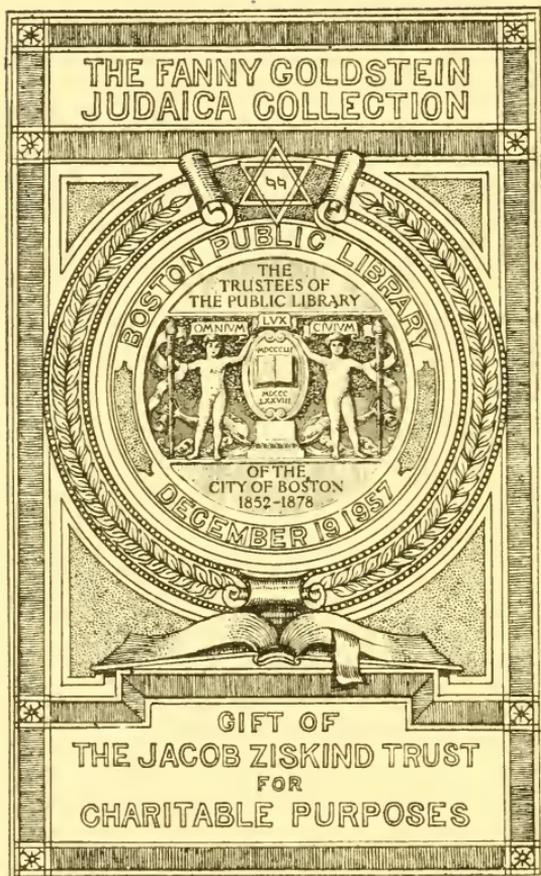


# Song Divine

Leibele Waldman

# Boston Public Library





Dear Ms. Ota:

RE: Song Divine by Leibeke Waldman

Call #: ML420.W15S6 1941X

I am the sole surviving child of the late Cantor Leibeke Waldman. My father passed away in 1969.

Recently my friend Usher Piller visited the Boston library and told me that the library has a copy of my father's autobiography, 'Song Divine.'

Mr. Piller told me you informed him that the library could scan and place on internet archive the entire book.

I hereby grant full and unconditional permission and request that the Boston Public Library do so. This will make available my father's early biography to the many that love and adore Jewish cantorial music.

I express much gratitude to you for your kind assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

  
Harvey Waldman

ML 420

, 2015 SL

1944X

Harvey Waldman  
517 Jordan Way  
Monroe Township, New Jersey 08831

November 13, 2008

Ms. Diane Ota  
Curator of Music Department  
Boston Central Public Library  
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SONG DIVINE







With Best Wishes  
from  
Carter Louis Waldman

# SONG DIVINE

An Autobiography

By

Cantor LEIBELE WALDMAN

Compiled from facts and anicdotes related by the  
cantor, choir leaders, boyhood friends,  
and others, as told to  
MONA SARRO.



THE SARAVAN HOUSE  
Publishers  
New York

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**First Edition**

Typography by M. Sandal

Printed in the United States of America.

*In Memory of*  
*my departed Brother,*  
**MORRIS.**



## EDITOR'S NOTE

*Readers may question why Cantor Leibele Waldman should have been chosen by the publisher to write his autobiography. And yet the answer is not difficult to find.*

*One of the youngest cantors, born and reared on the East Side, with a remarkably matured voice shaded with delicate nuances, Cantor Waldman remains the symbol of the success of Jewish ideals coupled with a new outlook in a modern world.*

*No attempt has been made by the editor or his staff to embellish the book with fancy or decorative language. It is the unique story of an American-Jewish boy's problems and triumphs.*

*The editor has selected SONG DIVINE for a two-fold purpose: to bring to the reader unusual experiences both interesting and amusing and with the hope of bringing American youth closer to a true evaluation of Jewish tradition and at the same time offering the public a clearer picture of Cantor Leibele Waldman, the man.*

*Paul H. Forman, Editor*

*THE SARAVAN HOUSE*

*January 1941*



## CHAPTER I.

IT was a grim and determined group of boys that sat huddled in deep silence. The hour had not yet come. How long, they wondered, does it take for a fairly fast "stepper" to run around one block and back. At last the leader rose in disgust.

"That Mangin Street bunch has kept us cooling too long. We're not holding back any longer. We're gonna fight those guys with the same weapons that we used last time, and this time we gotta win. You all got your bricks and empty cans? Those that haven't get 'em from Murray."

There was a hurrying of feet as each of the twelve boys began to scatter to his strategic point. Only the leader stood at the corner of Delancey and Cannon to watch the approach of the enemy. Nor did he have to wait long. An army of twelve boys, not unlike the former group, came fast, but cautiously, up the street. The shriek of a whistle was heard and the battle was on.

"From nowhere it came," later explained Mrs. Leventhal to the cop on the beat. I was just about to turn in to my street, when I was fairly caught in a whirlpool of stones and cans. It's a wonder people weren't killed. If only the mothers of those boys were less religious and

paid more attention to the upbringing of their children, this street would at least be livable. If you don't arrest those boys, I will have you taken off this beat."

"Now look, lady, did I say I won't arrest them? But where are the boys? Do you know who they are? Would you recognize them?"

"I don't have to recognize them," replied Mrs. Leventhal. "You and I may not know who was in it, but we both know who started it." Shaking her know-it-all head, "Yes, the Waldman kid."

\* \* \* \* \*

That the "Waldman kid," as Mrs. Leventhal referred to him, was the instigator of these block fights, was not a new fact to his mother and father. It was a constant worry and bother to them, and many was the time that the parents would sit for hours thinking of what to do about it. Hyman Waldman was not a lenient father, not too easy with his children. To deprive the boy of his hobbies, even physical punishment, did him very little good. Besides, Hyman had enough worries in a land where an orthodox man looked to make a living and yet had to, above all, observe the holy Sabbath.

The boy's mother knew that he was not exactly a well-behaved child. To tell the truth, she knew he was quite the opposite. There were quite a few mothers that came to see her about the harm her son, Leibele, had caused their children. At such times she would be very gracious and diplomatic, and they would find themselves so taken aback that before they knew it, both mothers would be sitting over two cups of tea, discussing their mutual hardships. Thus the interview would end on a

very friendly basis, and none would like Rose Waldman the less.

"I think, Hyman, that Leibele is very good these last few days. He has been paying attention to his school work more so than ever. I think our little boy is growing up."

Hyman glanced quickly at his wife to see if she was jesting. Such an admission from Rose meant only one of two things. Either it was her sense of humor or else she must be in deep earnest. Not to be taken by surprise, he smiled to himself as he answered wisely, "The week isn't over, Rose. We might hear something about his mischief before then."

Both laughed—Hyman at his good little joke, and Rose because now she wasn't so certain but that Hyman was right. Rather than have Hyman point out her mistaken notion later, she would let it pass as a jest. Should Leibele prove to be really on his good behavior, what a triumph she would hold up to Hyman!

\* \* \* \* \*

Rose leaned out of the window. Morris, her eldest son, should have been home by now. It seemed to her that no two of her children were alike in character. Gertrude was the oldest, quiet when at home, but feared by even the boys on the street. Not that she was mischievous on the outside, like her brother Leibele was, but all the children knew that, if need be, Gerty had a way of defending herself and getting what she wanted when she thought she had a right to it. Rose remembered too well the incident she had with Mikey, the local tough guy.

One evening he was standing on the stoop when her brother Morris came home. Just as her brother was about

to enter the doorway, Mike got in his way. Morris, always unaware of the worst in people, made another attempt to enter through the doorway. Again Mike stood towering over his victim. Morris was not a coward, nor was he a weak boy, but the thought of a brawl in the street appalled him more than any physical pain. He stood, therefore, waiting for Mike's next move. Mike, sure of his victim, was about to raise his foot for a very unceremonious kick in the pants, when just as unceremoniously he was pulled by the hair, and at the mercy of his assailant, was kicked in more places than one. Mike would have fought back when he finally realized what had happened to him. But the thought of having fought with a girl was something no boy of his rough exterior could forgive himself. He would be the talk of all Cannon Street, and probably the joke of the rest of the vicinity. No tough hombre could live that down.

Then there was Leo. According to Leibeke, he was wasting his time at school. The world would not miss a scholar like Leo. His report card was mute testimony for the rest of the family. Why didn't Leo go on the stage? There was nothing to compare with his brother's puns and clowning ways. Rose had to admit that the boy had something in him that amused people. It wasn't so much what he said, but the way he said it that made them all laugh. She recalled *Purim* night of last year, and the "one man fight" that Leo put over. All the neighbors laughed until tears filled their eyes. Perhaps Leibeke was right, but whoever heard of an orthodox family having a relative on the stage. Leo might get modern notions and work on Fridays and Saturdays. That thought sealed the doom

of Leo's career. It was final. She must discourage Leibele and Leo from talking about it.

\* \* \* \* \*

The future happiness of each of her children kept exciting new thoughts in Rose's mind. Morris must be a rabbi. Didn't the rabbi laud him every time that she went to Hebrew school to inquire about the other two boys? His love for peace and his quiet ways, his so much wiser judgment and the love people had for him just made him fit for what she was thinking. Yes, she must talk to Hyman about it, but not now. She had extolled one boy today. Tomorrow it would be Morris.

It was funny the way she could tell which child was walking up the stairs. This time it was Morris. She turned to her work in order to seem very occupied. Rose would have considered it a weakness to show her children how much she loved them.

"Hello, Mom. You'll never know what happened today at school. We had to write an English composition, and when I finished before the rest, I tried my hand at some drawing. I was just about to put the finishing touches on my work, when the teacher saw me and snatched the paper. Gee—it must have been my good conduct all term 'cause she didn't give me a zero. After school she said my drawing was very good. She's gonna show it to the art teacher. She thinks that when I graduate from public school I should study art. In fact she thinks I might some day be an artist."

Rose's world seemed about to crumble. Where does an artist come into her family? If Leo or Leibele had mentioned this to her, she probably would have made nothing of it. But Moishe, he was such an earnest boy,

and at the moment he seemed so eager. She laughed under her breath, how silly of her. Here Morris was still in grade school and already she was so worried about him. And anyway she need not worry about Morris—this child of hers would never hurt her. So she only seemed happy and proud as she said, "When you have time, Moishe, I wish you would draw something for me, and if it looks good I may even hang it up in the living room."

Moishe was not the kind to wait—now was the time to start on it. As thoughts for his subject began to crowd his mind, he had an insatiable desire to complete it before the Sabbath—he would surprise his mother after she had lighted the candles.

So absorbed was he in his work that he did not even hear the bang of the door as Leibele followed Leo into the house. Nor did he hear his father come in.

"Well, what's this mess?" his father shouted, leaning over his shoulder.

Morris hastily gathered the evidence of his work.

"A surprise for Mother. I'll have it ready tomorrow night. Please don't say anything to her."

"Rose," remarked her husband, "you must speak to Gertrude about singing when walking up the stairs. After all, we are not the only ones living in this house. And why is she coming home so late? It seems to me she can come home when all the children do."

Rose was about to answer in her defense when Gertrude rushed in. One glance at her father told her that she had done something he didn't like. Now was the time to tell them—her father was angry anyway.

"Ma, do you know why I am so late from school today? We had music period and do you know what the

teacher said? She thinks I have a good voice. In fact she thinks I ought to do something about it, but I told her I would talk it over with you."

If ever, thought the mother, there was a contrary day, this was it. Gertrude might have waited to break this news to her alone. She could bear it, but Hyman would become uneasy and spend many restless hours about what Gertrude had said.

"You know, Hyman. Our children certainly are becoming individualists."

Trying to find some way to ease Hyman's mind, Rose added, "But we don't have to worry. We haven't even the money to send them to high school."

Her words had the desired effect, for Hyman was asking Gertrude to sing something to him. Now that worries were thrown to the winds, there was no harm in letting the child sing something for them; there were no strangers present. Gertrude sang a piece she had learned in school—a song the other children were still practicing but which she knew at the end of the second rehearsal. Her little audience was impressed and gleefully expressed their admiration. All ended in a very happy mood for everyone but Gertrude. To think that her hopes had been built up so high at school only to be so completely shattered by her mother's last remark. However she did not blame her mother, for she knew that she had spoken the truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

On Friday nights the modest home of the Waldmans seemed like a palace to little Leibele. He did not question himself as to why it appeared to him that way, but it always did. He watched his mother's preparations for

the holy day, and wondered how one woman could do so much. The boy doubted whether all women cooked and baked as much for the Sabbath as did his mother. He recalled that the preparations started on Thursday afternoon. She would give them lunch on that day and would be out of the house before the children went back to school. When the child first asked his mother where she was rushing off so suddenly, Rose replied. "I'm late already. The choice fish and chicken will be picked out by the other women if I don't hurry. I must shop for the Sabbath." Leibele could not understand why his mother found it necessary to be in such a rush on Thursday afternoons to buy food that would be eaten on Friday night and Saturday.

Friday morning found Rose rising with the dawn. She would move quietly from one task to another, walking on her toes so as not to disturb the children. While the little family was at breakfast, their mother could be heard chopping the fish that would be made into *gefilte* fish. If these deafening sounds annoyed the children then, they were more than compensated when they inhaled the appetizing vapors of the fish cooking on the stove. And not only was there fish, but there was chicken roasting in the stove, bread was baked and neatly covered with clean white towels, and the noodles were also covered up and placed near the bread. And what meal was complete on Friday night without cooked prunes!

If the early part of Friday was a confusing combination of noise and activity, by two o'clock on that day there was not a trace of this tumult. Even a child could see that Rose Waldman was a very tired woman, as she swayed to and fro in her rocking chair.

Finally she rose from her chair and made her way to the linen chest. From there she removed a pure white table cloth which she spread neatly on the table. Two *cholis* were then placed near the seat of the head of the family; the Sabbath knife was put near the bread; and the other essentials were also laid on the table—the salt shaker, the candlestick, the candles, the silverware, the wine and the wine glasses.

\* \* \* \* \*

Early Friday afternoon found Hyman Waldman going home from work. There was no special reason for him to hurry for his place of work was only two blocks from his home. On this particular Friday Hyman was thinking to himself, "If I had to travel home on Fridays, anything might happen to cause delay." His face clouded with pain at the possibility of his violating the Sabbath under such circumstances.

As he walked into the house, he was greeted with an hello from his children. Somehow to him their greeting always sounded more warm and affectionate on Fridays. Perhaps because they were more serious on this day, he thought, as he from time to time glanced in their direction and saw them wash and change their clothes for a very special occasion—they were accompanying their father to synagogue.

It was customary for the family to sit around a little while waiting until their mother would light the candles. Soon they would see her, dressed in a silk dress with a small, starched apron, coming out of her room somewhat selfconscious yet proud of this attention from her husband and children. Little Leibele knew the ritual by heart yet he would not miss one single second of it. He watched

his mother put a white lace kerchief on her head and she proceeded to light the five candles individually. Then she placed herself directly in front of the candles, and holding her hands directly in front of her face with palms facing the candles she proceeded to say, in quiet and fervent tones, the prayer for the lighting of the candles. After saying the first and shorter part of the prayer, she circled the candles with her hands three times, and then put her two hands lightly on her face and proceeded with the rest of her prayer. The prayer was said, and then the mother turned and smilingly wished her husband and children a *Good Shabbess*. As they rose, they promptly wished her the same. Gertrude remained with her mother, as the father and his sons left for synagogue.

\* \* \* \* \*

At first Leibele was disappointed at the size of the place of worship. A place that holds just two hundred people was very small compared to some in the neighborhood that held ten times as many. What his father's *shul* lacked in space it more than made up for it in the character of its members. They were all devout Jewish people, who practiced their religion in the same way and with the same zeal as they had done in the Old World.

Leibele understood very little of the prayers that the old patriarchs were chanting, but that did not make any difference to him. The sound they made had a way of lifting the soul higher and higher until one felt so very close to holiness and God. The boy's eyes were turned on the pulpit. Surely the whole effect would be more inspiring if the man chanting the prayers had a more pleasing tone—perhaps like the cantor at the big temple. It must be wonderful to lead all these people in prayer, espe-

cially if one had a good voice! Suddenly it occurred to him that he would like to be the central figure in such a group as this. Sure he did, he was certain of it. If only he could, but he did not want to wait until he was as old as this man. Leibeles glanced furtively at his father to see if he was watching him. But he need not have troubled on that account—his father was much too absorbed in his prayers so much so, thought Leibeles to himself, that he wondered if his father remembered he was near him.

The boy slipped away unnoticed, and home he ran. After many minutes, Hyman noticed the boy was not with him.

“Leibeles probably asked my permission to go with the boys and I did not hear him,” remarked the father to his neighbors.

As he ran home, Leibeles tried to save time by thinking of where his mother could have put his father’s old praying shawl. He must not take too much time in finding it for his family would soon be home. Not that his father would object to his doing it, but they might laugh at him. For all he knew, it might not work out as he thought.

There was one place it would be, and if it wasn’t there, the task of finding it would be too great at this particular time. Leibeles prayed to himself that it might be there. He went to the dresser and pulled it wide open. No, it wasn’t there. In a last hope he ran to the chest in his father’s room. No discoverer could have felt more elated at his find. The *talis* was in the chest!

He took it tenderly out of its hiding place and put it around his little shoulders. Leibeles took one good look at himself in the mirror and began to make sounds. He

knew no Hebrew words to chant, but he had feeling. The tones re-echoed in the empty house, as Leibele with another glance in the mirror and with more vigor did a wordless imitation of the *baltfiloh*. So absorbed was he and so much noise did he make that he was not aware of his loving family watching him, amusement all over their faces. His mother remarked, "Here we come from a *baltfiloh* only to find a cantor in the house." Her husband and the children found this amusing, and they all laughed good-naturedly. No more time was spent on this incident, as the family sat down to dinner; they were half starved already.

Leibele hardly touched his food. He thought of what his mother had said: *A cantor in the house.*

## CHAPTER II.

LEIBELE could remember the first day his mother took him to Hebrew school. He did not anticipate anything new, for he had been taken more than once by his sister to her public school. The only difference, he thought, was probably in the number of teachers and the height of the building. He only hoped that the recreation period would be longer in *Chader*.

He was astonished when he beheld his new place of learning. Instead of a huge structure, it was a basement store on a very noisy street; instead of neat little desks and chairs there was the endless bench that somehow got harder and harder from day to day. Instead of the school teacher who was understanding and kind there was the one rabbi who ruled that room like a tyrant. From time to time the rabbi used a funny looking whip on any of the boys whose only crime was that of being too playful. It was music in Leibele's ears on such an occasion to hear the boy say that he would bring his mother and father and then the rabbi had better watch out! It seemed to him that he was the only one who waited anxiously for the morrow when this boy's parents would come to see the rabbi. The next day came and with it the mother of the boy that was whipped. Instead of indignant tones, he heard the teacher

and the mother speaking things over and the mother's warning to her son. "The Rabbi did good. Imagine, gazing out of the window when you should be paying attention to the rabbi." And with that she left.

It was then Leibele made up his mind to "learn," for what all he knew of his mother, she too might be in sympathy with the rabbis and their ways. Anyway he wasn't going to take any chances. What troubled him now, as he was trying very hard to listen to the rabbi, was the fact that his brothers and sister were excelling in something while he was not. True there was no one who could stage a more successful and spectacular fight than he could, but that was frowned upon by his parents.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was like a sting on his hand! It came hard and fast. Leibele turned his head from the window and gazed up into the rabbi's eyes. Speechless, the boy didn't move out of his seat. He sat waiting for the inevitable. But the blows did not come. Had he guessed the rabbi's thoughts he never would have expected what he did. For at that time the rabbi was thinking, "It would not be wise to lick this boy now. He is just a beginner and might be scared by such punishment." Instead he looked at the boy in a manner that said, "You know what to expect if I find you wasting your time anymore."

Somehow Leibele could not picture himself under that whip—not only would it be painful, but terribly humiliating. If it ever reached the gang's ears, that would be the end of everything. There was only one thing left to do, to study and study hard. Then who knows but that some day the rabbi would feel ashamed that he ever laid that whip on Leibele's hands.

During one of his *Chader* sessions Leibele involuntarily studied the countenance of his rabbi. He was not an old man to judge by his walk and inexhaustible energy, yet his face was wrinkled and as pallid as parchment. As he looked at the rabbi's beard, Leibele wondered why he did not cut it around a bit—like his father did. Perhaps it would not look as wild, if only it wasn't red.

The boy's serious face lighted up with a big grin—he must tell it to the boys just as soon as *Chader* session was over. He was sure they would agree with him. Anyone would just have to be blind not to see that the rabbi had a striking resemblance to Robinson Crusoe.

The rabbi rang his rusty little bell, and this time Leibele was the first to run to the door. He stationed himself so that none of the boys could get through.

Leibele shouted, "Hey, gang, meet me at the end of the block. I have something very funny to tell you."

Before the rabbi could get to the door to ask the meaning of this, Leibele was down the block and the boys right behind him.

The word got around that the rabbi looked like Robinson Crusoe. Had the boys felt differently about their teacher, this discovery probably would have impressed them very little or not at all. But little grievances against him made them take up this nickname for him as a sort of revenge. Yet how could they create an opportunity for calling him this name in his presence! They need not have worried very long, for in Leibele's mind the idea was already shaping itself.

He conveyed his plan to the boys. On the opposite side of where the rabbi taught his pupils, the wooden

floor was broken up. That in itself would probably not have attracted Leibele's attention, were it not for the fact that one day while he waited his turn to learn with the rabbi, he noticed water flowing from that direction. Upon closer inspection he found that the water pipe was leaking profusely. Leibele had sufficient time to mend the leak with some soap he found on the sink. Would it not be a good idea to remove that soap on the morrow and allow quite a bit of water to accumulate under the floor? He could put some loose boards on that spot to make it appear as if nothing was amiss. Then at the end of the session, when the other boys had gone home and only this particular group remained, the boys would scream "Robinson Crusoe." The rabbi would be enraged at this audacity and would in all probability run after them, falling a certain victim to their trap. The boys were greatly impressed with the plot and were unanimous in expressing their admiration.

If the rabbi had at all wondered about the excitement at the door the previous day, he had forgotten all about it this bright afternoon as the boys were coming into the room. To any one more observant than he, it would have been clear that the boys were behaving in a most unusual manner. They moved more quietly about and assumed an air of complete innocence. While he was "learning" with one boy, he noticed a particular group of boys hushing anyone that made the slightest sound. So cooperative were they, that soon there was complete quiet—only the rabbi and the pupil learning at the particular time could be heard. The rabbi looked around, well pleased with himself.

An hour passed and then Leibele signalled to them

that the time had come. In a chorus they yelled "Robinson Crusoe! Robinson Crusoe!"

Had an earthquake occurred at this time, the rabbi could not have been more surprised or scared out of his wits. The sudden tumult in an atmosphere where perfect quiet usually reigned would have unnerved a more composed person than he. He did not understand the significance of their words, but one thing he was sure of—it meant something no good. He pretended to pay no heed to their outburst, but his hand could be seen reaching for the whip that hung right above his head. As the boys saw what was taking place, they made a rush for the door. But their teacher was not going to let them get away. He rushed out of his seat and began to run towards them.

The boys held their breaths as their victim was about to fall into their trap. Somehow the humor of it was gone as the consequences of this act presented themselves to each boy in the room. They could not exactly surmise what the rabbi would do under such circumstances—he might whip all of them in turn or worse. Had they been able to stop him at this moment, not one boy would have hesitated to do so. But alas it was too late. They could only stare in despair as the rabbi's foot caught and he fell. The water splashed in all directions, drenching the rabbi from head to foot, making him seem indeed like Robinson Crusoe in a rainstorm.

The affair was much too ticklish for any serious contemplation of punishment. There was the sound of hilarious laughter such as the rabbi had never heard before. Nor did they stop this uproar for some few minutes, as their teacher finally stood before them bewildered and

helpless. Now, thought the group, was the time to run, and run they did. But the rabbi was not going to let them get away—as the pupils ran, so ran the rabbi. Books are wonderful things but not when they get in the way of a man of learning and cause him to fall at a most inopportune time.

The fall seemed to sober the rabbi a bit. Reflection was a better way than haste. He would rid himself of all this disturbance in his classroom, but he would have to find out the inventor of this beastly trick. Now that he had the afternoon to himself, he would sit at his desk until he ascertained the instigator of this affair.

What incident, thought he, had occurred that would enlighten him? Who were the boys that gave him trouble at school? Like a flash it came to the rabbi. He again recalled yesterday and the commotion after session. Who was it that ran so quickly out of the room, only to station himself at the door? That little boy, Leibele. Why did he leave the room first, a thing he never did before? There was no time to lose. He would go directly to the boy's parents and tell them they could keep their offspring at home. It was better than venting his wrath on all of his pupils, and perhaps cause their mothers to take them to a different teacher. He could not afford that, and anyway boys will be boys. He must rid himself of that Waldman boy.

And so the same bright afternoon found the rabbi hurrying to his place of destination. As he did so, he thought of the boy's mother. How proud she had been that first day she took Leibele to *Chader*. How she assured him that the boy was really a good child, but so full of fun. He supposed it was fun, but he could not just let

it pass as if nothing had happened. For all he knew the boy might be up to something else before long, and it would not do to have his sessions interrupted.

He knocked on her door and did not wait to be asked in. It seemed so unnecessary to knock on people's doors. People always said come in, so what was the use of such ceremony. He remembered in the old country people did not knock on each other's doors, and it did not seem to do anyone any harm. People lived just as long, if not longer.

Rose was a little annoyed as she sensed that someone was coming in without waiting to be asked. But her displeasure soon turned to a smile of welcome as she saw who her visitor was. No doubt, thought Rose, the rabbi came to tell her how her Leibele was doing?

The rabbi came to the point immediately. He related the whole story and her son's part in it. Had this happened with any of the other children, Rose would not have been so easily convinced of her child's guilt, but with Leibele there was no doubt. There was no humor in such an incident—to Rose a rabbi was a person to be honored and above all, not to be ridiculed. She would see that the boy was sufficiently punished but how could she convince the rabbi to give him another trial. So Rose resorted to her usual diplomatic gesture. The coffee was on the stove, and the rabbi did look chilled. He drank the liquid, for to refuse would be a sin. Hospitality extended must be accepted, especially from such a well meaning woman as Mrs. Waldman. If Rose thought the rabbi would change his mind after this act of friendliness, she was greatly mistaken. Instead he offered to remit to her the balance of the tuition that was due her, and with-

out much more ado bade her good day. She watched him leave only to see him turn back almost immediately. She caught her breath as she hoped it signified the rabbi had changed his mind. Rose was once more unhappy, as she saw the reason for the rabbi's turning back—he had forgotten to kiss the *mizzizza*.

Rose was very disappointed and hurt. She could hardly blame the rabbi. Who would act differently in his place? But what to do she could not decide. At any rate she would have to speak with her husband about this. She knew that he would take it very hard, but she saw no way of avoiding the issue. She would at least break it to him very gently.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hyman was seated at the table, unaware of the strain Rose was under. Twice she opened her mouth as if to speak to him and both those times could not bring herself to say those words. With a final outburst of courage she spoke:

"Hyman, I have something very important to say to you. I wish you not be alarmed after I have told you what is in my mind."

Hyman dropped his knife and fork and turned to his wife. If he had been hungry before, there was no thought of food in his mind now. For Rose to interrupt his meal was a very rare occurrence, and when it did happen it was mighty serious. One glance at his wife told him that she was very much agitated.

"Go on, Rose," he replied, trying to speak as calmly as possible, "tell me what it is that is troubling you."

"Leibele was the instigator of a very mean trick on

the rabbi," and with that she continued to tell him the same story as the rabbi had previously told her.

Forcing a half smile to his lips, he retorted, "I will punish Leibele when he comes home, and tomorrow morning I will go to see the rabbi myself and apologize profusely for our son's behavior. When Leibele goes to *Chader* tomorrow you go with him and have him apologize to the rabbi also. I am sure the rabbi will forget the incident and everything will turn out all right."

"But, Hyman, the rabbi was here already."

"Then everything is fine," beamed Hyman, as he once more turned to eat his supper.

"No," Rose replied, no longer being able to keep the words in her, "it is quite the opposite. He refuses to put up with our boy and emphatically said that I should not send him to his school."

Hyman pushed his plate away from him. This was not a time to eat. He must sit down with Rose and work this thing out. It would not do to have his son carry on like that. For all he knew the boy might grow up to be worse. However he must say something now to comfort Rose.

"Well, if he does not go to this teacher, he will go to another. Why do you worry so?"

Rose's face brightened—if Hyman saw it this way, she would too, and so the two got together and planned Leibele's future place of learning.

"It seems to me, Rose, that the *Yeshiva* would be the best place for our boy. They are more strict there and I've known of worse little boys who were broken in. They tell me at the *Yeshiva* they learn with the whole class at one time and there is no opportunity for mischief."

"A fine idea," said Rose. "But I have one more suggestion. Do you recall, Hyman, the other Sabbath when we found Leibele walking up and down the room trying to imitate a cantor? I feel that the child has a fondness for music. Since that incident I have spied him on several occasions walking up and down the room, with your old praying shawl on his little shoulders, singing certain melodies. And I tell you, Hyman, it was not at all bad. He really has a pleasing little voice. So my idea is to ask one of the choir leaders to take him into his choir. Between *Yeshiva* and choir rehearsals I doubt whether he will have time for his mischievous ways."

"Rose, if you had a beard you would certainly be a sage. It's funny that I did not think of the idea. Why, it is the very thing for Leibele."

\* \* \* \* \*

Hyman was becoming alarmed.

"Rose," said he, "what could have happened? The child is two hours late in coming home."

"Nonsense," replied the mother, "when he has done something wrong, he never comes home before the three hours after school have elapsed. I don't begin to worry until the three hours are up."

Hyman laughed, for now he recalled that Rose was right. The greater the offense, the later Leibele came home. Hardly were these thoughts out of his mind, when Leibele's soft tread could be heard on the stairs. The parents became occupied—Hyman in his prayer book and Rose in her cooking. Leibele could be heard opening the door. They neither heard him come in nor close the door. After some short while, the parents were curious to see the meaning of this. When they finally glanced in his

direction, he was standing with one foot on one side of the threshold and the other foot on the other side, making ready to run if need be. With one hand he held to the door and the other hand was shielding a black eye that shone out of Leibele's fair face.

As Hyman looked at his little son, he wondered how so much mischief could be in one boy. Instead of the usual questioning, and the punishment that followed it, Hyman decided to resort to a different method.

"Leibele, you can come into the house; I will not punish you."

The boy did not hesitate to come in. He believed his father, for if his father said a word it was so. He was quite ashamed, though, at this kind of reception. He had certainly expected the opposite. The world was full of wonders, and this must be one, thought the boy.

The father related their plans for him with regard to *Yeshiva* and warned his son to be on his good behavior for any other kind of deportment was not tolerated there. Whereas in Hebrew school he had to deal with only one rabbi, in this new place there were many teachers, and if need be, principals to deal with. The boy listened as his new little world was being depicted to him. Then the father told him of their plans to recommend him to a choir leader so that he could sing with other boys. The boy forgot all his prior fears as he listened to his father speaking. One thing he was sure of—he would like singing in a choir. But the other thing—the *Yeshiva* that his father spoke of—well, he was not so sure he would like that.

### CHAPTER III.

**H**YMAN WALDMAN believed in doing everything promptly. Furthermore, it would be well to place his son in a choir before he was enrolled in the Yeshiva. It occurred to Hyman that here was a weapon he could use over the boy.

"Leibele, if you will behave in Yeshiva and learn well, I will see that you remain in the choir for a long time. If you do not, I will immediately withdraw you from the choir."

The father's words had the desired effect—the boy faithfully promised to be ever so good.

"Now, then, wash yourself a bit and change your clothes, but do not take too much time doing so. We shall go to see the cantor."

"Yes, father," replied the boy as he hurried off to do his bidding. In a short while he was back and father and son left the house.

Neither spoke on the way. The father was occupied with his thoughts—he had never done anything like this and he did not know how to go about it. He didn't even know how much a boy was paid for this sort of thing. Yet, he thought, if the remuneration were sufficient to buy the boy a new suit of clothes and perhaps little things

that he needed, it would be very fine. And perhaps if more was paid, then a little money could be set aside for the child. He would not use a penny of it for himself.

The boy's thoughts, on the other hand, were not of material things. How grand it must be to do that sort of thing. To stand before an audience and perform!

\* \* \* \* \*

Their thoughts ended abruptly as they arrived at their destination. Hyman was about to relate to the cantor the reason for his visit when the man interrupted him.

"I know, Mr. Waldman, but I am busy right now. I have a rehearsal tonight. Remain here and I will audition the boy when I am all through."

Hyman glanced at his watch. If he did what was suggested, he would be home rather late and tomorrow he had to be in to work. But he could not disappoint the boy who looked so eager now, and he could not come home to Rose and say that he had accomplished nothing. So he turned to his son and said, "Shall we stay, Leibele?" He had but to look in the boy's eyes to see the answer.

In a few minutes father and son were left to themselves. As the cantor could be seen looking over his sheets it seemed that he had forgotten all about his two visitors. Hyman and Leibele had no other alternative—they found themselves chairs and sat down to wait their turn.

Shortly after, boys' voices could be heard in the hall. Soon the door opened and in walked a group of boys ranging from seven to twenty-two years of age. As each took off his coat, he was given a sheet of music to follow. This group must be the choir, thought father and son. To their surprise two men walked in who, it seemed to the

guests, were at least thirty-five years old. These men must have the heavier voices, thought Leibele.

The leader tapped his foot for attention. All eyes were focused on the one man. His hands were raised well above his head as he tapped his foot a second time. With a quick movement his hands were let down and with that gesture came a most unharmonious sound of voices. The singing became louder but not any better. To Leibele's ears there seemed to be something wrong. If this was the group his father wished him to join, he was not so sure that he would be proud to do so. As if in answer to his thoughts, he heard the cantor say, "No, no, stop that noise. This is not the way we rehearsed." He looked over his men, and found that he had not grouped them correctly. He thereupon began to put them in their right positions. Altos were placed together, basses in another group, tenors by themselves, and sopranos still in another. He nodded his head as if to say, "Now it must be good." He came back to the head of the group, and once more he tapped his foot for attention. The same procedure was repeated and this time the result was more satisfactory.

While the choir was singing in a complete group, Leibele could only marvel at the beautiful harmony they created. When the choir leader pointed his forefinger at a particular boy, Leibele immediately glanced in that individual's direction. The boy pointed at sang a few bars by himself, the choir remaining in the background.

Leibele could hardly wait for the two older men to sing. He wondered what they sounded like. After some time the leader motioned to the men, and Leibele sat forward in his seat. With the first note he fell off the

chair, so taken was he by surprise—the men were sopranos and sounded more like women than any he had ever heard. All eyes were turned on him, the leader's in complete anger.

"Can you tell me the meaning of this commotion?" inquired the cantor.

Leibele had nothing to answer, and was relieved when his father spoke.

"I am dreadfully sorry, but the boy must have been so impressed that he did not realize he was gradually moving off the chair. Please go on, I will see that he does not disturb you again."

The rehearsal continued while Hyman Waldman circled his arm about the boy's waist. He knew very well why Leibele had fallen off the chair. He recalled that under similar circumstances he had almost done the same thing. They both sat watching, Leibele looking as if not knowing what to expect next, and Hyman with a smile on his face as he guessed what was going on in his child's mind.

The rehearsal ended and the choir left in little groups. Soon there was no one left but the cantor and the father and son. The leader did not waste time in coming to the point.

"Well, young fellow, I am ready for you. Come here and sing for me the scale like this." And he proceeded to sing it for the boy.

Leibele jumped off the bench and walked briskly over to the man. He raised his chest and breathed deeply, and that done he sang down the scale.

"Sing that again," ordered the leader.

Leibele did so, and then turned to his father for ap-

proval. He could see by the expression on his father's face that he had done well.

"To speak frankly, Mr. Waldman, the child will have to be trained. I cannot use him until the High Holidays. While he rehearses, he does not get paid, but for the High Holidays I can offer you five dollars for his services. If that is agreeable to you, he can start next week."

Hyman did some fast thinking. The holidays were at least eight months off. In the meantime he did want Leibele to go to *Yeshiva* and perhaps it would be too much responsibility to put on the boy. Perhaps it would be better to forget about singing in the choir and give the boy a chance to accustom himself to the *Yeshiva*. After all, was not a Hebrew education more important than musical training?

"I don't know whether I want the boy to start just yet, but I did want to find out whether he has a singing voice."

The cantor had been impressed with Leibele's voice, but he was afraid to pass judgment. The father might want much more for the boy when he finally decided to put him in the choir. The best thing to do would be to answer very conservatively.

"The boy is not bad. He has possibilities."

"Good day," said Hyman. "If the boy has possibilities, we will let him grow up with them. Perhaps in six months, when you really need the boy, you will admit that he has more than just possibilities."

With that Hyman left the room, not giving the boy a chance to say good night.

\* \* \* \* \*

Father and son were hurrying home. Rose would be

very anxious to hear the result of their mission. Leibele glanced at his father and saw that he was very angry. Could his father feel resentment at the man for saying that he only had possibilities? Could his father really think that he was actually good?

Hyman walked up the stairs and the boy followed without saying a word. Such a long stretch of silence made the boy impatient and he was therefore relieved to hear his mother questioning his father.

"Hyman, I am very anxious to hear what happened between you and the cantor. Did he say he would take Leibele into his choir?"

"I am sure he wants and needs our son. I could see that he was much impressed by his voice, but I do not think we ought to let the boy join him."

"Not join the choir? What are you talking about?"

"I have my reasons," replied Hyman. "We do want him to go to *Yeshiva*, and I am afraid that both this and his music rehearsals will prove too much for the boy. I think we should wait about six months."

Hyman seemed too definite on that point for further discussion. As she looked at her husband, Rose noticed how tired he was and she knew the reason why. When he came home from work, he should be able to rest instead of having to bother about the children. She did wish Leibele would make up his mind to behave himself so that there would be peace in the house. She glanced at Leibele playing with his marbles and buttons, seeming to be unaware of what was said just a while ago. Strange, thought Rose, that this little "terror of hers" could be so quiet sometimes.

Actually the boy was not absorbed in his playthings.

He had heard everything his father and mother had spoken. He had hoped against hope that his mother would take the opposite stand and insist that he sign up with the cantor. As little as he had seen of that group, he had an insatiable desire to be part of it.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a very impatient pupil that sat in his first grade class waiting for school session to end. Of all the days he spent in school, this seemed to him the longest. The clock on the wall pointed to two-thirty, and in another half hour he would be home. There his mother was waiting for him to take him to *Yeshiva*. He could hardly wait to see what the place was like.

