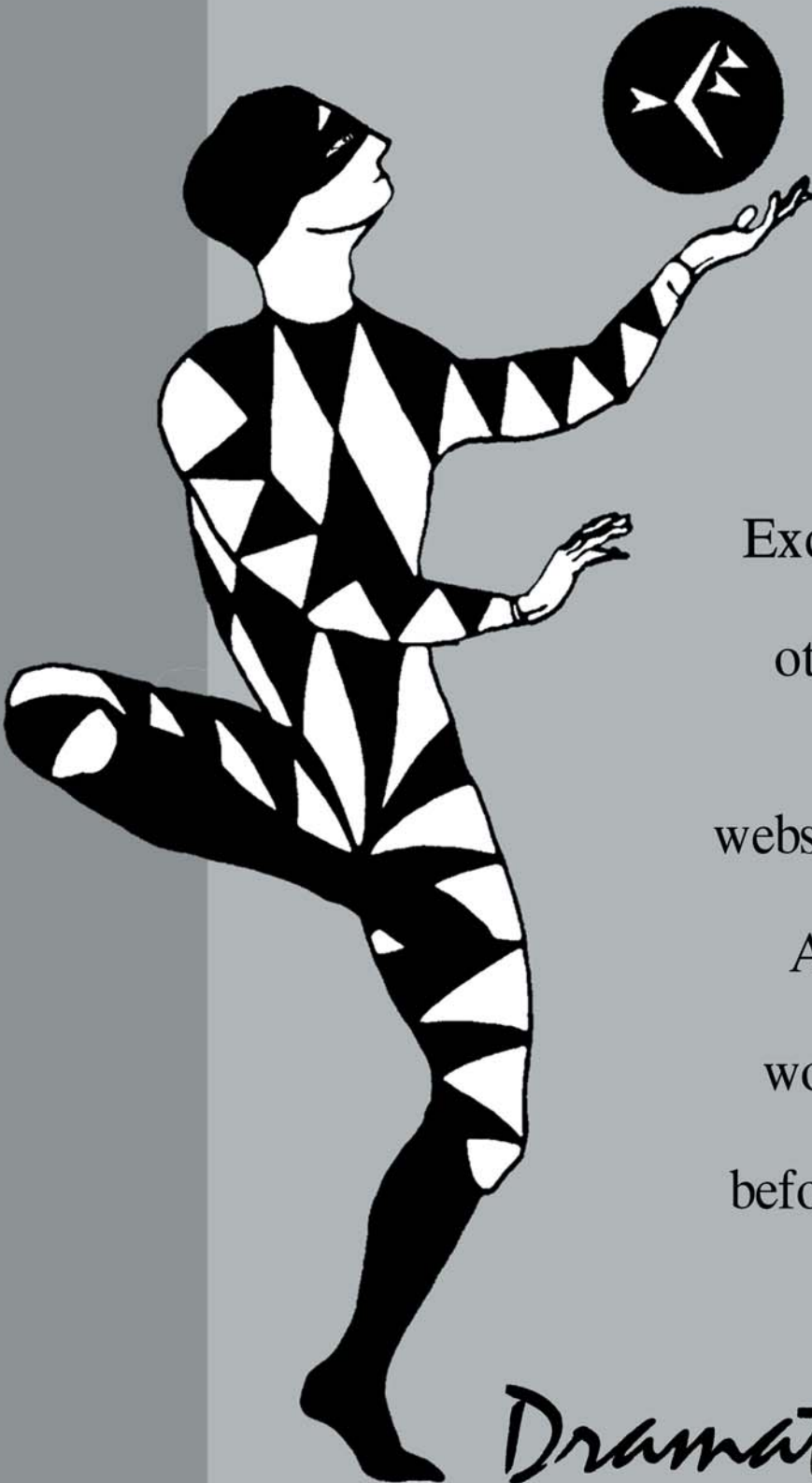
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*Dramatic Publishing*



# **CAPTURE THE MOON**

A play for young audiences  
based on the folktales of Chelm

By  
ERNEST JOSELOVITZ  
and  
HARRY M. BAGDASIAN

An expanded-cast version of their play.  
Originally written for six performers  
and published by Dramatic Publishing.

