

“Using the backdrop of the Hanukkah holiday, the author realistically captures the challenges of peer pressure and positive ways to overcome adversity against a bully. An important addition to the meager amount of Jewish-themed early chapter books, this heartwarming novel marks a promising debut for this first-time author. Kids will enjoy this book at Hanukkah time or throughout the year.”

****Starred Review**** *Jewish Book World*

“The melding of plot and theme, Jewish history and contemporary life, Jewish values and character development is done very skillfully, with a light touch and a sure feel for childhood emotions and relationships. Ben’s family’s celebration of Hanukkah is portrayed with joy. Consider this a first purchase . . .”

Linda R. Silver, *Newsletter of the Association of Jewish Libraries*

“Highly recommended.”

Midwest Book Review

“. . . a winner.”

Hadassah Magazine

Days before Hanukkah, ten-year-old Ben’s soccer team makes the league championships. Only one thing stands between Ben and victory: the rival team’s best defender, a school bully whose favorite sport, other than soccer, is tormenting Ben. No one at home seems to understand. And now he has to share his room—and his family’s attention—with his grandfather, who has recently come to live with them. Facing humiliation at school and misunderstood by those who love him most, Ben finds an unexpected friend in his grandfather, learning ancient wisdom and steadfast strength, enough for the big game . . . and beyond.



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R.L. grades 3-6; I.L. ages 8-12



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One
LATE AGAIN



I should have said yes when Nick offered me a ride home. By the time I saw Mom's blue van, the field was dark and street lights dotted the parking lot. Shivering, I zipped up my jacket and packed my soccer gear.

Coach waved when he saw Mom pull up.

I was the last kid to leave. I jogged to the van and threw my soccer bag on the floor.

"Sorry we're late, Ben," Mom said as she turned down the radio. "We had some Hanukkah shopping to do and Grandpa was

LIKE A MACCABEE

tired so I took him home before coming for you.”

I just shrugged. What was I supposed to say? I wanted to say that I was sick and tired of waiting in the freezing cold while my coach kept checking his watch. “Late” had become a way of life since Grandpa came to stay. Grandpa is my dad’s dad. Mom and Dad had been asking Grandpa to move in with us since Grandma died two years ago, and now he was here for good. I thought it would be great when Mom quit her job at the bank so she could be home. Boy, was I wrong about that!

“Daddy’s making latkes tonight! He’s practicing for Hanukkah!” my sister Mandy shouted.

“That’s great, Munchkin,” I said, clicking the seat belt around my waist. When I was Mandy’s age I got excited about Hanukkah, too. I still liked the potato latkes, and all of the presents, of course. But I turned ten on my last birthday, and that’s a little too old to get wound up about

LATE AGAIN

silly kid songs and plastic dreidel decorations. Besides, we only get our big presents at the end of the holiday. The first few days we get stupid stuff like pencils or toothbrushes.

“So, how was practice?” Mom asked.

“Okay. Coach told us we made the finals for league championship.” I stared out the van window.

Mom stopped the van at a red light. “That’s terrific news. Why don’t you sound more excited?”

I shook my head. “We don’t stand a chance. We’re playing the Bulldogs. One of their defenders is this huge kid named Travis. Everyone calls him Travis the Tank. He’s fierce and he’s fearless. We’re going to get killed.”

“Just do your best, Ben. I’m sure it will be fine. The Eagles have had a great season,” Mom said.

She didn’t get it. I worked hard all season to become a starter. We made it to the finals, and now I was about to be destroyed by Tank.

LIKE A MACCABEE

Mom said, “We have a lot to do this week,” as if she hadn’t heard a thing I said about soccer.

“Soccer is silly,” Mandy said as she patted the pink tutu she was wearing over her jeans. “Ballet is better.”

“Yeah, no kidding. We all know you like ballet. You wear that tutu twenty-four seven.”

Mandy scrunched up her face. “Mommy, Ben is being mean.”

“I’m not being mean,” I said. “You do wear that thing all the time.”

Mandy crossed her arms over her chest.

Mom said, “Kids, please. It’s been a long day. Let’s just enjoy a quiet ride home.”

I really didn’t want to fight with a five-year-old, or Mom for that matter. The van suddenly felt stuffy. I opened the window a little to let in a sliver of cold air so I could breathe again.

For the rest of the ride home Mandy sang “I Have a Little Dreidel” at least ten times, each verse louder than the one before.

LATE AGAIN

When Mom finally pulled into our driveway,
I couldn't wait to bolt out of the van.