At the ringing of the bell Leibele was the first to run for his clothes. Many a coat fell to the floor until he finally found his own. He didn't stay to make plans with the gang but rushed straight for home. He found his mother waiting for him on the stoop. He ran upstairs, washed, combed his hair, looked at himself in the mirror and came down the stairs again. Immediately he turned back again. He would take his buttons and marbles with him.

Placing the toys in his pocket, he ran down the stairs as fast as he could. One look at his mother showed him very plainly that she was displeased.

"What in heaven's name were you doing upstairs so long? It shouldn't have taken you more than ten minutes and here I am waiting for twenty minutes."

Leibele did not answer. He did not wish to lie to his mother and on the other hand he feared to tell her the truth. He knew very well that at the first sign of an ash can she would dump all his playthings into it. He merely

looked at his mother with such an innocent face that Rose wondered whether she was not being too hard with the boy. It probably did take him that long to get ready. She reached for his hand and in that way they walked to their destination.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Here we are at last," commented Rose tired from the long walk.

She wondered what need there had been in hurrying. The child would not start school the same day. She was merely enrolling him.

Leibele hardly heard a word of what his mother had said. All he heard were her first words that conveyed to him the fact that this was the *Yeshiva*. He looked about him and saw that on the exterior it looked much the same way that his public school did, the only difference being the size. This building was smaller.

After making inquiries Rose was directed to the office. There a young lady informed her that the principal would see her in a short while. Soon the door of the principal's office opened and a mother and young boy made their way out. Leibele and his mother were ushered in.

The principal motioned Rose to a seat and directed the boy to sit down in a small chair near him. While his mother and the head of the *Yeshiva* were discussing rates, time of attendance, and other miscellaneous details, Leibele had an opportunity to study the principal. How unlike his rabbi this man was. He was a young man, probably forty years old or so. He too had a beard, but it looked neat and was of course smaller. In dress he was immaculate, and he spoke slowly and impressively. He

was a man not to be tampered with decided the youngster.

"Do you think you will like it here?" questioned the principal.

The boy fairly jumped out of his seat as he realized the question was directed towards him. He became confused as he could not recall the import of the query and he looked helplessly at his mother. It would be just like Leibele not to pay attention, thought Rose, as she immediately came to his rescue.

"I am sure the boy will find it pleasant here and will give you no trouble. Is it necessary for me to bring him here or can he come himself?"

"I believe he can manage himself. But be sure that he is here promptly at three-thirty. His class begins then."

"I should like to ask you a question, Mr. Green. Do the other boys find it difficult to attend Hebrew classes after their regular classes in public school? Do any of them eventually drop out from your *Yeshiva*?"

"That is a very good question, Mrs. Waldman. To a mother enrolling a son the first time in this institution it is natural that these thoughts should trouble you. It need not bother you, however. All these boys here attend their regular public school classes and it seems not to undermine their health. There are, of course, a few exceptions, but those are only the lazy ones. But you need not worry—your boy looks like a very intelligent child."

"But that gives them so little time for play," reasoned Rose, "and they should have more recreation and fresh air."

"That is true, but that is the choice you make. . If

you are desirous that your son have a Hebrew education, you must make some sacrifice. However, you can rest assured that these young imps find time for their fun. Then there is Saturday and part of Sunday when they can do as they like."

This reassured Rose and she smilingly wished him a good day.

On the threshold he extended his hand to Leibele.

"Are you not going to say good day to me, scholar?"

The boy was moved at the friendliness of the older man's voice as well as the gesture. He extended his little hand, unafraid, and the two men, young and old, shook hands like old friends. Rose looked on, very proud, thinking that perhaps here the boy would be different—he seemed a little man already.

\* \* \* \* \*

At first the boy inwardly rebelled at the new system of things. It was proving an arduous task for him to rise early each morning, rush to public school, and then when school hours were finally over, he had to hurry home, wash, change whatever clothes were necessary, eat a small meal, and be off to *Yeshiva*. His days were a continuous cycle of school hours and more school hours. This program left a fellow so little time for real sport—like organizing the gang for block fights, roasting potatoes and marshmallows in the street, and similar activities. He carried his grievances like a Stoic, but a day came when he could no longer hold it within himself. His parents were unaware of the boy's resentment and assumed that everything was well. One day they overheard a conversation between Leibele and little Harvey Glick who were playing together in the street.

"Say, Leibeles, how do you like going to the *Yeshiva*?" inquired Harvey.

"I don't like it. It is not anything like Hebrew school."

"But my brother attends classes there and he likes it very much," persisted the other.

"Let me explain to you," replied Leibeles with an impatient shrug of his shoulders. "In *Chader* we had to wait our turn to learn with the rabbi, so that we had a chance for fun, like shooting marbles, playing buttons, and other games. In *Yeshiva* there are classes, and when the teacher comes in, we all learn together so that there isn't any time for fun. And, also, in *Chader* the rabbi was easy to fool. Here they watch you and you don't get a chance to do anything but learn."

"In that case," speculated his friend, "I don't blame you. Why don't you ask your parents to put you in *Chader* again?"

"That is a good idea," beamed Leibeles, "I am going to ask them right now."

Hyman and Rose pretended that they had heard nothing. They had conceived of a plan whereby they could manage this situation. As anxious as the boy was to speak to his parents, now he stood before them unable to begin. They on the other hand understood what was going on in the child's mind.

"Leibeles," asked Rose, "is Nathan Cohen in your class?"

"Yes, Mom. Why?"

"You'll never guess. I met his mother today and the poor woman was very worried. It seems that Nathan does not want to attend *Yeshiva* because he finds it too

difficult. She asked me about you, whether you also find it that way. I tried so hard not to show off for her, but I could not help it. I told her how well you are getting along and how much better you liked your classes there. You ought to speak to Nathan and make him change his mind."

The boy stood as if caught in a trap. A lump rose in his throat as the words he was to have spoken no longer had any meaning to him. He turned to his father and saw a fond smile on his face. Perhaps if they had scolded him he would have found it much easier to convey his thoughts to them. Now it was an impossibility.

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Leibele's standing with the boys at the *Yeshiva* was fair. Not that they did not like this quiet and self-centered boy, but he always came later than they did, and no time was left for them to get together. They noticed also that he seemed to prefer being by himself. Leibele, on the other hand, found them much too tame. Somehow he could never picture these boys in block fights—they would probably be afraid of getting hurt. He did not dislike them, but he preferred to spend his spare few minutes with the boys in his public school classes. They were more his kind.

On this particular afternoon Leibele had an inclination to come to *Yeshiva* a bit earlier. He was attracted to a small group that was centered around Solly Mandel. Leibele became curious, and, with his hands in his pockets, pretended to pass them by. When he overheard the first few words, he stood still, straining his ears to hear the rest of the conversation.

"You see," said Solly, 'I sing in this choir all year.'

"Gee, you must make a lot of money," spoke up one in the audience.

"Well, I don't make so much, but I certainly travel."

"Travel?" questioned another.

"Why, yes, didn't you know that choirs travel to different cities? This coming High Holiays we are going further than we ever did before."

"I bet to Europe," gasped a smaller boy, wonder written all over his face.

The boys burst into hilarious laughter.

"No, not Europe, dopey. Don't you think Jersey is far enough?"

"Jersey?" queried the group. "Gee!"

Without any doubt the most impressed boy there was the one who uttered not a sound during this entire scene. To think that Solly, who was in the same class with him, was doing such marvelous things. What fun it must be to ride so far in a train. How foolish it was of him to waste all his time with the other boys, when he could have been friends with Solly and who knows where that friendship could have led him. But he would speak with Solly. Perhaps he could take him to his choir leader. Leibele gathered up courage to speak to Solly when he looked about him and saw that the boys were gone. He could see the last of them hurrying to classes. It finally dawned on him that he too was due for class session, and so discarding all caution he ran as fast as he could to catch up with the others.

The afternoon passed with Leibele hardly hearing a word of what the instructor was saying. All he could think of was Solly's narrative. All he could visualize were trains, engines and more trains. The boy was all but

exhausted from his imaginary travels when the bell rang and the period of learning was over.

He fairly upset everything in his way as he made a mad dash to reach his schoolmate's side. Solly glanced up and his manner was one of surprise as he wondered why he was being so honored. In the few months that this boy had been with him in the classroom he had hardly spoken to him aside from mere salutations.

Leibele stood undaunted as his ambition began to crowd out all other feelings.

"Solly, I heard you tell the boys all about your experiences with the choir. I also heard you tell them that you travel out-of-town some times. Is it true that you are going to Jersey these coming holidays?"

"Of course, it's true. You can even ask my mother and father if you don't believe me."

"I do believe you, but I just wanted to make sure. But what I really wanted to ask you is whether your choir leader needs another boy about my size."

"You mean you want to join my choir?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean," replied Leibele, relieved from the task of finally conveying his main thought to this boy who was practically a stranger to him.

"I might ask him. But don't you think you should ask your parents' permission before doing anything?"

"No, no, I would rather find out if the leader needs me. Then I could have my father speak with him."

"All right, then come along with me. I am going to rehearsal now."

The boys set off at a quick pace and in a short space of time they reached their destination.

He watched Solly walk over to the leader and ex-

change words with him. As the man turned to look at him, Leibele guessed that he was the subject of their conversation. He fixed his glance on them, so as to be on the alert for any motion from the leader. Sure enough, Solly was beckoning to him, and Leibele wasted no time in approaching. As he came nearer, he noticed that the man was looking intently at him, amusement written all over his face.

"So you want to join my choir?"

"I do, very much," replied the boy.

"Have you sung in any other choir?"

"No, but I was auditioned by a cantor and he thought I sang very well."

"If he thought you were very good, why did he not hire you?" reasoned the leader.

"My father did not think he was offering enough for me," answered Leibele, for such was his impression at the time.

"That sounds reasonable enough. Come, I shall find out for myself. Can you sing up the scale? Like this."

Leibele proceeded to do what he saw the other singers did. He cleared his throat, breathed deeply, and sang the notes of the scale. The leader rested his head on his hand and looked the boy over from head to foot. He was just the size he needed and his voice was pleasing. The boy would probably cost him very little, for he was unusually anxious to become a choir boy.

"That was very well done. I will take you into my choir if your parents are agreeable to my doing so. Bring your father to see me."

With that he turned his back on Leibele and commenced with his rehearsal. He seemed patient with the

boys and from what Leibele could see they seemed to like their leader very much. The boy did not wait to witness the entire rehearsal, but with a wave to Solly hurried home to tell his parents the good news: he was going to sing in a choir.

## CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a certain tension in the room that was almost unbearable. The only sound was the ticking of the clock on the shelf above the coal stove. The mother sat in her rocker, her hands screening her face. She tried very hard not to show her state of mind to her husband. But there was a world of thought going on in her mind. She had been in every conceivable place to look for Leibele. The only clue she could get was that her son had walked off with another boy. Her one consoling thought was that the teacher spoke well of the fellow. But where could her boy be? Already it was close to ten o'clock; he had never stayed out so late. She heard a noise on the stairs and supposed it was the other children who had gone out to search for their brother. But as she listened more intently she could make out one pair of feet running up, and she knew it was her Leibele.

He rushed in so excitedly, his face flushed, his clothes at random and with such sparkling eyes that she could only stare at him in amazement. The angry words that she had saved for this occasion were forgotten as she wondered what was on the child's mind. Hyman eyed the boy up and down and spoke very harshly.

"So even *Yeshiva* can't tame you down? Where

does a child like you have the nerve to do such a thing? Where have you been so late?"

The father's angry words did not have their usual effect. The admonition seemed of very insignificant importance just now. As young as he was, he realized that he had caused them a great deal of worry. He was inwardly sorry, and was going to say so, when his brothers and sister ran in with flushed faces and worried looks.

"There is the runaway," exclaimed Gertrude. "We've looked for you everywhere."

They all eyed him as if he had done a terrible crime, and right then he felt like a criminal. Some explanation was necessary, and that gave him the opportunity to tell them what was uppermost in his mind. He related each incident that happened at *Yeshiva* and how he had gone to the cantor's house.

"And he says that I can come to sing with his choir," continued Leibele, "and he said you should come to see him, Pa."

By this time the other children were as excited as he was. Only the parents remained outwardly cool and to a certain extent angry with him. They were not going to grant him his desire so easily, now that he had done this thing to them.

"You did not have to go off by yourself until so late. You could have come home, had your supper and I would have gone with you."

Hyman shouted angrily and the boy knew he was right. He just stood there unable to defend himself.

The children sensed that their brother would be denied his wish and they were genuinely grieved for him. It seemed to them that their brother's behavior had im-

proved considerably since he was attending *Yeshiva* and that their parents ought to sort of reward him by granting his wish. Instinctively they grouped themselves together and whispered their thoughts to each other. Hyman walked over to his wife and spoke to her in serious tones. Only the boy seemed unoccupied as he was left to himself in the center of the room. He shrugged his little shoulders and retreated to a chair at the farthest end of the room and sat down with his legs curled under him. He was unaware of the fact that his sister and brothers surrounded his parents and were talking excitedly with them. When one finished speaking, the other began. They were all pleading for their brother. But he heard nothing of what was going on. He sat there not saying a word, quietly nursing his disappointment.

His father and mother exchanged amused smiles. They were rather gratified to hear their children argue so well for their brother. They sensed the affection that these usually scrapping youngsters had for one another. Hyman turned a questioning face to Rose and she nodded. The father cleared his throat but failed to get Leibele's attention. It was not until Leo walked over and practically pushed his brother off the chair that Leibele looked about him.

"Tomorrow, after supper, I'll go with you to see this man," his father said. "Make sure that you come home in time."

After this decision the children ran over to their brother and embraced him. Each one had something to say and they all said it at one time. Only Leibele was silent, but pleased. After a while they looked at him, wondering why he was so silent.

Aren't you happy now that you are going to sing in the choir?" queried Gertrude, looking at her brother as if unable to make him out.

"Of course I'm glad," retorted Leibele, "but I was just thinking how much happier I would be if I could become a cantor."

\* \* \* \* \*

There was no one more prompt to come to rehearsal than Leibele. He was usually there before any one of the boys. The cantor noticed the boy's ambition and made up his mind to make him a soloist in his choir. It was very simple to teach this boy. Music to him was as natural as swimming to a fish. The boy deserved watching, but the cantor was not going to praise him. On a particular occasion when the boy had done unusually well, the cantor was so pleased that he could no longer withhold the praise long due his pupil. The boy beamed not with youthful egotism but with an inner pride in knowing that he was good. If the master felt that his lauding the boy would go to his head, now he had to admit to himself that he had been greatly mistaken. Instead of what his teacher expected, the boy set himself more diligently to the task of learning. The other boys in the choir showed no jealousy of Leibele's success as a choir boy. No doubt had he tried to impress them with his new status, they would have resented him. As it was, they felt that he deserved the recognition that he was getting from his teacher, and they knew long before they were told, that this new boy would be a soloist among them.

The weeks passed in quick succession, and the men as well as the boys looked eagerly for the day that was not far off when they would be leaving for their High

Holiday position in New Jersey. For days and weeks Leibele dreamed about the trip, which would be taken by ferry and a real train. It seemed to him that the days intervening were just that much more unnecessary—they were merely passing to make way for the big days.

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The eventful day rolled around and Leibele's home was typical of the homes of the other members of the choir with one exception. Though his family had been just as impatient as he that he should set forth on his venture, now they were a little sad that he would leave them when most families are together on these important days. The parents were, of course, the hardest hit. Rose thought to herself that maybe she was not doing the right thing in letting her son go, for after all he was only a child. She dared not tell her fears to her son, but whispered her thoughts into her husband's ear.

Hyman smiled to himself as he marveled that his wife should have thought of the same thing he did. But he, on the other hand, realized that it was an impossibility. The cantor was depending on Leibele to be a soloist, and Hyman was not going to harm a man who had never done any harm to him. If anything, this man had done him a good turn—his son was not as unruly as he used to be and had become quite a little man. Anyway, going out into the world even at such a tender age was a good thing for a boy. Trying to dispel his wife's motherly fears, he called Rose into another room.

"I am surprised at you for feeling this way. Our boy is not going to Europe. You as well as I know that Jersey is a very short distance from here. And Leibele is not the only small boy in the choir. If all the mothers felt like

you, there would be no boys in the choir but bearded men. Come, come, don't let him guess what is going on in your mind. He is probably a little scared already. So let's make nothing of it and make him feel glad that he is going."

Rose wiped away tears which she could not suppress. Her husband was right, as he usually was. With an exaggerated stride she walked into the room in time to see her small son timidly saying goodbye to his sister and brothers. This done, he stood waiting a bit confused as to what to do next. His father came to his rescue, "Come, my son. If you are ready, I can take you to the cantor's house now."

His mother walked over to him and again and again instructed him how to take care of himself—he should eat, he should go to sleep early, and he should be careful about drinking or eating anything ice cold. She just about had time to kiss him on the forehead as the father took him by the hand and not too gently made off with him. There were cries of "Goodbye, keep well, take care of yourself," as father and son made their way down the stairs.

As they approached the cantor's house they saw that everyone was there waiting for them. As if summoned to action by a whistle they all picked up their valises and came to meet the two. Leibele's father was a little embarrassed, but there was no time for that now. He spoke hurriedly to the leader. "Take good care of my boy. After all it is his first trip. Goodbye, Leibele." His son glanced at him as if realizing for the first time that he was leaving his family behind. It was only the thought of being later ridiculed by the boys that he choked back the tears that were rapidly blinding him.

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It was a new experience for Leibele to be hurrying so to catch up with what the leader termed a "train schedule." He did not exactly understand what was meant by that term but apparently it was a good reason for this rapid pace. At times he was forced to run to keep up with the wider stride of the older boys and men.

After riding on a trolley they finally reached their first destination. Here he was told that they were going to take the ferry to Jersey. Soon something that looked like pictures of a ship, yet was not a ship, came toward the shore and the group got on. They all pushed forward to the front of the ferry, and the boy viewed wonder after wonder as he looked about him. He felt a little frightened as he saw the water swishing on all sides and the shores appeared further and further away. What if this "boat" should sink and he should never see his parents and family again? A shiver ran through him as the whistle from the top cabin screamed that the Jersey side was reached.

There was the usual clamor and noise as each passenger made his way about. Not far off Leibele sighted the trains, and a real locomotive. No adventurer could have been more thrilled. He could only stand and stare at all about him.

"Come, Leibele, you'll be left behind if you don't hustle," spoke one of the boys.

Leibele shook himself as if coming out of a dream. He grabbed his little valise and proceeded to follow the boys into the train. As the train sped on he thought of many things. It was exciting to be in a choir—not only does one learn to sing but one travels.

"We are here, boys. Make sure you don't leave anything behind."

The boys hardly paid any attention to this advice for their leader said it to them year in and year out. But to Leibele it sounded important. He looked about him several times, while his right hand gripped his belongings.

The company followed their leader. They made an odd picture walking along in this manner. People turned puzzled faces to them, but the boys stared back in an equally rude manner. Only the new boy found himself uncomfortable under the stares. It was therefore a great relief to him when he finally found himself, together with the leader and two small boys, in a strange man's house. When he inquired as to the whereabouts of the other members of the choir, the cantor told him that they were stationed in other houses belonging to members of the synagogue in which they were officiating.

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Long before the people came for services, the cantor and his boys were already in the *shul*. Leibele found it interesting to observe that this place of worship was no different than the few he had seen in his own neighborhood. There was the usual color scheme of white and light blue; there were the symbols he had seen in his own father's *shul*; and there were the tablets with the ten commandments in gold letters guarded by those two lions. This atmosphere made him feel closer to home, and some of the lonesomeness that was slowly creeping up on him seemed to leave.

The skies had darkened and the crowds were making their way in. The leader directed his boys to gather in a side room where their gowns and caps were stored. They

hurried to obey him, and in no time at all each member of the choir was equipped with gown, cap and music.

When the time came, the president of the synagogue directed the cantor to come in with his choir. They walked, two abreast, with their leader at the head, directly to the pulpit and grouped themselves as they had been previously instructed. So far so good, thought Leibele, trying as hard as he could to control the wild thumping against his ribs. The leader glanced at his boys, and his eye caught the nervous expression on his new pupil's face.

"Don't be afraid, Leibele, just do as well as you did at rehearsal and forget that there are people about you. If you are still uneasy, focus your eyes on one spot and sing to that. You will soon find that you are helped that way."

Because the singing had to begin, he stopped talking to Leibele. He raised his hands for attention and the boys obeyed instantly. The beautiful harmony their voices created charmed even their leader. As he glanced at Leibele, he noticed that the boy was not yet singing, that the child was genuinely upset. But as he glanced again at the boy, he saw his eyes fixed at something, and his mouth was open to let his sweet voice come out. He smiled at him, as with new energy the leader proceeded with the services.

By the time Leibele was directed to sing his solo, he was no longer afraid. Careful to keep his eyes fixed on the leader, he sang unaware of anyone in the place. He finished and simultaneously turned his questioning face to his leader. The latter nodded happily, and the boy knew that he had done well. He was, however, unpre-

pared for the additional praise that was bestowed on him by members of the *shul* after services were over. The women especially were effusive. "You have a very sweet voice," commented one elderly woman to him. "Blessed be the mother that has such a son," remarked another. More and more they crowded about him, as some women tried to kiss him. This, thought our little hero, was a bit too much. He turned to his leader, who was being congratulated on all sides, and said, "Look, couldn't we leave now?"

"Yes," returned the other, "of course we can go now."

The remaining services went over as well as the first. Then, too, Leibele sang his solos, this time more sure of himself and not at all afraid. If at first he was shy of praise and admiration the women and men showered on him, now he no longer felt as if he wanted to flee in the midst of it all. Instead he stood beside his leader and expressed his thanks either by word or look when they lauded him. Only when the women again attempted to embrace him did he look up to his leader for help, and more than once his rescuer diplomatically forestalled any such attempt.

The holidays were over and the group found itself once more on the train, this time headed for home. Leibele had to confess to himself that being away was not as bad as he thought it would be. He was rather ashamed that he could not feel a more exhilarating sensation at being bound for home.

They were over on the New York side, and the group dispersed. Only the small boys accompanied the leader. They all lived in the same vicinity and it was no great

task for the leader to make reasonably sure that the boys arrived home safely. When Leibele came close to his street, he turned the corner toward his house. After a few steps he turned quickly about and was surprised to see his leader behind him.

"I am going with you to your parents. I want to tell them how well you have done."

"Then I can remain with your choir?" questioned the boy eagerly.

"That is just what I want to speak with your parents about. It would be a shame to waste your talent," replied the other, leaving Leibele to wonder what the leader meant by the remark.

They climbed the stairs, the boy leading and the other following. They found the family waiting for them, for most of that day his brothers and sister were approximating the time of his arrival. As he came through the door, Morris ran forward to embrace him before the others. They all did the same in turn and Leibele realized how much he really had missed them. The parents smiled fondly at him, feeling it their duty to extend their hospitality to their strange guest, before taking up with their son.

"I hope you will excuse my presence here at this time, but I could not refrain from stepping up and personally tell you about your Leibele's success. Not only was he a perfect choir boy, but he was my star soloist. The people in Jersey did not stop praising him. I must congratulate you on your son's ability."

The leader sat back self-satisfied with his little speech. The others looked from Leibele, who was now trying very hard to be indifferent to this praise though

feeling very proud inside to the leader who was waiting to see the reaction on their faces. Rose expressed the feeling that they all experienced.

"We want to thank you for your kind words. We certainly are very proud of our Leibele."

"Then my brother will remain with your choir?" questioned Morris, in a tone which conveyed that there could be no doubt about it now.

"That is just what I wanted to talk to you about. You see, I do not have sufficient work during the year that would warrant my having a choir. It is only for the High Holidays that I organize one. Usually the same boys come back to me. If it is all right with you, I should like you to give me your word that your son will be with me next year."

He spoke thus to the boy's father and mother, and therefore could not see the disappointed faces of the children. The most dejected, naturally, was little Leibele. Morris understood, and walked over to his brother and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Well, if by that time our son still wants to sing, I shall see that he sings in your choir," replied Hyman teasingly, glancing at his son.

But the father's expression changed from one of amusement to one of serious contemplation when he saw the sad look on his child's face. To relieve the boy's sorrow he added. "I do think, though, that my son will sing before the next holidays. Won't you Leibele?"

The boy turned bright eyes to his father and could not find words to answer. But Hyman understood and gave him one of his very fond smiles. The boy was reassured, and soon joined the others to tell them, with suf-

ficient modesty, just what had taken place from the time he left his home to the time that he came back.

At first Leibele thought it was only a matter of days before his father would make off with him to a choir leader. But soon weeks passed and the boy wondered whether he would ever sing in a choir again. He tried to retain what he had learned by singing his solos again and again. His mother, brothers and sister never tired of listening to him. Only his father heard very little of his singing, for with the passing of the holidays his working season set in. The early morning found him leaving the house, and at this time the children were still sleeping. Night found him coming home so very late that the children were already in bed. Saturday was the only day that Hyman spent with his family, and even this day passed too quickly for him—for there was the going to synagogue, dinner at home, followed by a nap, and then the return to *shul*. When Leibele would creep out of his little shell and remind his father of what he had said about finding a leader to take him into his choir, Hyman would promise again that at the very next opportunity he would keep his word. But the toils of the following days wearied him so that only thoughts of sleep and rest consumed him. Leibele kept his disappointment to himself, not knowing that his brother Morris shared it with him. But things were not going to be that way for long, for a movement was taking seed in the *Yeshiva* which was going to be the turning point in Leibele's whole career.

## CHAPTER V.

THE *Yeshiva* that Leibele attended had something in common with all Jewish institutions of learning—it was short of funds and desperately in need of money. The head of this school not only was a man of learning but a great organizer. It occurred to him that money could be raised through the efforts of the students with the cooperation of the faculty. The plan was simple and was sure to be successful. He called all the members of his staff into his office and conveyed his idea to them.

“It is my plan to raise funds for our *Yeshiva* in a way that seems to me feasible and amusing. I would suggest that we select boys from each class who, in our opinion, have good voices. After we have picked the group we can then select one who is the best among them. This particular boy can be the soloist, so that the whole set up will be similar to that of a boy cantor and a choir. How do you like my plan so far?”

“The idea is novel and certainly would bring in money,” enthusiastically answered one of the teachers, and the others agreed.

The principal, much heartened by such unanimous approval, continued.

“The next step in our procedure would be to engage

various synagogues and auditoriums where we can hold concerts with our so-called artists. And we can also convey to the audiences our dire need for funds, and acquaint them with the work of our institution. I would suggest that you discuss this among yourselves for ten minutes and then I shall be glad to listen to any criticism or suggestions from you."

He settled back comfortably in his chair and pretended to be absorbed in some literature. Actually he was thinking up more angles to his idea.

After a short time, Mr. Cohen, of the faculty, rose from his seat and conveyed the general sentiment of the group.

"It is our opinion that there could be no better way. We should be glad to cooperate with you in every way possible."

"Then we shall lose no time. I shall start right now to pick out the boys for our chorus."

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It was a great surprise to the boys in Leibele's class to see the door open to admit the principal of their *Yeshiva*. One saw this exalted personage on very special occasions only—upon registration in the institution, when being honored or graduated, and when bad behavior resulted in expulsion. For him to enter a classroom was an act none of the boys ever witnessed. The class made an obvious effort to appear well-behaved, but the true victim was the boy who had just prior been called upon by the teacher of the class and who remained standing when the principal had walked in. He could find no words to continue, and to save his pupil and himself further embarrassment, the teacher requested the boy to sit down.

The head of the *Yeshiva* exchanged some words with the teacher and then addressed the class.

"You are probably surprised to see me in your classroom. The reason for my being here is both a good one and a surprising one. I should like you to sit back in your seats, absolutely at ease, and listen to me."

The boys proceeded to do so in perfect unison, and their principal felt immediately that these boys would cooperate with him.

"To continue, I am about to state a very serious problem with which we are now faced. To put it bluntly, this institution needs money to carry on its work. After thinking about it at some length it occurred to me that our very students are the ones who can help us most to raise the funds."

The boys could not resist looking at one another, somewhat perplexed. To conceive the fact that money was needed was easy, but that they could be of considerable help, that puzzled them. After this slight commotion, they were again all attention.

"And this is my plan." The principal thereupon repeated to them what he had told his faculty.

"Now who among you has a good voice? There are no doubt those here who sing in choirs, and they certainly are qualified for my plan. However, if you have not sung anywhere and think you have a good voice, please stand up anyway and I shall ascertain whether you are correct in your opinion."

One boy rose from his seat and Leibele recognized him as one of the boys who sang with him in the choir. Another boy rose who said he had never sung in a choir but that his family thought he had a good voice.

The principal turned to the first boy.

"Will you sing for me something you know? Make it something short."

The boy nodded his head and sang his little piece. The principal smiled his approval and called the boy to him.

"Will you sing for me, anything that you know?" This was addressed to the boy who had never sung before.

This boy proceeded to do so, and he had hardly finished when the whole class was in an uproar with laughter. His voice was so whiney and flat that even the principal had some difficulty in hiding his mirth. The boy sat down, his ears burning with indignation. To soothe the boy's feelings the principal said, "That was not bad at all. At least you have shown that you want to cooperate with me. I sincerely thank you."

This seemed to appease the little fellow and his face took on a pleasant expression. It is not every boy that is spoken to in this manner by a principal and he turned a proud head to the boys who were still smirking.

Leibele had decided to stand up after the second boy, but frightened by the scene just witnessed decided not to do so. As the principal and the boy selected were about to take leave of the class, the boy's eyes rested on Leibele for a moment. He turned to his principal and whispered something in a low voice. The latter turned back, and fixing his gaze on Leibele, said, "From what I hear it seems to me that there is still another boy who should walk out with me to my office. Since you are too modest to get up of your own accord, may I ask you, Leibele Waldman, to sing for me a piece that you know?"

The class was impressed with these words, and they

all focused their eyes on Leibele. There was nothing left for him to do but to comply with the request. Fixing his eyes on a spot way over the head of his teacher, he sang one of the solos that he had repeatedly sung in his home. If the class had been ready to laugh at his attempt, they were not at all tempted to do that now. They could see, too, that their principal was very much impressed.

"Excellent, excellent," commented Mr. Green, "and you were not going to join us? That indeed would have been a pity."

Leibele could say nothing, for how could he state the reason for his unwillingness to stand up and be judged?

Mr. Green looked at Leibele as if expecting an answer and, not receiving any, sought to relieve the situation. He thanked the teacher for his trouble and asked the boys to come with him. In his office he took their names and addresses and asked them to come to his office at the end of the session. They promised to do so, and he directed them to go back to class.

During the remainder of the session Leibele hardly heard a word of what his instructor was saying. Every once in a while he would glance at the other boy who had been picked and wondered why he was not as excited as himself. His face became suffused with color as he visioned himself once more doing the work he liked best. And he would probably continue to sing for his *Yeshiva* for a long time. He hoped deeply that it might be so.

The bell rang, and he walked quickly to his classmate's desk. The other packed his things very leisurely, while Leibele wondered how any one could be so slow at a time like this. Finally, his classmate rose and

proceeded to walk with him to the principal's office. Soon the latter found himself lagging behind, which caused him to say to Leibele. "Say, what is the matter with you? One would think you were rushing for an ice cream soda. Slow down and give a fellow a chance to catch up with you."

"I'm sorry," replied he, "but I can't wait until I sing again in a choir."

"First he acts indifferent and now he can't wait. He's crazy," muttered the little fellow to himself.

They reached the principal's office and Leibele took the initiative to open the door. So eager was he to reach his destination that he half banged it. It was only when the occupants of the room looked inquisitively at him that he realized what he had done. He remained standing on the threshold, nor sure of his next move. He was surprised to see the room filled to capacity with pupils and teachers.

"Either our little friend is timid as a lamb or bold as a lion," remarked Mr. Green.

They laughed goodnaturedly, and respectfully stood looking up at their principal.

"I have asked all of you boys to congregate in my office for this reason. Our Mr. Cohen will pick out the very best among you, and those boys will become our regular choir. The boys who, in his opinion, do not have good enough voices will be eliminated and will be called upon should an opening occur through sickness or otherwise. You will please give him your attention so that we can do this in as little time as possible."

Mr. Cohen was no ordinary musician, and in a short time, through the process of elimination, a group of

fifteen voices had been chosen. There was some little excitement as the boys divined what the next step would be—the leader was going to select one boy among them to be the soloist.

Leibele was one of the students chosen to be in the chorus. He was happy and excited though he tried to appear as calm as the other boys, but try as he might he could not suppress that tugging in his chest that became so violent now that the outstanding singer was to be picked.

Mr. Cohen continued with the audition. When it came to Leibele's turn, his anxiety and nervousness left him as he opened his mouth to sing. He finished the bit of song and was about to step in line with the boys already auditioned when Mr. Green directed him to stand on the other side of the room by himself. He did as directed and after what seemed like a year, the boys had all been put through the test. Mr. Cohen conferred with the principal, and the latter came over to Leibele. Taking both hands in his, he congratulated him on being their choice for the soloist part.

"And to think," mocked the principal, "that you were the boy who did not stand up when I asked for volunteers."

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Good news travels fast. That same day Leibele's two brothers, Morris and Leo, learned in their respective classrooms that he had been chosen from all the other boys to be the soloist of the choir. They could hardly wait to join their brother after school and share with him his good luck.

Their session was over and they half ran down the

stairs to the street. There they caught up with Leibele, who in the excitement had forgotten that he was to meet his brothers and go home with them.

"Well, won't Mama and Papa be surprised that you have been chosen from all those boys," spoke Morris boastfully.

"I don't know whether it is such a surprise," said Leo nonchalantly, "not after what he did in Jersey. And anyway it is about time they realized that he is no ordinary singer and gave him lessons with some good teacher. Who knows but that he may some day be a great cantor."

Leibele looked appreciatively at his brother, for had Leo read his innermost mind, he would have seen those same thoughts lodged there. Morris came to his parents' defense.

"I happen to know that Leibele would have had lessons long before this, but for one thing. Haven't you noticed how worried Mama and Papa are lately? Don't let her know this, but yesterday she did not know that I was in the house, and I overheard her say to Papa that she had the last quarter, and that she dared not go out shopping because she did not know what to buy first. Papa assured her that he would get two dollars from his boss so that we would have something for the Sabbath. So you see it is not their fault that Leibele has not been sent to study."

Neither of the two brothers contradicted Morris for they were fully aware that if he said a thing he knew whereof he spoke.

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Rose sat in her favorite chair rocking to and fro. On former Friday afternoons she would rest in the same chair

reminiscing about the more outstanding happenings of the week. Now she sat as one deeply troubled. The week had not been such a good one financially, and were it not for the fact that Hyman had received an advance of two dollars, they probably would not have had food for the Sabbath. When the children were much younger, it was hard enough to get along, but now it was even more difficult. The boys needed suits, Gertrude needed dresses, and Hyman's income was still pitifully small. How she managed all these years she could not imagine. Either she was getting old and afraid of the future or else times were becoming more difficult.

Yes, she knew why she had found this life more tolerable in the earlier years. The children had been small and she had very little time to think of anything other than caring for them. Now that they were older and Rose had an opportunity to look about herself, she became discontented. And no one could blame her. One could hardly expect her to feel otherwise when looking about the crowded four rooms—as if they could be called rooms. It seemed to her that if all four rooms were thrown together, it would make just one sizeable room, and not too large at that. At least if there were more light. The one window in the dining room faced the bleak windows of the apartment houses across the street. The houses were so close together that one could actually smell the cooking in the homes of the neighbors. The windows of the bed rooms and kitchen were even worse. They were facing a blank wall that seemed to extend out as if jealously guarding them from any light that might break through.

As she looked at the furniture she became even more

depressed. The dining room contained exactly a table and four chairs, a rocking chair and a book case that Hyman himself had constructed in which he had fondly placed his Hebrew books. The walls were profusely hung with pictures of Rose's father who appeared as a very old man with a white flowing beard, one hand leaning on a cane, his attire being typical of the type worn by the orthodox Jews; a picture of her mother who appeared as a worn old woman, with a kerchief on her head; then there were pictures of her grandparents and near relations who were still in Europe. It was a long time since she had looked at those images, and they had a calming effect upon her.

In the number of years that she had been in America conditions had not improved for her. She searched her mind for the logical reason for her status and it occurred to her that perhaps Hyman was at fault. As quickly as that thought came, it left her. Hyman never had an opportunity to better his job so that he remained where he was. He could not risk losing even one week's wages. How could anyone advance with this handicap constantly confronting him? And then how many jobs could one find where he would have the privilege of observing the Sabbath?

There was a rumor that times were going to improve now that the United States was involved in this World War. If good fortune was coming to some people through this, it must have missed her husband. Anyway she would not want fortune through the deaths of so many young men who were sent over to fight. She shivered as she imagined what was going on over in Europe, and Rose became remorseful for being unthank-

ful to the Lord. It was still better to be here than over there, she concluded, her face taking on a brighter expression. And who knows but that her children will have better fortune in this land of opportunity and that she and her husband will enjoy their good fortune with them.

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She started in her seat as a tumultuous noise of running feet came to her ears. No doubt her sons coming home from *Yeshiva*. She made an extra effort to appear cheerful so that even Morris would not guess her previous thoughts. While at times she could hide her true feelings from the other children, it seemed to her that she could not fool him. On such occasions he would look understandingly at her as if pleading to be taken into her confidence. Perhaps he was old enough to confide in and talk things over with. She promised herself that the very next time she was troubled she would consult her oldest son.

"Hello, Ma, we have a surprise for you," greeted Leo, "and this time it is a real one. Shall I tell her or will you?" He looked at his brothers half in fun and half in earnest.

"Go ahead," answered Morris, "you'll probably tell it better than I."

The mother looked from one to the other and guessed that it concerned her Leibeles for he stood unusually quiet, trying to appear as casual as possible.

"Well, I hardly know how to begin to tell you," continued Leo, "but the main thing is that Leibeles is now a cantor."

"Of all the impossible things I have ever known you

to say, this is the silliest. What's he talking about, Morris?"

Morris was happy to see his mother's reaction to Leo's words. The more skeptical his mother was, the greater the surprise. His mother's face took on a look of annoyance as she guessed that this must be some trick her sons were trying to play on her. He decided to tell her the happenings of that day.

Rose listened to every word her son was saying. This news was making her more happy than she had been for ages. She glanced fondly in Leibe's direction, but the boy pretended to be occupied with something in his pocket.