This large-cast version was first produced by  
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# **CAPTURE THE MOON**

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

For 12 to 23 players

### **IN CHELM**

Yossel, a boy of 13  
Berel, his father  
Shulamis, his mother  
The Mayor  
Rabbi  
Cantor  
Chaim  
Esther  
Rachel

### **IN THE NEIGHBORING VILLAGE**

Dexter Williams  
Lillian Williams  
Faith Williams  
Charles  
Elaine  
Rochelle

### **IN THE FAR FAR AWAY**

Cousin Jeremy (optional) - non-speaking role  
Uncle Patrick (optional) - non-speaking role  
Peel Person 1  
Peel Person 2  
Pants Person 1  
Pants Person 2  
Pants Person 3  
The Monster

## **SUGGESTED CASTING FOR 12 PERFORMERS**

Yossel

Berel

Shulamis

The Mayor / Peel Person / Monster

Rabbi

Cantor

Chaim / Charles / Peel Person 1

Esther / Elaine / Peel Person 2

Rachel / Rochelle / Pants Person 1

Dexter Williams / Pants Person 2

Lillian Williams / Pants Person 3

Faith Williams

## CAPTURE THE MOON

AT RISE: *Upbeat klezmer music plays. A lively company of players enters as they chant:*

BEREL: I'm Berel!

SHULAMIS: I'm his wife, Shulamis!

YOSSEL: And I'm their son—their son, that's me, Yossel!

MAYOR: And I am the mayor!

CHAIM: And I am...!

MAYOR: *(interrupting)* Elected, selected...

ESTHER: And I am...!

MAYOR: *(interrupting again)* ...lauded, applauded...

RABBI: *(cutting off the MAYOR who might just go on and on)* And me, I'm the rabbi.  
*(After being nudged...)* Oh! ...and this is my cantor.

SHULAMIS: We're all from the long-way-away long-time-ago very little town of Chelm.

*(The entire company is now assembled onstage. Everyone is neutrally dressed in plain clothes to which they will add costume pieces as they play each part. Music plays under as they continue to speak to the audience.)*

RABBI: Our story is about this boy, Yossel.

YOSSEL: Shalom.



RABBI: And he's going to need your help. When he needs your help, you need to say  
*(displays placard with the words on it, and says to audience...)* "Hold on, Yossel!"  
*(RABBI encourages the audience to get very energetic and has them practice the  
phrase at least two more times.)* "Hold on, Yossel!" "Hold on, Yossel!"

MAYOR: That's splendid! Isn't that remarkable!? Awesome! Fabulous!

RABBI: This story takes place in the "old days."

CANTOR: "Old days"? What's that mean? Last week?

RABBI: Before that. Think of an old invention.

CHAIM: Invention?

ESTHER: *(to CHAIM)* What's an "invention"? *(CHAIM shrugs.)*

RABBI: For instance, computers.

CHAIM: Computers?

ESTHER: *(to CHAIM)* Is that a fruit? *(CHAIM shrugs.)*

RABBI: Television. Airplanes. "The Old Days" is even older than that. It was so long ago that...

CANTOR: ...people dressed differently then.

RABBI: Yes. In "the old country" they dressed in homemade clothes. *(The CANTOR:  
hands out clothes to the performers. As they dress...)*

CHAIM: Homemade, sure.

ESTHER: *(to CHAIM)* There's another kind? *(CHAIM shrugs.)*

YOSSEL: Papa, what does that mean, "the old country"?

BEREL: Well, son, people in America come from all over the world. Like where your grandmother and grandfather, or their parents or even their parents' parents came from. They call those places "the old country."

