

# ROSENTHAL'S WIDOW

*How Esther Berger Won a Fall Suit From Her Husband*

By ED. CAHN

"AND so, Minnie, I have come to you for advice and to ask you to have Dave find out if anybody in the waist business wants a lady traveler." Mrs. Kraussman's visitor, in handsome, man-tailored mourning, dabbed her fine brown eyes with a black-bordered handkerchief.

Minnie Rosenthal stared at her open-eyed. "Hattie Rosenthal!" she exclaimed, as soon as she had sufficiently recovered from her amazement to speak. "Do you mean to tell me that you want to go on the road yourself? Why you're crazy! The very idea! And you only a widow three months. What would poor Adolph say if he could hear you?"

Hattie's eyes twinkled. "Adolph would say, 'Go ahead, kid, don't let me detain you,'" she rippled.

Minnie tried to look shocked, but failed utterly, and laughed instead. "That's a fine way to be talking about your poor dead husband, Hattie, but that's just what Adolph would say."

"But you couldn't travel like a man does, you have no experience; why, you never sold anything in your life. Dave says it's a fearfully hard life even on a man—and you could never compete with men. But you don't have to work, do you? Adolph always made big money—I thought the insurance—"

"Yes, he did, and he was also a swell dresser and a high liver, and so was I. We never saved a penny; in fact, we owed money when Adolph died and the insurance wasn't much. It's gone to pay those debts and for my trip South and this mourning. I have my board paid for a week where I'm stopping, and exactly three hundred dollars in the bank: 'it's all my fortune. So you see, Minnie dear, I'll have to find something to do right away. Now I just know I can sell goods. Adolph took me on several trips with him, and once, in Wilmington, he was sick and I called on the trade, made the appointments and sold as many hats as Adolph ever did, at least in that town."

"Well, then, why not get into a millinery store here and not go on the road?"

"Oh, pooh! Work for twelve or fifteen dollars a week as long as I live? No, thanks. I'm thirty-three, you know, Minnie, and I'll have to make hay while the sun shines. I can make bigger money, and I'm going to—all I want is the chance. You be sure to tell Dave to keep his eyes open for me. I wish I could get Mr. Berger interested. I'd simply love to get Sol Berger's line of Esther B. waists. Adolph and I met Sam Posner in Baltimore once and he showed me the line; it's beautiful. I always knew that Dave Kraussman was one of the best designers in the business, but until I saw the line I didn't know how good he was. It's lucky for Berger that Dave's designing for him. Minnie, I want Berger's line and I want you and Dave to help me get it."

"But Sam Posner has it!"

"Certainly, but the United States is a big place, even if you New Yorkers don't know it. Mr. Posner can't make every town in it. I want to try at the towns he misses."

"Posner has the cream of the territory."

"Well, all I want is a generous share of the skim milk, then. You needn't try to discourage me, Minnie; I know I can make good."

Mrs. Kraussman rose. "Hattie, I see there is no stopping you, so I'll try to help. My! but you're brave! Wait until I get my hat and gloves, we'll go and see Sam Posner's wife Agnes; she's got a heart like a lion, and if anybody can help, she can."

"Mrs. Posner?"

"Yes. She's the wife of the Posner you and Adolph met in Baltimore, the fellow with Berger's line. She's been growling this long time because Sam has to travel so hard to make his big territory and she'll be tickled to death if he gets rid of some of it. Come on, I'm ready."

"I don't know about that. Perhaps Mr. Posner might not like to have his territory cut up; he might lose money."

"Don't you worry about Sam's losing money. He'd make just as much if he only made two towns. When money sees him coming it just gets up and runs to him. I wish Dave was more like him."

THEY found Mrs. Posner at home and, immediately after introducing Mrs. Rosenthal, Minnie came straight to the point.

"Agnes, I thought of what you always say, 'Women have got a right to help each other,' and so I brought Hattie right to you. You know she's

a widow and all that, because I told you—remember?"

"Yes, it's so sad."

"You bet it's sad; 'scuse my slang—when I get worked up over anything it always makes me awful slangy; but, Agnes, it couldn't be any sadder because she hasn't any money—she's got to get a job!"

"That sounds as if you thought it was worse to have to go to work than to be a widow," said Hattie. "No, Mrs. Posner, I don't mind that a bit. I'm strong and healthy and I want to be busy. You see, Mr. Rosenthal was a traveling man and I learned a lot from him. I know I can't sell goods well enough to make a living. The hardest thing I have before me is to make some one else believe in me and to get a start. Mr. Rosenthal and I met your husband once and saw his line, and ever since I have been aching to handle it or one like it. Minnie says perhaps you might know of something."

Agnes reflected. Then she asked a few questions and promised to see what she could do. "Come on out in the dining-room and have some chocolate, and let's get real well acquainted."

"There, Hattie! You're job's as good as got. When you know Agnes better, you'll know that when she says 'chocolate' and wrinkles up her nose like that when she smiles, that she's got another one of her famous schemes just about hatched."

"Oh, Mrs. Posner!" said Hattie, gratefully.

"Don't call me Mrs. Posner. Call me Agnes. I like you ever so much, Hattie Rosenthal, and we are going to be friends. Come on, I've got some perfectly grand devil cake to eat."

"I'm going to have Dave tell Sol Berger, to-morrow, what a smart business woman Hattie is, and the next day the same thing, and that she's going on the road for Jaffee & Janowitz. Sol hates them so that will make him wish he had her," said Minnie at parting.

"That's a good scheme; do it, but have him say they are trying to get her but somebody else is after her—see? Well, good-bye, I'll do all I can and I'll get Sam to help. Don't worry, now, Hattie; Minnie and me never yet failed to get what we wanted, did we, Min?"