"Suppose you tell me about it," requested Rose of Leibe.

"Well, Leo was exaggerating a bit. The truth is that I was picked as the soloist of all the boys. Our principal plans to arrange for concerts with the choir and myself. But he is planning to have me sing at the *Chanukah* concert, accompanied by the choir, in the *Yeshiva* synagogue. He said that he would be honored if you and Papa would come down to this affair."

"You mean the principal actually said that? Wait until Papa hears of this."

Just then they could hear Hyman coming up the stairs. He came in followed by Gertrude who had met him on the stoop. Leo could not wait to tell his father the good news. As he related it to his father and sister, they both looked in Rose's direction, as if questioning her whether this be a jest or whether there was some truth in it. Rose nodded her head, and father and daughter were at a loss for words.

"Of course I am not very much surprised," boasted Rose, "you see some one in the family has to inherit my talent."

The children looked at their mother in complete surprise. Something in the tone of her voice told them that she was not joking. As she was too modest to explain her words, Hyman spoke for her.

"Your mother has a very fine voice. While your mother, being a woman, could not become a professional singer, let us hope that Leibele will some day be an accomplished one." Now they recalled how unusually beautiful their mother's voice had sounded to their childish ears when she sang them to sleep.

This being a late Friday afternoon, the father and his sons made their customary preparations for *shul*. After services some neighbors, curious to know the truth of their sons' gossip, came over to congratulate Hyman on his boy's success.

"So, it is true that your Leibele is to be groomed by the *Yeshiva* to be a boy cantor?" asked one of the neighbors, whose boy on more occasion than one had been beaten up by Leibele. This he said in a mocking tone which in no way fooled Hyman.

"Not exactly groomed and not exactly a boy cantor," answered Hyman good-naturedly. "But if it is destined that my son be a cantor, God will find the means."

On their way home they were met by neighbors who seemed especially aware of Leibele. They would inquire about his health and hint that they too know what had happened at the *Yeshiva*. The boy took all this in, not commenting on all the fuss, though inwardly he liked this attention very much.

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They could smell the vapors of the day's cooking all the way out in the hall. They came in, took turns at washing at the sink, and promptly sat down to supper.

Rose forgot her cares and tiredness as she smilingly served her little family. Soon she would hear what to her was more soul-satisfying than the best opera. Her husband and the children would sing *smires*, religious hymns sung on Friday nights in the more orthodox homes.

It reminded Rose of days that seemed so long ago when her own father and brothers sang those same tunes. Her husband began and the children sang with him. She could detect Morris' voice and it sounded pleasant indeed; Leo's sounded even better than Morris'; Leibele's seemed lower but very sweet. And the way they harmonized, as if they had rehearsed for this night. Perhaps, thought Rose, she was being biased. It might be that to strangers it did not sound so good. It was getting a bit warm in the house, and Rose went to the kitchen window and lifted up the bottom. As she did so she could see her neighbors leaning out, their eyes directed to her windows.

"Is there anything wrong?" Rose asked. "Are we disturbing you?"

They all laughed good-naturedly, and Mrs. Greenberg spoke for them all.

"I'll tell you, Mrs. Waldman, we were having our supper when suddenly we heard these beautiful tunes. After a while we could not stop ourselves from coming to the window where we can hear so much better. We heard that your Leibele could sing, but we had no idea that your whole family were singers."

Rose felt flattered, but this was no time to stand by the window and converse. Already they were calling to her for more food. She excused herself, and came back to serve her family. So she had not been wrong, even the neighbors appreciated her family's singing.

"Were you speaking to some one?" inquired Hyman of his wife.

"Yes, the neighbors were leaning out of their windows to listen to your singing. And there were no complaints."

"That is a true test of our worth," Leo boasted, "I think we could go out as a team. Would we make money!" And with this Leo rolled his eyes in his own comical way which made his family laugh.

"Well, if you are so anxious to make money that way, why don't you too join a choir?" questioned his father.

"Oh, no," replied Leo, "one singer in the family is enough. We'll see how well he makes out. As for me, I like to sing for my own pleasure."

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The days that followed seemed long and uneventful to Leibele who lived only for that day when he would be called upon to perform in the *Yeshiva*. And when the time came, it did not seem so long in coming after all. There was intense excitement in Leibele's house. He had performed before and with good results, but here he was to appear before his neighbors and should he not prove himself good, he could not face them thereafter.

"Well, let's go. Are you ready, Leibele?"

"Yes, I'm ready," replied Leibele with a sigh. "I guess I can't get out of it now."

"What do you mean by that?" asked his father, regarding the boy with an anxious look. "Aren't you acquainted with your prayer?"

"That doesn't worry me. I'm just thinking of what they would say if I am not as good as they expect me to be."

"In that case, if the worse comes to the worst, we'll move away from the neighborhood," said Leo, "or shall we say that they'll make us move, eh?"

All, except Morris, laughed at Leo's pun. He put his hand on Leibele's shoulders and said reassuringly, "Don't you worry. You're going to go up there and knock them off their feet." With this prophesy ringing in his ears, the little cantor, together with his family, left for the *Yeshiva*.

Leibele and the choir congregated downstairs in a small room, where their leader gave them last minute instructions.

Soon they were walking up the stairs to the room of worship. They could hear the people in the *shul* exchanging opinions as to the practicability of the principal's scheme, all ready to judge according to his own prejudices. In every boy there was the desire to succeed.

Indeed as the boys came up, dressed in their black caps and gowns, the people looked at them half in awe and half in amusement. They were delighted to see these boys that ordinarily were seen playing all sorts of games on the streets dressed in so dignified a manner and taking their task so seriously. Their surprise knew no bounds

when the choir finally began to sing. It came to Leibele's part and the instructor motioned to him to begin. Leibele found himself of a sudden absolutely speechless and voiceless. He tried again and again and no sound came. The teacher became panic stricken and the boys shifted uneasily. The leader had in his possession a sharp instrument that he used for opening letters and such. In desperation he sought out this article and, pretending to lean over Leibele, took this opportunity to stick him in the back. The shock had the desired effect, and as if from a trance Leibele shook himself and opened his mouth to sing. The people were left speechless in their seats. They could only nod satisfaction to each other and then sit back and enjoy the miracle that was before their eyes. Actually this choir was harmony itself, and they searched their minds to recall when they had heard another that sounded better to them. As to the little boy that sang by himself, they had never heard anyone as sweet.

The principal leaned an ear to the comments about him. Several men of the neighborhood congratulated him upon the performance, promising to come again even if money was charged for tickets. He listened to all this while his mind was already formulating plans for the future. He would this week obtain permission to have his little group perform in one of the synagogues in the neighborhood. He lost no time in doing this, and the venture was very successful judging by the comments and the financial outcome. After each concert he would convey the actual amounts taken in to his staff and to the boys, and they would feel very proud and happy that this was being done with their help.

It was during one of these concerts that the principal

called Leibele and his parents on a side and made a suggestion that determined his career.

"It seems to me that it would be worth while to send Leibele to study with a good teacher to become a cantor. I am curious to know whether it has never occurred to you to do that." He spoke kindly yet with disappointment that they had not already done what he was suggesting.

The parents looked at each other in a hopeless sort of way. The man brought up something to them that they had discussed many a time only to drop the idea because they could not see their way financially. As always, when confronted by such questions, Rose nodded her head to Hyman as if to say, "It is all right. You can tell him."

Hyman was embarrassed. He was a man that preferred to keep his affairs to himself, especially one that was so personal. He braced himself for the effort to tell the principal the truth, for he realized that this man was interested in his son and meant to be helpful rather than critical or curious.

"To tell the truth, we have thought of doing just that long before you were kind enough to elevate him to his present position. I am sorry to say that I do not earn enough to pay for his lessons. Even paying for his *Yeshiva* education proves very difficult at times."

"Forgetting the fact that you are not financially able to send Leibele to a teacher, and let us say that you had the means, would you prefer to have him study to be a cantor?"

"If I had the money, I should prefer him to be a cantor to any other profession," answered Rose quickly, carried away by the thought.

"That is all I wanted to know, Mrs. Waldman. Because I have made up my mind to send him to the best teacher of this type that we have in America."

"Excuse me for interrupting," said Rose, "but as my husband told you, we do not have the money to pay for his lessons."

"But the *Yeshiva* has the money," answered Mr. Green. "You see, Mrs. Waldman, I really feel that Leibele should be compensated for his work, and I do plan to have plenty of work for him. Instead of paying him with money, I will pay his tutor. This particular teacher happens to be a good friend of mine, and he will make it unusually reasonable for the *Yeshiva's* sake."

"Why, that is wonderful of you, Mr. Green. I hardly know what to say."

"There is nothing we have to say, except wish each other good luck. I am sure it will prove a privilege to do this for your son."

## CHAPTER VI.

THE following Monday Leibele sat in his *Yeshiva* class wondering whether Mr. Green's promise was going to be fulfilled in the near future. Suddenly the door of the classroom opened and a boy stepped in. He handed a note to the teacher, who motioned to Leibele to come to his desk.

"Mr. Green would like to see you in his office," spoke the instructor. "I think you had better go now and come back to class when you are through."

Leibele followed the other boy without saying a word. He knew that Mr. Green wanted to see him with regard to his studying cantorial music. At the office door the messenger left him and Leibele, very sure of himself and very eager, entered the room.

"Sit down, Leibele, I have a few things I want to say to you about your music instructor."

The boy did as directed and sat facing his principal. The latter marveled at the grown-up way this boy was behaving. Somehow he did not feel that he was addressing a young boy so purposeful and keen were his actions.

"Your teacher is a great musician and he should do wonders with you in a very short time. He not only has a marvelous sense of tone, but he is a master of pitch.

You may not quite understand what I am saying to you, but you can surmise that he must be a great music teacher. He is also a very religious man, and may sometimes do things that will seem odd to you. But you must promise me to do everything he tells you to do."

"I certainly will," promised Leibele with excited interest.

"I have arranged for you to start today. He is expecting you after supper. Good luck, Leibele."

"Thank you," answered Leibele, putting his hand into that of Mr. Green, "I shall do my very best."

Leibele returned to his class, anxious for the hour to come when he might leave for home. He half wished that he did not have to go home but that he might go to his teacher right after *Yeshiva* session. The bell sounded, and Leibele dashed for the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the sound of Leibele's running feet on the stairs Rose guessed that something very important had happened. She and Gertrude rose to their feet, impatient to hear the news.

"Ma, do you have supper ready for me? I'm in a hurry."

"And where are you going so late?" questioned Rose anxious for her son's explanation. As usual, if anything happened she had to drag the information out of him. Sometimes she wondered whether it was indifference on the child's part or whether it was extreme modesty.

Leibele realized that supper would not be forthcoming until he conveyed to his mother the why and wherefore of things. He spoke rapidly, expecting his supper to come in on the last words of his narrative. Rose

served him while he spoke, not missing a word of it. He was half way through with his meal, when his brothers burst in.

"A big shot, eh?" jested Leo, "so you can't wait for your own brothers? Pretty soon he won't even know us."

"Now what kind of a talk is that?" asked Morris in quit tones." "If he didn't wait for us, Leibele must have a pretty good reason. Haven't you?"

Leibele interrupted his meal long enough to smile affectionately at his older brother and to turn an amused glance in Leo's direction. Gertrude, guessing that he was in great haste, proceeded to explain to her brothers why Leibele rushed home.

"Well, well, so today really is the big day. I wonder what your teacher is like," went on Leo with his clowning ways.

"If Mr. Green selected him, he must be a great man," defended Rose, giving Leo one of her stern looks that spoke volumes.

Leibele made sure to eat everything his mother gave him, for not to do so would cause delay—she might keep him until he did. He waved goodbye as he dashed down the stairs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Walking as fast as his small legs could carry him, he soon came to the address which he had written on a slip of paper. A gentle voice answered his knock on the door.

In the room were six boys, all older than himself. At a table sat a middle-aged man, with a long beard. When he saw Leibele come in, he rose from his seat and came toward him. As he did so, the boy was impressed by the older man's stature and height.

"You must be the boy Mr. Green recommended to me," spoke Mr. Himmelstine in pleasant tones. "You can sit at this desk. So that we won't waste any time I'll start you with your first lesson. Take this sheet and beat four quarter time with your hands this way. Do this until I tell you to stop."

Leibele sat down and did as he was told. Time went on, and after what must have been about an hour, his fingers began to feel tired. His wrist felt strained and he looked about for his instructor, who was nowhere to be seen in the room. Leibele continued with his task, hoping that Mr. Himmelstine would soon come in and relieve him. The pain in his wrist became more acute, and he felt that he could no longer move his fingers if he did not stop for a little while. With sudden resolve he discontinued, and turned to the boy that was nearest him.

"Say, can you tell me where Mr. Himmelstine is? He said I should continue to do this until he told me to stop, but I can't any more. My fingers hurt."

"You'll find our teacher a bit queer that way," answered the older boy. "You see he is a very religious man, and they say he gets up at three in the morning to say his prayers. When it comes about this time of day, he gets very sleepy and goes off to bed in the room behind that curtain. You can stop what you're doing, but when you see him coming, continue and he won't know the difference. That is what we all did when we first started. In that way he thinks that you had been doing this all along, and that no time was wasted while he was sleeping. However, if he finds you idle when he comes back, he becomes furious."

"Thanks a lot, I think I'll do as you say. After I have

rested my hand, I'll continue."

The boys smiled at each other knowingly, and in the few ensuing days there sprang up between the two a deep liking and understanding. Leibeke later learned that the boy's name was Bennie and that he lived not so far from his house.

Leibeke found that the hours he spent at his music instructor's house were the most enjoyable to him. Even the monotonous beating of time held a fascination for him. He would become so absorbed in his work that he would be unaware of the lateness of the hour. On a few occasions his father would walk all the way from home to find out why Leibeke had not come home at his usual hour. At such times Hyman would peer through the window and see Leibeke all alone in the room beating time as if that were the most absorbing of all occupations. He would walk in cautiously and fairly startle his son out of his seat.

"Why aren't you home? Do you know what time it is?" his father would ask wonderingly.

"Is it very late, pa? I didn't know the time."

"Doesn't your teacher tell you when to go home?"

"Oh, Mr. Himmelstine fell asleep long ago. He told me to beat time until he would tell me to stop, and then he would show me what to do next. But he fell asleep and I didn't dare to wake him. So I sat here waiting for him to get up."

"That is enough for one day. Come on home, your mother is very much worried."

Although Mr. Himmelstine was a "queer" individual,

his knowledge of music and his ability to teach made up for his eccentricities. Those in the cantorial profession recognized him as a great teacher. So impressed was Leibele with Mr. Himmelstine's reputation that he considered it very important not to miss a single lesson if it was physically possible to be there. It was only on cold winter days, when the snow was so high that few people ventured out, that Leibele found it difficult to come regularly. But cold or no cold, snow or no snow, Leibele made up his mind to be at his music teacher's home. It was no unusual sight for the neighbors to see Leibele trudging in the snow, hugging his shabby little coat more tightly about him to keep out the cold. When he finally arrived at his destination Mr. Himmelstine would scrutinize his half-frozen pupil and would vow within himself to teach this ambitious youngster all that was in his power. The great master would say to anyone who asked him about Leibele's progress. "That boy, with his natural talent and eagerness to learn, will some day be a great cantor."

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The World War did not end with the signing of the Versailles treaty. A catastrophe was gripping the multitudes of the city as if anxious to engulf them in part of the havoc that was wrought on the other side. Like a jealous monster it seemed to resent the gayety of life in the metropolis while in the larger cities in Europe only ruin and ashes remained.

The frightening spectacle left terror in the hearts of the people. Ever present was the fear that they too would fall in the streets just as so many already had done. Deep sorrow reigned on the East Side as well as in other parts of the city. One funeral procession after another passed

by the various *shuls* to pay respects to the dead. Whereas on the other side the soldiers fought with a visible enemy, here the population was struck Death by something they could neither feel nor fight.

Influenza was taking its heavy toll. The vicious monster did not restrict himself to one age—young an old were stripped of their lives. City officials were at a loss to check this pernicious epidemic. Busy as the chemists were, no remedy was as yet discovered.

Rose Waldman was helpless to cope with the dreaded sickness. Though no one in the family had been afflicted with the disease, she was nevertheless going through all the tortures of fear for her family's welfare. Perhaps if one in the family had been stricken, she would have been busy nursing him and would have resigned herself to her misfortune. However she dreaded the day when one or more of her family might suddenly appear with the symptoms. She could neither go about her household duties nor sleep at night. She walked about as one dazed.

When each of her family came home, she scrutinized him thoroughly and, when everything seemed all right, inwardly thanked the Lord for his mercy and goodness. The children sensed what their mother was going through these dark days, but they all pretended to be as cheerful about it as they could.

At the *Yeshiva*, learning was of secondary importance—even Mr. Green seemed to have lost his energies. Now he was not worried about the financial status of the *Yeshiva*—for at this time there were a number of people who had become members of the institution and were paying monthly dues for its upkeep. Each day found one or more of the members of the school within Death's

reach, and to the principal each one was a personal loss. He had become friendly with these members and had taken them into his confidence. He mourned each one as he would a member of his own family.

He also regretted that he could do nothing for them. And as he had this thought, a new fire came into his eyes. At least he could do this for his fellow members—he would suggest to the various families that the honors for the dead be done at the *Yeshiva*. What finer thought than to have the boy cantor and the choir of the *Yeshiva* officiate at the funeral of each member or his kin!

He promptly sent word that Leibele come to his office. He explained to the boy the reason for this sudden call and made no attempt to find out the boy's reaction to his new task. Leibele stood still, the blood draining from his face. Mr. Green glanced at him, and immediately became alarmed.

"Aren't you well, Leibele?"

"I'm all right, Mr. Green. Only must I say the funeral prayers for the dead members?"

"Oh, I see." The principal contemplated upon this new phase of his scheme. It did not even occur to him that Leibele would have any objections to his plan. However, he could understand the reason, now that he was facing the situation. He was still a young boy and the thought of the dead probably scared him out of his wits. There was no other boy, however, who could take his place. He decided to reason with the youngster, and make him see the idea as he was seeing it.

"No, Leibele, you don't have to do anything that you don't wish to do. I did think, though, that the departed would have preferred to have you and the choir from the

*Yeshiva* pray for them. But since you don't want to, that is another thing."

The boy could read the disappointment in Mr. Green's words. He also felt that his principal knew the reason for his hesitancy. Leibele thought fast—perhaps the spectacle might not prove to be such a frightening one after all. The prayer would be said in the open, with many people about, and the boys he knew would practically be surrounding him. He decided to do it for Mr. Green's sake, and he told him of his willingness to abide with his plans.

Mr. Green beamed his gratitude, and assured Leibele that he was doing a very humane thing.

"And let us hope that this great catastrophe may soon pass and that we may go on entertaining people as we did before this misfortune," prayed Mr. Green.

Under his breath, Leibele whispered fervently, as he had heard his father do on frequent occasions, "Amen."

On his way home Leibele thought of his promise to Mr. Green. Right now he was not so sure that he had done right. He had a fear of the dead that most children his age have, and as he pictured himself making that prayer with a hearse drawn up in front of him, a shiver ran through him. He presented a melancholy picture indeed as he walked into his house.

He came in not saying his customary "hello" to his family. They appraised him for some time as each knew what the other was thinking. Could it be that Leibele, looking so pale and dejected, was contracting the flu? Rose ran over to him and touched his forehead and his hands. Apparently the boy had no fever, in fact he did not feel warm enough to her touch. She knew it

could be just one other thing—her boy was frightened of something. Perhaps he witnessed a funeral on the way home—they were so common now. It was better not to discuss the subject. The boy would soon forget the scene.

That night Leibele had one nightmare after another. There were many funeral processions in front of the *Yeshiva*, with him standing on the stairs and chanting the prayer for the dead. In his dreams he felt himself tiring from the ordeal, and when he would ask Mr. Green if he could go home, the latter would answer, "No, you promised me." He felt weary and frightened and all at once he keeled over and fell down all the stairs. Leibele fell out of his bed, and the commotion awoke the household. He looked upon the concerned faces of his family and heaved a sigh of relief as he realized his ordeals were just nightmares. Rather shamefacedly he went back into bed and pulled the blanket over his head.

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This was the first funeral Leibele had witnessed so completely. Now that it was over, he stood unable to determine his next move. It seemed to him that his feet were numbed, so heavy did they feel. All this weeping and fainting not only laid a cold hand on his heart, but it did something to him that took all the joy out of living. It was hard for him to start the prayer for the dead when he was so deeply affected by this dreadful scene. If it had not been for Mr. Green's understanding look, that somehow gave him courage, he probably would still be standing there without a sound coming from his lips. The crowd had accompanied the hearse down the street, some going to the cemetery and some just going a few blocks. The boys from the choir had scattered in different direc-

tions and only Leibele remained as if rooted to the spot.

Mr. Green's voice startled him. "I'm glad you did not leave yet. Here, Leibele, is a half a dollar for you."

"That is not my money, Mr. Green."

"You don't understand. The family of the deceased person left this for you."

"I don't want it. That is not real money—that is *dead* money," said Leibele in a lifeless tone.

"Come, come, Leibele. If I tell you to take it, you take it. Your mother could do lots of things with that half a dollar."

That remark brought Leibele out of his mood. The principal was actually giving him a half a dollar. And how his mother could make use of that amount. Now that Leibele was old enough to understand he knew without being told that things were even worse in the house than they had been.

"Thank you, Mr. Green. But I don't know whether my mother will let me keep it."

"You explain to her that I am giving it to you with my kindest thoughts and with my fervent prayers that you should some day bring her money earned by you on happy occasions only. Please tell her that I am sending her this money with my very best wishes."

Leibele rushed away, as he felt the hot tears filling his eyes. The day had been a bad one for him.

He rushed blindly ahead, not giving a thought to that fortune of money in his pocket. Eventually he dried his eyes, for it would not do to have anyone see him in this state.

He ran up the stoop, looking neither to one side nor the other. He sensed a person in his way, and made as

if to pass him by.

"Hello, Leibele, is anything wrong?"

He forced a smile to his lips as he recognized his friend.

"Hello, Bennie, I didn't see you. Are you going to see anyone in my building?"

"No, I'm not going to anyone. I didn't see you for quite some time, so I thought I'd come over to see if anything was the matter."

It was true that these two boys had not seen each other for some weeks. Due to the abnormal conditions, the boys who were studying with Mr. Himmelstine hardly came for their music lessons. Bennie felt concerned about his younger friend and decided to look him up.

"No, there is nothing wrong in our house. It is just that I am so busy making *molehs* at the *Yeshiva*. I never know when Mr. Green will call on me."

"And you don't mind making them?" questioned the older boy, who knew something of Leibele's sensitive nature.

"Mind?" fairly shrieked the boy, "I'd give anything not to have to make them. But you see Mr. Green depends on me."

"Gee, I'm sorry. I hope you don't have to make them any more. If only this sickness would leave the city. Well, here's hoping you don't have to make a *moleh* at my funeral! Goodby."

The last words shook every nerve in Leibele's body. Try as he might he could not shake off the terrified feeling they gave him. Under his breath he whispered, "God forbid."

That night, brooding over his noodle soup, Leibele

wondered how he might explain to his mother about the half a dollar in such a way that she might be induced to take it. He shifted in his seat noisily and purposely banged his pocket against the chair.

His mother raised questioning eyes to him as the sound reached her ears. "What is that you have in your pocket?"

"Oh, I almost forgot. Mr. Green gave me a half a dollar for the *moleh* I made today. He said that you would make him happy if you would let me keep it. But of course I don't need it. Could you use it in some way, Ma?"

They all kept their eyes averted from their mother, and made more than the usual noise eating their soup. Rose's face betrayed none of her feelings. There was a battle raging in her heart and mind that threatened to consume her. Her heart told her to send the money back with Leibele tomorrow explaining to Mr. Green, who would in turn explain to the particular people, that she could not possibly accept such money. If her son made the *molehs*, she did not want him to be compensated for doing it. It was the least she and her family could do for the deceased members and their unfortunate families. But the realization came to her that tomorrow would come, and that she only had a quarter for the day's expenses. She had been feeding her family noodle soup all week, and without complaint they ate what she served. With sudden resolution she made up her mind to keep Leibele's earnings and for the first time that week feed her family a half decent meal.

She took the coin and put it in her apron pocket.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele awoke with a premonition of something being wrong. Actually everything in the house was the same. Yet he had to force the food his mother hurriedly served him, for in a half hour he would have to make a *moleh* at the *Yeshiva*. Rose, knowing her boy as she did, attributed this to the strain he was undergoing these days.

He did not hurry to his destination—rather, it seemed as if his feet were reluctant to carry him. It was only when he could see from a short distance that the choir and Mr. Green had already congregated on the stairs that he quickened his steps.

The usual procession started, and not so far from where he stood Leibele could see a middle aged woman fainting. A middle-aged man was half carried, as the boy guessed, by relatives. Leibele was beginning to have that certain feeling at the pit of his stomach that left him weak for the rest of the day.

Mr. Green bent over Leibele to give him the name of the departed, which had to be mentioned in the prayer for the dead. The information was like a stab to the boy's heart, as his face turned ashen gray. Mr. Green looked at him alarmed as he half shouted, "Leibele, what is the matter? Leibele, speak to me."

The tears came rapidly as the boy made no attempt to wipe them. Deep sobs shook his young frame. The people looked on, their eyes filling up slowly and fully. He seemed oblivious of them all as the words of the prayer came involuntarily to his lips. Only when it came to the name "Bennie" did he swallow down the tears that he was holding in check. After the *moleh* the relations of the deceased boy came over to console the boy cantor, but he was nowhere to be found.

Mr. Green had been watching Leibele and had guessed that the deceased boy was a friend. Had he been a relative Leibele would have been prepared for the shock, but as it was he had not known about the death of the boy. He saw Leibele run into the *Yeshiva*, and Mr. Green made haste to console him there.

All of his kind words had only one effect. The strain of these tragic days had been wearing the boy down but he had fought with himself to keep up his work. But this was the hardest blow. His little body shook violently with sobs, and the merciful tears were uncontrollable. Mr. Green ceased to talk for he could see that what the boy really needed was a good cry that would take all that pent-up feeling out of him. So he waited patiently until the sobbing gradually subsided and Leibele took out his handkerchief to dry his eyes.

"Leibele, that *moleh* you made was wonderful. I am sure that the boy's parents and kin feel very much indebted to you. That was the most genuine thing I ever heard."

Even this sincere compliment did not have its desired effect. Except that his eyes were dry, Leibele looked as if he had been shaken by seven demons. He had a far-away hopeless look that affected Mr. Green deeply. It would not take long before he too would go through exactly what Leibele had been through if he did not tear himself away from this boy.

"Leibele, an uncle of the boy left this dollar for you and asked me to tell you that he is very grateful."

Mr. Green touched a sensitive spot, and too late he realized that he should not have offered the money to Leibele at this time, if at all. Half in anger, and half

hysterically he screamed, "I don't want to make *molehs*. I don't want that money either. That is *dead* money, I tell you; it is *dead* money!"

Abashed, Mr. Green waited until the fury would spend itself and he could take the boy home.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele looked forward eagerly to going back to his music study with Mr. Himmelstine. The appalling days of the flu had passed, leaving behind orphans and bereaved families. The days in the *Yeshiva* were now spent in acquiring knowledge, and not in saying funeral prayers. That thought alone made the boy beam all over.

The last episode with Mr. Green still lingered with Leibele. He felt ashamed at the outburst which was not justly due his friend. He felt that Mr. Green would no longer have any use for him. For on that fateful day his principal had taken him to his house, and without a word left him. He had not heard from him since. As matters stood, he had just one desire—to get a chance to apologize to him and to once more be in his favor.

Leibele was absorbed in the assignment Mr. Himmelstine had given him and did not see that Mr. Green had walked into the room. He had come to talk things over with the boy's music teacher with regard to matters affecting Leibele.

After the usual friendly exchange of greetings and personal conversation, Mr. Green spoke with reference to the thing uppermost in his mind.

"I am planning to start my concerts again. Only this time I should like to have everything go about in a professional manner—nothing amateurish. And that is where you come in. Do you think you can train Leibele,

in a short time, to officiate at Friday night and Saturday services?"

"You forget I am getting older and no longer have the drive of my younger days. However, for you and that boy's sake, I'll do it in six months."

"I knew you would, and for a good cause too. With the money taken in we plan to enlarge the *Yeshiva* and reduce the rate so that even the poorest boy would have a chance for a Hebrew education."

"I am glad I, in my small way, can help you with this noble work. Leibele, Mr. Green wishes to see you."

Leibele trembled from head to foot. Possibly Mr. Green had come to tell Mr. Himmelstine that he was not to receive lessons at the *Yeshiva's* expense. His principal must still feel indignant at his behavior of some weeks ago.

The latter greeted him in the fondest manner that made the boy feel he must be dreaming. The boy mumbled that he was well and thanked the older man.

"Now we shall really have to work hard. Mr. Green proposes to have you officiate at Friday night and Saturday morning services in a very short time, and he wants me to teach you as soon as possible. That means long hours here and plenty of ambition. Think you would want to do it?"

"Would I want to? Why, there is nothing I would like better."

He thanked his principal for his kindness and assured him that he would be ready for the services just as soon as Mr. Himmelstine could prepare him for them, even if he had to neglect his other studies.

"Neglect your other studies? Why, Leibele that includes those at my *Yeshiva* too!"

"Well, neglect them just a little," answered Leibele, trying to worm himself out of a very embarrassing situation.

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This, the boys exalted, was real adventure indeed. They were lucky to be in the choir that Mr. Green had organized. Within a relatively short time they found themselves to be performers, and they were going places. Right now they were paying passengers on the Long Island Railroad on their way to Edgemere, Long Island.

The weather was very hot, unrelieved by the rain that hid itself in the clouds and taunted humanity below. Clouds would appear very dark in the sky only to be scattered by the myriad sabers of the sun. The boys did not seem to mind the heat nor the dampness. They could almost see the vast beach and they could neither talk nor think of anything else.

Leibele seemed the most disinterested in this spirited conversation. He thought of the training he had gone through, the long hours spent at Mr. Himmelstine's, and the exhaustion he felt at the end of the day. At times he could see that even his teacher was weakening from the task. At last the day came, and Leibele vowed that he must show Mr. Green and Mr. Himmelstine that their faith in him was not misplaced.

Their station was called out by the conductor and they got off. Some boys had the foresight to equip themselves with bathing suits, and since they had a few hours to spend before services, they went bathing. The others, in a group, went to seek other diversions.

"Aren't you going with the boys?" inquired Mr. Himmelstine, who came along to see whether his pupil would succeed.

"No, I don't think I'd care to right now. You see, I thought if you wouldn't mind, you would go over some of this music with me again, so that I would be perfectly sure of it."

In Mr. Green's own words, the event was a sell-out. The synagogue was packed to capacity with older people whose greatest enjoyment was to hear a cantor and choir in *shul*. Their satisfaction was complete when Leibele's sweet singing fell upon their ears. The choir was also soul-satisfying, and from the expression of the audience it could safely and accurately be surmised that the whole scheme of things was a success.

Leibele's singing improved as the night wore on. That tension had left him and now no one would have argued against the fact that the boy was enjoying his work. There was a short part of the service left when suddenly a thundering crash was heard that threatened to root the synagogue out of its foundation. There was a minute of turmoil until the people came to themselves sufficiently to realize that it was merely thunder heralding the coming of the prayed-for rain. There was a blinding flash of lightning that made the lights in the *shul* seem pale and insignificant, and then followed a more deafening thunder. The lights went dead, as if snuffed out by a mad genii.

During all this Leibele, miraculously it seemed, continued to sing as if nothing had happened. The people were astounded to hear his voice chanting the *kadish* of the Friday night services, at a time when they half ex-

pected him to run away and hide. With the last note of his singing, there was unanimous applause for the game youngster, who not only possessed a voice that went straight to their hearts but had a professional manner that must have been born in him.

## CHAPTER VII.

EACH time that Leibele found himself in his Grammar class it seemed as if he was in another country. He believed that the teacher spoke correct English but how different it was from the same language spoken in his neighborhood. Leibele tried to imitate his instructor's pronunciation of words but it only met with ridicule on the street. To avoid further embarrassment and taunts by the members of his one-time gang, Leibele spoke two kinds of English—correct English and East Side English. He found that he could equally adept himself to the various kinds of Jewish spoken—he could speak it the Russian way, and the Galician way. He never became confused.

Leibele was an average pupil both in his English class and in his mathematics. But when it came to his music Leibele was sure to get an excellent mark. This day they were going to be taught the notes of the scale. What a laugh that would be, mused the boy. He was not going to let on that he knew anything.

The bell sounded and the children hurried to their next class. On the board was drawn the scale with letters indicating the notes. "Baby stuff," thought Leibele.

The teacher proceeded to teach the notes on the five

lines, and when she saw the puzzled looks on the students' faces, she decided to make the lesson more simple.

"You will learn the notes quicker if you will just remember one sentence—'Every good boy does fine.' You will then recall that the first line is E, the second G, the third B, the fourth D, and the fifth F. In the same way you can learn the notes in the spaces. For instance the word to remember is 'Face.' So that the first space is F, the second A, the third C, and the fourth E. Now, isn't that simple?"

The children marveled at this idea and they all nodded assent. She then called on one of her pupils and, while he remained standing, she erased everything on the board.

"Now, can you name me the notes on the five lines of the scale?"

It seemed strange to the boy that the plan outlined by the teacher was not so simple after all. He could not grasp it as well, now that the blackboard was erased. His young mind confused everything the teacher had said and he stood unable to give the correct answer. In vain did the teacher ask him to recall the sentence and the words that were the key to the solution.

Leibele's desk was next and he stood up to face a most unnerved teacher.

"Don't waste my time. Can you give me the key to the notes on the scale, or did no one understand what I said a while ago?"

Leibele did not reply to this outburst, but in quiet tones began hurriedly, "There are five lines to the scale." And he proceeded to name each line and each space therein. The children could hardly follow him but their

teacher knew that his answer was correct. Needless to say Leibele's mark for that lesson was no less than an A.

"I wonder what the teacher would say if she knew that I learned this almost two years ago." And Leibele chuckled to himself.

The music session was proving to be real fun for the youngster. This particular day their instructor was attempting to teach her class sight reading, and what a useless attempt it was. The poor children were still wrestling with the key to the scale taught them the day before.

One pupil after another failed to recognize the notes on the music sheet that she had handed out. She gave up in desperation, her mind made up to teach them the songs by ear. She dreaded the thought of having to go over the various pieces again and again until the class would finally be able to sing these simple compositions. This was the most difficult class to teach music, with the exception of that bright boy, Waldman. Were she able to teach them the notes, the work would be much simplified.

Leibele got up, because it was his turn to try, and without hesitation, began to read the notes so rapidly that the teacher had difficulty in following him. When he was finished he gazed innocently at his teacher as if to say "I am finished." She was almost breathless from surprise as she tried to frame her question.

"You did not learn *that* well in my class, or did you?"

"No, I didn't," answered the boy, trying to hide his laughter for his teacher looked very comical to him at this time.

"Then how is it that you can read notes so well?"

"Oh, I have been studying some two years with a private teacher," answered he modestly, trying to appear

as nonchalant as possible. The children giggled, and because their laughter was infectious, Leibele laughed also.

An angry look came into the teacher's eyes as she guessed that the boy was trying to have fun at her expense. It was something about his cocky manner that made her resent him. She would deal with him in his own way, and then he would see that she was no fool.

"In that case, Louis Waldman, I and the whole class would appreciate it if you would sing that song for us so that we could all learn as rapidly as you."

He fairly glared at his teacher and at the same time marveled at her cunning. He wished he hadn't thought of his little scheme, for the teacher was bound to have the last word anyway. He looked at the music sheet in a most contemptuous manner and in very low tones sang the piece.

"That was very well done, though I think you can do better. However, I hope you will do your very best on the next song we take up."

Leibele felt squelched, and as the children giggled, at his expense, he had an irresistible desire to answer back. He caught himself in time, as he recalled the consequences of such an act and he resigned himself to his fate.

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Ah, thought Leibele, this was different from his public school classes. Why couldn't he be as proficient in his public school work as he was at his *Yeshiva* studies?

What finer inspiration for a Jewish youngster than to learn the history of his people—their hardships, their conquests, and the subsequent downfall of their kingdom. What greater spiritual satisfaction than to pray in

the same language as our forefathers did thousands of years ago. Leibele was too young to realize this, but inwardly he felt this. The same was true of his fondness for music—it seemed a part of him.

The *Yeshiva* was growing rapidly, and Mr. Green found that he could no longer devote his energies to officiations and concerts. He also felt that the institution could now stand on its own, and being the fine man he was, the thought of raising money for a cause that no longer was existent became a repugnance to him. He sent written notices of the discontinuance of the choir to each boy, with his profound thanks for their cooperation. He included a postscript that their last appearance would be in a Jewish theatre, the occasion being a memorial meeting for the soldiers who died in the World War.

Several days later, the young cantor and the choir found themselves backstage of a prominent theatre on Second Avenue. While speakers could be hard eulogizing the brave, the music leader took the opportunity of giving the performers last minute instructions with regard to their position on the stage and their bows acknowledging the applause that would undoubtedly come.

Except for the usual nervousness and the desire to start the performance, Leibele felt at ease. His work here was simple compared to the singing he had done in various *shuls*.

Mr. Cohen signalled, and the boys, dressed in their caps and gowns, walked unto the stage in a most dignified manner. The curtain was down and the boys guessed that the excitement in the audience had subsided and the people were probably sitting back in their seats. Leibele, at the head of the group, made a very appealing figure,

dressed in his gown and a high hat similar to the ones older cantors wear. The costume had been made for him at the suggestion of Mr. Green, who thought it would make him look the part of a little boy cantor.

The curtain was slowly drawn apart, and little exclamations of delight could be heard from the occupants of the theatre. The spotlight played around the group, and although each boy pretended to be unaware of it, they were actually very uneasy. It finally came to rest fully on Leibele, and as it enveloped him every sensation of life left him.

He became terror stricken as he felt his teeth stuck together and a numbness taking hold of his whole body. Vainly did he tell himself that this was not the first performance he had made, only that here were more people. If he could see those people perhaps he would not feel as he did—the only thing he saw was heads, thousands of them. An anxious murmur passed through the house for they guessed that the child was stage struck. The situation was not as embarrassing as it was pathetic.

Mr. Cohen, rather astonished at Leibele's inability to go on, resorted to the only method that could not be detected by the audience and which yet might have the desired effect. Under pretense of asking the boy something, he pinched him in the back and that immediately brought the boy to his natural self. Simultaneously he motioned the choir to sing, and Leibele fixing his eyes way above the heads of the people sang the prayer for the dead as he had on many a former occasion.

