

# The Entanglement of Nathan

Depicting the Predicament Into Which Too Much Business Enterprise Got Nathan Lepat

By ED. CAHN

NATHAN LEPAT, after vainly trying to borrow money from scornful relatives and suspicious bankers, at last had to admit that there was only one way left in which to acquire capital to extend his struggling clothing business, and now, at eleven o'clock, he closed his ledger, turned out the gas, made sure that the rear door of his establishment was securely bolted, and reluctantly admitted to himself that honesty is, after all, the best policy.

He was a young Russian who had come to America determined to win a fortune, confidently expecting to have to go to no great pains to do so.

Several discouragements had put to flight any lingering scruples, and two years before, he had managed to fail, for his own benefit.

The fact that the hard-won dollars of some of his nearest relatives would be forever lost to them did not deter him, and, so skillfully did he manage matters, that he had been speedily, if reluctantly, acquitted by the bankruptcy court, if not by those whom he had harmed.

However, the money he had made by this means was soon lost in a speculative venture, and he had been obliged to begin again at the very bottom and climb slowly, and without assistance, to his present rung of the ladder.

A light from the street shone in over the transoms and Lepat, with his hand upon the door-knob, glanced around once more.

"Ach! The clothings business!" he muttered, disgustedly. "I wish it I had never so much as hears of it. *Oi!* If only I could get it a little credit—or if I only had a few dollars more; what couldn't I do wid it?"

His small, grey eyes darted here and there as if already critically inspecting the placing of piles of new goods, and then he screwed up his shoulders into a shrug, and left for the night.

The lower East side, even at this hour, was still teeming with life, but Lepat was no more aware of it than he would have been if set down in the middle of Sahara.

He was running over in his mind the list of girls and young women whom he knew, and considering them as impassively as he would have considered a consignment of new suspenders.

"Rachael," he thought, as he climbed the innumerable dark stairs leading to the room where he lodged, "I guess maybe she is the best one. She must be about thirty, an' she aint pretty, an' she could easy get along with twenty pounds less of fat, but she's got it maybe a thousand dollars saved up. I could use it, and the only way I could get it is to marry her. She is also big and strong like such a old country *ochs* and she could help it me along in the store, but, even so, she is bound to be nothing but a ixpense." He sighed heavily, and, as he punched up his lumpy pillow preparatory to going to sleep, he decided once and for all, "A wife I don't want, but what else could I do? I'll go see Schlotz tomorrow."

SCHLOTZ, grey-bearded, and the most reasonable marriage-broker in the neighbourhood, listened with patience to all Lepat's stipulations as to what he deemed fitting in a wife, and when his customer paused for breath, stopped running his bony forefinger down the column of names in the book before him long enough to peer over his horn-rimmed spectacles and say, "Sure, Lepat, you got the right bringings up, and you know what is what. Now, here is fine young lady, by the name Ippstein. Her *fater*—"

"Nothing doing on Fanny Ippstein," interrupted Nathan, impatiently. "I been thinking about Miss Rachael Savin. She aint such a much on looks, but—say! come to think of it, you know her folks, don't you?"

"Jah, I know her *Mutter*. For ten dollars I will talk to her that she should let you call on Rachael, and if she iss agreeable, I'll make you an introduction to her."

"If!" cried Lepat, and then he laughed, showing yellow, fang-like teeth, that grated even upon Schlotz. "If there is any 'if' about this business, it's goin' to be on my side."

"A young man like what I am could always get it himself a wife, a young, pretty girl."

"So?" said the *Schatchen*, "then vy don't you—hey? I got already on my books young and pretty girls and vimmins, lots. Vy not one of them? You are right, a man like what you are oughta get a pretty vife because—"

"How much money has the others got it?" demanded Lepat.

"A pretty girl shall not need it such a larger *nadinyah* as what a ugly one does; but some got it a hundred dollars, some got it, extra pretty ones, fifty dollars."

"Nu Nu! Money I want. If I get married, I got to be paid for it. I heard Rachael Savin has a thousand dollars."

"*Oi!* You vant *mazuma*, not a vife! Maybe if I look around once I could maybe find you one what's got more yet as Miss Savin."

"Say, Schlotz, do me the kindness to tell me why you aint crazy to introduce me to Miss Rachael Savin."

"What a crazyness for a idee!" protested Schlotz, who threw more enthusiasm into his voice from then on, and, after a half hour's spirited haggling, finally accepted seven dollars as his fee for the introduction, instead of the ten which he had at first demanded.

That afternoon Schlotz called upon Mrs. Savin, the mother of Rachael, and, over coffee and *nuss kuchen*, put Lepat's proposition before her.

"Now, *mein freund*," he concluded, "I have earned it my fee from him, and can now be a *freund* to you mit a clear conscience."

"It's true he has got it a business of his own, even if it is small yet, but, don't you be in any rushes to get Rachael married."

That was all he would say and the more Mrs. Savin thought of the matter, the more convinced she became that Schlotz meant it as a warning. After his departure she hastened out to make inquiries regarding Lepat, of whom she had heard, and, strangely enough, to his credit.

That evening Mrs. Savin broached the subject to her daughter.

"Now, Mommer! Don't, for mercy sake, begin that 'get married' business again. I'm all right the way I am, and I don't want no husband."