"I haven't a doubt but what you will succeed, but I'm going to call on his biggest competitors so that we will have more than one string to our bow," said Hattie.

"WHAT'S the matter with you this evening, Sam?" said Agnes to her husband on the way home from the theatre. "You look as blue as indigo."

"I am blue; all shades. Here I was sure I could be home two weeks this time, and to-night Berger tells me that he wants me to cut it short and go out again day after to-morrow. Isn't that enough to pinch the arm off a goat? Honestly, Agnes, I'm all tired out. How can I do justice to myself or him if I never get a minute's rest?"

"If you made fewer towns, Sam, couldn't you do just as well and be home more?"

"Gewiss! Sure, and I wouldn't wonder if I'd make more money in the end. Would have more time for the big towns and could drum 'em better."

"Why don't you tell Berger that?"

"Why don't I? Why, I have been telling him nothing else ever since I've been home; told him this morning for that matter. But he's as pig-headed as a mule. He says I've always made it and he can't see why I can't keep on. He says I'm bad enough, but somebody else might be worse. That's quite a compliment, coming from him. I know an awful decent young fellow that's looking for a job and he'd be fine for us, but I'm not going to say a word to Berger about him. Every time I try to do Berger a favour, something always happens and I get it in the neck. I'm through. Gee! Agnes, I'd give anything to be able to stay home a month; I'm about all in."

"I wish you could, too, Sam. Did you ever know a traveling man by the name of Adolph Rosenthal? I think he sold ladies' hats."

"Yes, nice fellow. Kraussman tells me he is dead; was some relation to Kraussman's wife. Last time I saw Rosenthal was in Baltimore; he had his wife with him. She's a mighty fine looking woman and smart as a steel trap. The boys say she had more brains in a minute than Adolph had in his whole life. I believe it, too, for I showed 'em my line and she asked all kinds of questions that showed that she was no slouch of a business woman. Won-

der what will become of her now she's a widow? Too bad. Wow! but I'm sleepy; me for the hay as soon as we get home."

"Do you suppose Mrs. Rosenthal could make a living selling goods, Sam? That is, if she had to? Do you think any woman could?"

"Oh, I dunno. Ask me something easy. Any woman couldn't, but some few can, and I wouldn't wonder if Mrs. Rosenthal was one. Hope she won't have to—she won't, either—some guy'll marry her—she won't stay a widow."

"Well, Sam, Sol Berger needs another traveler; Mrs. Rosenthal has to live from now until the time she gets married again, and I don't see why they can't help each other out. Sol Berger's got to give her a job."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, ever since this afternoon; Minnie brought her up. I like her ever so much and I promised to have you help her get a position with Berger."

"Now look here, Agnes! You oughtn't to do that. I can't be mixed up in any such thing. Women don't know anything about business. Berger would fire me out of the place head first if I so much as suggested a woman drummer. If he had his way there wouldn't be a woman down town. He says they belong in the home and no place else, and he's right."

"But, Sam—"

"Agnes, I won't listen to any argument—that's enough." When Posner spoke in that tone Agnes recognized the uselessness of further words and said no more, but she was by no means vanquished.

AGNES had finished her marketing and was walking home with her arms full of bundles, when she almost collided with Esther Berger, the beautiful and golden-hearted (if somewhat plump) wife of Sol Berger. Though Esther was considerably older than Sam's sensible little wife, she enjoyed her stimulating society very much and was really very fond of her.

"Ach! I'm glad to see you. Come, give me part of those bundles, and I'll help you carry them. Oh, yes; don't argue with me. You are as bad as Sol. You are coming to lunch with me, and then we'll go by the matinee."

"All right; that's fine."

"Something is wrong, Agnes. A little *tsuris* wrinkle I saw just before you saw me. What's the matter? Couldn't you laugh no more? *Das iss besser*—a smiles skiddoo it. Is life not all smiles, nein?"

"How German you are this morning, Esther!"

"No Germaner than I am every morning, and all Germany couldn't close it *mein* eyes. Come, don't you feel like telling me? Couldn't I help?"

"Yes, you could do a good deal, but—"

"I give you *mein* word that I will, then; that is, if you will so soon as we get by my house, sing me that Heinie song."

After hearing the story of Hattie Rosenthal and Sam's opinion of her abilities, Esther promised to see what she could do. "But I warn you, don't expect anything, Agnes. You know Sol's got set ideas about what womens can do and what they can't do."

When Sol came home that evening she mentioned seeing Agnes, sighed heavily and shook her head, but said nothing.

"Esther, *vat iss*? You look like you heard it of a death. What's the matter with Agnes, hey?"

"Poor child! she is worried to death about Sam. I feel sorry for her, honestly."

"What for is she worried about him? I aint seen nothing wrong."

"I couldn't tell you, Sol. She told me in the strictest confidence."

Sol was immediately interested. "What was it, Essie? Never mind the confidence part; aint we one yet? Aint a secrets told to you meant for me also, too?"

"She'd never speak to me again if she knew I told you; but you come first, Sol, and you oughta know. She says that the doctor says that Sam's not as strong as he looks; and he's working too hard; and if he don't quit he will have it a noivous smash-down. Agnes says if it wasn't the busy season coming on she'd make him give up his job, but Sam says he wouldn't give it up till he drops down dead. He's got that much feeling for you, because you've always been good to him. Agnes she just cried awful when she was telling me, so it must be serious, Sol. Aint it good I found out in time? Now you got a chanct to get a man to travel

(Continued on page 30.)