

### Cast of Characters

LINDA, the mom, 40s

MITCH, the dad, 40s

JULIE, the older sister, teens

BEN, the little brother

### Setting

The messy, burglarized home of a suburban Jewish family.

### Time

The third night of Chanukah.

### Acknowledgments

*Home for the Chalidays* was produced by Youngblood at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in the Fall of 2007. It was directed by Catherine Ward.

## HOME FOR THE CHALIDAYS by Sharyn Rothstein

*(In the darkness, before the action begins, a long string of blue Christmas lights, forming the shape of a house.*

*The sound of an SUV or Volvo station wagon driving up and into a garage. The car is turned off.*

*In the darkness of the garage, overlapping each other—)*

LINDA. I am never traveling again. What a zoo.

MITCH. Linda, it's Christmas Eve.

LINDA. I don't care Mitch, never again.

BEN. Can someone unlock the door?

JULIE. Yeah I have to pee.

MITCH. I'm looking...

JULIE. Well look faster.

LINDA. Julie—

MITCH. I am looking as fast as I can. God I need a drink.

LINDA. Mitch—

MITCH. Don't Mitch me, Linda. The traffic—that toll booth collector—where are the damn keys?

LINDA. Mitch, I think if you just calm down, you'll be able to remember—

JULIE. I need to pee.

MITCH. Well they're not here so maybe I left them at your parents—Call your mother.

LINDA. I'm not calling my mother at this hour. She'll think something's wrong.

MITCH. Something is wrong, Linda.

BEN. I can break one of the windows. Dad, you want me to—?

MITCH/LINDA. NO.

JULIE. I can call Trent.

MITCH. Why would you call Trent?

JULIE. Because he has an extra key.

MITCH. You gave your boyfriend a key to our house?

(Pause.)

**JULIE.** No. Of course not Daddy. I just meant maybe he could get one, cause his dad's a locksmith...

**BEN.** I thought his dad was in prison.

**JULIE.** Shut up Ben.

**LINDA.** Don't we have an extra set hidden somewhere? Under the mat or—

**BEN.** I think it's in the watering can.

**LINDA.** That's right! Here they are...

**JULIE.** Finally.

*(The sound of keys unlocking a door. The door swings open into the family room of the house.*

*Darkness.)*

Would somebody get the lights?

**LINDA.** I got them. They're out.

**MITCH.** They're out?

**LINDA.** Maybe there was a storm?

**MITCH.** Ben—where's that lamp, the camping lamp? Does that still have juice in it?

**BEN.** Uh, maybe a little.

**JULIE.** Don't we have flashlights?

**LINDA.** I'm sure we do.

**JULIE.** Well? Where are they?

(Pause.)

My friend's mothers are so much more organized than you.

*(BEN returns with the lamp. It's a kerosene lamp and he lights it with a Zippo.)*

**JULIE.** Is that a Zippo?

**BEN.** Shut up, Julie.

**LINDA.** Ben, you have a Zippo?

**BEN.** It's not a Zippo.

**JULIE.** You're such an obvious at-risk delinquent.

**MITCH.** Julie...

**BEN.** You should talk, you bulimic self-mutilating—

**LINDA.** Ben!

*(As the light of the lamp grows to encompass the family room, the family grows silent. The room has been trashed. Paintings hang sideways, tables have been overturned, one sofa is missing all of its cushions. On one side of the room is a row of potted plants.*

*Beat.)*

Oh my God. Mitch, oh my God...

**MITCH.** Okay, calm down. Everyone stay calm. *(On his cell phone:)* Hello, this is Mitch Cohen. My house has been burglarized— Yes. I know it's Christmas Eve... No I won't call back tomorrow!... Yes, fine, I'll hold.