The familiar words and music subconsciously brought bitter memories, and as he sang his heart cried. His heavy heart conveyed its feeling through his song, and

the effect his singing had on the people could be plainly seen. Each one seemed unashamed of the other as the tears rolled down their faces. Handkerchiefs were pulled out and the tears wiped away as quiet sobbing could be heard in the theatre. Nor was it just the boy's heartfelt singing that did this to them—there were many here who lost a near and dear one in that bloody war. The *moleh* was finished and the boy's face was tearless. All his sad thoughts went into his music and he was plainly relieved.

A thunderous applause burst forth from the spectators. As if that were not sufficient, there was a stamping of feet and a whistling that was almost deafening. People came back-stage, anxious to be close to the boy that made them feel so deeply the sorrows of a year ago. There were among them some choir leaders and music teachers who inquired whether the boy would be interested to join with them. Mr. Green was pleased at the boy's success, but decided that the boy had had enough excitement for one day.

"If you are interested in the boy, you can get in touch with his parents. I shall be glad to furnish you with his address. However, right now I wish you would leave the boy alone. He had a difficult time here today."

Leibele smiled his thanks to Mr. Green and the latter closed the door of the dressing room.

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The boy's father and mother, as well as the rest of the family, had been present at the theatre when all this took place. Modest as they were about Leibele's success, inwardly they were bursting with pride. The days of his bad behavior seemed a long time gone. What a difference in the boy, Rose would reflect many a time.

They did not wait to see him after the performance but left for home. Their boy could take care of himself, and anyway Mr. Green was there. Waiting outside was of no use for they were bound to be surrounded by people once their identity was disclosed. Though they appreciated the good wishes of the people, they disliked being made a fuss over. Their son was making good, and it was he who deserved the praise.

"Boy, did you see what a hit Leibele made?" asked Leo almost in awe. He resented the fact that his parents did not discuss his brother's success, and he felt he would burst if he did not say something.

"A hit did you say? Why he knocked them off their feet," replied his brother, Morris. The latter phrase was a favorite one with him.

"Oh, if only I could sing like that. I'd surely be on Broadway," mused Gertrude. Her mother's stern look checked any further outbursts from her.

The boys refrained from saying any more, for fear their sister would say something foolish again. An embarrassed silence fell upon the group, as they reached their destination. Leo, however, was just working up a frenzy. No longer able to contain himself, he burst out, "The way everybody carries on it would seem that you were ashamed of Leibele's singing. I for one am proud and I think I'll run down to the street and tell somebody since I can't say anything here."

The parents laughed as did the rest of the family. Perhaps Leo was right—they were being too modest.

"Leibele was really wonderful tonight, wasn't he, Hyman? There were tears in my eyes and a lump in my

throat when he sang. Why do you suppose it took him a little while before he finally started to sing?"

"He was probably a little afraid. And who could blame him? This was the first time he sang for an audience of almost three thousand. Even I was scared for him." Hyman spoke these words so the children would not think he was indifferent to all that had gone by that night.

"I think it was more the spotlight than the vast audience that frightened him," spoke Rose with a mother's accurate intuition.

The children went into a further discussion of what had happened. Rose was glad to see them so stirred and almost forgot that they had hardly eaten their supper so eager had they been to be off to the theatre. She served them a light meal, which they somehow finished amid a continuous discussion of Leibele's singing. There was a knock on the door as if someone was mighty anxious to come in.

"Come in," called one of the children as part of a man's coat could already be seen on the inside of the door. They looked askance at the man who entered. Apparently he was not anyone they had met before.

"How do you do?" spoke the man, "you do not know me, but I happen to be a choir leader. One of the better choir leaders, if I may say so."

"You are welcome here," spoke Hyman, "did you want to see us about something?"

"Yes, otherwise I would not be here. You see, I was in the theatre tonight and I heard your son sing. I thought you might be interested in letting me have him in my choir."

The man continued to tell them the price he would pay for the various work Leibele would be required to do. The man wanted him as a soloist in his group, and the parents could see that he was intent on having their boy. They also sensed that they could even ask for more money, which they felt would be forthcoming. The children stood aghast with surprise as the various amounts were mentioned by the choir leader.

"Boy, will Leibele be in the chips," exclaimed Leo. "I'd better get on the good side of him."

Morris laughed at Leo's remark.

"Well, you don't have to worry because you are on the good side of him already."

"Oh, stop that clowning. Why when I work, do you know what I will do with my money?" asked Morris.

"Well, I don't know but I know what I'm hoping. You'll share it with me."

"No, wise guy, I'm going to send Leibele to the best music teacher there is, that is what I'll do."

"Is that so?" drawled Leo.

"Quiet, boys," admonished their mother. "Finish your supper and go downstairs. We have to discuss business with this man."

"You know, Morris, sometimes I wish a choir leader would want me. Did you hear all the money he wants to pay Leibele?"

"Well, if you are really anxious, I'll tell the man that you want to join with him."

The choir leader, Mr. Gruber, overheard Morris' answer to Leo. Perhaps there were more in this family that could sing. Anyway there was no harm in trying.

"Young man, could you oblige me with a tune? I could use a boy like you in my choir?"

"Yes, Leo, let the man see if your voice is good enough. Perhaps you ought to sing in a choir, it might put serious thoughts in your head." Rose spoke with a broad smile on her lips.

"But I just ate," answered Leo pleadingly, trying to get out of the situation.

"I will make allowances," Mr. Gruber answered. "Sometimes it is better to sing on a full stomach than on an empty one."

Leo was caught in a trap. It would not do for anyone to say that Leibele's brother was afraid to get up and at least make an attempt to sing.

He sang a snatch of something he had learned in school. His eyes were averted from the group for he dreaded the decision of the choir leader.

"Why, you have a fine voice. If your parents will permit, I should like to have you too."

Leo could hardly talk, so complete was his surprise. He could only mumble to Morris, "Say, maybe you had better try your voice out. Looks like this family is composed of born singers and we don't know it."

"No, thanks," answered Morris quietly. "I think I'll stick to my studies. Two singers in one family is quite enough."

"About my boy, Leibele. I shall have to consult him about this. If he wishes to join up with a choir leader, I promise you that I shall give you the preference."

"Couldn't we sign on that, subject to Leibele's approval?"

"No, I don't have to sign anything. My word is sufficient."

"Thank you, Mr. Waldman, I shall be here tomorrow. Good night."

Shortly after the man had left, Hyman said to Rose, "Now why do you suppose the man was in such a hurry to sign up Leibele?"

"Maybe that is the way they do their business," answered Rose though she remained as puzzled as her husband.

Leibele walked in, minus his usual tiredness after a performance. He glowed all over as he recalled the number of choir leaders that came to ask for his services. The praise of the people who crowded round him when he walked out of the theatre still rang in his ears. He could still hear the thousands of hands applauding for him.

"That was very well done," his father spoke with a note of pride in his voice.

"You even made me cry," said Rose, anxious to put in her praise.

If the other people thought he was good, why couldn't she tell him how she felt about his singing. Yes, she would praise him if she thought he deerved it, and she might even help him with his work. She knew Hebrew as well as any man in her acquaintance. Rose Waldman was no ordinary woman when it came to a knowledge of Hebrew.

"Do you know, Leibele, there was a choir leader here tonight who heard you sing at the theatre. He would like you to join his choir."

"Judging from the number of choir leaders who were backstage tonight, I think you will have many more

here today or tomorrow," answered the boy without a shade of conceit.

Hyman looked at Rose and she returned his look. So that was the reason why the man was in such a hurry about signing up their boy. However, they would soon see the veracity of Leibele's statement.

Hardly were these words spoken when there was a knock at the door. The man explained, like the other, that he was present at the theatre and that he wished Leibele for the soloist part in his choir.

"You are just about an hour too late. You see, another choir leader was here tonight and Leibele is practically promised to him."

The choir leader was a shrewd man, and he guessed that perhaps Hyman Waldman was using this decoy for more money. He made a second offer, which exceeded Mr. Gruber's by a hundred dollars.

Hyman experienced a feeling of dejection as he visualized a hundred dollar bill just flying out of the window. But a promise to him was more binding than any legal paper on earth. The boy was pledged to someone else, and he was not a man to break his word.

"If you gave me many times that amount, I could not let you have my boy. I gave my word to Mr. Gruber. Perhaps next year my Leibele will be able to sing with you."

The man saw that the boy's father was in earnest. He attempted to extract a promise from Mr. Waldman for next year, but failed. He had to be satisfied with Hyman's final decision, "The next year, if we shall live and be well, we shall see."

There were more choir leaders who came to see the parents of the boy, but each got the same answer.

Leo, more than anyone, mourned the loss of that one hundred dollars, for he remarked to Morris, "This teaches me a lesson. I shall never make a promise that I cannot break."

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"Hyman," Rose spoke, "there is something on my mind that I could like to discuss with you."

"Well, go ahead, I'm listening."

"Now that Leibele is making a little money from his work, I should like to ask Mr. Green to stop paying the tuition money to Mr. Himmelstine. We can do this ourselves now."

"Why, do you know that I had forgotten about that altogether. By all means attend to this, Rose. I shall be too busy to do so."

"Well, what would you say if I told you that I have already spoken to Mr. Green?"

"Now, aren't you a fast worker. Did he say anything to you?"

"Oh, yes. I had quite a talk with him. When I first conveyed to him my feelings about the matter, he would not hear of it. He claimed that Leibele put the *Yeshiva* on its feet and now the *Yeshiva* must put him on his feet."

"And what did you answer to that?"

"I said that he had already done enough for our boy. Even though we could never thank him, we felt that since our boy was earning enough for his tuition, that we did not want to use the *Yeshiva's* money."

"And what did he say?"

"He said that there must be other uses that we could find for Leibele's earnings. He insisted we let the *Yeshiva* pay for his studies until he is a full-fledged cantor."

"And then what did you answer him?"

"I said that we had made up our minds on this. That if we could use more money, you would have to earn it, not Leibele."

"That must have been quite a battle between you two."

"No, when I left he wished us all sorts of good luck. He made me promise to send him a complimentary ticket to any and all performances that Leibele would give in New York. That would sort of make it seem like old times he said."

"There is a very fine man for you. I really do think he will miss all that work he has been doing."

"I think in a little while he will not mind it so much. From what I saw, he is a very busy man."

Leibele came into the house, and judging from the expression on his face, something new was happening.

"Ma, I'm going to the country next week. Mr. Gruber is taking us to a hotel for a Sunday concert. It is too bad that you can't come along."

Rose did not take this news in a happy vein. It was true that she had never been to one of these hotels in the country, but from hearsay she knew that the meals were not as healthful as home cooked. As one of her neighbors had said to her, "What kind of a taste can it have, when they cook their food in such big pots, and goodness knows what they put in there."

To restrain him from going would be sheer folly.

She might just as well resign herself to having her son away almost anywhere for that is what his profession called for. She could already feel herself missing him, and with that she made such noise washing her dishes that the family looked at her with some surprise.

Leibele was becoming accustomed to this going away from home. He did not seem to sense his family's regret at seeing him go. He had almost forgotten that Leo was coming with him, now that he too was a choir singer. His brother seemed reluctant to go, not because of his greater love for his family, but he had made up with the boys to go hiking to some place in Jersey. They half pushed him along. Leibele scratched his head in perplexity as he heard Leo trying to find excuses for not going.

"What's the matter with this boy, Rose? Maybe you can put some sense into him."

"I'll tell you, Hyman, it is not good when you have to force them to do something. He'll never be a singer."

"I thing you're right. How two boys can be so different. Here Leibele can't wait until he's there, but Leo hopes that he never has to go."

"But I don't care to go," argued Leo. "Why can't just Leibele go? One representative from the family is enough."

"All right," agreed his father, "just you go now, and thereafter you don't have to."

Leo, seeing his father giving in to him, ventured further.

"Well, if I am not going to sing anymore, why do I have to go now?"

Exasperated, his father fairly thundered. "Because the man is depending on you, that's why!"

Leo took his valise and made ready to follow Leibeke. When his father got into this mood, it was best to listen and not argue. However, he would see that his father kept his word. This business of having to leave just when the boys were depending on him for other things was not to his liking.

Leave-takings always embarrassed Leibeke. He let himself be embraced by his parents and by his brother and sister. Leo stood there uncertain as to what to do. With sudden resolve the parents hugged him too.

As he sat in the train enroute to their destination, Leo was beginning to feel remorse. No wonder Leibeke was so eager about his profession—it took you places.

As he took his eyes away from the window they came to rest on their choir leader. He sat apart from the boys fairly buried with his music sheets. As he glanced through various sheets he said something to himself. Leo looked away and immediately his head darted back to Mr. Gruber. The man was still talking to himself. Leo became uneasy and resumed his former occupation of looking out of the window.

What a different world this was. On either side there were fields, where now and then could be seen some horses and cows. Then the towering mountains came into view, and Leo fairly slid down in his seat, so insignificant did they make him feel. The skies were clear and the sun played upon every tree and made the leaves glisten. Leo settled himself deeper in his seat the better to view these wonders. Suddenly the train was swallowed up, and only darkness prevailed. When they came into the light, he

looked askance at the conductor, who merely gave a one word explanation "Tunnel." They were in the light again, and a small town could be seen in the distance.

"All right, boys," said Mr. Gruber rather anxiously, "let's get ready."

The boys were up on their feet and were lining up in the aisle. The conductor came to the door and announced the station.

Gruber smiled rather foolishly, and said, "A mistake. That is not our place."

The boys resumed their seats rather annoyed. They looked at their leader with slight contempt. He turned his back on them, and raised his brows. So he thought it was their destination, so what?

After some time, another town came into view and Mr. Gruber more convinced than before said, "All right, boys, we're getting off."

They again lined up in the aisle, not quite sure that they were going off. They began to wonder whether he himself knew where he was going.

The conductor came in view and called the station. Their leader a bit shamefaced mumbled, "Not yet, boys, perhaps the next one."

The result was that when they finally came to their destination and their leader called them to be in readiness, they no longer believed him and kept to their seats. The conductor did all in his power to fairly put them off the train when the leader explained the situation to him. Mr. Gruber was last, and the train was beginning to move. The conductor who could have been a wrestler, lifted Mr. Gruber from the ground, and while the latter was convulsed with terror, threw him off the train. He rolled

down to the side of the station platform much to the amusement of the passengers who had gotten off. While they climbed a hill to their hotel, the boys were still laughing.

"I only hope none of the people at the station check into this hotel," Gruber repeated again and again to himself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

FRIDAY night found the boys seated at a separate table with their leader at the head. At first they were extremely conscious of the glances directed towards them, but their ravenous appetites soon dispelled any other thoughts. They could hardly wait to be served when the proprietor, Mr. Keen, stood in the center of the dining room and announced.

"Ladies and gentlemen. We have here tonight one of the best choirs in New York. There is among them a little boy of thirteen that has taken New York by storm with his beautiful voice. They are here for a Sunday concert, but I should like to ask their leader, Mr. Gruber, if his boy could sing for us *kiddish*, accompanied by his choir."

There was a deafening applause, as those nearer to the boys were personally pleading with Mr. Gruber to do as the hotel keeper suggested.

"I knew there was a catch to this," muttered Leo to his brother, "of all times to ask us to sing. I'm dying on my feet from hunger."

Leibele turned an amused glance to his brother. "You'll get used to this," he answered wisely.

Leibele, with a glassful of wine in his hand, began

the traditional prayer, while the choir harmonized with him. It was so quiet in the otherwise noisy room that it greatly surprised Mr. Keen. Everyone's eyes were directed toward the boy and choir.

When they had finished, they were very enthusiastically applauded. True these people had seen and heard entertainment in the mountains, but this was different—it was more home-like and therefore more soul satisfying. Praise for the boy soloist especially resounded at every table as from time to time glances were directed toward him. If Leibele had been hungry before, he just nibbled at the food now—how could he eat with a few hundred people staring at him.

“Right now I wouldn't be in your boots for anything,” teased his brother. However, seeing that Leibele was not eating any of the food served him, Leo warned, “If you don't eat, I'll tell Mama.”

Leibele had no doubt that Leo would, and so he made several attempts to eat. Now, why did he have to have his brother with him in the same choir?

Mr. Keen was overjoyed to see his guests enjoy themselves so thoroughly. Perhaps he ought to arrange with Gruber to prolong his stay until the following week when the boys would again make *kiddish* and perhaps give another concert next Sunday too. He promptly strolled over to their table and whispered his invitation to the choir leader. The latter agreed, conducting himself in a very business-like manner. Never before had he made such immediate success and he attributed this to Leibele's singing.

With these thoughts in his mind he looked at the boy, and immediately his face clouded. The boy was not

eating, and goodness gracious he would be too weak to sing. He thereupon set himself to coax the boy to eat, and Leibele was becoming very much annoyed.

"Now I don't have to watch over you. You've got a mother hen to guide you," taunted Leo.

The following day being Saturday, Mr. Gruber had time for his reflections. The boys had gone off for a walk, and as he thought about them a certain idea came to him. If they were doing so well in this hotel, what was to prevent him from performing at the neighboring resorts? He formulated his plans and decided that tomorrow he would hire a horse and buggy from a neighboring farmer and set off with his boys for the nearest hotel. He did not know the road that he would have to follow, but it would not do to ask directions from anyone connected with this hotel. For all he knew, Mr. Keen would resent the idea.

That Sunday morning after breakfast found Mr. Gruber waiting for the boys. He had already hired the horse and buggy and the farmer's boy was watching them somewhere on the road, out of sight of the hotel.

The boys set off at a faster pace, and as they came to the place where the horse and buggy were standing, Mr. Gruber was nowhere in sight. One glance at the horse set the whole group bursting with laughter. Here was not a high stepper, but indeed a typical spark plug.

"Hey, boys, let's have some fun with Mr. Gruber. Let's dare him to make the horse run," urged Leo, an impish gleam coming into his eyes.

Leibele was on the verge of protesting but it was too late. The boys were unanimous in their assent. Already their howling and hysterical laughter could be heard by

their leader who was just now coming towards them. Their outbursts subsided, and no one would have recognized this as the same group that had carried on so uproariously just a while ago.

Mr. Gruber had some difficulty in getting on the buggy but nevertheless refused to be heaved up by the boys. After some few attempts he was on, and took the reins in his hands.

They were going at such a slow pace that the boys were whispering to each other that they were nauseated. Some even determined to walk rather than take this dull ride.

"Mr. Gruber, do you think you could make this horse go a bit faster?" questioned Leo.

"No, can't you see it's the horse that needs pushing? I bet we'd do him a favor if we put him in the buggy and pushed him," teased another fellow.

Mr. Gruber did not answer, for this conversation was proving too much for him. He guessed that they were making sport of him. To add to his troubles, he did not know as yet whether he was going in the right direction. It seemed the further he rode, the denser the woods became, and the farther they seemed from any inhabited place. He whipped the horse vigorously, and coaxed it to run along. But no results. He made several attempts to instill some life in the animal, but apparently it was resting on past laurels. The horse would turn its head fully on its driver, stare at him vacantly, and continue its slow plodding.

It was futile to try any more, and so the little company resigned itself to this monotony. Suddenly the horse snorted and set off at a gallop that fairly pulled its driver

beneath it. He recovered himself sufficiently to hold on to the reins while the boys encircled his waist in an effort to keep him to his seat. Off went carriage and boys and driver, with never a chance to slow down the animal, or to make him stop. A squirrel had darted past them and had frightened the half-asleep horse.

Soon they came to a hill, and the animal was not slackening his pace. The group stared disaster in the face, and none of them could do anything about it. Their leader whispered *Shma Israel* and with that horse, buggy, leader and boys went plunging down the steep hill.

Wheels, fragments of wood and metal screws went flying in all directions, as the group attempted to shield itself. In a while it had subsided, and the boys got up, unharmed, except for minor bruises, and shook off the debris from their bodies. They espied their leader hanging on to the horse's neck, terror all over his face. They disengaged him and helped him brush off the dirt and splinters which were showered all over him. They looked at the horse, and they couldn't control their irresistible laughter. It was so pathetic looking, laying there crouched in an inconceivable position. They scratched their heads as they wondered how they were going to extricate him from the wreck.

"Is it a horse or is it a pretzel?" laughed Leo.

"A pretzel," answered the boys unanimously.

After hours of labor, they finally got the horse on its feet. It would seem that the horse had had its last fling of life, as it gazed mournfully and exhausted about itself.

Mr. Gruber guessed that it must be way past dinner time. There was no time to be wasted but to start hiking back to their hotel. They were to perform that night.

and the boys and leader were certainly in no mood today.

"Well, that sure was a joy ride; something to write the folks back home," joked Leo.

Mr. Gruber was talking to himself all the while. What a mess when everything was going on so nicely. This would teach him to run after fortune. That is what a man gets for planning his business affairs on the Sabbath. He did not know on what to blame his ill fortune, and he saw his little money just turned into ashes—he would have to pay for the buggy, and he hoped to goodness that he would have a little money left for fare. Yet, it was partly the farmer's fault; he had asked him for a slow horse, not a race track winner. Yes, he would recompense the farmer, but he would make sure that enough money was left for himself and the boys. In sudden fury he turned on the horse.

"Why did you have to do this to me? What did you want from my poor life?"

"Say, the guy's nuts," ejaculated Leo.

"Sh, let's listen to him," admonished another boy.

"I never harmed a horse, and to think that you should do this to me."

The horse seemed unaware of these rebukes directed at him, as it plodded along. Suddenly it turned its head toward Mr. Gruber and snorted. Its hot breath fairly stifled him, and he moved back from it and heaped curse upon curse on its existence.

By the time they reached the hotel, they were as lifeless as the animal. They made a mirth-provoking picture as Mr. Gruber could be seen leading a half-dead animal, while the boys walked on either side of it. It seemed as if they were accompanying the horse to its grave.

What made the situation more ticklish was that just as soon as the horse came near the entrance to the hotel, it slumped down on all its fours.

The boys hurriedly walked into the hotel, while Mr. Gruber remained with the fallen animal. The guests' humiliating laughter sent daggers to his heart and he could only resort to cursing the horse, cursing the profession, and cursing country places.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the next day, Mr. Gruber's headaches were increasing. The farmer was an obstinate man, and seemed determined to get much more than the choir leader had figured on. In vain he told him, in broken English, the circumstances that led up to the accident. In equally broken English, the farmer insisted on being paid his price. He threatened to call State Troopers and Mr. Gruber fairly felt his skin creeping. With a heavy heart he handed the money to the man. This left him just about enough for train fare. Dejected he walked back to the hotel.

He had dragged himself up the front porch steps, when he could hear Mr. Keen calling him from back of the house. He retraced his steps and found himself face to face with a strange man. The hotel keeper introduced him as another hotel keeper from another county who came to engage him and his choir for a Friday night.

This was heaven sent indeed. Arrangements were made, and the boys were instructed to pack off. The man's horse and buggy were waiting, and the boys climbed on. Mr. Gruber eyed the animal, as if he did not trust the best horse in the world. The animal snorted at him, and the leader's heart was filled with misgivings. The boys

nudged each other, as they guessed why Mr. Gruber was hesitating to come on.

"I hope you are not afraid of horses," spoke Mr. Field.

"No, no, I am not afraid of them. I just don't get along with them," answered Mr. Gruber naively.

"Another spark plug," whispered Leo to his brother.

"I just hope no squirrel gets in his way," answered Leibeles.

The Friday night at Mr. Field's was just as successful as at the other hotel. Naturally enough, they were engaged for a Sunday concert. This time Mr. Gruber was not going to let any of the youngsters out of his sight. Wherever the boys went, there went Mr. Gruber. So exhausted was he from following them around that when he came to the nearest resting place, he sat down and soon dozed off.

"What do you say we go rowing on the lake," suggested Leo. "Gosh we have a whole day to kill."

"That's a good idea," agreed Leibeles. "Let's go."

"Look Leibeles, can I go with you," asked one of the boys whose name was Izzy.

"Well, I figured on going with my brother, but since you want to come with me in the same boat, well, all right."

The boy was clumsy in helping Leibeles push the boat into the water. By his movements it could be seen that he was no rower. Ah, well, thought Leibeles, if need be he could row the boat all by himself.

They both got in, and Leibeles began to paddle away.

"Well, aren't you going to help me?" asked Leibeles.

"I will. Only wait until we go a bit farther," pleaded the boy.

Leibele was at a loss to understand why Izzy acted so mysteriously. The truth was that he could not row, and being afraid lest none of the boys would take him along he had thrown himself on Leibele. The reason he picked on him was because he heard that he was a good rower, and also because he was more tolerant than the other boys.

After about an hour of this, they found themselves in the middle of the lake.

"I think we'll turn back now," said Leibele.

And with this he attempted to steer the boat towards shore, but the boat seemed to prefer to go further. Leibele tried harder, but to no avail.

Leibele glanced upward and what he saw there turned his heart to stone. The sky was lined with heavy clouds that chased each other in mad pursuit. Not a light spot could be seen in that vast firmament. From nowhere a terrific wind blew up and lashed the little boat on all sides. The tide was against them and they were being blown further and further from shore.

"I tell you what, Izzy. You just try using your oar, and maybe we can get the boat to go towards shore."

The boy began to cry as he feared to tell his companion what had happened.

"What are you crying about?" asked Leibele in surprise. "We'll get to shore."

"I can't help you," answered the other. "A while ago I lost my oar."

Leibele looked in amazement at the boy. How could

anyone be so stupid? Fear gripped him too, for as yet they had not moved an inch.

"For heaven's sake, stop your crying. I can't do a thing with your wailing in my ears. What the devil are you crying so bitterly for?"

"I have a concert tonight."

"*You* have a concert? Well, how about me?" And wishing to avenge himself and scare the boy out of his crying fit, he added, "Don't you think it's more important to come back than it is to make a concert?"

At this the boy began to cry the more.

"Now, look here, if you don't stop this, I am going to keel over the boat and swim to shore."

"Oh no, no," begged the other, "don't do that. I can't swim."

"Well then, do as I tell you. Get in front of the boat and paddle with your hands. And sit in the middle of the seat."

Izzy wiped his eyes, and did as he was told. Leible's words and manner reassured him. The process was a very slow one, and way towards dark they found themselves on the way to the hotel. On the lawn they were met by a worried Leo who vowed he would tell mama and papa, and by a furious Mr. Gruber who once more cursed country places and swore that he would "spit" on anything that even resembled grass.

\* \* \* \* \*

Events pass like dreams, and on the following Monday, the choir leader and the boys were ready to start for home. Mr. Gruber's manner was one of complete dissatisfaction—nothing could induce him to spend another hour in the country if he could help it.

The youngsters were, however, loath to leave.

"Gee, now that it's over I hate to think of going back to the city," said Leo.

"I don't mind leaving. What've you got here that you haven't at home?"

"Now, how do you like that for a question? Where have you been all this week?"

"Just wait until he gets into the city and the hot air begins to choke him. I think I'll tell my old man to send my mother and the family to the country. A lot of good that would do, though. My dad hasn't even the money for the fare," spoke up Izzy.

"Ah, well, there is always the street showers. As for sports, there is nothing like playing handball under the bridge," chimed in Leo in an effort to brighten up Izzy's mood.

"Yeah, what about meeting there for some handball games?" asked Leibele.

"You're on, anytime you say," agreed another boy.

Even the boy who questioned the advantages of the country over the comforts of the city had to admit that climatic conditions were better in the former. The heated city laid a clammy hand upon their bodies. Their clothes became soaked with perspiration, and no amount of wiping could prevent their clothes from sticking. The two weeks in the country only tended to bring clearer to their eyes the restrictions within which they were living.

If there was rebellion in their hearts at having to come back to such heat and dirt, while out in the country people were keeping amazingly cool, it soon wore off. The showers in the street claimed them to their pleasures and they soon found them as satisfying as the country

lakes. The wall under the bridge might not be as inviting as a first-class handball court, yet there was a certain thrill at banging away at a massive pile of stones. They hit that wall and hit it with a revenge.

Leibele was among the group, and it was his turn to serve. He dropped the ball and prepared to hit it in a strategic corner when he saw his father half running and half walking toward him. Hyman motioned to him to come toward him, but this was no time to stop. He pretended not to see him and hit away at the wall. His opponent was caught off guard and Leibele served again. This time there was quite a bit of volleying until it seemed that there would be no end. Hyman, knowing that his son had seen him, angrily walked onto the center of the imaginary field and thus stopped the progress of the game.

"Oh, gee, Pa, look what you've done?"

Hyman stood there quite unimpressed. To him the whole thing appeared very silly indeed.

"Now *you* tell me what I've done."

"We were working so hard for that point and here you spoiled our play."

Hyman shook his head. Sometimes this son of his was proving to be an enigma. As a rule his ways were clever and grown up, except, in Hyman's opinion, when he ran back and forth and perspired so freely for nothing.

"Now, what kind of fun is this? You hit the ball, then he socks it, then you, then he and where does it get you? And if you should have the points, what would you do with them?"

Leibele dropped his hands to his sides and gazed laughingly at his father. While to the boy all this hitting had a clear enough meaning, he could now vividly see

how it impressed his father. He laughed right out, and the boys, who restrained their outbursts because they did not want to seem rude to their playmate's father, joined in his merriment. Hyman was a bit confused.

"Enough, enough. Already making fun of your father. If you like this sort of play, you can go ahead later. Right now there is a choir leader that wants to see you. He is waiting for you upstairs."

Leibele rushed upstairs, anxious to see this personage. He was intent on joining with another choir leader now that his parents refused to let him remain with Mr. Gruber. He had related to his parents the happenings in the country, and Rose had insisted that Leibele and Leo sing with another man. Gruber was probably out of his senses and she did not consider him responsible enough to look after her two boys. She made one concession—that they be permitted to accompany Mr. Gruber to Brooklyn. This was to be their last appearance with him.

\* \* \* \* \*

The stranger regarded the boy with amazement. How different he looked without his costume. Now he looked like a real life, in-the-flesh boy, whereas during officiations he seemed almost angelic in his appeal.

Mr. Levy seemed to resume a former conversation he had been having with his father and mother.

"And I also propose to do something that has not yet been done for your son. I shall write special solos for him."

There was some talk as to price, Hyman asking more than for the year before. Some sixty minutes passed in this mutual conversation but Leibele took no note of this.

In his ears he heard Mr. Levy's promise "I shall write special solos for him."

Mr. Levy's visit came to a close and he took his departure. What a difference in two choir leaders, thought Leibele as he rushed off to rehearsal with Mr. Gruber. The latter had pleaded with the boys to see him through this job of his in Brooklyn, and then they could do as they chose—they could either remain with him or otherwise. The boys felt sorry for him and promised to do so.

"Boys, this Friday we go to Brooklyn," and Mr. Gruber mentioned the name of the synagogue wherein they would officiate. "You will, therefore, congregate here at 3 o'clock and that would give us an hour to get there."

The choir agreed to these instructions and left for home.

They were almost crushed in the subway rush. The boys no longer needed to lift their feet; they just let themselves be pushed around by the crowd.

Mr. Gruber glanced at his pocket watch and saw it was close to four. The ride was taking a bit longer, but that was due to the delay caused by the crowds jostling into the cars. It was remarkable to see how the desire to save a few minutes could make otherwise intelligent people so unreasonable in their actions.

There was a grating of wheels as the train came to a full stop en route from one station to the other. The people glanced around in some surprise, as they surmised that this was probably for a few seconds. Some ten minutes passed and the train was still stationary. There was a little panic in the car but it subsided somewhat when the conductor came through booming that an accident oc-

curred on the station ahead and that the train will be held up a half-hour or possibly more.

The passengers' fear turned to annoyance as each tried to occupy himself as best as he could. Some read papers, others books, while others amused themselves by manicuring their nails. Our choir leader alone was quite in despair. If they were to be delayed an hour he would be too late for the officiation in Brooklyn. As the quarter hour passed Mr. Gruber resigned himself to his ill luck. He glanced at his watch and determined that it was time for the evening prayer. He promptly lifted himself from his seat and proceeded toward the rear of the train. All eyes followed him as they wondered where he was going since there was no place to go. They followed his motions and some understood that he was praying while others thought the man was crazy. They laughed convulsively, all of which did not ruffle the older man. He continued with his prayer, and having finished turned a look full of contempt upon them. His manner told them without words that in his eyes they were mentally deficient, not he.

A shudder went through Leibeles as he realized that for the first time in his young life he would be violating the Sabbath. Though it was not his fault, and he was not the only one to be trapped in this net, nevertheless he felt like a fugitive. In his heart he uttered a prayer that the Lord might forgive him for his sin.

When the train finally began to move the boys surmised that they would be too late for services. Oddly enough they did not hesitate to hurry as Mr. Gruber urged them to walk at a quicker pace. He was already enough

perturbed and they did not want to make matters worse for him.

From a block away they could discern people walking out of the synagogue—it was too late. They quickened their walk in an effort to reach their destination before it became entirely empty. Come what may, they must find shelter for the night for they neither had the money for lodging nor was there a hotel in the vicinity.

When they finally arrived, the *shul* was locked and there was no one in sight.

With a despairing gesture, Mr. Gruber sat himself down on the steps of the synagogue and the boys did the same. Their stomachs were empty and they wondered how soon it would be before they would eat.

“Why are we sitting here?” Gruber directed the question to himself.

“Because we are breaking in these hard stones in case we have to sleep here tonight,” answered Leo bitterly.

The cold went through them, and Mr. Gruber seemed to be affected the most. His teeth chattered and his frail body shivered. He was a pathetic figure indeed.

“Well, boys, there is just one thing left to do. Let us look for the rabbi.”

“How are you going to do that, when you don’t even know his address?” questioned a boy.

“He must live in the neighborhood. Anyway someone around here ought to know where he lives. I propose to go from house to house until we find someone who can give us his whereabouts.”

After knocking on many doors, they finally obtained the desired information. They walked briskly to the rabbi’s home, and a sigh of relief arose as they approached

their destination. They tapped on the door, and it was opened by the rabbi himself.

"Come in," invited the reverend.

They all walked together, and proceeded to warm themselves at the stove. The rabbi was surprised at his visitors for as yet he did not know who they were. To cover his embarrassment, Gruber hurried on to explain.

"We are the choir that was supposed to officiate at your *shul*. We were delayed on the train because of an accident. You must believe me, for it is you only who can help me now."

The rabbi and his wife had no children and it was an occasion for them to have all these youngsters at their table for the Sabbath. The rabbi's wife served them, and when they had finished one serving she coaxed them to others.

"But it was an act of God. How was I to know that there would be an accident in the subway?" Gruber mused to himself.

"I have an idea," said the rabbi in a comforting tone. "A lecture is being given at the *shul* tonight, and if we could somehow induce our president to let the boys sing, perhaps the people will plead in your behalf for the Sabbath."

"What have I to lose? Come on, boys, let us set out."

When they arrived at the *shul* a second time the people were practically all there. The leader and the boys took their seats in the back in a most inconspicuous corner. None guessed that they were the choir.

Mr. Gruber heard not a word of the lecture. To him only one wish kept recurring—that the president would be in a receptive mood.

The speaker had finished, and the rabbi stepped up to thank him. Then he proceeded.

"We have in this audience the leader and his choir who were supposed to have officiated tonight. Through no fault of his, he was held up two hours in his travels because of an accident which we will probably read about in the papers. I have his word for the veracity of my statement. How many of you would like to hear them just for a while tonight? Shall we say that if you like them, they be made to stay over for tomorrow's services?"

The rabbi was very well liked in this *shul* and no one doubted his word. There were exclamations of "Let them sing. It is not their fault if they were detained by an accident."

The boys walked on toward the altar, Mr. Gruber and Leibele at the head of the group. The people were delighted as they watched this procedure. The president stood sulking, though he was not totally against the rabbi's suggestion. Only, he thought, they had better be good.

"Leibele" Leo whispered, "If you ever sang well, you must do so now. On you depends whether we eat tomorrow or not."

"Well, if the worse comes to the worst, we could always eat at the rabbi's," remarked a boy.

"Eat at the rabbi's, dope? What, an empty icebox? Didn't you see that we cleaned out everything tonight. It looks to me that we'll have to take the rabbi and his wife along too. I bet they have nothing left for themselves after tonight."

Leibele sang *kidish* and the choir lent their support. In their eagerness to please, they put everything into their singing. The boy knew what this test meant, and he did

his very best. Something occurred which never was allowed in this orthodox place of worship—the people applauded wildly.

They remained for the Sabbath and were remunerated fully. Not only that, but little gifts of money were left for Leibele as well as for the rest of the boys.

“Which goes to prove,” Mr. Gruber philosophized, “when things look darkest they are bound to turn out for the best.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Rose sensed that there was something wrong. Of late Leibele was unusually quiet. It was true that he was a self-centered child, but his manner was most unusual. He seemed to eat without any appetite, as if unwilling to squabble with his mother about the food.

“Leibele, is there something wrong? You are acting like a chicken without a head.”

“No, nothing.”

“But why are you so sad lately? I haven’t seen you smile or enthusiastic about anything for some time. Aren’t you feeling well?”

“Gee, Ma, do I have to go around grinning like an idiot? If it will make you feel better, I’ll smile.”

His attempt at a smile was a very poor one, and his face became so contorted that Rose burst out laughing. Leibele, on the other hand, resumed his former expression. He sighed deeply, and indeed he looked as if a great catastrophe was ready to engulf him. Rose shrugged her shoulders and decided to consult Hyman about the boy. He would know better how to deal with him.

The next morning she found spots on the pillow, and Rose decided that this had gone far enough. Her boy had

been crying his heart out over something dreadful that she knew nothing about. For days, had she only known, Leibele was troubled by a great fear—a certain choir leader had maliciously remarked to him that he was due to lose his voice. He was tempted to ask the man what he meant by this, just what happened when one lost his voice, whether it came back, and such questions, but he hesitated to do so. Somehow he did not feel that the man was his friend.

At first he thought he would ask someone else about it, but he dreaded to hear the worst. So the boy tortured himself with his fears, yet hesitated to consult anyone about it.

Meanwhile Rose had talked to Hyman about her discovery. The latter was much perplexed and promised to have it out with the boy immediately.

“Leibele, what is this your mother is telling me? What is it that is making you act the way you do?”

“Nothing. I don’t know what you mean.”

“I’ve had enough of this. When I ask you something don’t answer me the way you talk to your mother.”

Leibele trembled in his seat. When his father resorted to this thundering attitude, one had to do what he said or else there was a revolution in the house. In the end his father would get his way, anyway, and the boy decided to convey to them what the choir leader had said.