SHULAMIS: Most people in "the old country," like here, live in little villages.

RACHEL: Jewish people like us live in villages we call “shtetls.”

SCHULAMIS: People like us, who live in shtetls, dress differently from everybody else.

ESTHER: *(to CHAIM)* We do? *(CHAIM shrugs.)*

RABBI: The men wear tzitzit. And... *(as the RABBI hands out yarmulkes to the men...)*

CANTOR: ...yarmulkes.

RABBI: ...and yarmulkes on their heads. *(The CANTOR hands out babushkas to the females on stage.)*

RACHEL: The women wear babushkas.

RABBI: And instead of churches... *(A church steeple appears as in the distance.)*

ESTHER: Wait, wait! I know this! We go to a synagogue. *(The synagogue—no steeple—as if mid-distance, appears.)*

MAYOR: And the people of Chelm are different, singular, unique from every other shtetl.

ESTHER: Different? We are? *(CHAIM shrugs.)*

BEREL: Because we are thinkers.

ESTHER: Oh.

CHAIM: *(to ESTHER)* I’m thinking about lunch...

SHULAMIS: ...about washing the clothes...

YOSSEL: ...games...

RABBI: But we also have *big* thoughts.

ESTHER: *(to CHAIM)* I’m thinking about a *big* lunch.

RABBI: No. Like *that*... *(The cast, dressed as the people of Chelm, stops and stares at BEREL, who is seated and thinking.)*

RACHEL: Is he sick, your papa?

YOSSEL: No.

RACHEL: He's tired?

SHULAMIS: No.

YOSSEL: He's thinking.

ALL: (*impressed and understanding*) Oh.

YOSSEL: A *big* thought.

RACHEL: So? —Berel? —What are you thinking about?

BEREL: I'm thinking. Why does it get cold in the winter and hot in the summer?

ALL: Aaaaah!

*(The people assemble around BEREL as he is thinking.)*

RABBI: On this question, Yossel's father thought for an hour.

*(They hold, look at BEREL, and wait a moment.)*

RABBI: For a whole day.

RACHEL: You should eat, Berel.

*(Not hearing her, BEREL rises. A thought is about to break through...but no. He sits again in deep thought.)*

RABBI: For...two days...

RACHEL: Berel, take yourself a nap?

RABBI: ...three.

*(BEREL stands up, as if out of a daze, his expression brightens.)*

SHULAMIS: So?

YOSSEL: Papa? Why does it get cold in the winter and hot in the summer?

BEREL: I think...during the winter, we burn wood in the stoves for the heat. This heat gradually warms up the air so that by the time summer comes, the days are hot. In the summer, the stoves are used very little—only for cooking. Therefore, the air cools gradually month by month. When winter arrives, it is actually freezing, so the stoves are lit and the whole process is repeated all over again.

MAYOR: What an amazing thought! (*Shaking his hand.*) Excellent! (*Continuing, to individuals in audience.*) Isn't that a fantastic idea? (*CHAIM shrugs.*)

RABBI: So you see, we Chelmites are thinkers. Little thoughts...

RACHEL: He should rest his brain, eat a meal...

YOSSEL: Holidays, desserts...

RABBI: Big thoughts...

MAYOR: Winter... Spring... Stoves... Incredible!

RABBI: This story is about one BIG THOUGHT, one strange answer, and one great adventure.

CANTOR: It all started...

RABBI: ...in the old days. In the Old Country...

ESTHER: ...here in our own shtetl of Chelm.

CHAIM: One Friday night...

RABBI: When we were going home from the synagogue.

SHULAMIS: That's not a problem on most Friday nights, because there is light from the moon.

BEREL: But on some Friday nights, like on this Friday night, there is no moonlight.

RABBI: Imagine it's very dark. If you could see in the dark this is what you would see.