**LINDA.** Oh God, my jewelry!

*(LINDA runs off stage. BEN walks around the room with the lamp.)*

**MITCH.** Linda! Don't— *(Into phone:)* Hello? Hello, is anyone—?

**BEN.** Whoa, they stole all the cushions from the couch.

**JULIE.** And they put all the plants in the living room. What weirdoes.

*(BEN starts to exit the stage.)*

**MITCH.** Ben! Get back here. They could still be here—

**BEN.** They're not.

**JULIE.** How do you know?

**BEN.** Because it's Christmas. They probably broke in so they wouldn't have to buy presents. They could just steal them. They're brilliant.

**JULIE.** They're not brilliant. They're cheap. I've gotta pee. Give me the lamp.

**BEN.** No way. Pee in the dark.

**MITCH.** Ben— *(Into the phone:)* Yes, hello, I've been on hold? No I won't hold again— I don't care if you're the only one working—

**JULIE.** Give me the lamp, Ben!

**BEN.** It's not that complicated. You just undo your pants, find the toilet—

**JULIE.** Oh my god you are so disgusting.

*(JULIE heads toward the bathroom.)*

**BEN.** *(Sticky sweet:)* Want my Zippo?

**MITCH.** My house has been burglarized and I want someone to come now—...yes, uh huh... We just got home, we walked in the door and—...No, we weren't caroling, we're— No, we weren't at a tree lighting, we're Jewish.

*(LINDA re-enters, looking devastated.)*

**MITCH.** *(To the phone:)* We were on vacation, we just got back today—yes on Christmas Eve. *(To LINDA:)* Are you—? Are they—?

**LINDA.** They're gone.

**BEN.** The burglars or your jewelry?

**LINDA.** Both.

*(LINDA bursts into tears.*

*From offstage JULIE screams.)*

**MITCH.** JULIE?!

*(MITCH drops the phone and runs offstage.)*

**LINDA.** Julie, honey?!

**JULIE.** Dad! Don't come in here! Oh my god.

**MITCH.** I'm sorry, I thought—

*(MITCH and JULIE come back into the room.)*

**LINDA.** What is it? What's wrong?

**JULIE.** *(Shaken up:)* They...took...the toilet seat.

*(BEN cracks up.)*

**LINDA.** Oh thank god.

*(LINDA hugs JULIE.*

*MITCH grabs the phone.)*

**MITCH.** Hi— Hello? I'm sorry about that— I was saying— No I will not hold.

**JULIE.** Shut up you nose-picking pus ball— If you'd given me the lamp— Mom, let go of me.

**BEN.** Yeah she doesn't need a hug, she needs a towel to dry her—

**MITCH.** *(On the phone:)* Look could you just send somebody? Fine, as soon as possible, that's fine... Thank you. 23 Tremont Road. Thank you. *(He hangs up.)* You'd think we were the only Jews in the whole town.

**BEN.** We're the only ones without a Christmas tree.

**MITCH.** That isn't true, Ben. You don't know what you're talking about.

**JULIE.** Yeah. Sarah Klein's family doesn't have a Christmas tree.

**LINDA.** *(Opening drawers:)* I can't believe this.

**JULIE.** They have a Hanukkah Bush.

**BEN.** Shaped like a Christmas tree.

**JULIE.** Yeah but it has a Jewish star on top.

**MITCH.** Linda—

**LINDA.** Mitch. Our house.

*(They look at each other.)*

They ruined everything.

*(The whole family looks around, bleakly.)*

I knew we shouldn't have gone on vacation this week. I had a feeling.

**MITCH.** Linda, you couldn't have known—

**LINDA.** I just had this feeling that something terrible would happen.

**JULIE.** Mom you always have that feeling.

*(BEN picks up the lamp to explore the kitchen, off stage left.)*

**MITCH.** Julie—

**JULIE.** What? It's true.

**LINDA.** No it isn't. Ben! Put that lamp down before you trip on something and burn the whole house down!

*(BEN returns with the lamp.)*

**JULIE.** *(Staring at where the TV sits:)* OH MY GOD.

**LINDA.** What is it?

**JULIE.** They took the DVD player!

**BEN.** They took my X-box too!

**JULIE.** What the hell are we going to do?

**BEN.** We might as well throw away the TV.

**MITCH.** Julie, we can always get a new DVD player—

**JULIE.** But what are we going to do tonight?

*(MITCH and LINDA look at each other, a bit panicked.)*

**LINDA.** What do you mean what are we going to do tonight? We could—why don't we...

**MITCH.** Hey, hey, let's...why don't we calm down? It's alright. So for tonight, just for tonight we'll have to...do something as a family.