“I am not as unhappy as Mama said, but what does trouble me a bit is the fact that Mr. Fisher said I would lose my voice soon.”

Just troubled, Rose repeated to herself; God only knows how many tears this child of hers had spilled.

"Well, I don't know about things like that. But even if you do lose your voice, you will get it back again. You know more about this than I do, Rose."

"Yes, I do," replied Rose, relieved that the trouble was not a greater one, "as a matter of fact every boy singer loses his voice for about four years. Then it comes back stronger and better."

She did not add that sometimes it never came back.

"There, I knew it was something like that," pointed out Hyman, "now you don't have to worry. In the meantime we will both go over to Mr. Himmelstine and consult with him."

"But what would I do in those four years if I can't sing?"

"Stop counting the chickens before they're hatched. First we'll see Mr. Himmelstine, then we shall determine further."

Hyman lost no time in consulting Leibele's teacher.

"I did not acquaint Leibele with this fact because he still has a few months to go. However, since he is already aware of the truth, let me just say this. I can bank my life's experience that Leibele's voice will come back—and very much improved. I would not call this losing his voice—actually his voice will become matured. You need have no fears."

The good news had the same effect on the boy's father as on the boy himself. But what would he do these four years, pondered the boy to himself? But, gosh darn it, he would do something as long as he was assured of one thing—his voice must come back.

## CHAPTER IX.

**P**A, I was just thinking, I should like to organize a choir. What do you think of the idea?"

"That is an excellent idea, but you are too young."

"You don't think I could do it? I bet I could."

"I have no doubt that you can. Only you are not old enough to be a choir leader. People would not have any confidence in you. You would also have difficulty in getting the singers, for they would doubt whether a youngster like you could secure work for them."

Leibele pondered upon this for a while. His father was right. What cantor would give a fourteen year old child work? He would have to wait at least another two years before he could start.

In the ensuing days Leibele wondered what he could do to occupy his time. During the day there were his studies, handball and baseball, but at night he missed something that would give him complete enjoyment.

In his games he had made the acquaintance of a young boy named Jack. He was an easy-going youngster who talked about some sort of social club where girls and boys got together. The club boasted a band of its

own and a mighty good one, and if Leibele had any doubts about it he could come some night and see for himself.

One night Leibele found himself at the club house. He was introduced to quite a number of boys and girls who expressed pleasure at meeting him. Already his name was familiar to them. They urged him to become a member of their organization—he was sure to like it. They were a fine group of young people and not a sign of rowdiness in the atmosphere. Soon the band began to play, and Leibele was especially fascinated by the piano player's fingers. When he inquired about the boy, he was told that he was an accomplished player, who had been taking lessons since he was five years old. The rest of the night Leibele's eyes were glued to the piano. He had decided what he would like to do during the next two years—he would learn how to play that instrument.

The next day found Leibele in a music shop. He bought a beginner's book and occupied himself with it for a few days. The first few chapters were simple, but as he delved further into the book he became confused. Perhaps it would all work out with a piano in front of him. Well, he would not worry about it yet, he would wait until he got a piano. His father had promised to get him one on the instalment plan.

\* \* \* \* \*

The arrival of the instrument caused no small bit of excitement. The family admired the piece of furniture that somehow looked out of place in its drab atmosphere. In her unwillingness to leave the piano for a minute, Rose for the first time in years burned her cooking. Leibele was drawn to it as to a magnet. He resented any-

one even putting a hand on it, for fear that the lustre might vanish under his very eyes. Jealously he set himself near the piano and pulled out his instruction book.

His face assumed a baffled expression as he could not associate the notes with the piano. Although he could read a sheet of music fluently, he was at a loss when it came to playing the simple notes. His father and mother watched him, as a fond smile played around the corners of their mouths.

"Is there anything wrong, Leibele? You seem like a lost sheep."

"And I thought it would be so simple. If only I could get a start on this. Seems to me perhaps I ought not keep the piano after all."

"Oh, I don't know whether it is as bad as all that. Perhaps we shall find a solution," hinted Rose.

Leibele looked at his mother as if not understanding what she meant. Just then Leo, no longer able to keep the secret, said hurriedly.

"Well, in case you're wondering what Mama means, there is a teacher coming to give you lessons."

Leibele turned unbelieving eyes to his mother and she nodded. He rushed over to embrace her and she, embarrassed by any sign of outward affection, allowed herself to be kissed lightly.

"Well, your father and I could not see why you should not have a piano teacher. After all it is your money that we are using for these lessons, and there is still some left for your singing lessons."

This came as a complete surprise to Leibele. He knew that he had made quite a little money, but he thought his mother had used it up for family expenses a long time

ago. And to think that she had saved it for him. He was overwhelmed by his parents' unselfishness.

On the next day his teacher came and Leibeles could hardly associate him in the same class as Mr. Himmelstine. He asked the boy about his musical knowledge and while he answered the teacher's questions, the latter amused himself by playing snatches from one classic and another. The boy stopped short as his ears were charmed by the music this man was playing—somehow ordinary words had no meaning compared to this. The teacher noticed the boy's interest and spoke softly while he continued to play.

"You will be a perfect pupil. I can see that you have a soul for music. If you are adept, you shall some day play like I am doing now. But you must practice with a will."

The instructor's bit of playing had the desired effect—Leibeles was almost always at that piano. The boys came to call him for some baseball or handball but were continually turned down and they soon tired of whistling for him. If they passed by his house and he was playing, they did not even bother to summon him to the window—he would not leave the piano abruptly. Only when no harmony reached their ears did they take a chance on calling him and very rarely now he would go along with them.

As if to draw a comparison Leibeles once in a while went to the social club and watched the boy at the piano.

"This gives me an idea, Jack. You play the violin, and if I learn to play the piano well, we can get some of the other boys in the club and organize a band of our own."

"Gee, that sounds good to me. Only your teacher does not teach you the kind of songs that a band must know."

"That's true. But I couldn't ask my teacher to teach me popular music. Why, he'd skin me alive. The other day I was trying to play some tune I heard here just as he came into the house. You should have seen him. He was storming. He said that it was trash, that it was an insult to the great masters as well as to the beautiful piano. I half thought he would kiss the piano in apology."

"And what did you answer him?"

"Answer him? Why he glared at me the whole time that he gave me the lesson."

"Well, if that is the case, I can just see our thought of a band flying out of the window."

"I've got it. I'll teach myself."

Jack looked at his friend. Lunacy must be contagious, he thought.

But at their next meeting Leibele had a surprise for him.

"Say, Jack, don't let us stay here. Come over to my house, and I'll show you something."

Jack followed meekly. A surprise? He wondered what it could be.

First Leibele gave him the most comfortable chair in the house. Then he fluttered about in the kitchen looking around for some *strudel* his mother had baked.

"Now you relax, and watch me."

His friend accepted all with good grace and did as Leibele asked. The latter sat down on the piano stool, and with some imitation of his teacher finally proceeded to play one of the classical pieces. Jack wrinkled his face

in disgust, for this type of music was not to his liking. The band at the social club played the type of music that he cared for. Leibele looked mournfully at his friend, as if sympathizing with him completely, and then began to play the kind of music that was nearer to Jack's heart, or more accurately, to his tapping feet.

"Say," gasped Jack, "that certainly is swell. How did you learn that?"

"Just the way I told you I would. I am playing by memory—no notes. I just hear the piece and I play it. How do you think we shall do two years from now? Now we just have to go about picking out our other players."

And the boys went to work on their idea. Now the simplest task confronted them—to keep their eyes open for boys who knew how to play some instrument and make a note of their names for future reference. As soon as Jack and Leibele found out that a certain boy played an instrument they became exceptionally chummy with him much to his surprise and delight. It was an honor to be associated with the wittiest boy in the club and with another who was already a celebrity among them.

"It just occurred to me, Jack. Why can't I organize a choir at the same time?"

"Well, as you say, why can't we?"

And while Leibele was learning how to play the piano he spent his spare time training a choir. He never tired of rehearsals—he worked feverishly to instill in them part of his great love for cantorial music.

At sixteen Leibele was a very busy young man indeed. He had learned to play to please both his teacher and his friend Jack. On many occasions he would amuse his family and friends by playing classical music and then

suddenly switching to popular jazz. He made sure, though, that his teacher heard none of the latter type of music.

The prospective players were now a complete band and Leibele's word was law. He took his task so seriously that the boys nicknamed him "Toscanini." He was amused by their jest and cared not a bit as long as they came to rehearsals and stayed as late as he wished them to.

With the choir he was just as successful. He worked hard with them for many months but the result was so gratifying that he himself was amazed at the outcome.

There was just one thing to be done now and that was to get work. They unanimously agreed that Jack would be their go-getter. He contracted various cantors, though not the great ones, who hired the choir for various officiations. Leibele's appearance on the pulpit as a choir leader at first would startle a particular audience, so young did he look. But after services they had to admit that even a choir leader should not be judged by age alone.

It was no rare occurrence for people in an audience to congratulate Leibele on his leading while the cantor himself seemed almost entirely forgotten. At such times the boy would gratefully acknowledge the praise bestowed upon him, at the same time looking apologetically at the cantor.

At one rehearsal Jack burst in, pushing everyone aside until he reached Leibele's side.

"Boy, oh boy, did I just take on work for you. And not only that, the cantor is to officiate at *maariv* services and then he will give a concert."

"Listen to him talk. What do you mean work for me? It is work for all of us. Seriously, though, Jack, what are you talking about?"

Jack explained that there was to be a concert at one of the orthodox synagogues in the neighborhood and that a certain cantor had engaged the choir for that particular day.

"Do you think I could sing some numbers?" questioned one of the choir by the name of Arthur.

"Now, look here, this is a cantor's concert, not a choir boys' concert. You will sing what you are supposed to," directed Jack.

Arthur glared at Jack, who looked contemptuously at the other. Leibele looked at them both and shrugged his shoulders. He hardly understood their animosity.

Rehearsal was over, and the boys left the two friends together.

"Say, Jack, you don't suppose Arthur meant what he said?"

"You mean about singing at the concert?"

"Yes. Surely he didn't mean that he wanted to sing by himself."

"Oh, you don't suppose he did! Well, what would you say if I told you that it's just what he wanted."

"But how could he?"

"Well, you don't know Arthur. You see he lives in the same building as I do. I understand he takes voice culture, and his mother thinks that he is a second Caruso. He studies all kinds of operas. All of which wouldn't bother me, but he sings them so badly that you have to be made of iron to listen to him. I can't. Everytime he sings, I run out of the house."

"Surely he doesn't think he could sing opera at that concert, just supposing that I let him sing."

"Why, that guy is crazy enough to sing anything. And

if he should ever start, you could not stop him. He is oblivious of everything once he starts singing."

"In that case, let's hope it never comes to that," replied Leibele, and both friends laughed.

When they were on the street, Leibele turned to Jack, "Say, that gives me an idea but don't laugh. Why can't I learn to sing operas when I get my voice back?"

"Yes, why can't we? Only don't you ever get to be like Arthur," warned Jack.

The rest of the way the two boys discussed the concert. It would be fun to lead a choir in his own neighborhood. It seemed that his neighbors were destined to witness all of his talents—first as a boy cantor, then as a choir leader, and then perhaps (and Leibele sighed) again as a man cantor.

To all appearances, if one can judge by first impressions, this was going to be no extraordinary evening. The cantor was not a star in his profession and the choir enjoyed no greater reputation as yet. However, the only highlight was the number of people that turned out on this occasion. Leibele learned later that it was not the performers that drew this large audience but the cause for which it was given—the proceeds were to go to a home for the aged.

There were no young people present, except the members of the choir. Leibele had grouped his boys and stood expectantly awaiting the cantor, for as yet he knew him by name only. The distinguished personage did not present himself and a murmur of impatience passed through the synagogue.

"What do you suppose is keeping him?" asked Leibele.

"Search me." answered Jack.

"Boy, do I hope he doesn't show up. Could I sing then?" asked Arthur.

"Now, Arthur, be a good fellow, and forget about singing. Just sing with the choir, that will be enough," pleaded Jack.

"Wouldn't it be funny if Arthur does sing tonight?" chuckled Leibele.

"In that case, I should even run away from here," threatened Jack.

The boys laughed quietly as they all guessed the meaning of Jack's words. There was a bustle in the rear of the *shul*, and Leibele, guessing that the cantor was coming, tapped his foot for complete attention.

The young choir leader glanced down the aisle and his hands subconsciously fell to his sides. Such a spectacle he had never seen. A preponderous person came walking, attired in the customary gown and high hat, with the prayer shawl wrapped around his neck in a manner that one usually wraps flannel when afflicted with a severe cold. As he came nearer Leibele noticed that his cheeks were puffed out as if making ready to blow at something with all his breath. Perhaps, thought Leibele, it was the man's mannerism. But no, he came upon the pulpit, stood for some few minutes, and still made no attempt to alter his features. The boys were just as abashed by this spectacle as their leader—they simply stared at the man.

Without warning, the cantor turned completely around and spat on the floor. The boys were too disgusted to follow this action to the ground when a noise as of marbles dropping attracted them. They could not resist

looking down and what they saw sent them into hysterical laughter. The man had been chewing a full box of cough drops which he later explained made his voice flexible. Leibele was filled with misgivings as he saw the turn this concert was taking and did not know what to expect next. He silenced his group and was thankful that they had not been the only ones who laughed, for all around the pulpit people were still laughing.

Leibele thought that the cantor would be ruffled by this; but not he. He seemed to be completely unaffected by their ridicule.

He turned to Leibele and asked for the tone. The latter, anxious to start with his work and inwardly hoping that everything would go on smoothly now, gave him the correct tone. The cantor attempted to sing, but he seemed to have forgotten the note just given him. He motioned again to his choir leader to repeat the tone. Leibele did so, and the cantor began to sing. As Leibele's trained ear caught the notes, he wondered whether it sounded as badly to anyone else in the audience. One look at Jack confirmed his belief that the cantor was off pitch and singing absolutely false. Leibele continued with his leading, fighting against the impulse to stop that terrible singing—to do that would be unethical and would disgrace the cantor.

There was a loud bang, as a voice thundered "Cantor, stop. Please start all over again." It was the president of the *shul* who commanded this.

With that the boys giggled and the audience went into an uproar. Jack was turning all colors in an attempt to stop the laughter that somehow refused to stay in.

Leibele gave him a stern look and he made a superhuman effort to be composed.

Unaware of the insult that the command to start again implied, the cantor signalled Leibele to give him the tone again. In a resigned manner the young leader complied with the request.

"You're wasting your time. He'll never sing this right," whispered Jack.

"Be quiet. Who got me into this if not you?"

The cantor, for all his chewing of cough drops, was very hoarse after a while and Leibele worked frantically to make the choir sing louder in places where the cantor sang flat. His efforts to cover that false singing took every ounce of strength away from him, and after that *maariv* service, Leibele hoped that the cantor would at least do better on folk songs. But he need not have worried on that account—the cantor could not sing at all. He was completely hoarse, and no amount of entreaties from the president and directors had any effect. He nonchalantly took out another box of cough drops and emptied them into his mouth.

The president was frantic. The people shifted noisily in their seats as they divined that something was wrong with the performer.

"Leibele, what shall I do?" moaned the president.

"I wish I could help you. Shall I have the choir sing some compositions?"

"That is very kind of you. But we were supposed to have a cantor sing here tonight. Could you perhaps sing something?"

Leibele explained the impossibility of such a thing. He had been forbidden to use his voice for that purpose

and nothing could change his strict adherence to that advice. Helplessly the president stood by, as if ready to receive the worst ridicule from the congregation.

A commotion behind his back made the choir leader turn around to see the cause of the disturbance. One glance was sufficient for him to grasp the meaning of this. Jack was holding Arthur back with one hand, while the other was clamped tightly on his mouth.

"What is the matter, Jack?"

"The worst. Arthur wants to sing."

"Did you say the young man wants to sing?" asked the president unbelievably. "Why, that would be fine. Come right ahead, young fellow."

With a despairing gesture, Jack let his culprit escape him. The latter straightened himself up in a dignified manner and with a hateful look at Jack, proceeded to the head of the platform.

"What do we do now?" questioned Jack.

"Nothing, just let ourselves be tortured," answered Leibeke.

Arthur motioned to the choir that they would not be needed.

"A one man show," said Jack sarcastically.

"If I had as much nerve as he, I'd be in opera," commented another boy.

Arthur announced his number. His voice was so incoherent that the audience did not know whether the title of the song was "He laughs," or "The end of the world." However, they settled themselves in their seats hoping for the best.

Jack's prophesy proved a true one. A half hour after he started, Arthur was still singing. No one knew whe-

ther that was actually the length of the song, or whether he was so enthused with his own singing that he was reluctant to stop. The audience soon tired of the monotonous singing and they began to talk to each other about matters not at all relating to this concert. The president seeing all this was shrinking deeper in his seat.

"He's taxing my patience to the utmost. What do you suggest we do with him?" asked Jack of Leibeles.

"If only we had some hook," mused Leibeles, "similar to the ones they have on the vaudeville stage, then we could simply hook him off the platform."

The song finally came to an end, and by that time the singer was a wreck. His shirt was opened, his tie was flying in all directions, and his face was perspiring freely. He bowed profusely, though no applause could be heard. That, however, did not discourage Arthur. At some length he announced his next number.

"Ladies and gentlemen. My next number will be the prologue from Pagliacci."

The people turned to each other, as each asked the other what the young man had said. They had neither heard the name nor did they understand the meaning of the words that followed. Thoroughly disgusted, the rabbi of the *shul* picked himself up and walked into the men's room. While Arthur was gesticulating wildly, the directors got up and followed the rabbi. The audience did exactly what they had previously done—they began a discussion of commonplace matters.

That also did not discourage Arthur. His song ended, though no applause was forthcoming, he announced that his next number would be an aria from a German

opera. He was about to begin when a man stepped up and said, "Just one minute, young man. I will take over the program."

Arthur was fuming with rage and refused to go off. The people applauded wildly for him to comply with the newcomer's request. There were comments, "Get him off. He sang enough. We don't understand what he is singing." The odds were against him and he very unceremoniously was led off by Leibele and Jack.

"I told you. Once he starts, an earthquake could not get him off. He either exhausts himself or his audience."

"Jack, I shall never doubt your word. And we must somehow get rid of that guy."

"But you haven't seen the end of this concert yet. Do you know who that newcomer is?"

"No, I don't. Don't tell me there will be more fireworks here tonight."

"No, not fireworks, but a war. That man happens to be a cantor who is constantly at war with the cantor who officiated tonight. He will never let this one sing at his concert."

Jack did not have to say any more. For at that moment the first cantor promptly got upon the platform and without much ado smacked the other man soundly in the face. The other lifted his arms in retaliation and a fierce yet comical brawl started. There were screams of "Police," "Fire," "Murder." The protective hand of the law was not long in coming, and the two cantors were escorted home by police. Poor Leibele was left to end the concert. He was so completely disgusted with the whole night that he promptly finished with the Jewish anthem, and

that done he said to Jack, "Come on, let's get out of here. I need some air."

\* \* \* \* \*

The effects of the concert did not wear off so easily. Leibele vowed he would not make any more concerts unless it was with a star cantor. In vain did Jack argue that it had no reflection on the choir. His leader was unmovable—his choir was not out to have fun at concerts; they were out to make a name for themselves. The more Jack pleaded that he could take on work with certain cantors, the more Leibele refused.

"Then there is just one other thing to do. Let us go out working with the band."

"There you have something. Just you get us the engagements and see if I turn you down."

Somewhat appeased, Jack set out to find work for the band. He could even sell shares for the Brooklyn Bridge. In a short time he had procured an engagement on one of the popular excursion boats.

Leibele looked forward to this for as yet he had never performed at such a place. The thought of creating music while floating down a river made a romantic picture indeed. The band came to Leibele's house and together they started out. It looked like adventure indeed when they beheld the beautiful new boat packed to capacity with a merry crowd.

The players' manner was professional, thanks to the unrelenting eye of their leader. They knew their music, for rehearsals had been frequent and long. From the first note that they played the people on deck were pleased. Soon some even came over and made special requests of

popular songs. They were obliged and the dancers were more than satisfied.

While thus leading his band, Leibele detected that the saxophonist was not playing. Completely bewildered, Leibele turned and motioned him to play. Instead the other put his instrument on a side, and resting his head on it, made as if to doze off.

"Jack, see what's wrong with the guy."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, he's very temperamental."

"What do you mean? I need him in this piece. The saxophone is the main thing here."

"He gets that way once in a while. Should he not feel inclined to play, nothing can make him."

"Why did you not tell me that before? We can't use a guy like that. This is a band, not a lunatic asylum."

"I'm sorry, Leibele, but he is the only saxophonist I was able to get."

"He's going to get thrown out of this band just as soon as we get through here."

"You're the boss," shrugged Jack.

Leibele glared at the player, who by this time had his eyes closed, and from all appearances was fast asleep.

That night when they had once more landed on New York soil, Leibele called the saxophonist to him.

"Now, can you tell me why you suddenly went to sleep? Did you come to rest here or did you come to work?"

"I wasn't in the mood to play. And anyway who can play with a boat rocking you to and fro. I don't think I like this kind of work."

His leader looked at him unable to make up his mind as to whether the boy was teasing him or whether he was

just plain crazy. He paid him for the day and told him that unless he mended his ways he could not remain with them. The other turned on his heels, uttered not a word, and walked away by himself.

"That's a fine musician you picked up. Where did you get him, in the crazy house?"

"Oh, all right, you don't nave to rub it in. I'll reform him for you."

"But make sure he doesn't get worse," and Leibele laughed.

Some few days later the boys were admiring some articles in a pawn shop in the neighborhood when Jack's eyes espied a familiar object—it was the saxophone.

A new player was found and rehearsals were again necessary. During one of these rehearsals, Jack burst in and seeing the angry look in his leader's eyes hurriedly began to tell him of another job he had undertaken.

"Honest, Leibele, it's not an excuse. I actually booked a dance for next week. Come on, cool off and give me credit."

Leibele was angry—he hated to have any of his players come late. It was unfair to the other fellows. But who could be angry with his friend?

"This better be the truth. Come on, give details."

"It is a beautiful place in Brooklyn. It is run by a social club and strangers are invited provided they pay fifty cents admission."

"The way you raged I thought it was at the Hotel Astor. However, we may sometimes be there too."

"Amen," mocked Jack, and he proceeded to his customary place.

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To the band the atmosphere of a dance was not entirely a new one, for at their social club dances were frequent but with less ceremony. Here the girls were dressed in their best, while almost all the boys wore dark suits.

In the midst of leading, Leibele felt himself pushed out of position. He turned about and met a pair of laughing blue eyes. He noticed that they belonged to a young girl who was dancing with a tall young man. To all appearances her dancing partner had not noticed the girl's actions. The young leader made nothing of this, thinking it had been quite unintentional. During the next number, he was jostled again, and this time Leibele was very much annoyed.

During intermission, he talked it over with Jack.

"What would you do in a case like this?"

"Frankly, if a girl flirted with me, and if she were nice enough, I definitely think I should reciprocate."

"That is not what I meant. I am not here to pick up girls and you had better feel the same way about it. Professionals don't do things like that."

"All right, so just ignore it."

"But it is embarrassing. I am sure other people noticed it."

"All I can say is that her escort had better not see too well."

The band started once more, and when the same couple danced past the leader, he noticed that the girl appeared very much dejected. Good for her! exalted Leibele. Apparently she had been quarreling with her boy friend, who by this time had noticed her conduct.

He continued with his leading in a very happy frame of mind. Things were going nicely, the crowd seemed

to be pleased with their playing, and no doubt it would lead to other and better things. Every once in a while he would turn completely about to catch the expressions on the dancers' faces. Once he turned and stared directly into the face of a scowling young fellow. That would not have affected Leibele at all, but he immediately recognized him as the girl's partner.

"Can you play the 'St. Louis Blues?' My friends want you to play the 'St. Louis Blues'."

"I shall be very glad to do so, if I have the piece with me," answered the leader in a professional manner.

"Say, no fancy pants around here. I didn't ask you whether you have it here or not. I said play it!"

Jack stepped up to Leibele and the two friends surmised what was brewing here. The other was completely surrounded by his friends. The looks on the latter's faces showed plainly what they wanted—and it wasn't music.

The boys in the band were no cowards, but they were completely outnumbered. And what was worse, if a brawl started they would probably be blamed and their remuneration would never come.

Leibele was cool in this crisis, as he made fruitless efforts to look for the song in question. Well he knew that he did not have it, but he was just playing for time.

The tough guy was exasperated as he guessed that the leader was just holding him up, and probably trying to make a fool of him. Everyone was trying to make a fool of him, he thought in self pity. This thought brought recollections and an unreasonable jealousy. He grabbed the music sheets from Leibele and tossed them in all directions.

"Pick up all those music sheets!" commanded a cool and determined voice.

The miracle that Leibele was waiting for had come.

The tough hombres looked around and were completely surprised to see about twenty-five huskies banded behind the individual that gave the command. They were broadboned young fellows from whose expressions one could tell that to them a fight was not a strange thing nor an infrequent one, and that they definitely would not hesitate to engage in one right now.

The original belligerents were somewhat taken aback. They were in turn outnumbered, and even if they were to fight in equal numbers, they would get the worst of it.

One of the gang, not wishing to see his leader so humiliated, proceeded hurriedly to pick up the music in question. But the one who was dictating terms was not satisfied, and just as soon as everything was off the floor, he took them in his hand and scattered them all over.

"Now you pick them up!" and he pointed to the leader.

The spectators were becoming amused by this, and a ringing laughter resounded through the place that did not stop for some minutes. Strangely enough, he did as he was directed, and having finished, turned on his heel as if to go.

"Now what song did you want the band to play?" taunted the one in power.

The other muttered something under his breath, which in all probability was not a prayer, and as he and his gang sulked away, Leibele turned to his benefactor.

"I really can't thank you enough. One never knows where his friends are."

"Gee, that was magnificent. Say, didn't I see you somewheres?" questioned Jack.

"Oh, you probably saw me at your other affairs. You see, we live in your neighborhood and we go along to every place where you play. You know, just in case." And the boy winked knowingly.

"No, that is not what I mean. I know you from somewhere. I got it, aren't you Seymour's kid brother?"

"Yes, but do I have to admit it?" and they all laughed.

Everything resumed its former character as the band once more played fearlessly and the dancers came on again and again to whirl with their partners. Jack was still excited from the recent experience.

"Well, that was a narrow escape." As he saw Leibele's face clouding, he continued, "But it didn't turn out so bad after all."

"All of which convinces me of one thing—I shall go back to cantorial. It is much safer."

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Though he did not immediately go back to his cantorial music, yet tucked away in a corner of his mind was the determination to go back to it soon and make it his life's work. He probably would have gone back to it immediately had it not been for his piano teacher's intervention. When Leibele mentioned his decision to resume his studies with Mr. Himmelstine, the instructor, Mr. Berg, fairly tore his hair. That was an old-fashioned method, it would not do for one as talented as his pupil.

"But you do not know Mr. Himmelstine. He is the greatest teacher we have for cantorial. His methods may be old-fashioned but they are still the best. I propose to

render my services to an orthodox or conservative public anyway."

"Yes, my boy, you may be right. But do not forget that these are modern times. People will expect more of you. Whereas a cantor may have been able to please with his heartfelt rendition of prayers, the public will not be satisfied with that alone. You must know music, my friend; you must be a musician as well."

"I can see what you mean. I never thought of this before."

"And further," continued Mr. Berg, "if you truly have a deep feeling for cantorial work, you will probably want to compose numbers, and that is also where you will want a much greater musical background than Mr. Himmelstine can give you. By all means go back to him, but not before you have studied voice culture and music composition."

The boy's parents had been listening to the conversation, and Rose agreed fully with Mr. Berg.

"Do you perhaps know of someone who would do this for our son?" questioned Rose.

"Yes, I know several. But I should prefer an Italian, a Mr. Cubelli. He is a wizard. But he is also expensive."

Details of fee were discussed and the parents decided that Leibele should have the best. Here Morris saw an opportunity of doing what he had always planned to do—finance Leibele's musical career.

"Ma, now that I am working and making a good salary, why not let me undertake to pay for his lessons?"

"I see no urgent reason for that," Rose answered. "We have saved up money from Leibele's earnings to pay for his lessons."

"Supposing you save that for his cantorial studies and let me pay the Italian instructor. So that every time he sings an opera, I'll be able to take some credit for it too."

Rose could see that Morris genuinely wished to do as he said. Now that he could not realize his ambition to become a rabbi, he, more than the others, wanted to have a part in his brother's career.

"All right. We'll let Morris pay for the lessons."

Leibele could find no words to thank his brother. He managed a "Thanks very much, guy. Hope I can do something big for you some day."

"That's all right," answered Morris awkwardly. "When you become a big man, promise I'll be your manager."

"That's easy. Only you'll have to wait some."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Between your piano playing, cantorial aptitude and opera studies, you should emerge a great success in no time."

## CHAPTER X.

LEIBELE met a short, dark, gesticulating man of about thirty-five when he knocked at the address Mr. Berg had given him. With much ceremony his new instructor showed him into the house and quickly closed the door. His movements were quick and unexpected so that he gave his pupil the feeling that he could transport him from one place to another without his even knowing about it.

After that first visit, which was mostly taken up with a discussion of Leibele's ambitions, the boy took his leave. The instructor's impression was that the young man would prove an apt pupil, and Leibele's impression of his instructor was a one word description: "Temperamental."

From the first lesson on, Leibele decided that Mr. Cubelli could teach. He was unrelenting until his lesson was rendered in a perfect manner. Sometimes Leibele would find himself there for a much longer period than his lesson called for, but his instructor was unaware of time. However, the pupil could see that his teacher was pleased with him. Mr. Cubelli no longer used that barking manner and was more condescending toward him.

"Supposing I should ask you something. Are you really going to be what you told me—a cantor?"

"Yes," answered Leibele, "when I have completed my three years' study with you, I shall surely go back to my other studies. You see I expect to make it my profession."

"Oh, that is too bad. For I see for you possibilities in opera."

"You flatter me, Mr. Cubeli, and I thank you for the compliment. But even if I should have the qualifications, and assuming I could reach that goal, I could never be an opera singer."

"Oh, now you talk nonsense, or perhaps I do not understand, eh?"

"I believe it's the latter. Should I ever become an opera singer, I would have to go against my religion."

"Oh, I'm sorry. But I still do not understand."

"Well, to put it simply, when one is in opera one has to perform on Friday nights and Saturdays, and that is forbidden by our faith."

"What, you would let a little thing like that stand in your way?" screamed the other, as he saw his hopes for Leibele's career taking flight.

"I shall not be angry with you for saying that, but that doesn't happen to be a little thing. Not only is the idea of violating the Sabbath out of the question, but my parents and family would never get over it if I ever thought of it."

The instructor muttered apologies and argued that it was still not reason enough. This was a modern world and a career was above all else. Leibele just continued to smile at the latter's frantic gestures, and patting him

on the shoulder, for by this time Mr. Cubeli was near tears, bade him good-day.

Leibele's studies continued there for two and one-half instead of three years. He felt in himself a great urge to go back to his first and greatest love—cantorial music.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele was happy now that he had made his final decision. It would be good to go back to his old teacher and go over everything he had ever learned. As he thought about it, he had an overwhelming desire to go directly there and say hello to him.

"So you have come back to me. I am very happy to see you."

Leibele was choked with emotion at these kind words. As he looked at his teacher, he noticed how he had aged in these few years. He looked an old man indeed.

Fond smiles and loving looks passed from teacher to pupil and from pupil to teacher. They seemed so happy together, now that they were reunited.

"As if you did not guess that some day I'd knock on your window for help."

"I'll tell you the truth, Leibele, I have been hearing that you were doing so many things, and doing them well, that I thought you had given up your one-time ambition to be a cantor."

"I only did that to cover up my impatience to start with you all over again. I'm sorry I wasn't able to come to see you. I had no idea you really missed me."

"Oh well, as long as you are here. Tell me, when are we starting again? For you see, my son, I am getting

old, and you had better hurry up or I won't be here to teach you."

"Nonsense," mocked the boy, repressing the tears from coming to his eyes, "you will be here for many years. Why you'll even see me when I grow a beard."

"That is quite a jest, but thank you for your wishes. Only you must never grow a beard—you have too nice a mouth," and they both laughed.

In going back to Mr. Himmelstine it occurred to Leibele that he would merely go over what he had previously learned. The old man, on the other hand, led his pupil into new and broader studies. Leibele wondered whether all this was necessary.

"Mr. Himmelstine, I hope you will take no offense at what I am going to ask you. I was under the impression that a resumé would be sufficient. As I can judge, what you are teaching me now is altogether new and will take more than I was figuring on."

"I was wondering when you would ask me that. First you must trust in my judgment, and then, Leibele, you must realize that when you venture forth into your profession now, you will be judged in an entirely different light. True your voice is better than it had been before, but that alone is not sufficient."

"In other words, you mean that I have to study further? That my previous knowledge of cantorial is not sufficient?"

"That is exactly what I mean. When you were a boy cantor you needed very little to satisfy the public in comparison with what you need now. You were able, with your pleasing voice and perfect rendition of what I taught you, to please your audience completely. And that be-

cause you had one great factor in your favor—you were a child. Anything you would have sung, even had it not perhaps been so good, would have put you across.”

“I think I am beginning to see what you mean.”

“Now,” his teacher continued, “you will have to know more and no allowances will be made. You are a young man and people will no longer make any allowances. Either you will know your work and win success or you will not and be a failure. You might perhaps get away with it. But I shall see that you take no chances. It is my ambition that you know everything it is in my power to teach you. In the meantime by all means take on work—whether it is Sabbath services or concert work. By experience you will know your shortcomings. Then you and I will thrash them out. You, yourself, will detect your deficiencies.”

“And I thought I knew cantorial music.”

“I see I gave you the wrong impression. You do know what I taught you, and more. But there is no end to this study. I want you to be perfect.”

Leibele was stimulated by this talk, and impulsively reached out his hand to clasp the hand of his teacher.

“Whatever you say,” spoke the young man wisely.

“And when I’m through with you, you will be able to stand up under the most trying competition—for you will have to compete with the much older and great cantors. I know you will do me honor when you meet up with them.”

“I can see I have a staunch fan already. One million like you and I’d be set.”

“With God’s help you will have them. And you can mark my words.”

Leibele decided to follow the older man's advice to the letter. There was a great deal of logic in everything he had said.

One day Leibele came in for his regular session with Mr. Himmelstine and noticed that there was a stranger there. As yet none of the other boys had arrived.

"Come here, Leibele." Turning to the stranger Mr. Himmelstine said, "This is the young cantor I spoke to you about."

The stranger, who happened to be a manager, appraised the young man. He wondered whether the teacher had been sincere with him. True he had expected to see a young fellow, but this one was probably about eighteen, at the most, and then he was being liberal.

Leibele guessed what was in the manager's mind and a smile came to the corners of his mouth. As the stranger shook his head, the young cantor saw clearly how youth, that was so priceless, was only a hindrance to himself.

"Mr. Himmelstine, I do not wish to seem ungrateful or critical of your opinion, but isn't this boy too young for my purposes." In his mind he meant, "How could such a youngster be good enough?"

"You must not be misled by appearances. I'll grant you he looks more like a scrapper, but he is nevertheless the best pupil I have. There is no one I have here who has a sweeter voice or a more appealing way of chanting his prayers."

The manager was impressed by such praise from Mr. Himmelstine, but nevertheless decided to be cautious. This Friday night and Saturday services he was financing in the Bronx was in no ordinary *shul*. The members in this particular one were orthodox and would consequently be

very severe judges. Voice was not as important as feeling.

"I should like to ask one favor. Would the young man sing a prayer for me?"

"Would you, Leibele?" asked the teacher, in a voice that implied "Oblige the man, and give him the surprise of his life."

Leibele was not quick in complying with the request. He was becoming a bit indignant at the man's audacity in doubting his teacher's word. Also his personal pride was at stake. Darn it, did a cantor have to have a long beard and glassy eyes in order to be impressive. His indignation soon turned to a grim determination to bring that manager to his terms.

"Is there any prayer you particularly want me to sing?" asked Leibele sarcastically.

The manager turned helplessly to the teacher for he detected the note of contempt in the younger man's words. The older man smiled and just said, "Anything, Leibele, anything you wish."

The young cantor made no effort to pick anything special. The first prayer that came to his mind he sang. And as he sang, he forgot that this was a test of his ability. The meaning of the familiar words took hold of him and he gave the prayer life and beauty. His teacher looked as if one enraptured—he had done well by his pupil. The manager looked long at the mere boy to make sure that it was indeed he who was singing. He could have sworn, had he not known the identity of the singer, that it was an older man singing, possibly one of the great cantors, so beautiful and ringing was the voice and so heartfelt the rendition. He nodded his head to Mr. Himmelstine, who was quite oblivious to all about him,

except the singing. He was beaming all over, and one could almost detect a youthful enthusiasm in the aged man.

\* \* \* \* \*

The manager, Mr. Sklar, decided to accept this youngster. First, however, he would redeem himself in the boy's eyes. In preparation for the services in the Bronx, he ordered a gigantic sign hung in front of the *shul* and had printed large posters with Leibele's picture on it. There was not a person in the neighborhood who was not aware of the fact that on that particular Friday night and Saturday the youngest cantor in the world, Leibele Waldman, would officiate in the neighborhood synagogue.

The advance sale was very heartening and Mr. Sklar knew that he had picked a winner. Friday rolled around and the *shul* was filled to capacity. The expensive advertisement had paid and now he hoped that his judgment of the cantor had been good.

Leibele had anticipated these days, but when he was actually there his characteristic nervousness before a performance gripped him. Only now more so than ever. His teacher's words kept recurring and he wondered whether he would stand the test. In other words, Leibele was not confident. What added to his uncomfortable feeling were the comments all around him. Some cantors, attracted by the wide publicity and curious to see for themselves, paid admission to hear the young cantor. Before services they grouped themselves around him and Leibele felt fairly stifled.

"Well, Leibele, you must be good to get yourself a manager like Mr. Sklar. Why, he manages the biggest."

In vain did he try to explain his meeting with the manager.

"You know you are not a boy now; you will have to be good to please these severe critics."

"If you please this audience, then there is no doubt but that you are a good cantor."

In the few minutes that he had left to himself these remarks kept hammering in his ears. He paced up and down. He hummed to himself. He was glad there was no one near him now.

"If I were you, I wouldn't listen to those mugs."

