

# BLANKETS WANTED!



*By Amy Van Veen  
Illustrated by Ryan Tsuen*

The rain of autumn had slowly turned into the sleet of winter as Oscar and his mom walked down the street to do some early Christmas shopping. Oscar's seven-year-old hand was wrapped up in his mother's as they navigated other pedestrians, being sure to keep away from the sidewalk edge where impatient traffic stopped and started to the rhythm of changing lights.

It was always a thrill for Oscar when he and his mom went into the city. Living in the suburbs with a big backyard was fun, but it wasn't as exciting as the hustle and bustle of the busy streets. His eyes widened at the buildings rising up on either side of him. They were so tall he couldn't even see where they ended. All kinds of cars drove by, cyclists braved the cold weather, and strangers squished past each other.

Oscar knew his mom didn't like the city. She'd spent the entire drive slowly getting more and more fretful, wondering out loud how other people tolerated the clogged streets. And now she tightened her grip on his hand whenever a

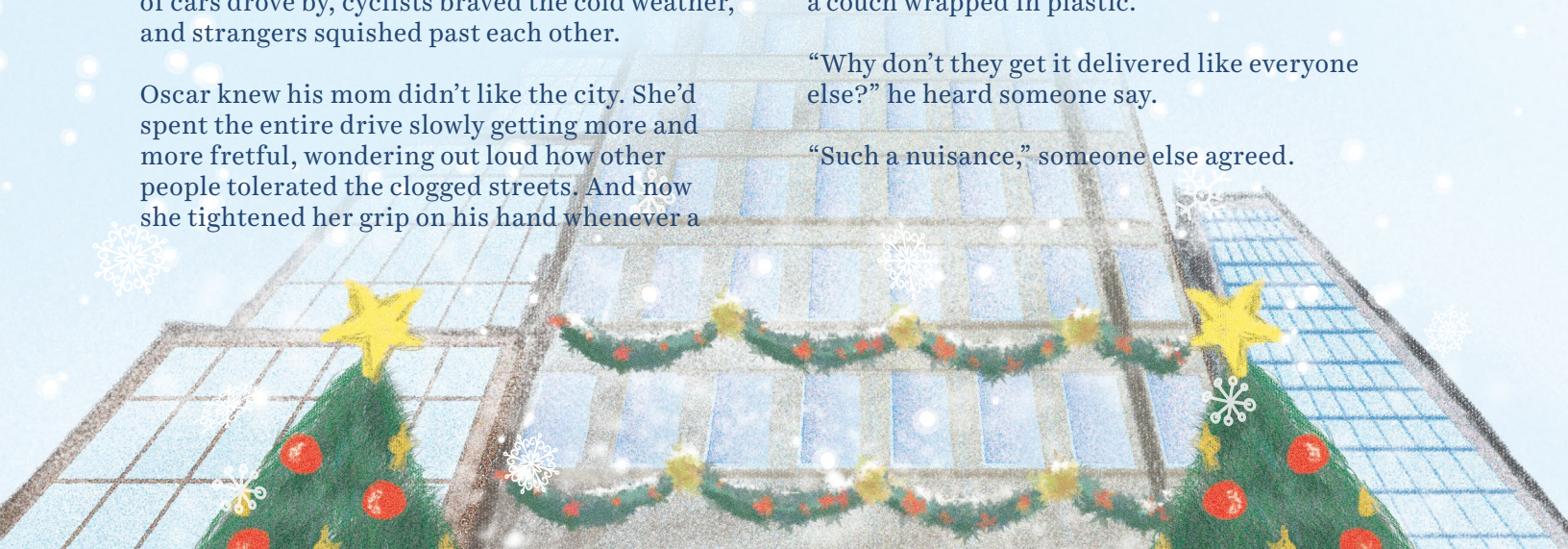
pedestrian jostled them on the sidewalk. Oscar stared with wide eyes at passersby as they approached.

They were nearly at the department store. Oscar's mom had promised he could help pick out something for Dad and his new baby sister, Naomi, and he hoped they would stop at the toy section first. But right before they reached the entrance doors, Oscar's mom suddenly pulled him back against the wall.

Quiet mutterings from people suddenly drawing in around them made Oscar wonder what was wrong. He peered between the adults squeezed, like him, against the store window and caught a glimpse of a young couple struggling to carry a couch wrapped in plastic.