*(Everyone freezes.)*

**LINDA.** Mitch, maybe we should go out?

**MITCH.** We can't. The police are coming...

**BEN.** Yeah but Dad there's nothing to do here.

**LINDA.** That's not true, honey. We could talk to each other—

**BEN.** About what?

**JULIE.** I'm calling Trent. Maybe he'll want to come over.

**MITCH/LINDA.** NO.

*(MITCH takes Julie's phone from her hand.)*

**JULIE.** Dad! *(As if he just took away her first born:)* That's my phone.

**BEN.** Technically it's Dad's phone.

**JULIE.** Technically you're a loser.

**LINDA.** Julie.

**BEN.** *(Re: Trent:)* I thought you liked losers.

**LINDA.** Ben.

**MITCH.** Look, this is our home. We don't need a television or an Xbox to enjoy it.

**BEN.** We don't?

**MITCH.** No. All we need is...

*(MITCH looks to LINDA for help finishing the sentence.)*

**LINDA.** Each other. All we need is each other, Mitch.

**MITCH.** Right.

*(MITCH and LINDA look at each other with fear.)*

**MITCH.** I need a drink. *(To LINDA:)* Gin and tonic?

**LINDA.** Just tonic.

**MITCH.** Good. I'll drink your gin.

*(MITCH heads to the kitchen.)*

*(MITCH screams off stage.)*

**LINDA.** Mitch! What is it?

*(There is no response.)*

**LINDA.** Are they still here? Oh god. They're still here.

**BEN.** Good. They can give me back my Xbox.

**JULIE.** They're not going to give you back your Xbox, you idiot. They're going to tie you to the treadmill and staple your dick to the wall.

**LINDA.** Julie. That is not helping.

**JULIE.** Why should I help? In like three minutes we're all gonna be dead anyway.

**LINDA.** *(Angry:)* That is not helping either! *(To the kitchen door:)* Mitch? Mitch! Answer me. Can you answer me? Okay. *(To the kids:)* One of you is going to have to go in there and get your father.

**BEN.** One of us? You married him.

**LINDA.** That was a very long time ago.

**JULIE.** Ben, just go.

**BEN.** Just go? You just said they're gonna staple my dick to the wall.

**JULIE.** If they can find it.

**BEN.** Bitch.

**JULIE.** Pre-pubescent genital wart.

**LINDA.** Fine. I'll go. Send your mother, the one person in your life who loved you and cared for you no matter what, who—

**BEN/JULIE.** I'll go.

*(As BEN and JULIE head for the door, MITCH enters the room, shaking.)*

**MITCH.** The alcohol. They took...all the alcohol.

**BEN.** No way.

**LINDA.** Oh thank god.

*(MITCH looks at LINDA, hurt.)*

**LINDA.** So they're not here?

**MITCH.** No, Linda, they are not here. They are probably at some wild Christmas party down the block, totally wasted.

**LINDA.** Okay, Mitch take a seat.

*(MITCH sits on the cushion-less couch.)*

**MITCH.** Ow! Those—whoever— They took the couch pillows too? *(Almost teary:)* All that driving—and that toll guy— *(In some sort of*

accent:) "Screw you for paying in nickels!"—and all I wanted was to come home... I wanted to come home and...

LINDA. We know, Mitch.

JULIE. Yeah Dad. We know this must be really hard for you. You're a total alcoholic.

(BEN nods in agreement.)

LINDA. Julie, that's not true.

JULIE. He has a drink every night. According to Mrs. Grody, my health teacher, that's alcoholism.

MITCH. Then Mrs. Grody would know how badly I need a drink right now.

LINDA. Mitch.

(Pause.)