Startled, Leibele turned around to see who it was. The young man was strange to him yet his manner was familiar. He glanced a second time at the stranger and the latter just stood waiting for some friendly word from Leibele. But the young cantor was not in such a mood now. He continued his pacing until he was ready to go on the pulpit.

A hush fell on the audience as the young cantor walked in. They had expected to see a much older man and this one looked more like a vaudeville performer. Leibele became uneasy as he guessed the reaction of the people. He looked in front of him and perceived the old patriarchs, with long white beards, leaning forward in their seats so as not to miss a minute of this service. They seemed more receptive—not as curious or critical as the younger element in this group. He would sing for them, determined Leibele, and the rest can think what they wished. He imagined he was in his father's *shul*, not as a performer, but as one of the congregation. He pictured the flowing prayer shawls on the bent backs of the devout Hebrews and the fervent prayers that issued from their

mouths. With this scene in his mind Leibele began to chant—not to impress the people but to give every word meaning. He restrained his voice—he was chanting the prayer with very little melody. The people looked at one another not understanding this type of singing. As he proceeded his voice came more into evidence until the *shul* was filled with heavenly singing. And now he forgot about everything but his singing and the meaning of the words he was chanting. He felt warm all over and his voice flowed easily without any obvious effort on his part. He bent his voice any way he wanted to and he found himself doing things with it that had not been taught him. The audience sat spellbound, surprised, and thrilled at the same time. Some had their mouths open, while the old men sat nodding their heads—to them he was perfect.

Leibele drank in the praise that was showered on him. The aged men trembled as they shook his hand and the young cantor experienced a satisfaction of one whose goal is reached. He looked around anxiously for his teacher but he was nowhere near him. Leibele spied him groping through the crowd, coming toward him.

Breathlessly the old man reached his pupil's side, and extended his hand.

"Congratulations, Leibele, I am indeed proud of you."

"Thank you, Mr. Himmelstine. Looks as if my audience does not think that I have to study any more."

Mr. Himmelstine's face clouded, though he did not know whether his pupil was serious or whether he was jesting. He hoped that he would not be swayed by all this admiration.

"But your audience is not your teacher. Don't you

let this go to your head, and give you foolish notions that you don't have to study any more. But perhaps you know better than your teacher."

Leibele detected the hurt note in this remark.

"I am sorry that I said that. I was merely jesting."

Reassured, the old man stood behind Leibele, watching him all the while that he shook hands with members of the audience who came over to congratulate the young cantor and to wish him future success. He scrutinized the expression on his face to see if the boy was becoming proud; but no, he was accepting the good wishes humbly and thanking every one in turn.

"Well, it's over now, how do you feel?"

This odd question was directed at Leibele. He stared at the fellow who asked him that and recognized the young man who accosted him before the performance. It amused him to have this stranger speak to him thus.

"I feel fine. How do you feel?"

Leibele couldn't make this fellow out and decided to speak to him in like manner.

Much encouraged by this question, the young man attached himself to the young cantor for the remainder of the evening. He followed the cantor to his dressing room where he changed into his street clothes, and when Leibele was once more in the street headed for his hotel the other still tagged along.

"I have a passion for cantorial music," blurted out the stranger, whose name was Jules.

"Every spare moment I have I spend in the cantors' meeting room. There was so much speculation about you all this week that I determined I must hear you. I

confess I came to ridicule, but I am filled with admiration."

Jules said this with his head held high and weighing every word. Leibele acknowledged the compliment, but what really struck him was the way this fellow spoke and conducted himself. His manner was almost regal.

"If I ever get to know this fellow well, I will call him Duke," mused Leibele.

"You come and tell me what they say about my pupil now," defied Mr. Himmelstine.

As soon as the old teacher had left them, Jules went into a complete history of himself. He had no father or mother, and he lived with a sister. He was not employed regularly because he had a heart ailment. Leibele was at once compassionate.

"And you would never think it, looking at me?" boasted Jules, the *Duke*. "And that is the way it should be. Otherwise how would I be able to spend so much time with cantors and listen to their singing."

At last Leibele was getting somewhere in learning about this young man. As Jules went into an enthusiastic description of the concerts where he had heard this great cantor and that mediocre one, appraising the talents of one and degrading the abilities of another, Leibele wondered whether he did not feign his heart trouble for the purpose of following more closely on the heels of these cantors and bask in their company.

The place where Leibele was to stay came into view and soon he was mounting the steps. Jules was close behind him. Near the door he stopped.

"Well, good *shabbes*. I thought I'd see you safely to your door."

"Thank you. Do you live near here?" asked Leibele.

"No, I live on the East Side not far from you. I'm sleeping in the baths tonight. And see, I brought along an alarm clock—so that I don't oversleep in the morning. I shall not miss a note of your singing."

"One million like you, that is all I need," muttered Leibele.

"What did you say? I thought I heard you say something."

"That was nothing. Just something I thought of. Good *shabbes*. See you tomorrow."

After the Saturday service, Jules could be seen strutting down the aisle to his new idol. His attitude seemed to say "Make way, make way for me. You are not as important as I."

People made way for him, for they guessed that he must be some one important to be coming down the aisle in such regal manner. The president of the *shul* bowed to him for he too had that impression. Leibele could see the homage this fellow was getting and he laughed within himself.

The *Duke* was like a changed person when he reached Leibele's side. He grew soft voiced and meek. He mumbled that the services were inspiring—wonderful. And he grew silent as eager hands clasped Leibele's, wishing him success in his career. A self-satisfied expression settled itself on Jules's face and he nodded acquiescence, to each compliment that was paid to his new-found idol.

Starting with the following day, Jules became Leibele's shadow. As soon as he left Leibele's side, he hurried to the cantors' meeting place. There he would praise his favorite cantor to the skies, which would lead

to arguments with the fans of other cantors. And Jules was not tolerant. If he admired one cantor, he could not see how anyone could possibly laud another. He had long and heated discussions which, had they not been interrupted, would have led to fist fights.

All these disagreements would lead to one thing—a tea session. But the tea would not appease Jules. Just as soon as he emptied his glass, he would start all over again.

On this particular day, Jules reached for his glass of tea and fumbled for the sugar bowl.

“Now who handed me granulated sugar?” He pounded the table with fury.

This tempest was met with laughter all around, and in a little while one of the combatants, with many flowing gestures, brought over the sugar bowl filled with lumps of sugar, and bowing low said “Lumps for the *Duke*; long live royalty.”

“What was that you called me?” bellowed Jules.

“Nothing less than your idol has nicknamed you, your highness,” laughed the other.

Jules could not understand, and it was explained to him that Leibebe had jokingly referred to him as the *Duke*. Jules was hurt at this joke. He pushed his tea away, completely dejected and disillusioned.

“See what you get for sticking up for your god?” Nothing but being made fun of. But the cantor I admire, he calls me Mister.”

He wasn't going to let that monkey taunt him. Forcing a smile to his lips, he answered, “Well, my cantor at least nicknames me *Duke*. Shall I tell you what your can-

tor possibly calls you?" And he proceeded to guess. The group laughed heartily.

When he saw that the other was squelched, he drank his tea and took his departure. He would go to Leibele directly for an explanation. He would cease friendship with him entirely if only he did not admire his singing so much. It was too late to go back on this idealism—he had praised him too much among the cantors. To reverse this opinion would only bring taunts and ridicule.

He burst in when Leibele was rehearsing some piece. Instead of sitting down and listening, as was his wont, he stopped Leibele and fumed.

"Is it true that you have been making fun of me behind my back?"

Leibele stared at him. There were more personalities to this individual than he had surmised.

"I don't know what you mean, but what did I say?"

"You have been calling me *Duke* in front of other people."

"Well, what's your objection to that? What's wrong with the name? However, if you resent it, I'm sorry. I shall not call you it again."

Now that Jules found himself in his idol's presence he felt that his god could do no wrong. *Duke* was a fascinating nickname—it commanded respect. Let the monkeys laugh—he liked the name.

"Oh, it's all right. I think I rather like it. I never did like the name Jules." *Duke, Duke*—not bad.

And *Duke* it remained.

\* \* \* \* \*

A strange person sat listening to the argument that *Duke* was having with another cantor's fan. He sat and

wondered how long it would be before glasses and sugar bowls would be flying in all directions.

He listened very attentively every time that "Leibele Waldman" was mentioned. From the argument he gathered that the young cantor in question was an American born boy, that his cantorial training was extensive, and that his voice and rendition of prayers were unusual. He listened to the concessions of the one *Duke* was battling with.

"All right. So with his ringing voice, his technique, and extraordinary saying, he still does not measure up to my cantor. Why, my favorite is twice as old as your mere boy."

"All the more reason why mine is a greater cantor than yours. If he can thrill an audience at his age, can you imagine what he will do when he is as old as your cantor?"

"Young man, come here please," interrupted the stranger.

*Duke* came over and smiled in a friendly fashion. He hoped that this individual was also a fan of Leibele's and would uphold everything he had said.

"I have been listening to your staunch defense of this young cantor. I am so curious I should like to meet the 'genius'."

"I don't think I could take you to him. But if you wish, you can come with me to his next performance," invited *Duke*.

"Well, I don't think I can wait that long. I must leave for Boston in two days. You see, I am looking for a capable cantor for a High Holiday position in Boston. I am a manager."

*Duke* was beside himself with happiness as he saw an opportunity to render Leibele a service. He would show him that he could accomplish things for him. Perhaps he would some day be his manager. His thoughts ran away with him, so that his answers to the manager's questions were uncertain and incoherent.

"I think you had better have the young cantor come to my hotel tomorrow after lunch, if he will be so kind. We can then talk things over."

*Duke* grabbed the card, and muttering "Surely, we will," ran off with it to Leibele.

His trip to the cantor's house sobered him a bit. It would not do to act so amateurish. He predetermined his conduct before Leibele. First he would greet him, and without further word would extend the manager's card to him, as if it were an every-day thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele, that's the card, turned it over and handed it back.

"Leibele, that's for you. A manager from Boston is looking for a good cantor. Let's go."

"Go where? How do you know he wants me?"

"Don't ask questions." *Duke* became authoritative and gave his words suitable action. "I have already spoken with the manager. It's almost settled."

Leibele knew *Duke* well enough to guess what was behind the exterior. *Duke's* hand was shaking from excitement and his friend could easily see that. He also knew him to run away with his thoughts. Nevertheless, the card was in *Duke's* possession and it was worth looking into. Of course he had not anticipated officiating the

holidays yet, but Mr. Himmelstine could easily prepare him in the interim.

So Leibele dressed and set out with *Duke* to the nearest phone booth. A pleasant voice answered the phone, and invited the cantor with his friend to his hotel where they could talk.

When Leibele arrived there, he was impressed with the suite. A beautiful piano enticed him to its keys. Asking for permission, he began to play some of the pieces Mr. Berg had taught him. He soon, however, switched to Hebrew traditional and he could see the effect his music had on his two companions. They stood over him afraid lest any note escape them.

"It would not be a bad idea if you sang a piece. Make this sort of an audition," suggested the manager.

Leibele was in a happy mood and this stranger had a way of making him feel right at home. Leibele had the inclination to sing. He probably would have done so even if the other had not been a manager and had not asked him.

The room became transformed as the ivories created the music in Leibele's heart. Soon Leibele himself felt transported to a different atmosphere. The familiar prayer shawls and the pious Hebrews came to his eyes. He began to chant, first with very little voice, then on full voice. Here was no critical audience. Leibele played with his voice—he performed feats with it. He ended, and turned apologetic eyes to the manager for being so carried away with his own singing.

"Bravo," applauded *Duke*, "I never heard you sing like that before."

"To tell you the truth, I never heard myself sing like that," joked Leibele.

"Young man, I shall say just one thing—you're the cantor I want."

"I had completely forgotten I was on trial here. I am glad you liked my singing."

"Can you leave tonight with me? I should like you to meet the board and sign the contract."

"I guess I can," decided Leibele.

They made arrangements for their departure. *Duke* pleaded with Leibele to be taken along.

"Can you leave with me? Are you sure you are not needed in New York?" Leibele asked him.

"You bet I can leave. Anyway you might need me there," replied *Duke*.

They arranged to leave from Leibele's house. At the appointed hour *Duke* was still missing. Fearing that he would miss the train, Leibele started out without him. *Duke* on the other hand could not resist the temptation to acquaint the cantors and their fans of Leibele's good luck. He stopped in at the meeting place for a while and taunted them a bit. Soon cutting remarks turned to arguments and *Duke* was not going to let anyone get the best of any controversy. Further he could not stand the jealousy of these people when actual proof of Leibele's recognition was staring them in the face. He stormed and fumed until the passing of time was the least of his worries. When he became aware of the hour, he was ready for a massacre—he guessed that they had teased him so that he'd miss his train.

*Duke* never saw Boston.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele came to Boston a week before the holidays in order to rehearse with the choir that was provided him. As he approached the choir leader's house, a sound came to his ears as of dogs whining.

"What is that peculiar noise?" asked the cantor of Mr. Selvin, the manager.

The other coughed in embarrassment—this young fellow was proving to be quite a critic. No cantor had ever complained of the choir. They were glad to be in the spotlight and did not wish for a choir that would take the honors away from them. To tell the truth, Mr. Selvin knew that the choir was quite bad, but to have the cantor disclose that to him was a surprise.

"I am sure they will please you after they really sing for you. You see, they are merely rehearsing now."

Leibele knew the other did not believe in his own words, but there was nothing he could do about it. Perhaps it would not be as bad as it sounded.

However Leibele's fears were confirmed. As he entered the room, his eyes immediately took in the costumes they were wearing. From the youngest to the oldest, they were attired with high skull hats and immense, white satin bow ties.

"That speaks plainly enough. The show is for the purpose of covering up their bad singing," reflected the cantor.

He glanced on the table, and observed about ten tuning forks. Leibele came to the logical conclusion that even this number could not help the choir leader. Why in the world did he have to have so many, when just one was sufficient?

After the first few rehearsals, Leibele knew that his

job here would be two-fold—he would have to train this choir in the short time that was left him. He buckled down to work. The choir leader, Mr. Greenspan, was surprised at the methods the cantor employed and the results he was getting. He had never seen the likes of it and Leibele did not disclose to him that he too had once been a choir leader.

Indeed when Leibele left that city, Mr. Greenspan had a much better choir than he had before. He was so grateful that he insisted that Leibele accept, as a gift, a beautiful gold watch and chain, as well as an attractive cash sum. The cantor pocketed the presents, feeling that he had indeed earned them.

The committee of the synagogue was equally grateful for his beautiful services. They had not heard anything like it. They compared him to the greatest cantor who was then gaining national and international fame. A banquet was tendered in Leibele's honor where he was presented with a sealed envelope. To the delight of everyone present, the young cantor opened it, and discovered an additional gift from the members of the congregation.

"Looks like I haven't done so badly," remarked Leibele to *Duke* upon his arrival home. "Seems only fair that I give you something in turn as my 'manager'."

Leibele handed a sealed envelope to his friend. *Duke* opened it and found a handsome sum.

"Oh, I couldn't take that. It is much too much," argued the excited *Duke*.

And he proceeded to put it in his pocket.

## CHAPTER XI.

LEIBELE was his severest critic and the success he attained in Boston did not blind him to the fact that he could improve on his *dovining*. And as the months passed in rapid succession Leibeled delved further into his studies with Mr. Himmelstine. The latter was elated to see his pupil come back.

"Seems to me, Leibeled, that by this coming High Holidays, there will be nothing further that I could teach you."

"Nonsense, there must be more in that brilliant mind of yours that you could convey to your willing pupil."

Brushing aside this compliment, the other went on.

"And where do you expect to officiate this coming holidays?"

"I really don't know. I have had no offer as yet."

"And that friend, *Duke*, that you have. Wasn't he able to find something for you?"

"If he hasn't, it is not his fault. Goodness knows he is trying hard enough. But just as soon as my age is mentioned the *shul* committees are no longer interested. Seems they can't believe that anyone as young as I could really be good."

"I must admit, Leibeled, that if I did not know your

worth, I would also be deceived into judging you adversely. How old are you?"

"I am eighteen, and look like sixteen they say," he replied, with a helpless expression.

Mr. Himmelstine scrutinized him anew. A mere boy yet, despite his great talent.

"There will be an offer before long. You mark my words."

Leibele left his teacher with the last remark repeating itself in his ears. If that position was coming, it had better come fast for the holidays were practically here.

As he came into the house, his eyes fell on a very contented *Duke* rocking himself in the chair with a glass of tea and cake placed right in front of him. There was an air of importance about him that could not be mistaken. He knew his friend by now—everytime that he adopted this attitude there was something new in the air.

"Hello, *Duke*, where have you been these last two days?"

"Business," he answered curtly. And that was that.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Duke* finished the tea in never-ending silence. He looked once or twice at Leibele as if to speak but he reached instead for another piece of cake. Finally he could hold back his secret no longer.

"Leibele, there is something buzzing in the market. A High Holiday job in a fine Jersey community. Say where is Passaic?"

"Then you mean that there is an opening in a Passaic *shul*?"

"Not just a *shul*. It is the biggest there."

"And what have you done about it? Have you per-

haps been to see the committee?" asked Leibele impatiently.

"I have tried to, but they are not interested. They have at least one hundred cantors to audition."

"That's a marvelous opportunity," answered Leibele sarcastically. "That means after the hundredth cantor I come in."

*Duke* looked hurt. To have his favorite tell him bluntly that he was incompetent hurt him to the core.

Leibele noticed his dejection and blamed himself for making *Duke* feel so badly. Poor fellow, he had tried but competition was too keen. It would be sheer egotism to suppose that one just had to mention "Leibele Waldman" to sweep a committee off its feet. No doubt there were older and more experienced cantors applying for the position.

"Oh, well," remarked Leibele, "that isn't the only position in America. Supposing you and I go to a good movie and forget all about it."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was dark when they came out. Leibele sought to appease his friend by treating him to an ice cream soda. *Duke* consumed his drink, all the while looking as mournful as anyone could be.

"If there was only some way. That's a neat position for you."

"Ah, forget it. Let's go up and have some supper. My mother is making your favorite dish—hamburgers and carrot and barley soup."

They walked in and Leibele's surprise knew no bounds. Sitting there, gazing at the clock, was an old acquaintance of his—more accurately a fan. He had met

him on a few occasions when he *dovined* as a boy. The man, Mr. Shatnis, had taken a liking to him and had insisted that he come to stay in his house. That was about eight years ago, but the man's face had not changed with the years.

"Hello, Leibele, am I glad to see you! A fine time to go to the movies when here I come all the way from home on very important business."

"I am very glad to see you too, Mr. Shatnis. I have forgotten where you live."

"So you forget your friends. I live in Passaic, don't you remember?"

Leibele guessed why Mr. Shatnis had come to see him.

"Leibele, a golden opportunity for you. Just as soon as I heard about it, I left my work and came running to you. And don't think I'm doing this for a commission. You're a fine boy, you have fine people, and I'd like to do something for you."

The man was carried away with his good wishes.

"What is it you have in mind, Mr. Shatnis?"

"You'll be amazed. There is a job waiting for you at the largest temple in Passaic."

Leibele's hopes dropped as he associated this position with the same one *Duke* had heard about. He could not conceive where Mr. Shatnis could be successful where the other had failed.

"I am afraid that is not for me. I understand that about one hundred cantors are listed for a trial."

"That is where you underrate me, my boy. I am not bringing you to the committee itself but to the house of the chairman of the committee. He is a friend of mine."

Leibele's face brightened and *Duke* was speechless. There was a chance and a good one at that.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" questioned *Duke*. "Let's be off."

"Not so fast, *Duke*. Let's hear Mr. Shatnis' plans."

"My procedure is very simple. I will arrange for a meeting with Mr. Rafel and I will telegraph you. In the meantime, tell me, what you have been doing since I saw you?"

The discussion proved a lengthy one, and Mr. Shatnis found himself leaving the Waldman residence late at night. Leibele and *Duke* accompanied him to the train and with promises of a current meeting took leave of each other.

"This is one night I won't sleep," meditated *Duke*. "I think I will step into the cantors' meeting room and tease them a bit."

"Oh no, you won't. If you ever do, instead of competing with one hundred cantors, there will be two hundred," Leibele laughed.

Lying in his bed that night, Leibele mused how strange fate is. Just when he despaired of the position in Passaic, along came a man whom he had not seen for eight years to open the way for him. Only, prayed Leibele, let this prove a reality without disappointments.

The next morning found *Duke* near the stoop waiting for that important telegram. The first day it did not come, and Leibele had a job on his hands to comfort his friend with the thought that the time was not yet ripe. The second day found *Duke* at his vigil and still no message. On the third day it arrived and he signed for it.

Breathless and perspiring, he ran up the flight of stairs as if in pursuit.

"Leibele, it's here. Let's go. Mr. Shatnis wants you there today in the early afternoon."

The contents of the telegram were thus conveyed to Leibele. It had come, this good luck of his. He dressed nervously as he recalled the attractive salary Mr. Shatnis had mentioned, and the fine congregation that the place boasted.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was an outwardly cool young man and a very restless *Duke* that Mr. Shatnis admitted to his house. From there they set out for Mr. Rafel's home.

They talked excitedly on the way until they reached their destination. They were admitted by a maid who said Mr. Rafel would be down presently.

The chairman came down and after shaking hands with Mr. Shatnis stared at his other two visitors.

"Then you did not bring your cantor today, Mr. Shatnis?"

Mr. Shatnis coughed in an embarrassed manner and turned to Leibele.

"Of course, I did. This is Cantor Waldman and this is his friend, *Duke*."

"This is the cantor? Surely you are not joking. But then you must be. I know he must be a choir boy in your cantor's choir."

Leibele flushed. At an early age he had learned to control his temper and be diplomatic. The man was entitled to his opinion, but he was too unreasonable. The least he could do would be to hear him.

"You laugh, Mr. Rafel. But I bet you I will laugh

last. I'll grant you he looks more like a baseball player, but he is a great cantor. Leibele, just you sing something."

"I am sorry, Mr. Shatnis. I am afraid he would never do. His young appearance is against him. He looks much too young. When our choice is between a good cantor as well as an older one, do you think we would choose a mere boy? Come, come, be reasonable. Perhaps in a few years, when the boy grows up."

Mr. Shatnis could find no words. This last thought was too much for Leibele. Unable to contain himself any longer, and filled with deep disappointment, he burst out of the room.

"Wait, Leibele," pleaded Shatnis, "don't lose your temper. The man does not know your ability."

In vain he pleaded for Leibele to come back. Leibele was already out of the house.

"You are a bit hasty, Mr. Rafel. I tell you that boy would amaze you. He is just what you need in your temple. All the young people would come to services, and there is no question about the older ones. I tell you bearded men have kissed him in admiration."

"Oh, well, I guess I was a bit hasty. But he is an impertinent fellow."

"Well, what did you expect him to do? Thank you?"

"I can judge he won't come back. Maybe you can induce him to audition before the committee. I will put his name ahead of the others. There is a meeting to-night."

"I am afraid I'll have a tough time with him. But I swear even if I have to chain him to me, I'll bring him. And mark my words, you'll take your words back."

They shook hands, without malice. They were old friends and understood each other well.

Later that evening, Mr. Shatnis went to see Leibele. He had been hurt deeply and made no effort to hide his disappointment and anger.

"That's a fine man you brought me to. It's lucky I didn't make the trip from California."

"I'm sorry, Leibele. Really more than you can guess. I myself can't understand his attitude. However, he repented and asked me to bring you to the audition tonight. He'll put your name ahead of the others."

"And I bet he wants me to grow a beard in the meantime. Isn't that impossible? Well, that's how possible it is for me to come back for a trial. I won't do it."

"Leibele, you are too young to let pride stand in the way of opportunity. You must come tonight."

Really, I appreciate your sincere efforts, but don't you see I couldn't face that man now. If it is destined that I officiate on these holidays, something else will come along."

Mr. Shatnis' pleadings were in vain. After a fond goodbye, Leibele boarded the train for home.

In vain did *Duke* plead with Leibele to do as Mr. Shatnis advised. The trip home seemed long and tedious to Leibele and after a while even *Duke* stopped talking.

In the meantime Mr. Shatnis had decided to see Leibele's parents. When the young cantor came into the house he was shocked to see his visitor. He gathered that a long conversation must have ensued for the small group was ready to plead with him anew.

Leibele again refused. The man had so humiliated him. How could he go back?

Morris had been listening attentively to the argument and thought a little brotherly advice might help.

"Leibele, I am not trying to tell you what to do but just this once you ought to go along with Mr. Shatnis. After all he had gone to a lot of trouble for you and he is doing it out of friendship. However, if anyone insults you again, just you wire me, and Leo and I will maul them down. What do you say, will you?"

He looked at his parents, at Mr. Shatnis and at his brother. They made it very hard for him, as if their lives depended on his going.

"All right, I'll go. But I know the answer beforehand. The committee will go into a huddle after I have sung my best numbers, and say 'He is too young.' "

Mr. Shatnis became joyous at the decision. He shook hands with Mr. Waldman, Mrs. Waldman and Morris. He gave Leibele a bear hug that made his bones crack.

\* \* \* \* \*

As they entered the temple, Leibele pleaded with his friend to sit in the rear. Mr. Shatnis left him there with *Duke* and proceeded toward the pulpit where the committee was seated. He had a short conversation with Mr. Rafel who in turn talked to the other men.

Leibele sat through some two hours while various cantors auditioned for the committee. "A tall, fat cantor will probably win out," mused Leibele bitterly.

After a while he wondered whether they were deliberately attempting to humiliate him further. A loud voice then announced "Cantor Leibele Waldman."

Leibele approached with as much indifference as if he had done this any number of times. The committee

gasped as young cantor stood before them. At a sign from Mr. Rafel they assumed their placid manner.

Leibele no longer cared whether he pleased them or not. He was here to please his two ardent fans—Mr. Shatnis and *Duke*. The committee had selected a very difficult prayer that Leibele was to sing. He began and as the first sweet note issued from his mouth, the committee leaned forward and scrutinized him more closely. They judged him to be about eighteen, a typical American boy, orthodox no doubt, for how could he otherwise render prayers in such heartfelt tones. Soon they forgot about his personality as his singing took a stronger hold of them. They nodded to each other and the most surprised was Mr. Rafel. He had never guessed that the boy had such ability. Leibele's voice was not loud, but it was ringing and sweet. It seemed to resound through the temple, even his falsetto filled the place. The boy had everything—sweetness, falsetto, coloratura, poise in singing. He seemed not to strain himself at all. He made no dramatic motions but held himself erect and very simply.

The number ended, the committee began to applaud spontaneously. Too late they realized their error. To cover their embarrassment, Mr. Rafel got up and announced that auditioning for that night was over. They would notify the remaining cantors of the subsequent meeting.

Leibele was immediately surrounded by the committee men who congratulated him profusely.

"I am wondering about one thing especially. Where does all your power come from? You don't look the part at all."

"The sweet tone that you have. It is marvelous to see a young man like you possess it."

They talked of engaging him for the yearly position and everything was agreed on except the price. Leibele asked for more and they offered less.

To Mr. Shatnis' disappointment Leibele did not rush to sign a contract. He was holding out for his price. The committee, a bit annoyed by the young cantor's terms, decided to think it over and that night Leibele went home minus a contract.

"There, you acted your age," blurted out Mr. Shatnis. "What is a few hundred more or less? The main thing is the position and the salary is nothing to be sniffed at."

"If they want me, they will agree to my price. Do you really think I am asking too much?"

Mr. Shatnis was going to answer in the affirmative. It was a great deal of money for a youngster, but he hesitated to say so. On one occasion already Leibele had fumed because he had been judged by his years and not by his ability.

A week and a half passed before Leibele was summoned again to Passaic. In the meantime Mr. Shatnis kept him posted of what was transpiring. It seemed that some agreed to Leibele's terms and some urged that other cantors be auditioned. The latter group won out, but that only convinced them of their choice—they wanted Leibele.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the outset the cantor and his congregation took to each other. They were impressed by his poise and sweet singing and he was grateful for their friendliness and appreciation.

Leibele indeed felt very fortunate. The temple was beautiful—new in design and structure. The place was kept in immaculate condition and he was never too anxious to leave after services. Many times he would come long before Friday night services and gaze about the place. He loved every inch of it.

So far as the members were concerned, Leibele wondered whether there were anywhere else more goodnatured or more refined people. During services, one could hear a pin drop. At the end there was always a group around him to congratulate him and tell him how they could never tire of listening to him.

His work at the temple fascinated him, yet he longed to perform for varied audiences. There was another type of work that he could do and do well, and that was to sing folk songs. Officiations only were required of him at the temple.

“If only I had an outlet for my concert numbers,” remarked Leibele to his brother Morris. “I would be doing all the work I care to do. But how does a youngster like myself get that type of engagement?”

“Most likely by being hired by the various institutions who do the sponsoring. Wait a minute. How would it be if you volunteered to sing for some leading charitable institutions?”

“That is an excellent thought, reflected Rose, “you would be doing two good things at once—you would donate your services for charity and at the same time you would be making a name for yourself.”

“Would you handle it for me, Morris?”

“No, I would rather not. For this sort of thing you

need some one who can devote most of his time to it and mine is limited. Why not let *Duke* do it?"

"Yes, let him. With his nerve and manner of approach he'd get further than Morris anyway," guessed Rose.

*Duke*, enraptured with his new task, assumed yet a loftier manner than he had ever assumed. He perused the newspapers for advertisements of concerts and soon made contact with the people running them. They were glad to have on their program such a young cantor, and according to *Duke*, a mighty good one. Leibele's name was on all posters and leaflets that were printed in conjunction with the concerts.

There was one particular concert that convinced him that *dovining* alone would never satisfy him completely. He enjoyed concert work and had something to offer the public. On the same program was the late Cantor Joseph Rosenblatt together with the most famous cantors of the world who were then all New York. It was given for the benefit of some *Yeshiva* on the East Side, and the audience was tremendous.

Leibele was thrilled beyond words. He had long admired the great artistry of Rosenblatt and many were the services and concerts that he and his father had attended where this same cantor had performed.

The concert was started and each cantor did well for himself. Any one of them could have given the concert alone. Each performer had a world-wide reputation, gained mostly by the phonograph records they had made for the various recording companies. Cantor Rosenblatt stood up and a hush fell upon the audience. He was the smallest of all the star cantors and the most beloved.

There were cries of "Sing your masterpieces, Yosele," and other intimate remarks. He smiled to the vast group and seemed happy to be among them. Leibele was impressed with his humility and gentlemanly ways.

Needless to say, the crowd was filled with ecstasy as he sang. His voice was not as loud as the others, but his sweetness not one possessed. His appeal was to the Jewish heart and none could resist him. Thunderous applause burst from the listeners and he, modest as always, bowed in appreciation. He sang two more numbers and Leibele, in complete awe and admiration, forgot that he too was on the program. He applauded as violently as any in the group.

When the audience had quieted considerably, Leibele was still applauding. Cantor Rosenblatt turned an amused glance toward the younger cantor who remained completely unaware of everything about him. Leibele was announced as the next performer and he cowered to stand up there after such a mighty artist. The renowned cantor must have guessed his thoughts, for he nodded very knowingly to him, full of encouragement.

Leibele appeared as a baby compared to the others who had gone before him. He began to sing and with each note confidence returned to him. The people were amazed as they detected a similarity of sweetness between this cantor and Cantor Rosenblatt. Yet his style was different, unlike any of the other cantors. This was no mere boy cantor, but an accomplished artist. His singing had the same type of appeal that the other cantor had—it went straight to the Jewish soul. The voice was cultured and his selections were tricky.

His number ended, violent applause burst forth.

Leibele bowed, bewildered at the reception. The applause became louder, urging him to sing again. Cantor Rosenblatt waited until Leibele came offstage and gently placing his hands on the younger cantor's shoulders, led him back to his public. This was greeted with more deafening handclapping and foot stamping, which subsided as soon as Cantor Rosenblatt went back to his seat.

Leibele thought he was dreaming when he found himself surrounded by hundreds of well wishers, who crowded each other to get a better glimpse of him. Cantor Rosenblatt asked him about his musical education, where his position was, his goal, and similar questions. Under the kind glance of the older man, Leibele soon felt at ease and found himself speaking as if he had known him for years. The older cantor wished him good luck and congratulated him on his rendition of both Hebrew traditional and folk songs.

"A truly great man," said Leibele to himself. "Should I ever be as great as he, I pray that I have his simplicity and consideration."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you still willing to sing for charity?" asked *Duke* of Leibele as he sat looking very supercilious.

"I think I shall do that for at least two years. Otherwise how will the public ever get to know of me?"

"If only records were as much in demand now as they used to be," mused Morris.

"There you have something," reasoned Leibele. "How much harder it is now for a good cantor to gain even a statewide reputation. Not so long ago if a cantor was good, all he had to do was to make phonograph records that went into millions of homes, in the United

States and abroad. Now the means is so limited. At the most he gains city-wide fame."

"I have taken on a very large affair for you," said *Duke* quietly, hurt that he was not getting more attention from the two brothers.

"For how much?" teased Leibele.

*Duke* turned his head away as if he resented the mocking tone.

"Okay, *Duke*, don't look so hurt. You know to a performer the remuneration isn't so much as the appreciation of his audience."

Morris laughed. It was fun to see *Duke* squirm under Leibele's ruthless words. Poor *Duke*, he was sensitive at anything Leibele said to him, even when in jest.

The affair proved to be a banquet for the benefit of a tuberculosis sanitarium. Leibele was inspired by the speeches of the various leaders of the organization, depicting the work they were doing for the unfortunates.

Leibele sang with a full heart. His manner was easy, friendly and without affectation. The people liked him immediately. On the same program was some Broadway entertainment and the master of ceremonies, who happened to be a Jewish boy, dashed over to Leibele and congratulated him heartily. He requested him to sing something in English for the benefit of his entertainers.

Leibele shrugged, for he did not know the reaction his audience would have to his singing English. He was a bit fearful that they would not like it. Yet the master of ceremonies was begging him now and the audience, judging that he was asking for something special from the young cantor, began to applaud.

Leibele sang a ballad and the crowd was surprised

at his perfect rendition. They did not know that a cantor could sing English so well. The younger element of the audience was especially enthusiastic about the number and applauded him loud and long. His performance was more than successful and he was well pleased. It made no difference to him that not a penny was paid him for his work.

As he started to sit down at the table, an impressive looking man came over to him.

"I must congratulate you, Cantor Waldman. Your Hebrew traditional was magnificent. And don't think that I don't appreciate that type of singing because I don't look particularly Jewish. But that English number, that was a knock-out. The contrast was so sharp, that I don't think the people are over it yet."

"Thank you, thank you very much. I didn't know I'd create such a riot."

"It occurred to me while you were singing that I could avail myself of your services. I produce Jewish talking pictures."

"I am grateful to you but what could I do on the screen?"

"Leave that to me. Suppose you come to my office, say Monday in the afternoon. We'll have a few hours to talk things over."

Leibele shook hands with the man, glad to have made this individual's acquaintance. There was something so keen and fine about him that the young cantor liked him at first sight.

All the time that Leibele conveyed to his family the happenings of that evening, Rose and Hyman were silent.

They were surprised and hurt that their son should even think about becoming an actor.

"Noo, so he probably wants you to act in his pictures," sniffed Rose as if that was the most obnoxious thing her boy could do.

"Ma, why do you come to such quick conclusions? You know quick answers are usually the wrong ones," admonished Morris because he was angry to see his mother discourage his brother.

"Your mother is right," defended Hyman. "If the man produces moving pictures, then he wants Leibele to act. And I say, here and now, he won't do it even for a million. I've had my say, now you can go to see that man."

Morris was hurt to see his parents so unreasonable. Surely this producer did not contemplate to make an actor out of a cantor. He doubted, too, whether his brother would make the change even if thousands were involved. Leibele was born to be a cantor and that was what he would be.

"Don't you listen to them," whispered Morris. "You go to see that man and find out what he has in mind."

"None of those clever tricks of yours, Morris. I heard what you said. When we will want your advice we will ask for it. As it is, your father and I said there will be no actors in this family and that is how it remains."

"Ma, who said anything about acting? And why are you getting so upset for nothing. Is there any harm in Leibele seeing the man?"

The parents could not help but agree to this simple logic. Morris always had a way of making them look unreasonable.

Leibele stood on a side, contemplating his little fam-

ily. Inwardly he had made up his mind to keep his appointment—for one thing he disliked disappointing people, and for another, there was no harm in listening to what the man had to say.

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The producer, Mr. Golden, was expecting him, for as soon as Leibele stepped into his fashionable office the office girl, without a word, led him to the private office.

"Hello, I am glad to see you. I have been waiting here for you. Seems we are both prompt."

"I did not intend to keep you waiting. I am annoyed when anyone does that to me."

He sat down and Mr. Golden came to the point immediately.

"How much acting would you care to do in my pictures?"

"Must I act? Can't I just sing?" answered Leibele promptly. "You see, Mr. Golden, I intend to make cantorial work my life's career and to my way of thinking acting and being a cantor are two extremes. Perhaps at first people would be curious to see what a cantor could do as an actor, but eventually his prestige as a cantor would fall."

Mr. Golden was impressed by the sincerity of the boy's words. It seemed odd to him that anyone so young and so typically American could make such a choice. He had anticipated making an actor out of him but that thought soon took flight. Yet he wanted this young man in his pictures.

"You will excuse me for a minute. I'd like to consult with one of my staff."

"Whew," heaved the young man, "it's good my mother wasn't here."

Mr. Golden soon returned with another man who aided in the production of his films.

"This is the young cantor. Now how could we work him into our pictures without his having to act but sing only?"

The other thought a while and his face brightened.

"Well, for one thing we could arrange for concert scenes. Then we could have synagogue scenes. Or perhaps wedding ceremonies."

Mr. Golden slapped his assistant's shoulders. "Good ideas, every one of them. How do you think them up so fast?"

"Just genius, mad genius," laughed the other as he went out the door.

"How does that appeal to you?" Mr. Golden asked Leibeles.

"That sounds plausible. Yes, I think I agree to that type of work."

"Well, then say we work it this way. We shall find out how the public takes to you. At first I'll produce a short, where you will be the main performer. If that proves successful, we shall sign a contract for your appearance in a number of pictures. For that short I will give you a flat rate. For the others, we will determine later."

"That's satisfactory to me." Leibeles could see nothing in the deal that would draw adverse criticism from the public.

"Just as soon as we have things arranged, I will no-

tify you. In the meantime if you are around here, drop in and see me.”

They shook hands, and the young cantor promised to call again. He felt happy that he had not listened to his parents but had followed his own inclinations.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele was barely in the house when he heard his mother still arguing with Morris about the advisability of his being in the films.