*(In blue light, everyone crosses the stage from different directions and they bump into one another, say “excuse me,” “beg your pardon,” then move along.)*

RABBI: For a grown person, getting bumped in the dark...

CHAIM: *(bumping into ESTHER)* Ouch! Ooh!

RACHEL: *(bumping into RABBI)* Oi! Rabbi? Can you ever forgive me?

RABBI: ...is annoying. *(He gets bumped into again.)*

ESTHER: That hurt. I'm scared. I'm not moving—not one step.

YOSSEL: But for a *little* person walking home from the synagogue on a dark moonless night... *(he gets bumped and falls)* this is a *problem*. A *big* problem, that *hurts*. *(He gets up.)* I tried staying behind my father, holding tight to his coat...

*(NARRATOR/RABBI holds up the placard and points to the words, encouraging the audience to say “Hold on, Yossel!” as BEREL and YOSSEL walk along. Except BEREL makes a sharp turn and YOSSEL gets bumped right down.)*

YOSSEL: I thought about carrying a torch... *(YOSSEL gets out matches and torch, begins to light it.)*

SHULAMIS: *(taking them away)* But you know very well that playing with fire is too dangerous.

BEREL: Then we had him try a warning whistle.

*(They're walking along, YOSSEL blows loudly on the whistle once, twice, three times. Everyone makes way for him, but then the MAYOR comes running onstage.)*

MAYOR: What's the matter!?? I'm here! Who's in trouble?! *(But it's dark, so the MAYOR crashes into YOSSEL, knocking him down. Then, goes from person to person explaining:)* I didn't mean it. I had no idea. Really, I didn't see him. I am so sorry. *(Turns to audience.)* I am, believe me, repentant, remorseful, I'm ashamed, regretful. *(MAYOR sees that SHULAMIS has tied a pillow to YOSSEL's tush.)* A pillow! Of course! What a fine solution! *(MAYOR crosses stage to speak to audience on other side.)* Don't you think so? A terrific idea—don't you think? A loving mother's idea.

*(Just then, the MAYOR, crossing back to address another part of the audience, bumps into and knocks YOSSEL forward. The pillow doesn't help.)*

MAYOR: Oh! Sorry!

SHULAMIS: *(hugging her little boy)* Surely there's something we can do.

RABBI: So everyone in the village did what everyone in Chelm does best. They thought, thought about the problem very carefully.

CHAIM: We thought...

ESTHER: We did?

BEREL: And thought...

YOSSEL: And thought.

*(Thinking music is heard. Everyone sits and thinks, including the RABBI.)*

ESTHER: *(eyes tightly closed, thinking very hard)* I'm thinking about...a piece of chocolate cake...

*(One of them rises, paces, stops, raises his eyebrows, raises a finger...shakes head "no.")*

MAYOR: A fire! *(Showing them.)* We'll build a stupendous, tremendous, great big fabulous fire...!

SCHULAMIS: Too dangerous.

MAYOR: Oh.

*(Silence for a short moment, then...)*

SCHULAMIS: A lamp! Two lamps!

MAYOR: Remarkable! What a stupendous idea!

SHULAMIS: Mr. Mayor, we don't have enough money.

MAYOR: Oh.

SHULAMIS: And lamplight isn't very pretty at all, compared to...the moon...

MAYOR: The moon.

BEREL: The moon!

ESTHER: *(looking up)* The moon?

BEREL: We'll capture the moonlight.

RABBI: Ah! So when the moon's not here, we'll still have its light.

YOSSEL: ...to light our way.

MAYOR: Astonishing idea!

CHAIM: But how?

MAYOR: Oh. Yes. How?

*(BEREL and YOSSEL have already dragged out a barrel of water.)*

BEREL: Watch. Wait. And you'll see.

*(The moon rises, first as a sliver, then higher and a crescent...higher... half-moon...until it is a full moon high in the sky.)*

BEREL: Now!

YOSSEL: Look!