BEN. Look it's not that bad, right? Think about families in like Sudan or...Liberia. They don't even have stuff for people to steal. They don't even have food most of the time.

JULIE. What are you saying? They stole our stuff?

BEN. No. I just think we should be a little grateful.

JULIE. We should be grateful because someone broke into our house, stole the toilet seat and drank Dad's booze?

BEN. Yes.

MITCH. Why you little communist—

(MITCH lunges at BEN, but LINDA restrains him.)

LINDA. Okay, Mitch. I think maybe we're all just a little too wound up over this whole experience. Ben is right. We should be...grateful.

(The family looks absolutely miserable.)

BEN sees something on the cocktail table.)

BEN. Hey I found something.

MITCH. Is it a bottle?

LINDA. Mitch.

BEN. It's a note.

LINDA. A note?

JULIE. Lemme see that.

(JULIE tries to grab the note from BEN's hands. They spar a bit.)

MITCH. Is it a ransom?

LINDA. A ransom, Mitch? They already took everything we've got.

MITCH. Maybe they want the kids.

(MITCH and LINDA shrug at each other.)

BEN. It's not a ransom. It's a card.

LINDA. A card? Who left a card for us?

JULIE. (Reading:) Wishing your family a Happy Chanukah.

(Beat.)

MITCH. Happy Hanukkah?

LINDA. Is it Hanukkah?

MITCH. Who signed it?

LINDA. (Frenzied:) Mitch! Is it Hanukkah?

BEN. (Trying to open it, he can't, he turns it over:) It doesn't open. No one signed it.

MITCH. I don't know. Does anyone have a lunar calendar?

JULIE. There's one in the December issue of Seventeen. (She grabs a magazine:) What's today?

BEN. Christmas Eve.

JULIE. It's Hanukkah.

LINDA. Oh, Mitch! We forgot! We forgot it was Hanukkah!

MITCH. Well, Linda, it's not entirely our fault. We've been very stressed, what with visiting your parents last week—

LINDA. What's stressful about visiting my parents?

MITCH. I— Nothing. I just meant, coming home, to this—

LINDA. But it's been Hanukkah all night!

JULIE. Actually, it's been Hanukkah for two days.

LINDA. Two days?! I didn't get presents, I didn't even buy latkes!

JULIE. Sarah Klein's mother makes latkes. From scratch.

MITCH. Is this the same Sarah Klein who has a Christmas tree?

JULIE. It's a Hanukkah bush. And at least her mother remembers it's Hanukkah.

BEN. Yeah but they only go to temple on Rosh Hashanah.

JULIE. That's not their fault. Sarah has travel soccer on Saturdays.

**BEN.** I don't think God cares about travel soccer.

**MITCH.** In this town he does.

**LINDA.** Oh god. This is terrible. Mitch, this is terrible. I feel like such a failure. What would my mother say? It's been Hanukah for two days, and we just now—just now did we even remember.

**BEN.** We didn't remember. Someone reminded us.

*(Beat.)*

**LINDA.** You don't really think the note has anything to do with...? I mean, you don't think someone left that for us on purpose, do you? Mitch?

**BEN.** It was right on the coffee table. *(To freak everyone out:)* Just waiting for us...

**LINDA.** Mitch?

**JULIE.** Dad?

**MITCH.** Ben, let me see that.

*(MITCH grabs the note. LINDA looks over his shoulder.)*

**MITCH.** It's hand-written.

**LINDA.** They spelled Hanukkah with a CH.

*(They look at each other, shocked.)*

We got robbed by a fellow Jew.