"Koosh! This young feller is—"

"Another! Well, who is it this time?" asked Rachael, in a bored tone, and reluctantly tearing her eyes away from the "Small Business for Sale" column in the evening paper.

"Nathan Lepat. He's got it a nice little business, all his own; he is about your age, and from all I heard, so far, a smart business man with a real *Yiddisher kopf* on him. I told Schlotz he should bring him around once, to call."

"Oh, shoot!" exploded Rachael, flinging the paper to the floor. A *schatchen* he has to go to! That settles it, he aint no good on earth!"

"Rachael!" shrieked her mother, "listen! Remember you are thirty-two years old already, and if you aint married soon—"

"I'll never be. Well, it wouldn't kill me, Mommer, that's one sure thing. Bachelor girls are all the style nowadays."

Mrs. Savin looked shocked, as she never failed to do when her daughter talked in this modern and reprehensible manner.

"Every woman oughta be married. Now, when I was young—"

"Yes, yes, Mommer, I know. To please you, only, I will see him. Tell Schlotz to tell him to call tomorrow evening. I'll get it over as soon as I can."

"You mean you will see him to please me, and tell him to go chase himself, to please yourself."

"Becky, *mein tochter*, you couldn't always work in an office. I wants I should see you in a house of your own."

"I'd rather see myself in a nice little business of my own, then we could be always together, Mommer. You'd be all alone if I got married. If I had five hundred dollars more, I could buy that little stationery store. I'd rather have it than any husband that ever grew. I suppose this Lepat has heard I have money saved. I wonder—yes, Mommer, tell Schlotz to send him up."

LEPAT came to inspect and be inspected, and he bore himself so well that Mrs. Savin decided that he would do, and she effusively invited him to return and, as soon as he was gone, began to urge him upon her daughter.

Rachael, for a variety of reasons, or, rather, from a variety of causes, listened both to the pleadings of Nathan and the urgings of her old-fashioned mother; who still saw something almost disgraceful in having an unmarried daughter; and she pas-

sively suffered Nathan's economical attentions, accepting his oft-proffered excuse for absence on the score of business, with considerable relief.

Nathan saw in her an industrious, silent, not too critical wife, and, sighing unhappily that he must marry at all, at last put the momentous question, was accepted, and found himself formally betrothed.

He pretended to give a full account of his life and the present state of his finances and then, as Rachael offered absolutely no comment, he said: "Now, sinct I been all fair and square with you, Rachael, it's only right you should be the same with me—aint it?"

"Sure, I will. Don't you fear."

"Of course, but *now*, I mean. Why don't you tell me—" He stopped, somehow at a loss before the gaze of those steady, brown eyes.

"There's nothing to tell that you don't know. There aint no story to my life, except that I've been working for the same firm for fifteen years and me and Mommer's always lived in this one flat."

"Aint you never saved nothing?" cried Lepat.

Rachael noticed the look of panic, mingled with anger, and the fear that had never been absent from her heart became a certainty.

She had accepted Nathan to please her insistent mother, but it was partly because she was beginning to feel that she could not work for wages forever, and marriage seemed to offer a safer hazard than the slow and painful saving of odd dollars against a lonely old age.

THE fact that Lepat had not mentioned a "dot" until after he had proposed had made her hope that the small things which had pointed to a nature mean and penurious were false clues.

She looked at him now with calm, observing eyes. How his hair did kink—what small and shifty eyes he had. A sick feeling of disgust surged over her, but she gave no sign of it as she answered, "Why, yes, of course I saved some money. You surely didn't think I spent every penny, Nathan?"

This restored Lepat's good humour at once, and he dismissed the subject altogether.

Rachael seemed to be in no hurry to set the day, but Nathan had no notion of allowing it to be postponed, for he needed that money at once.

The next time that he called, his manner was more of the husband's than the lover's. He pointed out that he was a poor man, and an expensive menage not to be thought of, and then remarked that he had already hired a few rooms in the tenement where he had lodged so long. Also, he urged upon his bride-to-be that she go to no expense for an elaborate wardrobe.

"Oh, I won't," said Rachael, a trifle sharply, for she was not pleased that he had not consulted her before selecting their future home. "But I want a few dresses."

"Dresses! For the store, a couple shirtwaists and a skirt should be plenty."

"The store?"

"Sure, the store. You are going to help me in the store, aint you?" said Nathan, firmly. He must make her understand that he meant to rule.

"Do you mean that you think I should work, same as I do now—only for you?"

"Every woman should help it her husband. That aint working."

"I will help once in a while, and be tickled to death to do it, but I don't think I ought to all the time, every day. Who would take care of the house? Who would get the meals?"

"You can get it breakfasts before we go, and after I go to lunch, you can go, and maybe, your Mommer would come to get us dinners every night."

Rachael threw back her head and laughed. "*Oi*, a joker you are, Nathan, right straight from Joker-ville. I don't have to get married to work in a store all day. I can do that now, and get paid for it, and have a dress now and then. I couldn't be a success as a married woman if I did that, not so much of a success as I am now, single, since I've saved a few pennies—maybe as much as five hundred dollars."

"Say, Nathan, did you tell me this here diamond was perfect?" she demanded, suddenly, twisting the engagement ring upon her plump finger. "Did you get skinned on it? I took it in to Zosky, the jeweler, to-day, to have it tested. He says it is flawed."

Thoroughly enraged by this speech, and by the laughter which was liberally tinged with contempt,

(Continued on page 29.)