“What does he need it for? An actor he is going to be? Not while I’m here.”

“Ma, I have no more strength to argue with you. Here is Leibele. Am I glad you’re here!”

“A fine world this is, when children don’t listen to their parents. So you are an actor now?”

Leibele could not control his mirth any longer. He burst out laughing.

“Mom, you can calm yourself now. I have been to see the man and he asked me whether I wanted to act.”

Triumphantly Rose turned to Morris. “Well, what did I tell you?”

“But Leibele isn’t finished. Why don’t you listen to the rest?”

“I said no, because my mother would not let me.” This time both boys went into an uproar.

“Stop your comedy. Who are you making fun of, your mother?”

“Seriously though, mom, I refused because I never intend to become an actor.” Rose sighed happily.

“Then it was a wild goose chase?” questioned Morris unhappily.

"No, we arranged something. He wants me in his pictures, but I am to do singing only. No acting."

"Now, who is right?" teased Morris. "Did you have to get all excited?"

"I wasn't going to take any chances. The man probably would have influenced Leibele if your father and I hadn't shown him how we felt about it."

"Mom, you know that isn't so," corrected Leibele. But getting an angry glance from his mother, he decided to let her have her way.

A week later he was summoned to the studio.

"You will do one number today," advised Mr. Golden. "The rest we can do during the remainder of the week."

Leibele wondered at this for surely a composition would take ten minutes at the most. He could see no reason why he could not do all his singing in one day.

The setting for a Passover scene was finally perfected. The group around the table were caught in the spirit of the thing and everything seemed to go along smoothly. Leibele rose and began to sing. When he was all finished, he was told that it had not been recorded. It had been a rehearsal. The heat given off by the lights was stifling. Leibele could feel the drops of perspiration running down his entire body. The others in the group didn't feel any different. Before they had looked fresh and clean in their costumes, now their hair was damp and untidy, their costumes appeared wilted and their expressions were not too refreshing. The lights were shut off and the players were asked to freshen their makeup. It was lunch time and food was ordered.

When the scene was reenacted it was a few hours

past noon. The head of the table had to speak some lines which he muffled a bit. Recording was stopped, the machine adjusted and the player had to repeat his part.

By the time Leibele's turn came, the heat had again become unbearable. Lights were shut off, as the young cantor left the room to relax a bit. He came back and rendered his piece perfectly.

"That was fine," congratulated Mr. Golden. The other players relieved of their task, extended their congratulations.

"I'd like to see that scene on the screen," Leibele wished aloud.

"When we are all finished with this short, I'll run it here in the studio. I'll let you know when we do, so that you can bring your friends."

Happy and tired, Leibele left for home.

"So that's how you look after making pictures," scolded his mother. "I think you would do better without them."

"No, mother, it isn't hard work. It is the heat from all those lights. But eventually I'll get used to them."

The short was promptly booked at a local theatre, and Leibele, his family, and friends went to see it. They were greatly excited about the premiere, even Rose had to admit it was an adventure for her. She was anxious to see what her son would look like and how he would sound.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE picture began to unfold itself and the young cantor could have fallen through the floor. His little company averted their eyes from him for fear that he would read their minds. Leibele gazed at his image on the screen and he had the temptation to hurl something at it. How emaciated and puny he looked, and how big his ears were. He touched them to reassure himself that he did not really have donkey's ears as depicted on the screen. He hoped fervently that his singing would be better than his likeness. But that was even worse. His voice sounded scratchy and strained. His mother always had a premonition of things—he should have listened to her.

He blamed the producer. On second thought he blamed himself alone. He should have witnessed one of Mr. Golden's films before making any movies for him. He might have known that they had cheap sound devices and other equipment. One could hardly expect the man, with his limited capital, to have the apparatus of a Hollywood studio. Leibele realized that instead of these films doing him good they would mar any little reputation he might have. But he could not undo what he had already done. Of one thing he was sure—he would make no more pictures.

The family group noticed his chagrin and refrained from being too effusive in their compliments. They had to say something and so they merely remarked that they had enjoyed it immensely. Leibele was grateful for their consideration but they did not deceive him.

"Well, how did you like yourself on the screen, Leibele? A good job, eh?"

Mr. Golden was happy and he was unaware of the imperfections of the film. The main thing was that his short was already billed and more offers had been accepted.

"I did not like myself on the screen, and if that is the way I sound I think I'll open a candy store."

The other detected the bitterness in his tone and for the first time was conscious of the inferiority of his productions. He shrugged—he had no ideals about the business. He was in it to make a living and there were plenty of players who felt the same about it.

"It is not as bad as you think. We'll improve on the other films."

"You mean you intend to use better equipment?" asked Leibele.

"Look here, young fellow. There is nothing I would like better. But that runs into hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Jewish films are not so advanced or so prosperous that my company can afford to do that. The main thing is that there is a market for these films—the older Jewish people do not look for defects. They see something in their native tongue on the screen and it satisfies them."

"But how about me? Judging from the way I look on

the screen, they'll think I'm a freak. And when they hear my voice they'll never want to hear me sing again."

"You are green in this business. See if something good does not come out of this for you."

Leibele did not let these words mislead him. If a thing was no good, there were no two ways about it. He would not make another film for Mr. Golden.

His disappointment wore off and the idea of performing in the movies was farthest from his mind. Mr. Golden was probably angry because he had heard not a word from him.

The phone rang one day, and to his surprise Mr. Golden was at the other end of the wire.

"Leibele, come right to my office. There is a man here from Canada who wishes to see you. So my pictures aren't doing you any good, eh?"

"I don't quite get you, Mr. Golden. What does that have to do with your pictures?"

"Just very little, Leibele," answered the other sarcastically. "My film was shown there, this man had seen you and now he wants you to come to Canada for a Friday night and Saturday officiation and a Sunday concert."

He could hardly believe his ears. There was no accounting for people's tastes.

"I'll be over in an hour," promised Leibele and hung up.

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Leibele was shocked to have the crowd tell him how they enjoyed him in the picture. Perhaps he was wrong and the rest of the world was right.

When he returned to New York, there was a message waiting for him to get in touch with Mr. Golden.

"Now, Leibele, will you make pictures for me?" asked the producer.

"I am afraid you win. But can't something be done to improve them—make me look the way I really am? And my voice, can't you make it sound more natural?"

Mr. Golden made all sorts of promises, but the other films were just as worthless as the first. However they were making a name for him gradually—offers came from cities all over the United States. The temple allowed him to cover all his undertakings, feeling a certain pride in having their cantor so in demand.

Mr. Golden eventually made a feature in which all the outstanding cantors of the world sang their masterpieces. Leibele was among them, singing one of his own Hebrew compositions.

The feature had tremendous success and offers kept pouring in for Leibele to make personal appearances in conjunction with the film. Though he was received warmly, he knew that the screening and recording of his voice was way below average—it was amateurish and bad.

An offer had come through the mails for Leibele to appear in a Chicago theatre. All his expenses were to be paid, a hotel suite was to be furnished. Leibele saw a new world opening up for him.

\* \* \* \*

Leibele hurried with his shaving and dressing. His performance would start in a half hour. True the hotel was right near by, but he wished to look over the theatre from the outside. He hurried down and as he came near his destination, he realized that he was not too early. There was a huge crowd blocking the entrance. Even a mounted policeman could not keep them orderly. A man

came out to announce that all seats were sold, requesting the people to come to the afternoon performance on the morrow. But they did not budge—they remained as they were. Breathless and worried, Leibele pushed his way through the crowd, finally coming face to face with the policeman at the door.

“Officer, I would like to get in.”

“Well, well, son. So would a lot of other people.” He swept his huge arms over the crowd.

“You don’t understand. I am the cantor who is scheduled to sing here tonight. I must go in now.”

“That’s what a lot of young fellows have been telling me. You’re about the fifteenth guy that’s been giving me this baloney.”

“But it’s the truth,” Leibele became panic stricken, as the officer was becoming more stubborn to deal with. “You must let me in.”

“You’re going one better. So I must, must I?” The officer grabbed Leibele by the sleeve.

It was proving humiliating. People closed in on the two and were having fun at his expense. This was his prospective audience and he wondered if he could ever live down the incident. Worse still, the bulwark of the law might fancy to take him to jail for contempt. He decided to make a last try.

“Look, see this gold watch. Suppose I leave this with you as a guarantee. If I do not show up with the manager of the theatre within a few minutes to confirm what I’ve said then you keep the watch.”

The officer was impressed with the scheme and agreed to the terms. He hoped that the young man would

never show up. In the meantime the crowd was buzzing with excitement.

Leibele did not keep his word for he was too ashamed to show himself. He knew that by this time all eyes would be glued on him. The manager of the theatre came out instead, looked contemptuously at the officer and took the watch right out of his hands as he was fondly dangling it in the air.

\* \* \* \*

With Leibele's increasing reputation more and more requests poured in from charity organizations. It was no unusual occurrence for him to come home and find a committee waiting to see him. He was glad to give his services for these worthy causes, but it would have been gratifying to take on a paying engagement.

But it had its compensations. At one of these affairs a man came over to him and suggested a proposition.

"Cantor Waldman, why don't you sing on the radio? The world ought to know of a voice like yours."

"It never occurred to me. I had rather intended to limit myself to the pulpit and to concerts."

"If a cantor takes on concert engagements, I can't see why there would be any objection to radio singing. After all we are living in a modern world."

"Perhaps you are right. However, I do not have the connections. One just can't go up to a broadcasting station and offer his services."

"Then why don't you try auditioning. You might sing for the station until some business or other organization desired to sponsor you."

"Is that how it works? I may take up your suggestion."

Leibele spoke to his brother, Morris, about the idea.

"Supposing they listen to me and turn me down, what then?" asked Leibele.

"Nonsense, they'll grab you up. Why don't you try?"

"All right. Tomorrow."

The next day, when Leibele had practically forgotten all about it and was not making any preparations to leave the house, Morris began to tease him.

"So you're afraid of not being accepted. That's why you are not going for that audition."

"No, you are wrong, my little man," answered his brother. "The only reason why I am not going is because I am tired of singing for nothing. If someone came along and offered me a program for money, you'd see how fast I'd grab it."

"Then you're becoming money mad."

"That's not the idea. I *am* singing for charity—well, I am glad to do it while I can. I have no real responsibility. I make my money at the temple and from my other work. But to actually sing on the radio without pay, that would seem like too much for nothing."

"I get it. A certain pride. Well I can really understand it now, but I still think that you could try it for a while and if a paying commercial does not come along, you quit. I sincerely believe, though, that you will be signed before long."

"Well, I see you're stuck on the idea. To please my sweet brother, I'll go for the audition today."

Morris was exuberant. He fussed around Leibele as he dressed, even taking spots off his suit. He looked Leibele over thoroughly and when he was finally satisfied with his appearance, fairly pushed him out the

door. Morris extended his hand and wished him good luck.

Leibele had come prepared to audition for Hebrew or Jewish singing, but instead he was asked to sing in English. To refuse would have proved embarrassing, so he sang what he was requested. The audition ended, he expected to be told that it was not satisfactory, and he did not care very much. To his surprise, he was congratulated and talk began about final arrangements. He would sing on WNYC without compensation, only English songs. In the few weeks that he was on, fan mail kept pouring in. Leibele could judge from their contents that they were mostly from young girls and women whose sense of romance was stirred by his singing. Some requested autographed photographs of himself, some even going to the extent of writing extreme nonsense. His cheeks flushed at the romantic note some of these letters contained. He hid them in an inconceivable place, lest one of the family find them. One day Morris noticed the pile of letters on Leibele's desk and spoke to his brother.

"Leibele, seems to me that you should have many more letters than are here. Why last week's batch alone was more than this."

"You're mistaken," lied Leibele, caught in a precarious situation, "that is all there is."

Morris was not fooled. His brother was concealing the greater part of his fan mail. Leibele must have a good reason and he was not going to pry into his affairs.

Leo had overheard his brothers' conversation and decided to find out for himself. This house of theirs

was becoming too serious—they had little time for fun now. He would leave nothing unturned until he found the letters.

As soon as Leibele was out of the house he set himself to his task. He unearthed the letters from their hiding place and for hours he devoured their contents. After each one he laughed to his heart's content. He was having a grand time all by himself. He picked out one of the gushy ones and made plans for its unveiling.

That evening, when they were all congregated at the supper table, Leo began his prank.

"Mom, can you stop serving a while. This morning I received a very important letter."

They all put their morsels down and turned interested eyes to him. He took his time. First he made an attempt to open the letter. Then he read how it was addressed, and with a loud laugh and a sly wink at Leibele, began.

"I won't read the salutation, but this is how it continues after that. 'I listen to your singing, and it is as if the knight I have always dreamt of was calling to me in heavenly voice'."

Leibele rose hastily from his seat and made a lunge for Leo. The two brothers landed on the floor, one attempting to grab the missive while the other was putting all his strength forth to prevent him from getting it. The battle was taking too long, for Leo found an opportunity to read further snatches. This angered his brother the more. There was one good way of subduing Leo—he was deathly afraid of tickling. As soon as it occurred to Leibele, he set himself to vanquish his brother. Soon Leo was prostrated on the floor as if a mountain had struck

him while the whole family was beside themselves with laughter.

Rose had hardly understood the meaning of the words, and when she asked Morris to interpret them for her, it only started the brothers off again. After the episode Leibele decided that there was one way of averting Leo's pranks—he would keep those letters under lock and key.

\* \* \* \*

At one of his broadcasts Leibele had an insatiable desire to sing a Hebrew number. He tried to banish the thought from his mind, but the melody kept recurring to him again and again. Subconsciously he found himself singing it while driving to the station. He made a sudden decision—he would take a chance on singing it. The worse that could happen would be suspension from the studio.

He rendered the number beautifully and to his relief no comment was made by anyone at the station about his little fraud. He was happier now that he managed to include a bit of Hebrew traditional.

In a short time an offer came to him from the leading kosher delicatessen manufacturer in New York to sing on WMCA. The fan mail coming in great quantities as a result of this hour did not have to be placed under lock and key. They were heartwarming expressions of thanks for his rendition of Hebrew traditional and Jewish folk songs. Blessings were heaped upon him in many a letter. Had they been golden treasure he could not have valued them more. To protect them from aging too fast and dirt he bought steel cabinets, and if ever a suggestion was made to clear them out to make room

for some useful piece of furniture, he looked upon these words as blasphemy.

He had hardly completed the season for his sponsor when an offer came through from a well known cigar company to continue on the same station with a Jewish program.

Leibele was a very busy young cantor indeed. His contact with various people gave him an assured appearance—he could mix with all types. He had no preferences and he did not attempt to push himself. Whether a person was rich and influential or otherwise did not make any difference to him provided he liked something about that individual. He was amassing friends all over; some that were intellectuals and others who never even had a complete public school education.

His democratic spirit and quiet manner charmed everyone that he met. After his greatest triumphs he was never boasting or egotistical. He also accepted criticism when he felt the one giving it was a friend and was not doing it out of malice.

\* \* \* \* \*

The High Holidays were very near and the end of Leibele's second year at the temple was drawing to a close. As yet he had not been notified by the committee of its decision to engage him for the third year. Leibele had come to an unflattering conclusion that they no longer wanted him and were too considerate to tell him. No doubt they were waiting for him to make connections elsewhere before they dismissed him.

The directors of the temple, without their cantor's knowledge, had taken it for granted that they would retain him for an indefinite number of years.

Leibele kept wondering how soon the committee would have an understanding with him. One particular Friday he came to Mr. Shatnis' house earlier than usual. He could hear Mr. Shatnis lauding him and then other voices reply. He wondered what it was all about.

In the group were prominent members of a large and very orthodox synagogue in the city. At first these men were loath to come into the temple—to them any place of worship that was less strict than theirs, was not a desirable place to enter. But soon word of the cantor's orthodox procedure reached their ears and curiosity won out. They came at first timidly, and then they came more often, so that soon people wondered whether enough members of the orthodox *shul* were left for services.

They had become acquainted with the young cantor, often complimenting him on his compositions, sometimes accompanying him to Mr. Shatnis' house. On frequent occasions they would, at the latter's invitation, come up to the house and spend some time conversing with the young man.

"Hello, Leibele, we have been waiting an hour for you. Mr. Shatnis and ourselves have talked everything over; now all you have to do is sign the contract."

"I am afraid I don't understand. What contract?"

"We have heard that you are hesitant about remaining at the temple. Since we didn't want to see you leave our town, we have had a meeting and have decided to engage you for our *shul*. We are offering you five hundred dollars more."

"I certainly appreciate the offer. As a matter of fact I should not like to leave here."

He did not disclose the fact that it was the temple

that had not rehired him as yet. He looked at Mr. Shatnis who shrugged as if to say, "What they don't know won't hurt them. Why tell them?"

Leibele excused himself and motioned to Mr. Shatnis. The two went into another room to discuss the matter.

"Do you think that I ought to discuss things with the temple before I sign with them?"

"No, I don't see why. Furthermore, it is their place to do that. If they want you, they can offer to engage you next year. What have you to lose?"

"I'll be truthful with you. I would prefer to remain here where I am. If only they would say something. The five hundred increase does not influence me in the least."

"I can't understand you, Leibele. Do you want the temple to think that you are pleading for the job? Furthermore, it is a good thing for them to see that another place wants you badly enough to sign you at a higher figure. They'll appreciate you more."

Mr. Shatnis' words were true enough. He decided to sign with the new synagogue.

That night at services, he had a premonition that he had done the wrong thing. As he glanced about, he felt how he would really miss this first fine position of his. His singing that night was extraordinarily good and the congregation was spellbound.

Mr. Rafel approached and shook his hand enthusiastically.

"Good *shabbes*, Leibele. Your singing tonight was heavenly. All the people are talking about you."

"Thank you. I have tried my best."

"Oh, yes, before I forget. I had in mind to tell you this two weeks ago, but my memory must be slipping.

Not that it's urgent, but the committee has voted that you remain with us indefinitely."

The cantor gulped. He could not face Mr. Rafel. The latter guessed that something was amiss.

"Don't you care to remain with us, Leibele?"

"Don't I care? I could stay here all my life. But I have already signed up with another synagogue. Only this afternoon."

And he explained what prompted him to do that.

"So they finally did that. The president of that synagogue was after you since he heard you in the temple. And I thought he was joking when he said he would take you away from us."

"I hope you understand my position. If I had had the least idea that you wanted me to remain, I never would have signed with the others."

"I can understand your feelings. But he never should have done it behind our backs. He might have consulted us about it. But never fear, you'll remain with us."

"But I have already signed. How do you propose to do that?"

"Don't worry. First, I don't have a son and a son-in-law who are lawyers for nothing. We will work out a scheme."

During the following week nothing new about the situation had come to Leibele's attention. However, when he found himself in the Shatnis' home the following Friday afternoon, there was the Passaic daily newspaper laying on the table with screaming headlines "Two Synagogues Fight for Cantor." There was a lengthy writeup about the whole case, with a humorous note to the effect that the writer could not understand why there should

be such a controversy when there are more than enough cantors to go around.

The synagogue was set in its plans to retain Leibele and the temple was just as definitely opposed to the plan. Finally they agreed to have a meeting and to let Leibele decide. To the synagogue's dismay he chose to remain with the temple. Angry at both him and Mr. Rafel, they became even more stubborn. Finally the members of both places of worship who held official jobs in the town were selected to arbitrate. They rendered their verdict that the temple pay one hundred dollars damages and that Leibele sign a contract to the effect that the synagogue would have preference to his services should his connection with the temple cease. But their wait was a long one.

Mr. Rafel was so happy at the outcome that he threw a big party for the other members to the controversy, as well as for the arbitrators and cantor. Actually the members of the other synagogue enjoyed the cantor's services as regularly as the temple members—for they almost never missed coming on Friday nights and Saturday.

\* \* \* \* \*

The prosperous days following the war were coming to a close. The stock market crash was turning rich men into paupers.

The temple, as well as other organizations, was hard hit. Not so much the crash as the depression which followed was stripping the members of their wealth. The expenses were great, the temple having cost a huge sum of money and the remaining mortgage still being a high amount. A budget was drawn up, for they could no longer expect the big contributions from the richer element of the congregation.

Leibele, as well as the rabbi and sexton, were requested to take a decrease in their salaries, with the promise of a subsequent increase when other expenses were noticeably diminished. The cantor could hardly refuse for they paid him well the four years he had been with the temple.

It was not an unusual occurrence for the phone to ring and for Leibele to hear a prospective client inquire about his fee. As a rule he never disclosed the amount over the phone, as to his mind, it was not ethical. The cantorial profession should have the same dignity as any other profession. One could not call a lawyer, doctor or dentist on the phone and obtain his price. Then why should not the same be true of a cantor's services? Those who are outstanding had earned their reputation through the same intensive study and persistency as other professional men. Leibele could not conceive of any reasonable person, who respected the ethics of any business or profession, having an objection to such a procedure. Those were his ideals and he lived up to them.

\* \* \* \* \*

The phone rang. Leibele stopped his meditating to answer it.

"Hello, Cantor Waldman? This is an old friend, Cantor Rosenblatt."

Leibele was truly thrilled. He had never gotten over his admiration for this great artist.

"I haven't seen you for quite a while. You must be a young man now. I hear good things about you."

"Yes," replied Leibele, "everything is going along fine, thank God. I hope you are well."

"Not so well, my boy. I have had my troubles. Most-

ly financial ones. The crash did not do me much good. Then that paper I was financing proved a failure. However, that is not what I called you for. I have a wedding for you. I must give it up because I have taken on an engagement in New Orleans for the week-end. I have spoken to the people about you and they agreed."

"I don't know how to thank you. I consider it a great honor."

"I must tell you something, though. When I told them how old you were, they were a bit skeptical. They could not see themselves blessed by such a young cantor."

"You must have had a tough time convincing them. How did you get around that?"

"By telling them that they need not pay you if you don't live up to all I said you were."

Leibele laughed for he was somewhat embarrassed by this huge compliment. They made final arrangements and expressed wishes of seeing each other in the best of health.

*Duke* and Murray who were in the house at the time of the call were so elated at the prospect of Leibele performing a wedding recommended by Cantor Rosenblatt that they pleaded with him to permit them to witness that ceremony.

On the designated night Leibele and his two companions found themselves in one of the finer catering places in Brooklyn. He was greeted by the groom's father who conducted him to the office where the marriage certificate was made out. *Duke* and Murray were looking over the place. A waiter who was serving refreshments to the guests approached the two.

"Will you have a drink and some cake, gentlemen?"

"Certainly, my good man," answered *Duke*, to Murray's surprise. "Won't you have some, Murray?" He handed the glass and cake to his friend.

Then they proceeded to walk upstairs where the guests were dancing.

Soon Leibele was summoned for the ceremony and a deep quiet enveloped the guests. In thirty minutes the couple were pronounced man and wife. The respective fathers and mothers of the bride and groom congratulated the cantor upon the perfection of the ceremony.

The best man approached Leibele. "Cantor, when I get married, you will be the one to perform my ceremony. I certainly enjoyed every minute of it. And this young lady agrees with me."

"Thank you. I am sure it will be a pleasure to serve you both." Leibele looked steadily at the young girl.

"You get me wrong. This is not the prospective bride. I'd never think of robbing the cradle."

The young lady flushed and Leibele gave her a reassuring smile as he answered diplomatically, "That is a gross exaggeration. However, what the lady lacks in years she more than makes up for it in other ways." There ensued an embarrassing silence.

Leibele never mixed his business with personal affairs but he nevertheless found an opportunity of taking the young lady home, so much had she impressed him. That night he learned that she was not a child but actually twenty-one. It was probably her turned up nose and eager smile that made her look a little younger than her years. In time he found too that she had a deep apprecia-

tion of the more important things in the world, and also a tolerance and understanding far beyond her years.

He had had no thought of marriage as yet, feeling as many an artist does, that his career was before all else. But in a short time it was quite clear to him that this girl was destined for him and they became engaged. If his father and mother had any objections to his sudden matrimonial plans, they were soon discarded when they met the young lady in question. She charmed his whole family. Shortly after they met, they decided to be married. Their decision to become man and wife elated both families.

One Friday night Leibele decided to disclose the good news to Mr. Rafel.

"I have a surprise for you. I am to be married in a month."

"Well, what do you know about that? I hope it is a Passaic girl."

"No, a Brooklyn young lady."

"I wish you very good luck. I am glad you told me for we shall have to make arrangements in the temple for your wedding."

"You don't mean that you wish me to marry here?"

"Why, Leibele, we practically brought you up. You mean you would do us out of your wedding?"

"Oh, no. We have hired a hall and of course the important members of this temple are invited."

"I am afraid you will make a lot of enemies, unless you can invite some eight hundred members. Of course, it will be a little difficult, but take my advice and make it here."

Mr. Rafel was so insistent that Leibele promised to

give the matter thought. He decided to take it up with his fiancé.

"To do as Mr. Rafel says would put all our New York guests to a great inconvenience. To refuse him would be to make several hundred enemies."

"I think the sooner we decide to marry in Passaic the sooner we'll get somewhere. I see no other way," she answered.

And so it was. The guests from New York rather liked the idea of traveling to Passaic—most of them had not seen the position Leibele held and were curious to see for themselves.

\* \* \* \* \*

At her home the bride-to-be was awaiting the groom's arrival. Everything was going along smoothly—her gown was simple but beautiful and the flowers were fresh and artistically arranged. The matron of honor, her oldest sister, was gorgeous beyond description; the flower girl, who was her niece, was appealing with her flowing red hair and baby blue ruffled dress. Everything promised to be as perfect as the day.

Leibele walked in, and one glance at him told her that something dreadful had happened.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked, afraid lest the answer be in the affirmative.

He took one look at her as if he wanted to remember her like this the rest of his life. With her simple bridal gown and princess crown she looked even younger than the time he met her. He hated to tell her the bad news, but she would have to know sooner or later.

"Do try and take it bravely; my brother, Morris, is gravely ill."

She turned ashen white. She had a deep affection for Morris from the moment she met him. Already he was like a brother to her. They had, of course, decided that he be best man.

"When did it happen? How serious is it?"

"Last night he said he was not well, and collapsed. We called our family doctor and found out that he had been ill for a week without our knowing it. He had sworn the doctor to silence. Double pneumonia."

"Who is with him? Will your father and mother come to the wedding?"

"We were going to postpone the wedding, but my mother had been to consult with the rabbi, and he said that under no circumstances was the wedding to be delayed. Morris has the doctor and a nurse with him. My parents will hurry home right after the ceremony."

The news had a frightening effect on her, but the desire to console Leibeke was paramount in her mind.

"I am sure he will be all right. I bet he will be up on his feet in a short time. Something always happens on one's wedding day—ours was almost too perfect."

All the way to Passaic she kept on reassuring him until she herself began to believe in these words. He was heartened by her confidence in his brother's quick recovery and at the end of the ride he seemed a different person entirely. It was only when they alighted and saw his parents' faces that the original fear clutched at them anew. Their expressions seemed to say that Morris was too far gone for even a chance at recovery. Her heart went out to them, but she still kept up the pretense.

Her intended mother-in-law looked at her as she babbled reassurances, but the older woman was not de-

ceived. Rose took her sweet face and kissed her, and the bride could feel the mother's hot tears running down her own face. Hyman was quiet, but the expression in his eyes could not be mistaken.

Thoughts of the wedding were farthest from their minds and twice they were called for the ceremony. The ushers were already lined up in the aisles and they were called more urgently. An understanding look passed between the immediate family as they docilely followed the man who was directing the ceremony.

The wedding march was held up a bit as the little flower girl retraced her steps to pick up the petals she had thrown on the floor. She seemed to regret their loss and intended to gather up all of them. A stern look from the man made her hurry down to her place.

The bride came, escorted by her parents, and the people all stood up in their seats to catch a glimpse of her. Exclamations echoed from seat to seat. "Isn't she lovely. She is so young." If only they knew that she had aged ten years that afternoon.

The ceremony passed as quickly as a dream, with the rabbis extolling Leibele's character and the love everyone had for him wherever he went. Some complimentary words were said about the bride and before they knew it, they were walking to the reception room where a buffet luncheon was being served for all the guests.

The bride, the groom and the immediate family felt as if they were enacting a part in a play. They were participating in an affair while their hearts were nearer to a sick-bed. Leibele's friends did not know of the tragedy.

"Now will you dance with me? exalted *Duke*. "A bride must not refuse her husband's friends."

With this remark most of Leibele's friends gathered round her and vied for the first dance.

"Look, boys, I'd love to dance with every one of you, but I can't think of that now. Please excuse me."

"What, refuse us? Say, do you ever say yes?" questioned *Duke* angrily.

She looked at his face and whispered something in his ear. He became sober immediately and apologized profusely.

"I had no idea. When did it happen?"

The others wanted to know what it was all about but she motioned to *Duke* to be quiet. She did not want to spoil their good time.

Mr. Rafel approached and extended his hand to Leibele. "Congratulations, young fellow. Now I can hardly blame you. You have a charming wife. Everyone is enchanted with her."

There ensued a little discussion, more in the humorous strain, and the groom and bride, out of good manners, had to laugh at that one's witticism and the other's pun. A guilty look would pass between them at such times, as if one was apologizing to the other for laughing at a time like this.

"And just so the bride has a little spending money and does not have to nag for it from her miserly husband, the temple has great pleasure in giving to you, as a token of their affection, this little check."

"You are all so very good to Leibele and myself that thanks do not seem to be enough."

"That is all I wanted to know," said Mr. Rafel, "that means I can kiss the bride."

\* \* \* \* \*

After four hours the crowd began thinning out and only the more important guests remained. Soon they too took their departure, and with one dash bride and groom ran up the stairs to change their attire.

They were finally on the way home. Leibele's mother was sick with anxiety. The ordeal of pretending all the while her heart was breaking had proved too much for her. None dared to stop the flood of tears that was running down her cheeks. Hyman was silent but in one day he seemed to have aged years.

They were met by the nurse who told them that Morris' condition was the same.

"Leibele, I suggest we call in another professor. It would make your father and mother feel a bit better."

The professor was summoned, and he very frankly told them that doctors could not help the sick man now—it was up to God.

The next day one professor after another was called but they all had the same answer. Some even had a guilty air when they took the money proffered them.

At six o'clock in the evening, another professor was called. The parents could not conceive that the others were right in their diagnosis.

While the last one was with him, Morris made an attempt to learn his chances for recovery.

"Doctor, do I have a chance?"

"One always has a chance, my boy. Don't be scared."

"Doctor, save me." With this last plea on his parched lips he died. The family was in the next room and hear-

ing these last words they knew it was the end. Rose fainted into Leïbele's arms. The father ran into the sick room and embracing his dead son babbled incoherently. The bride tried to tear him away as the nurse ran to aid Rose. All her coaxing and pleading was of no avail, and she sat near him, keeping her face averted from the dead man, tears rolling down her young face. Some neighbors ran in and they succeeded in taking Hyman out of the room, while the bride tried all in her power to comfort her husband.

Leo and Gertrude had been sent on some errands and when they saw the lighted candles everything grew dim and they lost consciousness. The nurse had the Herculean task of administering to the family, aided somewhat by the eager efforts of the bride who was trying to keep as calm in these surroundings as was humanly possible.

The funeral procession was a long one, for young and old in the neighborhood wished to pay their last respects to this beloved boy. After Morris' death they found receipts for money that he had donated to charitable institutions of which the family had not even heard. The rabbi of the *shul* ruled that a light be burned in memory of the religious young man whose conduct and character was comparable to a saint.

## CHAPTER XIII

THERE wasn't an affair or officiation at which Leibele was present that he did not think of his brother. Always the thought kept recurring in his mind that Morris would have been overjoyed to see him make good and be acclaimed everywhere.

On a particular night the cantor, together with his wife, were guests of a very worthy institution—the Home of Old Israel. This was their annual banquet, the proceeds being used to defray the expenses of the organization.

The entertainment committee did not restrict itself to Jewish talent alone—it had no difficulty in gaining the services of almost anyone asked.

One of the directors pointed to a man who was surrounded with quite a number of Jewish artists. He explained that the individual was president of a new million dollar organization who employed the artists to sing for him on the radio. That hour was proving the most colorful on the Jewish radio.

The English talent, consisting of dancers and acrobats, with humor thrown in by their master of ceremonies, pleased the audience no end. To Leibele's surprise they called on him next.

He sang a Hebrew traditional, and the applause was deafening. He then sang a Jewish folk song, which also went over very well.

Some one screamed, "English. Something in English."

This no doubt was coming from the younger element in the group. The older people took up the call for an English number.

Leibele sang an English ballad, a number that he himself liked very much. When he started to leave the stage after that number, he was met by a husky young man who introduced himself as the district leader. He immediately told Leibele that he was Irish and the song nearest to his heart was 'When Irish Eyes are Smiling.' Did the cantor know the number? Would he be good enough to sing it for his friends.

Leibele had not answered in the affirmative, but the other lost no time. He announced that the cantor had obliged him by promising to sing for him the Irish number. He was caught as in a net. To refuse would have been a gross insult to the non-Jewish element that were friends of that organization. He shrugged and signalling to the pianist, began the requested number.

The Irish people became enthusiastic as Leibele sang further and further. They marveled that he could sing the piece so accurately—even the brogue was perfect. His wife, who had never before heard him sing the number, could hardly believe that it was indeed her husband who was singing. He bowed and made his way off the platform. But they were not going to let him leave. That night he must have sung at least six numbers, while the other talent sat nervously awaiting their turn.

Somehow the rest of the talent was not enthusias-

tically received. It seemed that the audience had spent all its energy on the one performer. One after the other the performers, who were established on the Jewish radio, could not understand why they were not clicking that night. Even their best musical numbers did not bring forth any particular recognition.

The president of the million dollar organization came over to Leibele's table and instead of complimenting him insisted that he could not understand why an audience should go so wild over a cantor. He had never considered a cantor to be an artist, to have such appeal to an audience. He could understand it better if Leibele had been an actor.

A humorous expression passed between Leibele and his wife. Either the man was stupid or he was deliberately being insulting.

"There are probably a lot of things you don't understand," the young man answered, all the while a smile playing on his lips.

The man did not seem to be aware of the insult that Leibele's words implied. His naive manner convinced Leibele that he was not clever—he had a thought in his mind and he conveyed it, that was all. He even doubted that the other had a malicious intent.

"But I give you credit," continued the man. "Could you give me your card? I may need you."

At first Leibele had the impulse to refuse and he glanced at his wife to see her reaction. She nodded, as if to say, "There is no harm in it; he is still president of a big concern."

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day the phone rang and Leibele recognized the voice as belonging to the man who asked for his card.

"I have a proposition for you. Can you come to see me at the office in my store?"

"Yes. What time?"

"Any time today. I will be waiting for you."

The store the man referred to was a block square. In it could be found anything from shoe laces to bedroom suites. It was filled with thrifty shoppers, who literally took the word of the radio announcer that here you could get things at half price, and a gift to the bargain. From the looks of things, this organization could truly work itself into the million dollar figures.

Leibele was shown into the office where the president, Mr. Sobel, was looking over some documents.

"I shall come to the point," said Mr. Sobel. "I want you to sing on my programs. I have the best Jewish actors. I can get anyone I want," he boasted.

"I see. And you would like to have a cantor on your program too."

"Oh, no. It is not as a cantor that I want you to appear on my programs—just as an artist. I will tell you the truth, I have no real liking for that type of music and I doubt whether the public will take to it. But you could sing folk songs, and English numbers for the young people who listen to my hour."

"You mean you don't want me to sing cantorial at all?" questioned Leibele, angry at the man's choice of a program for him.

"No, no. Why cantorial? Just sing what I said."

"I am sorry, Mr. Sobel, but I don't think I should care to sing those numbers only; I would rather sing my Hebrew traditional music than any other."

"All right, so you can sing your cantors' songs once in a while; but not too often."

"It would have to be at least one a week," answered the young cantor stubbornly. He knew what he wanted and he wasn't going to let the man talk him out of it, even if it meant no radio work.

"All right, have it your way. You're about the only one of the artists who dictates to me. But I'd like to have you, so you win. One Hebrew song a program. You'll start this coming Monday, and you'll continue on Friday morning. If you make good, I'll put you on the Sunday hour."

This was like a challenge to the cantor. The man certainly had nerve. The way he said it, it seemed to Leibeles that he dared him to make a hit with the public.

In the man's mind, thought Leibeles, there still was the thought that a cantor was not an artist—that he doubted whether the public could be entertained by this type of performer.

"That is a fair proposition. I take it on." The price was agreed on and he was to start the following week.

Leibeles's earlier experience on the radio stood him in good stead now. He was perfectly at ease at the microphone and sang his compositions the same way he would at a concert or in a synagogue. With the first program, the fan mail came in great numbers, and with the passing of the months, it reached the thousands weekly. But Leibeles was kept in ignorance of all this.

He could not understand why his mail did not at least equal the quantity that the other artists received. And this thought had a very good effect on him—he set himself to work harder. His most beautiful compositions

were written during this period. He also employed a colleague to write special folk songs for him, not sentimental ones, but those that would depict the plight of Israel in these trying times. Also he demanded songs that would bring out the prayer that was in every heart, that God in his mercy spare His suffering people from any further persecutions here or abroad.

The compositions touched the hearts of the people. Thousands of letters came in requesting certain numbers, some asking where they could obtain copies. Apparently they were not answered and the people found a new means. They wrote directly to the cantor's home.

It was then that Leibele understood what was going on. He didn't worry much for he had already received a new offer to appear on a radio program.

However things were destined to turn out otherwise. Mr. Sobel was not content with merely being the president of a firm and the sponsor of three programs a week. He wanted to announce his programs and personally talk to his public. There was no one who could prevent him, so he was free to carry out his whim.

During one of his Sunday programs, he was engaged in an argument with an artist who was starring on the program. When Mr. Sobel threatened to fire him, the other egotistically replied that the president could not do without him, and that before long he would come to beg him to resume the program.

The audience could hear what was going on but that did not stop Mr. Sobel or the artist. To recall his performer would be to ridicule himself. But whom could he substitute? Already he had given the artist a big ballyhoo and had himself announced him as the greatest. Not that

he was a judge, but Mr. Sobel was never conservative—every artist that he sponsored, he announced as the greatest.

“There is just one man to take his place,” mused Mr. Sobel, “judging from all his fan mail. I’ll let him on for a while and if he makes good on this spot, I will retain him.”