"Why don't they get it delivered like everyone else?" he heard someone say.

"Such a nuisance," someone else agreed.



That's when Oscar heard his mom say, "Oh." It was a quiet, awkward kind of "oh" almost like she sounded uncomfortable. As she pulled him away again toward the door, Oscar looked back and saw a man sitting on the sidewalk, right where Oscar and his mom had been. His clothes were dirty and his eyes stayed fixed on a cup sitting on the ground in front of him.

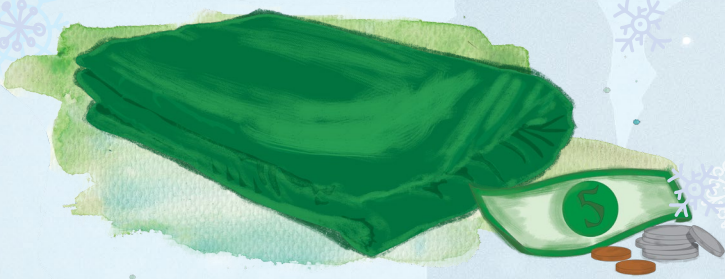
As they entered the store Oscar's mom said, "brr" loudly, then remarked to a nearby employee how chilly it had gotten outside. Oscar often heard adults talk about the temperature outside, but this time it made him think. Oscar's brow furrowed tightly.

In the toy section they chose a stuffed animal for Naomi. Normally, Oscar would have been excitedly searching the aisles and adding ideas to his own wish list, but this time he remained lost in thought.

When they reached the men's department, Oscar's mom asked him to choose between two sweaters for his dad. She had to ask twice because Oscar was distracted, still deep in thought. In the end, he chose the green sweater, since his favourite colour was green.

After a few minutes waiting in line to pay for everything, Oscar asked for his wallet. His mom drew it from her purse with a questioning look. The wallet held Oscar's life savings – all the money he'd earned from doing chores, from birthdays and from his grandparents, who'd always give him at least five dollars just for visiting them.

Just as they reached the front of the line, Oscar grabbed a soft, fuzzy, green blanket that sat at the top of a bin of similar blankets.



"What are you doing, Oscar?" his mom asked.

"It's a Christmas present," he told her.

"For who?" she asked.

But Oscar didn't have time to answer because it was their turn to pay. Oscar pushed the blanket onto the counter, took all the money from his wallet and piled it on top.

The cashier laughed as his mom apologized and helped Oscar count out all the coins and bills needed to pay for the blanket.

As they started to make their way out of the store again, Oscar held his Christmas present tightly to his chest.

"Who is the blanket for?" his mom asked again.

"You'll see," he told her.



When they pushed through the heavy entrance doors, Oscar felt his mom's hand clasp his wrist, preparing for the busy walk back to their car. But Oscar wriggled free and raced over to the man who was still sitting on the sidewalk, staring at the cup.

Oscar placed the blanket, hidden inside its plastic bag, beside the man.

"Merry Christmas," Oscar said with a bright smile.

The man looked up in surprise.

"My favourite colour's green," Oscar told him, his smile unwavering. "Bye!"

With that, Oscar turned around, took his mom's hand, and they began walking back toward the car.

Oscar's mom said nothing at all as they made their way along the sidewalk again. She didn't even mutter about the crowds. But when he climbed into the back seat of their car and buckled himself in,



she turned around and asked, “Why did you do that, Oscar?”

“He looked cold,” Oscar said simply.

She turned around again. When Oscar caught sight of her face in the rear-view mirror, it looked like she was crying.

“You okay, Mom?”

“Yeah, honey,” she said, her voice sounding a little weird. “I’m okay.”

“I think a lot of people must be cold.”

“I think so too.”

“I could give them one of my blankets. I have two. I only use one.”

“That’s very nice of you, Oscar.”

“Maybe other people have blankets they don’t use.”

“Maybe,” she replied.

When they got home, Oscar tore up the stairs to his room. An hour passed before he ran back down the stairs.

Oscar found his mom and dad talking in the kitchen. “Dad!” he interrupted excitedly, “Can you photocopy this?”

Oscar handed him the paper he’d been working on:

*Blankets wanted! For people who are cold!*

“What’s this?” his dad asked.

