

EIGHT SPECIAL GIFTS A Hannukah Story

By Sonia Levitin

Copyright 2019 by Sonia Levitin. Appears here with the kind permission of the author.

MORRY SAT ON HIS BED, feeling sad and a little angry. No Hannukah presents this year. These were hard times. Dad had lost his job, and Mom's pay was cut. The rent on their apartment had gone up, too. "We just can't afford presents" his parents said. "We're so sorry."

On Morry's bureau stood a photograph of his grandfather. His mother had told him often enough, "You are named for your grandfather Morry. He was the kindest man on earth."

Now Morry studied the face of the kindest man on earth. He looked no different from anyone else, Morry thought. He wondered, if his Grandpa were here, might there be presents for Hannukah? Every year, surrounding the menorah, there were eight presents for Morry, one for each night of the festival. He could hardly wait for Mom to light the candles, and then he was allowed to open one of the gifts. Hannukah was the happiest time of the year, until now.

All night the face of his grandfather floated through Morry's dreams, and the words rang in his mind. "He was the kindest man on earth!" Tonight was the first night of Hannukah. Morry jumped out of bed and hurried to get dressed. He would do something special for Hannukah.

Morry's building was filled with families, large and small. There were old people and babies, people who spoke English and those who didn't. Morry knew many of them by name, but they rarely stopped to talk. Everyone was so busy. He knew what he wanted to do, but it seemed impossible.

Suddenly Morry heard a loud noise, banging and shouting. He ran to the window. There was old Mr. Feldman, standing on the fire escape, calling "Sadie! Sadie! Come to Papa, please!" Morry knocked on Mr. Feldman's door. "My Sadie is an

indoor cat,” the man said. “I’m so afraid she will run away and get lost. She can’t manage alone in the city. Look! She’s half way down the fire escape!”

“I’ll get Sadie back for you, Mr. Feldman,” Morrie said.

A few minutes later Morry stood at Mr. Feldman’s door. “Here’s your cat,” he said, smiling broadly.

Mr. Feldman took Sadie from Morry’s arms. His eyes gleamed with tears. “Thank you! Thank you! How did you get Sadie down?”

“Tuna fish,” said Morry, laughing. “Cats can’t resist fish.”

That night Mom lit one Hannukah candle.

The second day Morry heard a baby crying. On the landing, stood a young mother with a baby in her arms. The mother looked pale and frightened. Morry asked, “Can I help you?”

The woman shook her head. “No English,” she said. She pointed to the baby. “Sick.”

“Wait here,” Morry said. He asked a neighbor to make a phone call. Then he waited with the young mother until the paramedics came.

That night Mom lit two Hannukah candles .

The third day Morry found a baseball mitt lying under the stairwell. He picked it up and stroked the smooth leather. He put his hand inside and imagined catching a fast ball. On the back was a name, written with a black marker. Morry climbed up the stairs to the fifth floor. When he rang the bell, a tall, thin boy came out. “Whadda you want?” he grumbled.

Morry held out the mitt. “I think this is yours,” he said. “I found it under the stairs.”

The boy grinned at Morry. “Hey, thanks,” he said. “Want to play catch sometime?”

That night Mom lit three Hannukah candles.

The fourth day was very cold. People hurried out, bundled into their coats, or they stayed indoors. Morry stepped out onto the sidewalk, looking up at the sky, hoping for snow. Crash! Someone had tossed a bottle out of a car window. Broken glass littered the street.

Morry ran inside. From the supply closet he took a broom and swept up the glass and put it into the dumpster.

That night Mom lit four Hannukah candles.

The fifth day it did snow. Danny Santos, the little boy who lived just below Morry's apartment, stood at the window crying.

"What's wrong, Danny?" Morry asked.

"Mommy won't take me and my brothers to the park. She said it's too cold."

"Let's go to your place and play," Morry said.

It had been years since Morry did simple puzzles or pushed small cars around on a track. The boys made happy noises. "Bruuum, bruum!" Morry played a board game with Danny and his brothers. Then Morry showed them how to make a Lego town and a Lego truck.

That night Mom lit five Hannukah candles.

The sixth day Morry was hurrying out to the store when he saw Mr. McDuffy carrying a bag of light bulbs. "Hello, Mr. McDuffy," said Morry. "Is your son home for the holidays?"

Mr. McDuffy shook his head. "Afraid not," said Mr. McDuffy. "I'll have to wait to get my light fixed."

"I'd be glad to do it," said Morry. "Do you have a step ladder?"

Soon the light was gleaming in Mr. McDuffy's kitchen. "My fingers don't work so well anymore," said Mr. McDuffy. "Arthritis. Now, thanks to you, I can read my newspaper at the kitchen table."

That night Mom lit six Hannukah candles.

The seventh day Morry tapped at Mrs. Mason's door. She lived alone, and her eyes were poor. She was nearly blind. "Mrs. Mason," Morry asked, "would you like to have me read to you?"

The woman looked up, astonished. "Why, yes!" she exclaimed. "I would love it." Mrs. Mason handed Morry a magazine with two women on the cover. As Morry read, Mrs. Mason nodded and smiled to herself.

That night Mom lit seven Hannukah candles.

The eighth day Morry looked all around the apartment building. He went from one floor to another. He looked outside. Nobody seemed to need a kindness, and it was the last night of Hannukah.

Morry hurried back home, taking two stairs at a time. He burst in the door. Mom rushed out to meet him. "Sit down, Mom," Morry said.

"How can I sit?" she exclaimed. "I've been cooking all day. I have all these pots and pans to scrub."

"No," said Morry, "Let me." He led his mother to the living room. He put on her favorite CD. Music filled with house. Soon the pots and pans were scrubbed and put away.

That night as Morry and his parents gathered around the menorah, his parents were beaming. "I hear you've been very busy, Morry," said his father.

"Some of the neighbors came today," said his mother. "A man holding a cat. A young woman with a baby. Old man McDuffy and Mrs. Mason and several other people. They told me all the things you did for them. "

"You gave us the best Hannukah gift in the world," said Dad.

"Acts of kindness," said Mom.

That night eight candles glowed brightly as Morry and his parents sang many songs of Hannukah joy.