BEREL: The moonlight...is in the water...in the barrel... *(Slaps a lid on the barrel.)*  
There! *(YOSSEL drapes himself over its lid.)* Guard it.

CANTOR: *(holds up sign and leads audience in yelling...)* Hold on, Yossel!

BEREL: Every minute. Every hour. Every day.

RABBI: On the first day...

RACHEL: The cold wind blew. *(A hard harsh wind is heard, everyone reacts.)*

CANTOR: *(holds up sign and leads audience in yelling...)* Hold on, Yossel!

RABBI: On the second day,...

RACHEL: Oi! Did it rain! ...and rain some more! (*We hear torrential rain falling, everyone reacts.*)

BEREL: (*holds up sign and leads audience in yelling...*) Hold on, Yossel!

(*Meantime, the moon sinks, first as a half-moon, then a crescent, then a sliver on the horizon...until the sky is dark again.*)

RABBI: The night was moonless again, and very dark.

CANTOR: Imagine it is very dark.

RABBI: If you could see in the dark, this is what you would see.

(*In blue light, everyone assembles around the rain barrel, but the MAYOR stops on the opposite side of the stage, thinking he's in the right place.*)

MAYOR: (*he thinks he's standing next to YOSSEL*) You haven't moved, haven't let anybody get into the barrel, haven't let anything out of the barrel? (*To audience.*) Wasn't this a great idea? Capture moonlight in the water...in the barrel. Are you ready, Yossel, to open the barrel?

YOSSEL: Yes.

MAYOR: Oh, oh. (*Heads across stage to the group as he says...*) Splendid! Magnificent! (*Bumps into someone.*) Excuse me. (*Making a speech...*) We are about to witness a great moment in the history of our little shtetl, which will make our children safe from the darkest darkness. No more bumping into things! No more falling down! No more... (*He mimes continued speechmaking as...*)

RABBI: Not everybody was as sure as the mayor about this idea.

ESTHER: (*to CHAIM*) Moonlight? In a barrel of water? (*CHAIM shrugs.*)

MAYOR: (*as if continuing*) ...the glorious, the radiant, the heavenly moonlight, will shine forth! Now! Young man! Let there be light!

(*YOSSEL gets off the lid, grabs it. He takes a dramatic pause and then lifts the lid off the barrel. Nothing happens. Everyone looks into the rain barrel.*)



MAYOR: Let there be... (*sticks his head in the barrel*) ...a little light. (*Farther in.*) A tiny speck... (*gurgling underwater*) ...of light?

RABBI: This caused the Chelmites to do what Chelmites always do...

CANTOR: Think.

(*MSX: music up—thinking music.*)

RABBI: For an hour.

CHAIM: Why did this happen?

RABBI: For two hours.

CHAIM: How could this happen?

RABBI: For the entire night

ESTHER: (*to audience*) *I'm thinking. Are you thinking? Are you? I am. I'm thinking...*

CHAIM: *I'm thinking, "What made this happen?"*

RABBI: ...And into the next day.

(*Thinking music plays. The Chelmites think, the lights change, and it's daytime. Music out. SHULAMIS speaks.*)

SHULAMIS: Water puts out fire. Moonlight is like fire. So, I think, the water put out the moonlight.

ALL: Ah!

MAYOR: That's it! Indubitably! But...then...what...will...we do?

BEREL: If we can't capture moonlight, we must capture the moon itself.

MAYOR: Brilliant idea! We are going to go up into the sky...!

CHAIM: Up? In the sky?

ESTHER: (*to CHAIM*) Me and you? (*CHAIM shrugs.*)

MAYOR: (*realizing the enormity of the thought:*) ...and...and take the moon down?

(*They all look up at the sky.*)

End of excerpt. Production notes follow.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

With *Capture the Moon* the set can be as simple or as complex as your time and budget allow. Young audiences have great imaginations: tell them a twig is a tree and they'll see a tree. It's one of the many reasons we love working with young audiences. You might want to go beyond the "this twig is a tree" approach when you produce this play, so we offer the following as a guide.

