

6: Excerpts from Sholem Aleichem's "Hanukah Money," translated and adapted by Uri Shulevitz and Elizabeth Shub, with illustration by Uri Shulevitz, 1978.

He stops before the Hanukah lamp, and prays and prays and never stops praying. We can't wait until he finishes, because it is then that he will reach into his pocket for his wallet. We look at each other, poke each other.

"Motl, you ask for the Hanukah money."

"Why me?"

"Because you're younger."

"No, you should ask because you're older."

Father knows what we're talking about, but he pretends not to. Slowly he takes out his wallet and counts out money. Our hearts beat faster. We look at the ceiling, scratch behind our ears, pretend as if what is happening has nothing to do with us.

Father coughs. "Hmm... Children, come here. Here is your Hanukah money."

We take it and walk away, slowly at first, like well-mannered boys, then faster and faster. We jig, we jig, and when we reach our room, do three somersaults, and end up hopping on one leg and singing.

*

At night, I lie in bed and try to figure out how much money we would have if all the uncles and all the aunts and all the relatives gave us Hanukah money.

"Motl, are you asleep?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"How much Hanukah money, do you think, Uncle Moishe-Aaron will give us?"

*

Breineh comes in from the kitchen carrying a huge platter of rubles. She isn't walking, she's floating and singing, "These candles we light to recall the miracles..."

Motl swallows the rubles like latkes.

"Motl," I cry out, "Motl, what are you doing? Eating rubles?"

I awake, sit up... a dream.