

A Daughter and Business

By BRUNO LESSING

MR. LEVINE, of Levine and Co., had a daughter named Sophie, a tea-gown factory in Broome Street, a young salesman by the name of Abey Harris, and a crotchety disposition. The reason Mr. Levine disliked Abey Harris was that he thought Abey Harris presumptuous, supercilious, overbearing, frivolous, forward, and unwarrantably offensive. The reason Mr. Levine had a crotchety disposition could probably be found in his rheumatism. His reasons for having a tea-gown factory and a daughter named Sophie I have never been able to fathom. Abey Harris liked the tea-gown business so much that he had even proposed to Mr. Levine that he be admitted to partnership in the firm. And he liked Sophie so much that he had confided to her father his willingness to marry her. The two propositions were made upon the same day. There isn't space to describe what happened that day, but the discoloration of Abey Harris' eye disappeared after two weeks. The relations between Mr. Levine and Abey Harris were strained for a while, but eventually matters resumed their normal course, and it is barely possible that nothing at all would have happened had not Katzenstein, of Katzenstein and Cohen, of Milwaukee, come to town.

The firm of Katzenstein and Cohen had but recently come into existence, and Mr. Levine was eager to secure their trade. There were perhaps forty other dealers in tea-gowns who were equally eager to sell their goods to Katzenstein and Cohen, but Katzenstein and Cohen were coy and canny, and hesitated to ally themselves exclusively with any single factory.

"It would be a great thing," said Mr. Levine to his salesman, "if I could get their business. Not only for the money, but it would make the other fellows green with envy."

Then spoke Abey Harris:

"Supposing I go out and get him. Supposing I sell him a big order. Supposing I get him to buy all his tea-gowns from Levine and Co. Supposing he is a big buyer, and you make a lot of money out of him. What do I get?"

Mr. Levine did not even look at Abey Harris. Gazing at the group of salesmen who stood before him, he continued, as though Abey Harris had not spoken:

"I know you've all tried and didn't succeed, and I've got a feeling that Blumberg and Miller will get them. But I'll tell you what I'll do. The one who gets Katzenstein is a member of the firm as long as we keep him on our books."

Three of the salesmen began to don their hats and coats. "We will draw lots and take turns," they agreed. Abey Harris donned neither hat nor coat. Hatless and in his shirt-sleeves he ran all the way to the little hotel where Katzenstein was staying, and, without waiting to be announced, burst impetuously into Mr. Katzenstein's room. Katzenstein, a man of perhaps sixty years, with a long, gray beard and keen, blue eyes, was occupied in assorting a heap of samples that lay on the table before him. When Abey Harris entered he looked at him with a perfectly expressionless countenance. Abey Harris seated himself upon a sofa, and lit a cigarette.

"My name's Abey Harris," he said. "I'm from Levine and Co. We can supply you with the finest line of tea-gowns in New York. We'll make up for you just the kind of goods you want. We'll fix a price that no other firm can beat. We'll give you as much time for payment as any other first-class firm could afford to give. We want you for a regular customer. Now, Mr. Katzenstein, just shake your head and say: 'No, thank you. I'm not going to buy exclusively from one firm. Maybe I'll drop in and take a look at what you've got, but I'm very busy now, and you'll have to excuse me. Let's get that part of it over with, and then I'll go ahead.'"

Katzenstein laid down the samples that he held in his hand, leaned his elbow upon the table and his head upon his hand, and, still without a trace of expression upon his face, said:

"Maybe you'd better go ahead first." There came a rap upon the door, and a boy handed Katzenstein a card. He looked at Abey Harris.

"It is a man from Levine and Co.," he said.

Abey Harris nodded. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "I expect they'll all be here in a little while. Mr. Levine said that the man who got your trade regularly would be taken into the firm."

Katzenstein smiled. It was an amiable smile, and it gave Abey Harris hope.

"Tell the gentleman to wait," said Katzenstein to the boy. "So," he went on, turning to his visitor, "I'm to buy from your firm and you are to get the order, and then they make you a partner. Yes?"

"That's it exactly," said Abey Harris. "You have a quick mind, Mr. Katzenstein. I like to deal with a gentleman who has brains."

A twinkle came into Katzenstein's eyes. "Abey Harris," he said, "we are trying to build up a big retail business

in Milwaukee, and we have lots of trouble in getting good salesmen. If you will come out to Milwaukee I will give you a better job than you have here, and if you show as much smartness in selling things for me as you do for Mr. Levine, you will have just as good a chance to get into the firm some day."

Abey Harris blushed with pleasure, but slowly shook his head. He arose and shook hands with Katzenstein. "Mr. Katzenstein," said he, "you are a gentleman of twenty-four carats. You're fine. But I can't do it."

"Are you so much in love with Mr. Levine that you couldn't hear to leave him?" asked Katzenstein sarcastically. Abey Harris looked into those blue eyes, hesitated an instant, and then, drawing out his watch, opened the case, and, without a word, held before Katzenstein a coloured miniature of a girl's face.

Katzenstein's brow wrinkled. "I don't understand—" he began.

"Sophie Levine," said Abey Harris simply. "The old gentleman looked at

him. There was something boyishly frank and simple in Abey Harris' face that must have stirred in Katzenstein's breast long forgotten memories, for as he looked into the young man's eyes a dizziness came over his own.

"The father object?" asked Katzenstein softly.

Abey Harris nodded.

"And the girl—she is willing?"

"Crazy about it," said Abey Harris grimly.

Katzenstein scratched his head, gazed ruefully at the heap of samples upon the table, and then arose and began to put on his hat and coat. "Take me to Mr. Levine," he said.