**BEN.** Or lots of Jews.

**MITCH.** A whole minyan. Temple Beth Shalom.

**JULIE.** House of Peace? I doubt it.

**MITCH.** They didn't even leave the kosher wine.

**LINDA.** I feel so betrayed.

**BEN.** How come you guys are so sure it was a Jew?

**JULIE.** Because of the Chanukah card, you idiot.

**BEN.** What if the card is just a decoy?

**MITCH.** A decoy?

**BEN.** What if the whole point is that the card would mean something to us but not to them?

**JULIE.** Your point is...?

**MITCH.** Like anti-Semitism?

**LINDA.** *(Gasps.)* You mean like a hate crime?

**MITCH.** That's ridiculous. We've lived in this town for twelve years—

**LINDA.** Well Mitch I don't think it's entirely impossible.

**JULIE.** Yeah Dad. I think the Henleys have always been totally irked that we don't hang Christmas lights.

**MITCH.** We do hang lights! They're just not red and green.

**JULIE.** Yeah but people notice.

**MITCH.** People? You said it was the Henleys.

**LINDA.** Mitch—

**MITCH.** No Linda. This is ridiculous. Twelve years in this community, you hang up one string of blue lights and they invade your home, ravage your security and steal your goddamn sofa cushions! I thought I knew these people!

**LINDA.** I doubt the Henleys robbed us, Mitch. They're our neighbors. We've known them for years. Besides, what incentive would they have?

**MITCH.** Incentive! They don't need an incentive, Linda! We're Jewish. Haven't you heard of the Inquisition, the Holocaust, Masada? In this world, Judaism is the incentive!

*(Beat.)*

**JULIE.** Whoa Dad. It's just our stuff.

**BEN.** Yeah, it's not like..they didn't try to kill us or anything. Besides, I really don't think anybody in town is openly anti-Semitic.

**JULIE.** Yeah. Hate crimes against Jews are totally retro.

**LINDA.** Mitch?

*(MITCH sits and starts to cry a little.)*

**JULIE.** Dad?

**LINDA.** Oh honey, it's okay. We're insured. It'll all work out.

**MITCH.** I knew I shouldn't have put up those light. I had such guilt even doing it. What kind of Jew hangs up Christmas lights?

**JULIE.** They're not Christmas lights, Dad.

**BEN.** Yeah. They're blue.

**MITCH.** Do you think blue fools God? What does the color matter? We know what they are.

**LINDA.** Mitch—

**MITCH.** Come on, Linda.

*(Short pause.)*

We know what they are.

*(A pause.)*

*BEN puts the lamp on the coffee table, better illuminating the room.)*

**LINDA.** Why are all of the plants...? Oh my god.

**JULIE.** What? Mom, what is it?

**LINDA.** The plants...I put the plants in the living room so that Doreen could water them. I gave the keys to Doreen so she could... That card must be—

**MITCH.** From Doreen Henley.

*(Pause.)*

**LINDA.** They're such nice people, the Henleys.

*(Beat.)*

**JULIE.** Hey does anyone want to play cards? Do we have a deck of cards?

**LINDA.** We should.

**BEN.** I'll get them.

*(BEN leaves the room.)*

**JULIE.** *(Calling after him:)* Don't go in my room!

**LINDA.** *(Overlapping JULIE:)* Ben be careful! It's dark! *(To MITCH:)* The police really should've been here by now, Mitch, don't you think?

**MITCH.** What can you do? It's a holiday.

*(BEN brings the cards. MITCH starts shuffling.)*

**MITCH.** What'll it be?

**JULIE.** Old Maid.

**BEN.** No way. Poker.

**LINDA.** What should we play with?

**JULIE.** Daddy's money.

*(LINDA laughs. MITCH groans.)*

**MITCH.** *(Dealing:)* Okay, five card draw. Aces wild.

*(BEN looks over at the lantern.)*

**BEN.** Huh.

**JULIE.** What?

**BEN.** That lantern.

**JULIE.** What about it?

**BEN.** It's been burning a really long time, hasn't it?

**MITCH.** Yeah. I guess it has.

*(Everyone looks at their hands.)*

**LINDA.** I have a three of a kind. Is that good?

*(MITCH, BEN, and JULIE groan.)*

**JULIE.** Mom...

**LINDA.** What?

*(MITCH begins to laugh. BEN and JULIE follow.)*

**LINDA.** What? Did I say something funny?

*(They all laugh harder. LINDA laughs with them.)*

*MITCH re-shuffles and re-deals.*

*Fade-out so that all we see is the lantern.)*

**End of Play**