“I think a lot of people are like me and have blankets they don’t need,” Oscar explained. “And I think a lot of people are like that man in the city who needed blankets but didn’t have any. I think we should share our blankets with people who are cold.”

Oscar’s mom and dad looked at him with expressions he didn’t understand. They looked almost sad, like his mom had looked in the rear-view mirror.

“Shouldn’t we?” he asked them.

“Absolutely,” his dad said. “I’ll photocopy this right away.”

“We can put it in the school and at church,” Oscar said, excited his parents were on board with his plan. “And on telephone poles and at the grocery store! Make a lot of copies, Dad!”

Within a week, they had received 20 blankets. Within two, the number had tripled. Oscar’s mom put his poster online and not long afterward they were receiving packages in the mail every day from people sending extra blankets.

And every day Oscar would come home from school with an armload of blankets. Eventually the principal put a bin in the lobby of the school so people didn’t have to keep bringing blankets to Oscar’s classroom. He even got to go up in front of the school and explain what the bin was for.



To Oscar, it didn’t seem like a big deal. But when adults would bring him blankets, they’d give him the same strange look his parents did that first day.

One night at dinner, a couple of weeks before Christmas, Oscar told his parents he thought it was time for them to share the blankets. He expected them to be as excited as he was, but his mom looked stressed.

“I don’t know if we’ll have time,” she told him. “Christmas is just around the corner!”

“She’s right, pal,” his dad said. “This is a really busy time.”

Oscar was upset. "But all the blankets!" he almost yelled. "The cold people need them!"

"We'll find a time," his mom told him. But he'd heard that before. He needed a plan. For the next several days, he constantly asked them if they could go give away their blankets. On the way to school, he asked his mom. On the way to the grocery store, he asked his dad. As they tucked him into bed, he asked them both.

Even after his parents turned off his light and closed his door, Oscar looked up at his star-stickered ceiling and asked God to help his mom and dad find a time to share the blankets.

Then one day, Oscar was in school when he got called to the principal's office. All the kids in his class oohed and aahed at him as he walked out the classroom door, wondering what he did to get into trouble. When he got to the office, though, he saw both his mom and dad.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"It's time to share the blankets," his dad told him with a big smile.

Oscar was so excited, he ran straight outside without getting his coat. But he didn't find his car, he found a huge van.

"The blankets wouldn't fit in the car," his dad said as he came up behind Oscar.

"We left Naomi with Grandma and Grandpa and rented this van," his mom told him, handing him the coat he forgot. "Come see."

With his mom and dad, Oscar walked around to the back of the van and they opened it up. Blankets were stacked up to the ceiling! Oscar's eyes got wide. "It's time to share the blankets!" he yelled.

Together with his mom and dad, Oscar drove back into the city. As the streets got smaller and the buildings got taller, Oscar grew more and more excited. Eventually they pulled up in front of a big building with a huge garage door.

People in matching shirts came out to talk to his parents, and together they all started to unload the

van. Oscar wanted to help, so he carried armful after armful of blankets into the big warehouse. He passed lots of people in matching shirts with big smiles on their faces, and he asked every one of them where the cold people were, because he had blankets.

One lady in a matching shirt brought him and his parents into a big room that looked kind of like a store. She showed Oscar to a large desk where people were receiving bags of food. Oscar put an armful of blankets on the desk and smiled at the lineup of people. Each time someone stepped up to the desk, Oscar handed them a blanket while the lady in the matching shirt passed them a bag of food.

"Green's my favourite," Oscar would say when he handed someone a green blanket.

"But I like this colour, too," he'd say when he couldn't give them a green one.



Some of the people looked at him in surprise when they received their blanket. Some quietly thanked him. And some laughed and chatted with him, his parents and the people in matching shirts. But before they left, every one of them had received an ear-to-ear smile from Oscar.

As they climbed back into the van, Oscar's parents told him they were sorry.

"We should have brought these blankets earlier," his dad said.

"Much earlier," his mom added.

"That's okay," Oscar replied. "The cold people will be warm now!" After a pause, he added, "Can we do this next year?"

"Of course," his mom told him in a shaky voice.

"Absolutely, buddy," his dad said, shooting him a smile.

"Good," Oscar replied sleepily. His eyelids were growing heavy after the busy day of handing out blankets.