Abey Harris' heart began to beat so tumultuously that he—but I must be brief. I shall have to omit all unnecessary descriptions, all psychological analyses, and all philosophical and didactic comments. Yet it would be intensely interesting to describe Abey Harris' feelings when he felt that the longing of his life was about to be gratified. And even more interesting to describe the sensations of the three salesmen of Levine and Co. who were waiting below when they beheld Katzenstein in the company of the hatless and coatless Abey Harris. But I control myself and hurry forward.

"Mr. Levine," said Katzenstein, when the formality of introduction was over, "I have come to make you a proposition. If you will make goods according to our orders, give us the same price that

bosom. "No, no," he said. "I want you to marry the man you love. Far be it from me to ask you to marry a man to please me. You have only to say that you would rather not marry Abey Harris and I am just as well pleased and we will drop the whole subject."

Then Sophie looked up with dancing eyes. "I wouldn't say anything of the kind," she said. "Abey Harris is a perfect dear."

Papa Levine groaned and smoked his pipe all that evening without saying another word. The next day Abey Harris was admitted to the firm, and at the same time his engagement to Miss Sophie Levine was publicly announced. Mr. Levine did not like Abey Harris one whit the more for all this; on the contrary, he constantly chafed under the conditions which Katzenstein had imposed. But the orders of Katzenstein and Cohen came in regularly and were pretty big and profitable orders, and Levine submitted with the same grace with which he submitted to his rheumatism.

Katzenstein came to New York regularly every month for four months, and his visit was always followed by a big order for tea-gowns. One day, however, a dapper young man, with heavy, black eyebrows and an enormous diamond watch-chain, strolled into Mr. Levine's office, blew a cloud of cigar smoke into Mr. Levine's face, and announced:

"I'm Cohen, of Katzenstein and Cohen. My partner's got the rheumatism and couldn't come, so I've come instead to look over your stock."

Mr. Levine greeted him effusively. "I am so glad to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance. We have had so much correspondence that I feel I have known you for many years. Give Mr. Katzenstein my sympathy when you go back. I know what rheumatism is. I have lots of trouble with it."

Cohen took Mr. Levine's chair and placed his feet upon Mr. Levine's desk. "I guess a little rheumatism won't do Katzy any harm," he said. "He's getting daffy in his old age. I don't know whether you know it or not, but we lose money every time we give you an order. Blumberg and Miller turn out just as good a line as yours, and their terms are much better. But I'm an easy-going man. As long as Katzy takes the trouble to come on to New York every month he can do what he pleases. I hate New York."

Mr. Levine's heart had begun to sink, but when Cohen had finished he felt relieved. "If you have nothing else to do to-night, Mr. Cohen," he said, "suppose you come to my house for dinner and I will get some tickets for the theatre."

Cohen yawned. "All right," he said. "I've got nothing else to do. Besides, I'd like to see the little girl that makes so much trouble in the tea-gown business."

That night Cohen saw Sophie. And the moment he saw her he conceived a violent dislike for Abey Harris. The next night he invited Mr. Levine and Sophie to dine with him at a popular restaurant and deliberately omitted to invite Abey Harris.

"Where's Abey?" was the first question that Sophie asked.

Cohen assumed his most ingratiating smile. "Doesn't Abey get enough bright glances from your eyes?" he asked. "He is entirely too lucky. Can you not spare a few for a poor visitor from Milwaukee who must go back in a few days, and, perhaps, never see you again?"

Sophie smiled upon him, and Cohen was dazzled. He ordered dinner with a lavishness that made Mr. Levine open his eyes.

"You spend money like water," he said. "What else can I do," replied Cohen, "to show Miss Sophie how much I think of her?"

Sophie said nothing, but every little while she gazed furtively at her father, who seemed to be plunged in thought, and each time she looked at him the little frown that had begun to appear upon her forehead grew deeper. Upon the following day Cohen sent Sophie more flowers than she had ever seen together at one time. Instead of remaining two days as he had originally intended, Mr. Cohen remained two weeks, and during that time he called upon the Levines every day and took no pains to conceal the ravages that Sophie had made in his heart. One afternoon he took Mr. Levine into a corner.

"Mr. Levine," he said, "I cannot keep the truth from you any longer. I love your daughter. Blumberg and Miller are ready to give us a much lower price



Lawyer: Now, sir, remember you are under oath, and must tell me the exact truth.

This young lady, at the moment you describe, was sitting on your lap?

Witness (blushing): Well, not exactly, sir; I was on hers.

in Milwaukee, and we have lots of trouble in getting good salesmen. If you will come out to Milwaukee I will give you a better job than you have here, and if you show as much smartness in selling things for me as you do for Mr. Levine, you will have just as good a chance to get into the firm some day."

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we have always paid to your competitors—you can see our books—and give us the same time for payment as the others always have and take Abey Harris into partnership and let him marry your daughter—if she is willing—Katzenstein and Cohen will deal with you exclusively and give you all their tea-gown trade."

The emotions that choked Mr. Levine, the expression that came into his face, the things he said to Katzenstein and the things he said to Abey Harris, could not be adequately described in less than two pages. And yet I skip them entirely. Besides, Mr. Levine eventually got over it, and the upshot of it all was that he consented to the entire arrangement.

"Sophie," he said to his daughter that night, "Abey Harris wants to marry you. Are you willing?"

Sophie looked at her father for a long time before she lowered her eyes and murmured:

"If you want me to, papa. I will do whatever you wish."

Hope kindled quickly in Mr. Levine's