

Sounds of Life

by Zalman Velvel

"Yitgadal vayitgadash shmey rabah..." Cantor Yosef chanted.

At 53, he looked resplendent in his expensive, dark suit, contrasted by his full white beard. He sounded resplendent, too, with his rich baritone voice melodically chanting Kaddish, the mourner's prayer. A respectful hush swept over the small congregation of Temple Chaim, in Sunshine, Florida, twenty miles west of Miami.

This was a holy moment, a special moment in the Shabbos morning prayer service, when it was time to remember the dear departed souls of loved ones. Cantor Yosef's mother had died two months earlier, still young at 78, and he and Shmuel Rosenkrantz, who's wife passed on after 55 years of marriage, stood and said the Kaddish prayer together. Shmuel whispered, not wishing to interfere with Cantor Yosef's superlative rendition.

"B'almah dee varah kerootay va-"

The second verse was interrupted when eight year old Benyamin Stein burst into the synagogue from the children's room in the back, followed by seven year old Sholem Greenberg.

"You're it!" Benny yelled as he ran.

"I'm gonna get you!" Shooly shouted back.

Several of the older men uttered loud shushing noises. Shooly chased Benny to the front door. Benny threw the door open, and ran out, followed by Shooly, who slammed it shut.

Cantor Yosef's concentration was broken and a look of rage transformed his face. He stared bullets at the front doors. Finally, after struggling for composure, he continued.

"... vayamleek malchootay vyatzmach poorkanay vee-"

The front door was thrown open again. Benny ran in, Shooly close behind.

"I tagged you and you're it!" Shooly yelled.

"Never touched me!" Benny shouted back.

Cantor Yosef took his double-sized heavy-duty prayer book, the one with big print made especially for weakening 53 year old eyes, and slammed it down on the bimah, the pulpit. It was like a peal of thunder as it reverberated inside the small synagogue.

Benny stopped dead in his tracks, a look of surprise and shock on his face. Shooly was unprepared for Benny's sudden stop; he crashed into his friend, sending both of them sprawling. They landed tangled up together on the floor in front of Cantor Yosef's bimah. This situation struck them as hilarious and they lapsed into a laughing and giggling fit.

"QUIET!" Cantor Yosef shouted.

Once again he took his heavy siddur and slammed it down. It sounded like the angry voice of God Himself on Mt. Sinai, after the Holy One, Blessed-be-He, saw the golden calf.

The boys stopped laughing and looked up at the red-faced Cantor, fear written all over their now angelic faces. The Cantor, a self-righteous froth on his lower lip, raised the book again. As he lowered his arm like a sledgehammer, he was suddenly stopped.

David Cohen, known to the congregation as the 'Mystery Man', held the Cantor's wrist.

"Boys, go sit next to your fathers," David Cohen ordered. He continued to hold the Cantor's wrist while the boys scurried over to their respective parents.

The faces of the congregation were pulled to the scene at the Cantor's bimah like iron filings to a magnet. David Cohen was also fiftyish, with thinning hair, a gray beard, and a body like a steel barrel. He came to services, blended in, and then left, talking little with the other members of the congregation, leaving nothing but questions in his wake.

Where does he live? ... What does he do? ... Does he pay his dues? were some of those questions. Rabbi Levy ignored them, even though he knew the answers. It was not his place to talk.

"Let go of my wrist!" Cantor Yosef hissed through gritted teeth.

**THERE'S MORE! WOULD YOU LIKE
TO READ THE FULL STORY? YOU CAN!**

PURCHASE THIS STORY FOR JUST \$1

Visit www.ZalmanVelvel.com for more stories like this one!

Copyright 1997 by SSS Publishing. All Rights Reserved.