

# Tale of a Theft Which Quite Upset This Little Community

By ELLA CLINE

Hilaniake, N. Y.,  
November 7, 1938.

Dear Grandmamma:

I can see you reading this letter, seated in your comfortable chair in the sunroom of our home in Newton, surrounded by the flowering plants you love. This letter is for the entire household: for you, dear; for Grace and Arthur, my youthful parents; for Horace, my brother, poet of the family and senior at Harvard, and for little Julie. Also for any of our numerous relatives in Newton, Brookline, Dorchester, Belmont, Chelsea, and all intermediate points, who may evidence an interest in our welfare, might want to know how Irving and Elsa are spending their time since they recently married and left the environs of Greater Boston to make their home in the Adirondack wilderness, far from the madding crowd (so they think) way up north, near Canada.

Nevertheless, Granny dear, this neck of the woods has been a very exciting place the last two months. We were simply stunned to learn that old Deborah Feurflam, after entertaining our young student rabbi at dinner before the high holydays, on an ordinary Wednesday, immediately afterwards took to crime. Her maid, Bridget, was her only accomplice. But Mrs. Feurflam planned the theft, did the actual stealing, and, later, admitted as much.

### No Bridge

My Tuesday afternoon bridge club were so tensely interested in the crime, took so much time discussing the Feurflams, two-three generations in this country, merchants mostly and with no criminal record so far, that during several sessions we did not get to play even one round of contract. It was so very exciting to realize that a rich, old widow should be the first to break that perfect record.

Very few in the back pews of the Temple during the high holydays gave proper attention to the service. The music was lovely, the pulpit was decorated with many autumn flowers, our young rabbi conducted the services with dignity, but every time the doors opened, we thought the police had come to arrest Mrs. Feurflam who sat in one of the front pews with her son, Dr. Theodore Feurflam, his very haughty wife, and their nineteen-year-old daughter, Diane. We speculated in whispers on what the dignified Dr. Feurflam would do when his mother was arrested. Diane must have shared our apprehensions, for she too looked back towards the doors every time someone entered.

Strolling on the sunny streets of our little city, the red and gold leaves of maples and elms slowly drifting down, all the world glow-

rilous contents could be read by any one, a source of contamination and a menace to the good will that existed between Jew and Gentile in the vicinity. Beside Henry Ford had long ago apologized for his connections with the mess, had affirmed many times that he was mistaken, and that he regretted the entire matter. Those books certainly have no business to be in an otherwise nearly perfect little library.

Both presidents agreed with the rabbi and promised seriously to discuss what could be done about the matter with their boards of directors. Time passed; and still the four obnoxious books remained on the shelves. Men in business, with good will to consider, do not like to be too irritating. . . . The books had been on the shelves twenty years already and no one had been poisoned by them, so why raise such a holler now?

Our young rabbi began to feel bitter about the situation, and helpless. Dining with Mrs. Feurflam he told her all about his failure to rid the town of those books. Mrs. Feurflam felt deeply for him. The librarian had refused to carry "Jurgen" even after Mrs. Feurflam had assured him it was the most poetic book she ever read. Bridget in plum-colored silk and white muslin, heard all the rabbi had to say as she waited on table. Her merry blue eyes hardened, the red glowec in her graying hair, her broad figure stiffened with war-like firmness as she passed the food, and took her time about clearing the table. When the rabbi left, she came to her mistress, wiping her red hands and said:

### The Fighting Irish

"Begorra, Mrs. F., it made the fighting Irish in me bur-rrn to hear that shwate young priest talk about them damn books. That is what I would do to them, bur-rrn them that I would!"

Mrs. Feurflam, who is rather short and very slender, whose pale face is finely wrinkled yet beautifully featured, as if it were carved in ivory, yet whose eyes are young black and sparkling, looked long at Bridget, considering; and then said slowly, "And why not?"

Several of us distinctly remember seeing Mrs. Feurflam leaving the library the very next day. Bridget a step behind her carrying four books as if each were a mad dog that might bite her at any moment and infect her with Hy drophobia. These books, it was learned later, were not taken into the Feurflam home, but to the back of the house where the handy man burned them, stirring the ashes thoroughly as if the black plague would spread from any unburned bit of paper.

Sometime later the president of

woman whose hair was snow-white, who deliberately took four books from our public library, destroyed them, and refused most stubbornly either to pay for them, or, behutle Gott, to replace them. And who had, furthermore, declared that she would willingly spend the few remaining years of her life defending her action, if need be. We hardly mentioned the younger Mrs. Feurflam's marvelous clothes, or Diane's latest hair-do. And there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the amiable Dr. Feurflam did appear rather worried.

#### But Why?

"Plaudersak!" I can hear you exclaim, as you adjust your glasses, "What is all this schmoos about arresting a good Jewish woman, a mother and a grandmother? Why should she steal books? Come to the point!"

So I shall, Grandmamma dear, right away. But please bear in mind, my sweet, that many subtle questions had to be put at the right time; there had to be much patient listening, a considerable amount of putting two and two together to get four, in order fully to grasp the remarkable facts of this crime that caused more discussion than any other single theft anyone remembers. I have heard so much about the Feurflams and Hilanlake, it seems to me I too have lived here about fifty years instead of merely six months.

The Feurflams settled here nearly fifty years ago, have prospered and been highly respected right along. Feurflam's is still the best department store here. Mrs. Feurflam lives in the large home she and her husband built about forty years ago. It is on the main street and business is reaching up to it, but she prefers it to a more modern house in a fashionable neighborhood. She is served by one maid, and is very charitable. Her only son is a successful nerve specialist in New York. Does not sound at all like the background of a thief.