Thus it was that Leibele found himself on a Sunday spot. Though Mr. Sobel announced him as the “one and only,” and similar ways, he lacked the sincerity that he had when he announced the previous star of the program. Leibele, unmindful of the other’s lack of enthusiasm continued to thrill his audience with every new song. Not until the people crowded the store at radio broadcasts requesting autographed photos of the cantor and personally conveyed their admiration for him did the head of the firm realize the worth of this artist on his program.

Very rarely did he repeat a number. And why should he? He was not an artist by reason of one popular number. His repertoire was extensive, and it would take him years to exhaust it. Every time that a previous number was requested, and he sang it, he felt cheated. There were so many songs he could sing. And all the time his colleague was writing new folk songs for him.

One day his colleague brought a new composition for Leibele’s approval. As was his usual procedure, Leibele sat down at the piano to play it before attempting to sing the selection.

“I would suggest a change here,” said Leibele.

The man seemed peeved.

“Look, Leibele, I would rather sell my compositions

to you than to anyone else. I know what you can do with them. But please don't change them."

"Now what is eating you? What do you mean don't change them? I read a composition, and then I sing it the way I judge it should be done. In other words, I interpret it the way I feel. How then could I sing it with feeling? Would you be more satisfied if I sang it just the way it is on the sheet? Anyone could do that."

"Well, in a way you're right, but it puts me on the spot. After some cantors and singers hear you do a number, they want to buy a copy from me. With the result that when they finally sing it, they don't recognize it as the same that I gave you. And they insist that I am playing favorites."

"I am truly sorry on that account. But that is the only way I can do a number. I've got to sing it the way I think it should be sung."

As always their arguments ended in an amiable mood.

True enough, the song that Leibele popularized would somehow sound different when anyone else sang it. In fact, it did not seem like the same composition at all.

Mr. Sobel was having his financial troubles and no longer found time to do the announcing over the air. He turned his announcer's job over to a professional in the field.

"I have a suggestion to make, Cantor Waldman," said the new man, Mr. Fleishmann. "Why don't you let me give you a little advertisement?"

"I am afraid I don't understand what you mean."

"Simply this. When I announce you I could say somewhere during the broadcast that you perform weddings, *bar mitzvas*, sing at affairs, and I give your address. I have never heard that announced on your programs. Don't you do that sort of work?"

"I most certainly do, but I do not allow my announcers to give me that sort of publicity. To my mind it sounds cheap and degrading to the profession."

"Come, come, Cantor Waldman. You know as well as I that it brings in business."

"That reminds me. Time and again I have people call me and ask me whether I perform that type of work. They go through a great deal of bother calling the station, getting my phone number and finally call me at home. Doesn't that prove that if you make an impression on the audience and they want you, they'll find you, but if an artist does not please his audience, then all the complimentary things you say about him will not help. Anyway, I don't think it is ethical."

"I still think it increases business," argued the announcer.

"I can't complain. My weddings come in mostly through recommendation. When I perform the ceremony of one member of a family, I am sure to be called on to perform the marriage of others in the same family. Invariably some prospective bride or groom will say that he or she had heard me at a particular place and was interested in obtaining my services."

"How about the concert work?" questioned the other a bit incredulously.

"The same is true of that type of work. I usually

find myself engaged for certain organizations year in and year out.”

“Then you don’t want me to make any advertisement with regard to yourself?”

“Definitely not,” answered Leibele emphatically.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leibele was indeed a rebel in the profession. He purposely refrained from doing things that were practically a tradition in the cantorial profession.

He recalled the Friday night and Saturday services at one of the largest synagogues on the East Side. From all appearances the *dovining* was a success.

He was therefore surprised to have a man bring up something to him about which he was never conscious.

“Cantor Waldman, I’d like to ask you something.”

“Yes. Go right ahead.”

“This is the first time that I have heard you and there is one thing about your *dovining* that I can’t get over.”

“Yes, yes, come to the point.” The young cantor was growing impatient. As a rule if a person took time in making a criticism, it was bound to be a very bad one.

“Well, it’s simply this. The cantors I have heard lately seemed to use every part of their bodies when singing. For instance they would make gestures with their hands, they would literally cry at the proper places, even their eyes played a part in their *dovining*. But you stand so composed, your mouth alone giving evidence that you are singing. You don’t use any motions at all. Would it not be better if you did?”

“Before I answer you, let me ask you one question.

Did my *dovining* have feeling? Did it move you as much as the cantors who use all sorts of wild gestures?"

"Oh, yes," answered the other enthusiastically. "But somehow I seemed to miss those actions. I think they give color to a cantor."

"That is where I don't agree with you. People are not fooled by a lot of gesticulating—what they want is feeling from within and a pleasing voice. To me any cantor that resorts to dramatic actions at a pulpit is an actor not a cantor, and is trying to cover up what he lacks in voice and interpretation."

The man held his mouth wide open as these new revelations reached his ears.

"Of course I don't expect you to agree with me instantly," continued Leibele. "But just study cantors who resort to violent motions on the pulpit. You'll find that I am right in my opinion."

"You might have something there," agreed the other.

"I must confess something else to you, Cantor. I had this on my mind all night Friday and today. I can't seem to understand it."

"I shall not be offended. What is it?" asked Leibele.

"I hesitate to say it to you. It is not a complimentary remark. But I must get it off my chest."

The man was full of criticism. One must take the good with the bad.

"Don't get the wrong impression," began the stranger. "It is not my opinion at all. I listen to you over the radio every time you appear. Naturally, there are many others here that do the same. In our opinion you are the greatest of these times. When there was some discussion in our synagogue about hiring you for Sabbath

services, some few members revealed that at various times some cantors have expressed the opinion that you are only good over the air."

"That is nothing new to me," answered Leibele. "However, what do you think? You can speak frankly; I tolerate others' opinions."

"Well, I don't know whether you will believe me, but as sure as we have a God in heaven, in my opinion you are even better in person. There is a certain quality in your voice that is lost over the air waves. Seems to me it is more ringing and more appealing in person."

"Frankly, I don't know how I would have felt had you agreed with those malicious people that spread such rumors about me. I have encountered the rumor in places where it did me a great deal of harm. I don't know what joy or solace they get out of slandering one."

"I suppose there is jealousy in every profession," replied the other.

"Take those places out-of-town, where they do not get my radio programs," continued Leibele. "You see it works like this. Supposing a few members of an out-of-town synagogue suggest to the committee that they hire me for an officiation. Then they are advised by an envious individual that Waldman is good on the air only. Certainly one of his own profession ought to know, they figure; and that is how some engagements are killed for me before the people have a chance to hear me. It has come to my ears from various places, where the people had the firm conviction to hire me and find out for themselves."

"Is it a personal grudge that these men have against you?" questioned the stranger.

"No. For I have not given offense to anyone in the profession. Usually this slandering is done by the insignificant cantors who would do much better as one of our jolly colleagues says, 'if he would open up a candy store for himself.' Those same persons seem to resent the fact that an American fellow, so young, could rise to public favor within a relatively short time, while they have struggled all their lives and are still not recognized."

The stranger nodded assent, his meaning being clear without spoken words.

"I hope I do not sound egotistical to you but that is the conclusion I have drawn from conversations brought back to me by my good friends who tell me everything that is said against me."

"I would not worry about that if I were you. To my mind they are not your audience. After all, it is the public that is the best judge, and it is to them that you have to look for success in your career," spoke the man wisely.

"I guess you are right. I hope you will excuse me, I have to change. I am expected for dinner."

They took leave of one another. Leibele became depressed as he realized how widespread the malicious rumors about him were. He decided on a clever course—he would accept the offers managers were giving him from time to time to officiate out-of-town, even if it meant going to the most far off places. Of course, reasoned Leibele, it would mean giving up business that came in steadily at every season. But it was worth it—it would make the rumor seem a deliberate lie.

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It did not matter to Leibele that his next engagement was in Winnipeg, Canada. The offer was a good one and

it was in line with his decision to officiate everywhere possible provided the fee also was attractive. As soon as he and the manager alighted at the station, they were not so sure that they should have come. The cold was unbearable.

"Look, Mr. Fine, don't you think we ought to buy ourselves some different clothes? How are we going to go out?"

"That's just it. We won't. People don't take walks here. Only those that must leave their houses. The proprietor of this place will see that we are comfortable."

"You mean to say that for three days we won't go out?"

"Look, Leibele, I brought you all the way from New York. The amount I invested in this *dovining* is a pretty penny. I am not going to take a chance of letting you out in a 20 below zero weather."

A chill went through the cantor at the mention of the thermometer reading. In the room it was warm and cozy, pretty much like home. But glancing through the window one white mass of blinding white met his eyes. The few people trudging along, dressed in their fur coats and long boots, looked more like bears than human beings. To the people in Winnipeg it was the usual weather.

"I forgot to tell you. A president of a *shul* in Ontario gave me a deposit for your services at a concert. We start tomorrow."

"That means I remain prisoner for another three days in Ontario."

"That is nothing," laughed the manager, "from there we'll go further."

"Oh no, Mr. Fine, that would be impossible. I must

be in New York at the end of next week. I have business to attend to there."

"That can easily be remedied. You wire your home to turn over that business to other cantors. As a sort of substitute."

"I can't do that. The people who hired me are depending on me. I don't approve of the practice of sending substitutes unless it is in case of sickness, when the people to the contract agree to my doing so."

"Well, then it's time you start now. Why the greatest cantors have done the same thing. Surely you are not going to give up big opportunities because of some ordinary business in New York?"

"I realize that I am giving up an opportunity of making a name for myself in Canada, but I am afraid I cannot do as you say. I have what you would call a conscience."

"Leibele, as a cantor you're tops. But you're no business man," said the other angrily.

"But you are not interested in the business man, so why worry? Don't fear. We'll be back in Canada some day."

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Upon Leibele's return from Canada he found a message from Cantor Rosenblatt to call him.

"Hello, Leibele. I have some news for you. I am leaving for Palestine."

"Not for long, I hope. That has been my life-long ambition—to go to Palestine with my parents for a trip. When are you leaving?"

"In two weeks. But first I am to appear at a concert

in Richmond Hill, and I should like you to share the program with me.”

“I should like to very much, but I don’t see how I can make it. I have two affairs that night.”

“Leave it to me, Leibele. Because of you, the people will get more for their money. I will prolong the concert until you come.”

It was agreed. And that night Leibele hurried about saving a minute here, and five minutes there, and at eleven thirty o’clock he at last found himself in front of the Center.

The golden voice of Cantor Rosenblatt floated through the open window so that people who could not find place inside the Center could very easily hear him on the outside. A thrill ran up Leibele’s spine as the sweet notes reached him, and with it the thought that this great artist was leaving for Palestine. Indeed the younger man was a little saddened as he waited for the number to end before he stepped into the place of worship.

There was a little stir as he came into the place. He made as if to sit down in back of the *shul*. He intended to sit there until Cantor Rosenblatt was finished with his part of the program, but the latter motioned him to come up front.

With his hand affectionately placed on Leibele’s shoulder, Cantor Rosenblatt led him to the center of the pulpit.

“Good friends, I don’t know whether some of you may have heard that I am leaving for Palestine. We are in God’s hands, and who knows whether I shall come back.” There was protest among the audience to these words.

“Should I not be among you again, I leave you a great heritage—none other than this fine young man whom I have learned to love as a son through my various contacts with him. Aside from his pleasing character, in my humble opinion, he is the greatest of the young talent that we have today.”

Greatly inspired by the compliment, Leibeles sang as he never had before. And that night went down in his memory as the turning point in his career—it brought him confidence and courage to produce his compositions in his own style, regardless of the criticism of any colleague.

## CHAPTER XIV.

IT was Sunday and the phone began ringing at seven o'clock in the morning. Afraid that the bell might awaken the rest of the family, Leibele's wife hurried downstairs to answer it. Shakingly she lifted the phone, for a call at that time of the morning was not a frequent happening.

"Hello," said Mrs. Waldman.

"Hello. I should like to speak with Cantor Waldman." This was followed by an hysterical outburst that left Mrs. Waldman terrified.

"Hello. Who is this? Please tell me what is wrong."

A man's voice took over. "I am sorry, Mrs. Waldman. That was my niece. She's lost herself, poor thing. Her mother passed away yesterday morning."

"Oh, I am dreadfully sorry. She gave me a terrific scare," answered Mrs. Waldman, wondering why they would call her husband.

"Please forgive us, but when one is in these circumstances one doesn't think reasonably. We called you because we would like to have Cantor Waldman say the prayer for my sister."

"I don't know how to tell you but I am sincerely sorry. What you ask is quite impossible. You see Cantor

Waldman, for very personal reasons, does not do that type of singing. May I suggest a rabbi to you."

"I am afraid that wouldn't do." Before the man had a chance to continue, the daughter of the departed woman got on the phone.

"Please, please, Mrs. Waldman," she sobbed, "he must do this for us. Before she died my mother requested his presence at her funeral. Surely he would not refuse the last wish of a dead person."

Mrs. Waldman felt chills race through her body upon hearing these words. Without asking her husband, she knew his reaction to such work. Time and again she had heard him turn down this type of an engagement. But the young lady's words had a paralyzing effect on her.

"Please understand that I know how you feel, and I truly sympathize with you. It isn't as if I personally have not had my share of this kind of tragedy. You see my brother passed away some ten years ago and I was very much attached to him. And Cantor Waldman's brother passed away one day after our wedding, so you see I can easily feel with you. But I am afraid that Cantor Waldman cannot do as you say—his recent tragedy especially has had such an effect on him, that a funeral scene would leave him sick for days. Please try to understand."

All the while that Mrs. Waldman spoke, the girl kept sobbing and occasionally would interrupt to say that it was not sufficient reason for denying the wish of a dead woman.

Leibele, also awakened by the phone, had picked up

the receiver in his room. He had heard the conversation between his wife and the young lady.

"Excuse me, Mollie. I'll speak to the young lady."

"Oh, Cantor Waldman. In God's name please don't refuse. I know the reasons why you don't sing at such occasions, but please make an exception."

"All right, tell me where it is. I'll be there," the cantor promised.

When he came down for breakfast, his wife looked at him questioningly.

"How could I refuse her?" asked Leibele, averting his eyes. "The dead woman wished it. I could not have that on my conscience."

"I came pretty near saying yes myself," answered his wife. "I am rather glad that you agreed to go. I know it would have bothered me had you refused. But, Leibele, please don't let it affect you."

"Oh no, it won't. Don't you fear."

When he came back from the unfortunate affair, Leibele was a changed man. His face was pallid and his appetite was gone. It had brought back more vividly thoughts of Morris and he was saddened the whole day. His wife had the good judgment to have some of his best friends over, and though he laughed at their jokes, and listened to their witty conversation, inwardly he remained as melancholy as before. His pretense of having forgotten the day's happenings did not fool his wife, who hoped that he would never again officiate at such occasions.

\* \* \* \* \*

"If there was any doubt in your mind of the affection your audience has for you, then this should prove

it to you," jokingly reflected Leibele's manager, leaning over his cantor's bed.

"It certainly is good to feel that people feel that way about you," answered Leibele, too weak to discuss it any further.

The attack of acute appendicitis had come on suddenly. Leibele was totally unaware of it, as he went about performing his week-end engagements. Everything was fine, until Monday night, when a severe headache made him go to bed earlier than usual. He thought it was probably the effects of a busy week-end.

By Tuesday it proved to be more than a simple headache. There was a pain in his side and a dullness that seemed to signal of other things. Still he did not suspect, and hesitated to alarm his wife.

He remained in bed which was not his custom at all. When his wife inquired whether he was all right he pretended that he was reading something interesting. Mollie, on the other hand, had noticed his pallor and when he refused to eat anything, lifted the phone to call the doctor. Leibele reached over to put the receiver down, saying emphatically that he did not need a doctor; just a good morning's sleep.

But the gnawing pain came back stronger. Mollie slyly went downstairs and called the doctor without her husband's knowledge.

When she had contacted the doctor on the phone, she asked Leibele to pick up the receiver.

"But I didn't hear the phone ring."

"But there is someone, nevertheless, on the phone who wishes to speak with you."

"Hello," spoke Leibele.

"What's wrong, young man? What seems to be ailing you?"

"Say who's this?" asked Leibele of his wife, but she only smiled. "What is this?"

"Look, Cantor Waldman. This is Dr. Orlick speaking. What is wrong?"

"Oh, all right. I suppose my wife called you. It's nothing. Just a pain in the side."

"And you have no appetite?" asked the doctor.

"How did you know?" questioned Leibele.

"What do you think I went to college for? I know all the answers. I am coming right over."

"Now why did you have to call him?" pleaded Leibele.

"Well, I don't like the way you act and I don't like the way you look, so I called the doctor."

In a short time the physician came and in a few minutes expressed his belief.

"Seems to me it's the appendix, young fellow. What do you say we do?"

"Appendix, what are you talking about? I'll be all right in a little while. Anyway I have a big concert this coming Sunday. I have no time for an appendix," joked Leibele.

"What do you suggest we do, Mrs. Waldman?"

"Just what you are thinking. Dr. Orlick. Call a specialist."

So it was that Leibele found himself in a hospital bed that night. Mollie had seen to it that the specialist deceive her husband into thinking that he was there merely for observation.

In the morning they came to prepare him for the operation and there was not a more surprised person than

Leibele. Why, he was merely here for observation. If they doubted him they could call Dr. Iason.

"Look, big shot, it's funny but Dr. Iason told us just the opposite. And you had better hurry. You're due up there in fifteen minutes."

The family doctor refused to let his wife near him before the operation for he saw that she was near collapse already. Her brave front was no longer visible, now that Leibele had been told the truth. He was afraid the ordeal would prove too much for her.

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The operation was successful and he was being wheeled out from the operating room. Mollie had dodged Dr. Orlick and learning the whereabouts of the operating room dashed up before the doctor had time to stop her. Leibele looked up at her.

"You are not frightened are you? You see it is nothing." And he smiled.

That reassured her and she left his side to join him in his room.

"Now look, Mollie, what about my work for the next two weeks?"

"Good gravy," wondered Dr. Iason, "is that all you can think of now?"

"Don't you worry about that now," replied Mollie assuringly. "I'll notify the people and we'll arrange everything to their satisfaction. You must rest now."

"But my concert this Sunday. What can I do about this? There is an advance sale."

"Well, they'll just have to get another cantor."

"Say, does he always take his work so seriously?" questioned the doctor.

"He just can't help it. He's conscientious about everything he does," defended Mollie. "Seriously, though, Leibele, you're not going to do yourself any good by having these thoughts. The people can readily understand that you did not wish this appendix operation on yourself."

"You are right. Will you break the news very gently to my parents? Go to them now."

With the passing of some four days, Leibele was on the improving side and his immediate family was breathing a bit easier. His mother had been ill with the flu and news of Leibele's operation was kept from her.

"Look, Gertrude, we will have to tell your mother today," said Leibele's wife.

"Why? Let's wait for a few days. By that time he will almost be ready to go home, and the shock won't be so great. And then Mama will feel so much better too."

"But don't you see, Leibele is on the air every Friday. Remember she has been wondering already why he has not been to see her during the week that she has been in bed. And if she doesn't hear him on the air, she will surmise that something is wrong. Today is Thursday."

"I think you're right. But I'll wait until tomorrow morning. In the meantime I'll arrange with Leo to have a cab ready; for no doubt she will want to go to him immediately."

"Then too the announcer over the Friday program may say that he is ill in the hospital. I debated with him what to say and it seemed to me that he would have his way."

"That settles it," answered Gertrude. "We will have to tell Mama tomorrow morning."

That Thursday night Gertrude hardly slept a bit. In her mind she was figuring out the best way to break the news to her mother. Perhaps this way was better; no, her mother would become hysterical. Perhaps just tell her that Leibele wanted to see her; that it was a surprise. No, that would not do—the shock might prove too great.

Friday morning found a sleepless Gertrude coming up her mother's stairs. She had prearranged for some of her mother's friends to be present when she broke the news to her.

"Hello, Ma. How do you feel today?"

"What a surprise. What made you come today again? It's such a trip for you from the Bronx."

"Oh, I just felt like coming. Seems to me you're feeling better, Ma."

"Much better. I think I'll make some fish today, since I do feel so much better."

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in," invited Mrs. Waldman.

"Hello, Rose. I thought I'd come up to see you before I get really busy. How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. I never had so much company on a Friday morning."

There was another knock on the door.

"Come in," said Rose.

"Hello, Ma. How do you feel?"

"What are you doing here at this time of day, Leo?"

"I have the morning off."

"Ma," said Gertrude, "Leibele asked us to bring you to his house."

"What nonsense are you talking about? Leibele is

going to sing on the radio at a quarter after twelve. What do you mean he wants me to come to see him?"

"We did not want to tell you because you too were ill. But he has not been feeling well these four days."

"What are you trying to lead up to? Gertrude, what are you trying to tell me?" The mother's face turned ashen, as she leaned on the chair for support.

"Look, Mom. You have to be thankful. First you must remember that he's fine. Very fine. But Mom, Leibeke is in the hospital. He was operated on for appendix."

"I felt there was something wrong. So that's what it was. Why didn't you tell me before? Where's my dress? My shoes? Leo, hand me some water."

It was marvelous to see such a transformation. She was no longer the sick woman, just out of her sick bed. She was strong, endowed with the same strength that all mothers suddenly receive when a child is in danger or ill.

With Gertrude's help, she was soon dressed.

"Take me to him." Then cautiously she asked, "Does Papa know?"

"Yes, Papa knows," answered Leo. "He has been to see him already. He'll be there today too. He's probably there since early morning."

"When did it happen?"

"Mama, please don't worry yourself so. An appendix operation isn't so serious. Why lots of people have them now."

"What do I care about lots of people? Why do you talk so childishly?"

After a hectic ride they finally reached the hospi-

tal. Gertrude showed her mother to a seat and told her they still had a half hour to wait.

"Where did they put him? Why didn't Mollie put him in a private room?"

"For a very good reason. See those people in that group there. They are all waiting to see him. If he weren't semi-private, he'd have company from morning till night. As it is he has too many coming."

"That's right. I did not realize it. But those are too many people to see him. We must not allow him to see so many visitors, it will weaken him," said Rose.

"Don't you worry, Mom. Mollie is in there and allows just one person at a time. The first four days she didn't even let me stay long—just five minutes. And I wasn't supposed to talk to Leibele. And if you want to stay in there a little while, you had better not carry on. Act cool and don't cry, whatever you do."

The mother's visit to her son did them both a great deal of good. She said not a word, as she sat by his bedside holding his hand. When he attempted to say something, she hushed him.

"That's the way it should be," beamed Leibele's wife. "No excitement and no hysterics in the sick room." The nurse smiled.

Visiting hours were over and the family left. Mollie, who usually remained for the evening visit, left for home because there were various business engagements of her husband's that she had to attend to that day.

No sooner had she stepped into the house than the phone rang.

"Is that you, Mollie?"

"Yes, Gertrude. Why are you calling me?"

"You'll never know what happened. I tell you I am still shaking from shock. My poor mother is more sick than she has been all this week."

"Gertrude, come to the point. What happened?"

"I'll tell you as quickly as I can. I must go back to my mother. Just as soon as we reached our street, we noticed that the block was filled with people, some talking excitedly and some crying and wiping their eyes. We thought, God forbid, someone had passed away. As we came nearer we heard the words 'Leibele Waldman,' 'That's the mother,' 'That's the sister.' My heart stood still; I was just rooted to the spot. A woman approached me and asked 'Is it true that your brother passed away?' Well, I looked at my mother and she had fainted. I was so mad at the woman that I must have screamed at her. All I remember her saying was 'Well, that's what everybody has been saying. I meant no harm.' "

"Go on, Gertrude."

"Well, we took my mother upstairs where her friends are with her. You should have seen our hall. It was full of people, some weeping and some discussing Leibele. When they saw us, especially my mother, they assumed that the rumor was true. And you should have heard the wailing. I left my mother upstairs and I went down to find out how this thing started."

"Gertrude, tell me quickly. How *did* this thing start?"

"Seems there was a radio announcement to that effect. Mollie, will you call the station and find out?"

"I will just as soon as you hang up. Call me later in the day and tell me how your father and mother feel."

"All right. Don't you be upset by any rumor. That

is really the reason why I called you. Just in case anyone gets in touch with you in regard to the same. Goodbye."

As Mrs. Waldman hung up, she wondered whether Gertrude had not been exaggerating. Nevertheless, it would do no harm to call the announcer of the broadcasting station and find out whether any misleading news regarding her husband's condition had been disclosed.

"Hello, Mr. Goren. I'd like to know whether any announcement was made regarding my husband's condition."

"Just one, Mrs. Waldman. On his Friday program it was said that he had been taken to the hospital for an appendix operation and that was the reason why he was not broadcasting."

"Are you sure there were no other announcements?"

"None. Except that we announced that his sponsor, Mr. Harris Miller, died the same day that your husband was taken to the hospital. Why do you ask?"

She explained the reason to him and the announcer repeated her that nothing had been said to give rise to such a dreadful rumor.

Tired from the few days' anxiety and rush, Mrs. Waldman sat down to have a sandwich and coffee. Things were turning out all right. Leibele would be home in a few more days.

The phone rang and Mollie went to pick up the receiver.

"Hello."

"Hello. I hardly know how to begin. I really hesitated to call. But, this is Mrs. Brown. Who is this?"

"How do you do, Mrs. Brown. This is Mrs. Waldman."

"Mrs. Waldman, this is Mrs. Brown, whose son your husband married off. It is such a relief to hear your voice. For that proves to me that it isn't true, otherwise you wouldn't be at the phone."

"What isn't true, Mrs. Brown? Please tell me."

"I really can't bring myself to say it to you of all people. But I had to call you. There are about fifty people in my store waiting for your answer. Goodbye, I'll call you again later."

Mollie put two and two together, and there could just be one answer. The rumor had spread from the East Side to Williamsburgh. But how could news travel so fast? It was almost unbelievable. Hardly were these thoughts shaped than the phone rang again.

"Hello. I hope you will excuse us. But how is Cantor Waldman? The rumor that is being spread is it true?"

"Cantor Waldman is doing very well, thank you. Any rumor to the contrary is not true. Please tell me how you heard of it?"

"Well, my mother went down to her butcher, and there she heard all the women talking about Cantor Waldman. When she asked what it was all about, they told her that there had been a radio announcement to the effect that he had passed away. My mother rushed right home and before we knew it, she was crying bitterly. Somehow the news had a very tragic effect on all of us. We never even met the cantor, but we all listen to him on the air and have learned to like him a great deal. Excuse me while I tell my mother the good news."

As one in a dream, the cantor's wife obediently

held the phone, while the significance of this second call came to her mind. Finally she heard an older woman's voice.

"Hello. You don't know how happy you have made me. Who is it I'm talking to? Mrs. Waldman? Oh, Mrs. Waldman, you don't know what's doing in my section. Everywhere, in the grocery, fruit stores and bakeries the women are crying. Can you imagine such a rumor? But that's a good sign. Your husband will live till one hundred and twenty."

"I thank you for calling and for your good wishes. Can you tell me where you live?"

"I live in the Bronx. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Just that I was curious to know."

"Well, please excuse us for bothering you. But we just couldn't help calling."

"I understand and I am sincerely grateful."

She glanced at her sandwich and the cold cup of coffee and found that she could not even touch food now. This rumor was not spread from mouth to mouth—it could not have reached various sections of the city in so short a time. There was something wrong somewhere. The sooner she found out the starting point of that false announcement, the better it could be stopped.

The phone rang again.

"Madison Park Hospital calling. Is this Mrs. Waldman? We would like your advice, Mrs. Waldman. We have been getting some five hundred calls this afternoon inquiring about Cantor Waldman. When our switchboard operator inquired of a few why they were calling so urgently, they answered that a rumor had been spread that your husband had passed away. Is there any way that

you could stop these calls? It is interfering with our telephone service."

"I don't know how I can stop it but I shall certainly try. I am sorry that we are giving you so much trouble."

That day and for the following two days and nights the phone rang constantly. Anxious to deny the rumors, Mrs. Waldman remained at the phone. By the second day she was exhausted, and a friend walked in just at the right time.

"Mollie, if you don't get away from that phone, I'm going to cut those wires. Look at yourself. I think in a short while they will have to move an extra bed into Leibele's room and put you in there."

"But Flo, I must remain at the phone. When people speak to me they are reassured of the truth. There are so many engagements Leibele has taken on and those people especially must be convinced that he is well."

"All right. Just you lie down on the couch and I'll take over."

Despite Mrs. Waldman's reluctance, the other had her way. The girl made a light meal, and Flo forced her to eat it.

The phone rang constantly, and Flo answered each one that Cantor Waldman was fine; that he was expected home in five days.

One particular phone call came through and no reassurances could convince the woman.

"What do you mean, how do I know if Cantor Waldman is fine?" inquired Flo. "I've just been to see him, that ought to prove something."

"You're a liar," screamed the voice on the other end of the phone.

"Who's a liar?" angrily retorted Flo.

"Let me talk to the woman," pleaded Mollie. "I'm sure she will believe me."

"Hello. This is Mrs. Waldman speaking. Can I help you?"

"You're Mrs. Waldman? Oh, I recognize your voice. This is Mrs. Resnick from the Day Nursery. Now I know it isn't true. You don't know what that news did to us all here. Please forgive me for my rudeness."

"That is quite all right. And thank you for calling, Mrs. Resnick."

"Do you still want to answer the phone, Flo?" asked Mollie.

"Not when I'm called a liar. Especially when I'm telling the truth." And they both laughed.

"Flo, seriously though, something will have to be done. All of Leibele's advance engagements have called me and I have assured them that all is well. But it will do him a lot of harm. Furthermore, we haven't slept a whole night, and one more night like this and I won't be able to stand on my feet."

"Who called you at night?"

"Mostly Leibele's closer friends and acquaintances. Seems that they hesitated to call for fear of learning the worst but at night they were so tortured by the rumor that they could not refrain from calling. Of course, under the circumstances, they did not expect me to answer the phone, but you should have heard their exclamations of joy when my voice answered them. That was worth the sleepless night I spent."

"May be so, but I'll take my night's sleep. What do you propose to do?"

"Methinks I'll call the radio station again. I'll pay for announcements to be made three times a day for two days that Leibeles is fine and that any rumor is false."

"That seems to me the only way out."

The phone rang, and Flo answered it.

"Who was that?" asked Mollie.

"That was the switchboard operator at the *Forward*. She has been getting hundreds of calls and visitors inquiring if the news about Leibeles was true. Guess what. She asked for an official announcement."

"This isn't funny. I know it is not true, yet every time I answer the phone to some weeping person, a shiver runs through me."

The phone rang again, and Flo rushed to answer it.

"Yes, this is Cantor Waldman's home. No, it is not true. As a matter of fact he will be home in five days. Who is it? The *Morning Journal*? Yes. You can say that the rumor is false and that he is, thank God, feeling very well."

"Let me have the phone, I'll call the station."

Mollie again contacted the announcer, Mr. Goren.

"This is Mrs. Waldman. My phone has not stopped ringing, and we have not had a bit of rest for two days now. Will you make some announcement with regard to my husband's condition? Say three times a day. I will gladly pay for the service."

"I don't think that would be advisable. The *Forward* and *The Day* and the *Morning Journal* have called me for an accurate statement. When I told them that the rumor was not true, they said they would run an announcement in their papers to the effect that the rumor was false and that Cantor Waldman was fine."

"Then you don't think I ought to do anything about it? The hospital especially is very much inconvenienced by all the phone calls coming in there. It disrupts their service."

"I am sure in a day or two it will all die down. Let's see how it works out."

That Saturday night, on the way to visit her husband, Mollie turned on the radio in the car. To her surprise a Jewish program was interrupted for five minutes by Rabbi Kronenberg who made the announcement that Cantor Leibele Waldman was on the road to recovery and that any rumor to the contrary should be disregarded. There followed a dramatic description of how the rumor started.

"It seems to me," spoke the announcer, "that when it was said over the air that Harris Miller, sponsor of Leibele Waldman, had died, the majority of the older people did not know what the word sponsor meant and assumed that the words were to the effect that Harris Miller wished to convey the sad news that Leibele Waldman had died. Otherwise how could such a rumor spread so quickly in all parts of the city as well as out-of-town places?"

"So *that* was how it started," remarked the cantor's wife, unbelievably.

When she came into Leibele's room, Mollie was quick to notice that he was not looking as well as the day before.

"How do you feel, Leibele?"

"Oh, fine, fine. Got any news for me?"

"Except for some people calling and asking how you feel, there have been very few calls," she lied.

"That's funny," he thought out loud.

"What's funny," asked his wife.

"Oh, nothing."

"Look here, Leibele, you're keeping something from me."

"No, really, nothing."

"All right," answered his wife, "then *I'm* keeping something from you. You tell me your secret and I'll tell you mine."

"How do I know you're not fooling me?" questioned Leibele.

"Well, that's the chance I'm taking, too. But I'll give you a hint. It has to do with a rumor."

"Oh, so you know, too. Well, I'll tell you. But my story is funny, I hope yours is."

"Not so funny, and not so sad," teased his wife.

"I'd never tell you this. But when I get through I'll tell you why I'm doing it."

"All right. So much formality. On with your story, or I will change my mind about telling you mine."

"Well, this is the way it happened. This morning I was having my breakfast when I heard an orderly asking my nurse.

"'Say, where is this Waldman guy? Poor fellow. I didn't know he died.' At this I pinched myself to see whether I was alive.

'And who said my patient was dead?' asked the nurse.

'Who said?' the orderly must have looked at her as if she was out of her mind. 'Why everyone is saying it.'

'Have you gone out of your mind? Come here I'll take your temperature.'

'No fooling, though, Miss Templeton, about a thousand people have been calling on the phone asking when he passed away and other details. If you don't believe me, ask the operator.'

"Miss Templeton, though she did not come from Missouri, did so. She promptly came back into the room.

'Well, Leibele, whether you know it or not, you're dead.'

'Did you ever see a dead man eat such a hearty breakfast?' I asked her.

'No, not exactly. But you're dead to the world.' And she related to me what had been happening at the switchboard and in the hospital lobby."

"Well, and how did you feel about it?" asked his wife.

"I wasn't worried about anything except how you and my family would take it. Do they know about it? Did you tell them that it's false?"

"Everything is fine. And now I'll tell you my story," Mollie proceeded to tell him all that had happened.

"And to think one little word like 'sponsor' could do so much harm," jested Leibele.

"I never did like that word in the dictionary," answered his wife.

Reassured that his family was fully aware that the rumor was false and hearing his wife joke about it, Leibele's face took on a healthier color. He looked like a changed man.

A colleague came to see Leibele at the hospital and the discussion turned to the rumor.

"Between you and me, Leibele, wasn't that started

by your manager for publicity purposes? You know you can't fool me."

"No, I won't fool you, for there is no satisfaction in fooling a fool. Only do you think anyone decent would start a rumor like that? Do you realize the effect it has had on my family? And if my mother had not visited me that day and had heard the rumor, do you realize what that would have done to her?"

"Well, I didn't know, so I thought I'd ask you. I knew you'd tell me the truth. You'd be surprised at how many people said that the rumor was started for publicity purposes."

"There is no accounting for what people will say. But the fact that telephone calls came from all parts of the city almost at the same time, and also from out of town points to the one solution as to how the thing started. What have you to say to that?"

"You are right. I'm sorry."

"Next time don't say things you are not sure of, or else at least think over what you say," remonstrated Leibeles.

The day for his homecoming came and Leibeles was fretting about one thing. How was he going to take all his letters and cards home? They had come from well-wishing people from all sections of the city, as well as from out-of-town, some written by hand, some printed ones, and many through the telegraph service. He would not budge from the room until he was sure that Mollie had tied every one of the missives into one large package. She could not move them herself and their robust uncle heaved the package on his shoulders and carried it safely into the waiting car.

For some weeks after, Leibele's main relaxation was to open his steel cabinets where his cards, letters, and telegrams had been neatly arranged, and read them one by one.

\* \* \* \* \*

His various engagements, contracted before his operation, had to be fulfilled, so that three weeks after convalescing Leibele found that he could no longer postpone his work.

Concerts followed, where the number in the audience was great, all anxious to see for themselves that indeed he was alive. If his voice was a bit weak, it had all of its sweetness and his concerts were successful.

Back to the radio he came with a song composed specially for the occasion. The words were to the effect that the rumor about him was a false one, and that he hoped that good health would be his and his radio friends' for many years to come.

The audience's reception of this song was a gratifying one. Letters and telegrams, as well as telephone calls, came pouring in, thanking him for the good wishes and saying that they had been thrilled to hear him again.

During an officiation in New York, the synagogue was packed to capacity despite the fact that the admission was a high one for these times. At the end of services something happened in that *shul* that had never occurred before—the audience stood up and applauded him for a long while.

Upon coming through the door, on his way out, Leibele looked over the heads of hundreds of people, who just as soon as they saw him, loudly screamed, "Bravo, Leibele, bravo."

Then followed applause that left him a bit breathless. As always, when coming face to face with this kind of acclaim Leibele, in his modesty, seemed taken aback and at the same time felt as thrilled as when his first audience approved of him.

"I can't get over it," a bystander said. "To think that this is an American boy, born in New York. Where does he get the feeling from? I know with my son, it is hard enough for me to get him through *chader* preparatory for his *bar mitzvah* party. I got to give that boy credit."

"Remarkable," another man answered. "All right, I could see where an American boy could become a cantor. But to be such an orthodox *chazin* and to reach such heights in his profession. The boy is good; you got to give him credit."

People still referred to Leibele as a "boy," though he was now twenty-eight years old.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yum Kippur had come and Leibele once more found himself surrounded by some three thousand people, who had chosen him to be the intermediary between themselves and God.

It wasn't just an ordinary Yum Kippur as the expressions on the people's faces showed. On other similar holidays they had come, out of tradition, to observe it. Now they were here for a purpose that was hidden in every heart and which they all knew. The Sons of Israel had never yet been in such danger of extermination as they were at present. Already hundreds of thousands had fallen victims to the monster who had vowed to banish them from the earth.

With tear-filled eyes they read from their prayer books as now and again they glanced at their cantor. Every word had meaning for Leibele; every plea was heart-wrung. As his congregation listened to him, there was the conviction that God in his mercy could not fail to lend ear to this righteous young man, who with love of God in his heart, was pleading their cause for them. His sweet singing was pleasing to their ears and his sincere prayers gave them comfort.

The end of the fast was approaching and Leibele began to chant his prayer.

\* \* \* \* \*

A far cry from the impish little fellow of the East Side streets. His snowy white cap and gown gave no suggestion of the dirt and squalor for which Leibele always had such an aversion. As for his appearance, there was no resemblance to the little fellow whose half-starved look seemed to say that he could have eaten so much more than his mother had to give him.

THE END











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