Start with simple things to denote the shtetl (schtet'-tul) of Chelm, a little village in the "old country" a long, long time ago. The minimum you need is the front of their modest synagogue, a rain barrel and something to which Berel can tie down the moon when it is brought into the village. Add anything else you desire or keep it that simple.

The journey "to the far, far away" calls for the crossing of a "rickety old bridge" which can be mimed and underscored with a creative sound-effects track. For our adventurers' first stop along the way, the Williams' village, there's need for the front of a church with a steeple. It does not have to be full-sized so that Yossel can climb up the steeple to "capture the moon." A modest-sized set piece serves well and allows for a rod puppet of Yossel to do the climbing and the tossing of the rope at the moon.

The other segments of the journey can take place on an empty stage or one filled with a variety of scenic pieces. You will need a lake for the climatic smackdown with the monster. A shimmery piece of fabric works very well to represent the lake. It can be easily manipulated to denote the drowning of the monster. It can then be laid out so that Berel, Yossel and Faith can "row out to the middle of the lake" and Yossel can capture the moon. What about a boat? Remember that "front of a church with a steeple"? A small boat can be created that also doubles as the recessed church door, light enough for Faith to move into place.

About the moon. Just in case you need a place to start, we offer the following: an 18 inch disc on a sturdy dowel about 4 feet in length. At times it was clipped to a pivot that allows the Rabbi/Narrator to tilt the moon partially behind a curved piece of black masking. This movement enables you to represent the phases of the moon from full to crescent to (and you need this!) "moonless Friday nights in Chelm." The dowel could be easily unfastened from the pivot to enable the Rabbi/Narrator to hold the moon over the lake and be "captured." Finally, when they release the moon, the Rabbi/Narrator can easily manipulate its rising high in the sky; replace it on its pivot and create the final "moonless Friday night" for the last scene of the play.

We wish you best of luck with your production.

Harry Bagdasian and Ernie Joselovitz

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

**ERNEST JOSELOVITZ** has been produced around the country. His plays have been widely published as well as anthologized in the prestigious annual Best Short Plays. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, won Washington, D.C.'s first annual Larry Neal Award and The Helen Hayes Awards' Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play, as well as Philadelphia's Barrymore Award for Outstanding New Play. He has twice received grants from the prestigious Fund for New American Plays. Most recently, his play *Vilna's Got a Golem* had a successful run off-Broadway then was published by Samuel French. Plays co-written with Harry Michael Bagdasian include *Love by the Numbers*, *Capture the Moon* (two versions), *Riddle Me a Prince* and *Journey to the World's Edge, a folktale in the Irish tradition*. He's founder of the Playwrights Forum, workshops for Mid-Atlantic playwrights, for which he received a Tony Taylor Award from D.C.'s Cultural Alliance.

**HARRY MICHAEL BAGDASIAN** founded and led Washington, D.C.'s acclaimed New Playwrights' Theatre (NPT) for 12 years. When Joseph Papp moved Ernest Joselovitz's *Hagar's Children* from NPT to off-Broadway, Bagdasian served as associate producer. With Joselovitz, he has written a romantic comedy, *Love by the Numbers* (published by Samuel French 1995) and three plays for young audiences: *Journey to the World's Edge, a folktale in the Irish tradition*; *Capture the Moon* (published by Dramatic Publishing 2007 and 2001 respectively) and *Riddle Me A Prince*, which had music and lyrics by Lenny Williams and Bari Biern. All have been produced by different theaters around the country. Singularly, and with co-author Lisa Levin Itté, Bagdasian has written many comedy reviews for young audiences which have been published and have received over 2,800 productions across the United States and Canada and abroad. His other plays have received productions at the New England Actor's Theatre, Source Theatre and New Playwrights' Theatre.