

Weekly Short Story

BLOND SHEIGETZ

By ELLA CLINE

The Feingolds were our nearest Jewish neighbors when we moved into Wilmot from Dragna Dam. For two years we had lived in a small settlement in the Adirondack wilderness, the only ones there of our faith. Since both Elliott, who is a mechanical engineer, and I have seldom been away from the immediate environs of New York, we eventually became heart-hungry for companionship with our own people. Mrs. Feingold, even before I knew who she was, fascinated me.

I saw her frequently on the streets of Wilmot, in the stores, driven by in her car while I was giving Junior his daily airing. She was middle-aged, brunette, not tall, and so motherly! She invariably dressed in costly black with the gleam of diamonds on her fingers and near her throat. Young enough to be her daughter, my heart was set on her friendship. Even the becoming curve to her nose endeared her to me. I was several months in town before we met formally.

Dr. McMillan was also a near neighbor. He took care of Junior and had introduced me to Mrs. McMillan. At a charity bridge in the McMillan home I met Mrs. Feingold.

"Mrs. Feingold, this is Mrs. Dagan, a newcomer in town. Mr. Dagan is helping build that many-million dollar dam," Mrs. McMillan said kindly.

"How do you do, Mrs. Dagan? I believe I have seen you on the street," Mrs. Feingold was most cordial, "and how do you like Wilmot after living in the forest?"

Instead of confining my remarks to the wonders of the dam across the upper Hudson, the marvels of the giant steam shovels tearing at the earth, the incessant whirr of the cement mixers in the trackless forest, the peaceful valley soon to be hidden under the waters of a slowly forming lake, I spoke about myself, about my loneliness . . .

Mrs. Feingold became a shade less cordial.

"I thought you were Irish, at-burn hair and all—I have lived twenty-odd years here and would not go back to New York. My daughter, Louise, is popular here and very happy socially. We make no distinction—"

Wishing to bring back her initial warmth, I plunged in deeper. "I suppose it is well enough for married people—we got along splendidly at the dam—but your daughter, a young girl, she might fall in love—"

Mrs. Feingold's very handsome head went up proudly, "It would

My kindly, gossiping neighbors told me all about it. Since the Feingolds and I belonged to the same "church" they took for granted that we were intimate socially and that I, doubtless, knew all about the affair, and discussed it with me freely. I felt no compunction in listening, after all the Feingolds were my people . . .

One neighbor told me, while strolling along behind Junior's perambulator, "I am really surprised, Mrs. Dagan, that Louise Feingold should take up with such an ordinary fellow as Ray Simpkin. Of course he is handsome, got the notion he will make a hit in the movies. If he had the railway fare he might start for Hollywood at once. His father does odd jobs, and his mother took in washings, but to look at Ray you would think he was the prince of England! I have seen him trail by with girls since he was in knee pants. And Louise belonging to the country club and associating with the people there—I think she would know better."

And another neighbor might inform me, "Louise is simply crazy about him. Such a nice, quiet girl and so well brought up, talks back to her parents—their housekeeper is sister to my cook—"You cannot dictate to me—I shall do as I please! Your Ghetto notions! I shall marry, or not marry, anyone I please. What if they are poor? Can't you think of anything but money?" I reckon they would not mind if it were Judge Jackson's son or Dr. McMillan's but Ray's grandfather died in jail and his grandmother is still on the county farm. I say it is a shame and I am sorry for Louise when she comes to her senses."

Louise was selling bonds that had been given to her by her grandfather and declining to tell her parents what she did with the money. Ray no longer made any pretense at clerking in the basement of a department store. He was seriously training to become an actor. He not only photographed well, but discovered he had a good voice, and was taking vocal lessons. Large photographs in various poses and varieties of expression and vocal lessons cost money; but he apparently did not lack funds.

Elliott had to be a few days at the dam and an odd job man came in to take care of our furnace. When I learned that his name was Simpkin I asked him if the good looking Ray was his son—the one that kept company with Miss Feingold.

Mr. Simpkin, Sr., wiped his soot-ingrained hands on his overalls, expectorated exactly into the end of an ash barrel, before he re-

she married a Jew or a Gentile. I was too young, too inexperienced, to take this calmly. I, fortunately, said nothing, but my facial expression must have shrieked, "How can you say anything so terrible, you, so obviously Jewish!" Mrs. Feingold moved away from me; for me the party was utterly spoiled.

Soon afterwards I met Louise Feingold. Elliott had taken me along to the dam, for the drive through the woods, glowing in autumnal glory, was a joyous experience. Louise drove up with a carload of friends and stopped at the engineers' office for a guide to show them through the forbidden places of generators and turbines. While Elliot got ready to go with them, we talked.

A tall, slender girl, faultlessly dressed and with pleasing manners, but not good looking. Resembling her mother only in the curve of her rather too large nose. Her eyes were gray, her skin sallow and freckled.

She asked politely if I did not find Wilmot too civilized after living in the wilderness. I told her it had been a memorable experience to witness the scientific control of natural forces and the production of tremendous power for use in distant cities. I pointed out to her the giant trestles on cleared paths on the hills that would carry great cables for transmission of electricity to mills and factories. But, rankling from my talk with her mother, I added, that I missed the fellowship of my co-religionists. She was amused.

"I never associated with Jews," she said, almost laughing, "and don't want to." Elliott was ready and the party went sightseeing.

Nevertheless every time Mrs. Feingold passed me with a cool greeting, or Louise flashed by in her car with no greeting at all, I felt deprived, as if I had a right to their friendship.

Only after one dreadful, sleepless night, when the shadow of death drew near the Feingold home, did that intangible barrier between us begin to disintegrate.

A change was taking place in Louise during the winter. I must have been mistaken in thinking her ordinary looking. Her eyes were luminous with happiness; soft color suffused her cheeks; her lips curved in a delighted smile; every movement of her slender form had become graceful, charming.

The reason for this remarkable change was almost always beside her, escorting her wherever she was going, on the street, in her car. He was a tall, blond young man, with laughing blue eyes and very handsome. No youth was ever more gay or carefree in appearance. I wondered sadly every time I saw them, with eyes only for each other, if the blond sheiketz had Mrs. Feingold's entire approval.

Alas, love's path was far from smooth and of wedding bells there was not even the faintest echo.

plied
"So the whole town is talking, is it? I knows my boy, I knows—Ray won't break his mother's heart for any girl, he won't—"
"But, Mr. Simpkin, I think you would be glad. Louise is an only child, the Feingolds could do so much—"

"Money ain't everything, ma'm, it ain't," he shifted his quid of tobacco to his other cheek and prepared to go. "His mother's back has ached plenty working for him. She will not have it unless the priest bless their weddin'. Not that our boy is invitin' us to any weddin' yet," he finished, hopefully.

No. Mrs. Feingold was not worrying which expensively engraved invitation to order or what guests to invite. She was being informed that these were modern times when young folk were not hampered by obsolete traditions. One was gay and one enjoyed life. Marriage was a dim and disregarded possibility in a dim and disregarded future. No one tolerated chaperonage or felt obligated to be at home at certain hours. Youth was free to go its own way, to the devil if it so pleased. And there, it seemed to the harrassed parents, their only child was going.

(To Be Continued)

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