

Weekly Short Story

BLOND SHEIGETZ

By ELLA CLINE

(Continued from last week)

At last they wrote to Mrs. Feingold's father in New York, asking him to come, to try to influence Louise, since she had always shown great affection for him. The old man came, groaning with sciatica and very anxious.

"What were you thinking of," he scolded, "to let this affair drift so far? Let me talk to her. Where is she? Let me talk to him, I'll tell him something!"

But no one knew where the young people were, probably dancing somewhere, may not be home till long after daybreak. Maybe this time she will not come home at all.

The housekeeper brought an electric pad to ease the old man's pain.

"Do they intend to marry soon? Your clothing store could use a good looking young man. Let him become a Jew—may not be as bad as you think."

"Father, you do not realize how bad the situation is," Mrs. Feingold tried to explain. "This man is training to become an actor. He thinks he will be successful—perhaps he will. He would not consider business and has no idea of marriage. He has been borrowing money from Louise—they call it borrowing!—She is not the first girl he has charmed—there has been talk some time ago—"

At about eleven rain began to fall and soon after Louise drove up.

"Why, Grandad, what a surprise to find you here!" Louise kissed him and then introduced Ray, who registered doubtful pleasure at meeting the old man. Looked as if he had been trapped into a family gathering—would never have believed it of Lulu—

"How pretty you look, Louise, what a nice dress, blue, like a fairy—" the old man was trying to gain time, but saw they were eager to go and came to the point. "Sit down, sit down, I want to talk to you two. Louise is my favorite grandchild and I am old—don't believe in intermarriage—but it has happened—you love one another. I should like to see the affair arranged before the angel with a thousand eyes comes for my soul. You, young man, could accept our religion—it has been done—it has been done—it has been done many times—and let there be peace."

"I don't get what you are talking about, sir," said Ray, glancing towards the door.

"O, please, Grandad, Ray and I just stepped in to get my rain things—we are late as it is—don't

on his strong, lean face, asked "Now, as your friend of many years and your physician, tell me what has brought about this emotional eruption—what happened?"

"They have ruined everything—spoiled my only chance for happiness—wanting Ray to become Jew. Why they never taught me anything about their religion—ye wanting Ray—I shall die, I want to die—"

"If it is Ray Simpkin you are talking about," the doctor spoke with compelling authority so that she had to look up—and listen, "saw him run towards the railroad station as I came here. Besides he is married already, and the girl he tricked will not divorce him—"

"I know all about that, he told me. He was so young then; it is just a matter of money. He wanted to arrange about the divorce and we would have married right afterwards. And now—and now—" she began to moan and sob.

Her father and grandfather looked long and earnestly into each other's eyes; then Mr. Feingold took the doctor apart and spoke with him for a few minutes. Finally he took his daughter's hands in to his while she turned her tear dimmed, hopeless eyes up to him.

"Listen, my child. You almost lost your mother and she is still a very sick woman. She must be spared all excitement. Tomorrow you will take your grandfather to New York and remain with him. He will need nursing. You will forget about this unhappy affair with Ray Simpkin—you must! Now Dr. McMillan will give you something so you can sleep."

"But mother, if she is so sick—" she asked faintly, too spent to resist.

"A nurse will take care of her. Mrs. Dagan will come in often. You will be kept informed."

Dr. McMillan urged Louise to do as her father wished, for her mother's sake as well as for her own.

The next day I saw her, pale but composed again, help her grandfather into the car that was to take them to their train. She pressed my hand, suddenly threw her arms about my neck and kissed me, returned to the old man and was driven away.

I began to spend some time daily with Mrs. Feingold, who recovered slowly, but never completely. Timidly at first, not quite certain of my welcome, but drawn by her motherliness, which had attracted me the first time I saw her. I gained assurance as I realized her need of someone she could talk freely with

things—we are late as it is—don't let's get into a big discussion." Louise protested, standing by Ray, ready to go.

"Before you leave," the old man insisted, "this affair is going to be settled. I am willing to do the right thing by both of you, and so are the girl's parents, but it must be a *right* thing. Now, tell me, what are your plans?"

"I am sorry, sir, but what is there to discuss?" Ray's voice sounded tired and conveyed annoyance. "I am leaving for the coast soon—"

"Ray, dear, don't mind what they say—they don't understand—"

"I think I'd better be going, honey," in tones vibrant with sorrowful resignation, "I shall write to you—"

"And am I not going with you?" Amazement, horror were in her wide, staring eyes.

Erect and proud, Ray was heroically determined. "How can you, with your family hanging to your skirts? My career—" He took a step towards the hall, "I'll write you and return as soon as possible what you lent me." With sneering contempt towards the older people, "also six per cent. additional."

As Ray turned to go, Louise began to laugh in a choking, horrible way. Mrs. Feingold suddenly put her hands over her heart, sighed deeply, and dropped in a heap to the floor.

In the alarm the old man forgot his sciatica and the young people, and helped his son-in-law raise his unconscious wife to a sofa. Dr. McMillan came and pronounced the patient in a grave condition, heart attack, possibly paralytic stroke. She must not be moved at present.

Louise was huddled in a chair, her fists crushed against her mouth, shaking with alternate sobs and laughter, probably unaware that anything had happened to her mother. Dr. McMillan told the housekeeper to get another woman to help. The housekeeper telephoned me to come at once.

Our bungalow is only a few minutes walk from the Feingold home; Elliott and I came with no delay.

The Feingold home, even during that frightful midnight, impressed me with its luxury. I felt the soft, thick piles of rugs underfoot, was aware of the mellow glow of mahogany, as I stepped to where Mrs. Feingold lay, her face and hands almost gray, her eyes dim and sunken, her breathing coming in faint, audible gasps.

The rain stopped and the first gray of dawn came ghost like through the windows before the doctor declared her out of immediate danger and turned his attention to Louise.

She was moaning miserably, her hair in disorder, her tears had streaked her make-up grotesquely.

"You have driven him away, you have ruined my life—I cannot live without him," grieved Louise, rocking to and fro in her abandonment to despair.

"What a night, what a night," sighed Mr. Feingold, giving Elliott a cigar.

Dr. McMillan, tired lines showing

someone she could talk freely with about Louise, discuss the letters that came.

At first these letters were mere notes, chaotic in composition and unhappy in content. She hated New York, she hated the people there; their indifference as well as their occasional intruding friendliness. She had to nurse Grandad a great deal. As soon as he was better, she will travel—anywhere.

"To Hollywood, probably," sighed Mrs. Feingold, "my poor child."

But pride must have asserted itself eventually. Her letters became more cheerful. She was buying clothes, going to the theatre, attending an occasional lecture, discovering the possibilities of the great city, making a place for herself there. As month followed month, she found a group of young people congenial; began attending the Sunday morning services of a world-famous rabbi, was learning about her race and religion.

"My hope is," Mrs. Feingold said to me one day as we were strolling together on the main street, Junior pushing his go-cart ahead of us, "that Louise become seriously interested in a young man of our own people. My terrible experience has convinced me how mistaken I had been, and has shown me the danger of drifting away from one's own people and religion."

(The End)