#### The Rabbi's Discovery

Our rabbi started it, really. He arrived at the beginning of September, was enthusiastic about our Temple, admired the town. While strolling among the back shelves of our library he was greatly distressed to see there four books decidedly not to his liking. With dignified restraint, as is becoming to a young man not yet a fully ordained rabbi, he spoke to the librarian about these books, suggesting that the library would be better off without them. The librarian told him courteously that the books in question had been on the shelves about twenty years and so far no one had complained about them. He promised to take the matter up with the committee. Two weeks passed, the books were still on the shelves and our rabbi began to grow impatient.

He told the presidents of the congregation and of the Jewish Brotherhood that four volumes of abstracts of the Dearborn Independent which contained about all of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were on the circulating shelves of the library. Their lying, scur-

quams or of conscience and though he should at least see one of the books the rabbi so much disliked, and asked for it in the library. A telephone request for the books was answered by Bridget who said her mistress was resting and could not be disturbed. Subsequent telephone inquiries, even when answered by Mrs. Feurflam herself, received the same reply. Finally the librarian sent Mrs. Feurflam a note asking about the books. Printed on the note were the rules relating to the non-return of books which mentioned the full extent of the law.

#### What a Letter!

Thereupon Mrs. Feurflam composed a long letter to the librarian, a copy of which she gave to the rabbi. He showed it to several people, and it is a marvel! Mrs. Feurflam wrote, in part, "In all the forty-eight years I have lived happily in Hilanlake, I have never before been so deeply hurt or so unjustly misunderstood. Will you kindly look on the record of donors for the building and maintenance of a public library in this town? You will see the name of Feurflam very near the top and most liberally represented. And yet you intimate that I, Deborah Feurflam, stole; and you threaten me with the majesty of the law. Is it possible that among the twenty-thousand inhabitants of my dear home town, all of whom I look upon as friends and neighbors, there could be even one capable of harboring so outrageous an idea? It is incredible. Inquire among the fraternal and charitable organizations here: the Willing Workers, the Welfare Mission, Home for the Aged, Order of the Eastern Star, the Woman's Club, the Sisterhood and the Assembly, and each member of all these worthy organizations will assure you that I am no thief. A little thought will convince you that if I did destroy certain books, there must have been good and sufficient reason. Those four books were unworthy to be on the shelves of our library and never should have been given room there.

"Those books, Mr. Librarian, were offensive and obnoxious, a menace to the moral and mental health of our town; were unjust, unfair, and un-American. By removing them permanently, I have raised the standard of our library . . ." and more to the same effect.

Just think, Grandmamma, what a grand time Deborah and Bridget must have had composing and writing that letter. It is well known that although Bridget is a perfect maid when company is present, the two women, when alone, are friends who have shared thirty years in the same home, also much sorrow and happiness. (Do you happen to know any one in Newton who has kept the same maid thirty years, Granny dear?)

But to resume. Mrs. Feurflam mailed her letter, and the same day instructed her lawyers, the oldest firm in town, all good Presbyterians, to issue an injunction against the replacement in the library of the four volumes. The injunction was drawn up by the youngest member of the firm who has literary ambitions while daily-

it aloud at a Rotarian luncheon where every man is so keen for brotherly love. It went over big. Now all eyes in town are turned of the poor librarian who claims he was merely trying to do his duty

#### Ready for Arrest

Mrs. Feurflam maintains her undaunted courage. She said, "Let them arrest me! I am already seventy-five years old. I am ready and willing to devote the remainder of my life and what little funds I have, (I assure you she has plenty) take my case through every court in my native land, to prove I had the right to act as I did. Let other libraries be likewise cleared of similar abominable books, and I shall consider my last days well spent."

All the Jews, and many Gentiles have assured Mrs. Feurflam their moral support, several have asked for the privilege of helping financially, if necessary. We young married folk would like to help also, but having to manage on narrow budgets, it was difficult to see how we could help, except morally. We decided to give a dance in honor of Mrs. Deborah Feurflam, all the proceeds of which will be given to her to do with as she may think best. There are so many relief drives, that will mean so much more for one of them, probably Mrs. Feurflam will be our guest of honor; Diane has promised to attend, and Bridget will preside at the refreshment table, in her very best plum-colored silk and white muslin. I told Diane that Horace will be here to act as her escort. What a good sister I am!

Kindly inform my dear brother to stop mooning about poetry, have his dress suit pressed, and begin saving his nickels and dimes. Diane will probably be able to pick him up in Albany. She drives the dearest roadster! The least he can do for me in appreciation is to present me with an orchid for the dance. My Irving said it will be all he can manage to pay for my new frock and dancing slippers.

#### Peace Offering

O, I almost forgot a most important item. Mrs. Feurflam is presenting the library with four fine, eighteen books as a peace offering. The rabbi is making the selections and is he happy. The seventy-two books will contain the best in his tory, art and science as well as some fiction, and will be an honor to our people as many Jews will be represented. My bridge club may change into a reading group as soon as the collection is ready for circulation.

Well, Grandmamma, enough chatter for one letter. Thanks again for lebkuchen you sent me. I have enough left for my bridge club which will meet with me next Tuesday. Now that the Feurflam "crime" has been diffused by many good words, some laughter, and a little worry—and several good deeds, we may play cards instead of just talk. On the other hand in spite of the fact that this is a wilderness, fully two hundred miles from the golden-dome of the Boston State House, a most exciting event may occur before next Tuesday.

My love to you all,

Elsa.