



MARRIAGE RIFT

Back from Provincetown, Margaret soon found a new interest. She started attending the "Evenings" given by Mabel Dodge in her Greenwich Village salon.

Mabel Dodge was a wealthy divorcée recently returned from Europe where she had spent most of her married life. France and Italy were places of glamour and romance to her, but at the insistence of her family she had come home to have her son educated in America. She sent the boy off to school and leased two floors of a brownstone on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Ninth Street, which she decorated all in white—white velvet chairs, white draperies, white woodwork and walls—quite unusual for the times. There she started a salon modeled on those in Paris, declaring that she was "empty" and had to be filled with other people's ideas. Her series of Evenings included intellectuals, radicals, and creative people of every kind as her guests. Each Evening centered around a particular theme, there were political evenings, poetry evenings, drama evenings, art evenings. At each, Mrs. Dodge, in flowing white chiffon, sat regally in an armchair until the moment of midnight, when a sumptuous supper was served.

Since most of her guests were accustomed to a late supper of little more than coffee and cake, and her tables were heaped with the finest meats, poultry, and French pastries, her invitations were rarely turned down. Her parties became a Village institution. Edgar Lee

Masters, who had recently published the *Spoon River Anthology*, was glad to lead a poetry evening. Gordon Craig, the stage designer, hastened downtown to conduct a drama evening Mrs Dodge soon declared she felt empty no more

Several of the very best Evenings were when Margaret held forth on the subject of sex. Although free love had been practiced quietly for years by many intellectuals in the Village, it was being openly, even flagrantly pursued. Eugene O'Neill, after a marriage so casual he hardly bothered to mention it, took on one mistress after another, boasting about them at his favorite hangout, The Hell Hole. Edna St. Vincent Millay hopped gaily from bed to bed and wrote about it in her poems. Floyd Dell and Max Eastman championed it in their magazine *The Masses*. And, long ahead of her time, Mabel Dodge was looking for the "perfect orgasm." When she found it with an American Indian named Tony Luhan, she retired contentedly with him to his reservation, though they had hardly anything to say to each other. Good sex was enough.

But few championed sexual freedom as ardently as Margaret Sanger. She had absorbed many of her ideas from Emma Goldman and Sasha Berkman who taught special classes on the subject at the Ferrer School. There they spoke intoxicatingly of the "dignity of the human personality and the need for unfettered self-expression," enthusiastically endorsing the Swedish feminist, Ellen Key, who claimed that "the most sacred thing in life is individual desire, with special emphasis on sex-desire." Margaret devoured their words. "I love being ravaged by romances," she wrote in her 1914 journal. To her, emotion was a higher force than reason. "Emotion is that which urges from within, without consciousness of fear or of consequences."

Mabel Dodge listened avidly when Margaret spoke. She wrote in her memoirs

Margaret Sanger was a Madonna type of woman, with soft brown hair parted over a quiet brow, and crystal-clear brown eyes. It was she who introduced us all to the idea of Birth Control and it, along with other related ideas about sex, became her passion. It was as if she had been more or less arbitrarily chosen by the powers that be to voice a new gospel of not only sex-knowledge in regard to conception, but sex-knowledge about copulation and its intrinsic importance.

She was the first person I ever knew who was openly an ardent propagandist for the joys of the flesh. This in those days was radical indeed when the sense of [sin was still so indubitably mixed with the sense of] pleasure. Margaret Sanger personally set out to rehabilitate sex. She was one of its first conscious promulgators.

Mrs. Dodge particularly remembered a night when she had given a small dinner party just for Margaret and another friend, and the three of them sat for hours talking about the possibilities of the body.

As she sat there, serene and quiet, and unfolded the mysteries and mightinesses of physical love, it seemed to us we had never [known it before as a sacred and at the same time a scientific reality.

Love I had] known, and pleasures of the flesh, but usually there had been a certain hidden, forbidden something in my feeling about it that made it seem stolen from life, instead of a means to the growth of the soul.

Margaret Sanger made it appear as the first duty of men and women. Not just anyhow, anywhere, not any man and any woman, but the conscious careful selection of a lover that is the mate, if only for an hour, or for a lifetime maybe.

The Evenings on which Margaret spoke publicly of these things delighted everyone except Bill Sanger. He would sit in a corner trembling with apprehension. He had kept her from going to Provincetown the summer before in order to keep her away from Goldman and her crowd, because he was sick of hearing Emma hammer away at the idea that marriage and fidelity were among the chief curses of mankind. Now he wrote "Do you know how this last year has impressed me? That the so-called Labor Revolutionary Movement is not noble but an excuse for a Saturnalia of sex."

One unexpected benefit did come to Bill from the Dodge Evenings, however. He made his decision to go to Paris to realize his dream of becoming a modern painter.

Before 1913 there had been practically no modern art movement in America. The one man who had tried to break away from the academic conventions was Alfred Stieglitz, the noted photographer. In 1913 he

arranged an exhibit of work by himself, his wife, the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, and a few other moderns "People came and gaped," Stieglitz told Mrs Dodge "But hardly a single picture was sold "

It was then that a free-lance publicity man, James Gregg, came up with a bright idea He would promote a really big modern art show First he interested Arthur Davies, an artist who painted "strange poetic figures wandering in allegorical scenes," as Mrs Dodge described them Next he approached John Marin, the well-known watercolorist, and soon was in excited correspondence with Leo Stein, brother of Gertrude Stein, in Paris Stein lined up works by Picasso and Matisse, and Stieglitz persuaded Mrs Dodge, who viewed it all as "an escapade, an adventure," to underwrite the show The result was the famous Armory Show of 1913, the talk for months of the American art world

Bill Sanger visited the Armory Show again and again, becoming more convinced each time that he could paint as well as the artists on display If only he could get the chance to work at it full time!

The main rub as usual was money Bill always managed somehow to send Margaret and the children away during the summer months to escape the city heat, but with a mother to support as well, he was hard pressed for funds If he was ever to get to Paris to study and work, even for a few months, he would have some tall figuring to do

Meanwhile another summer arrived, and this time Margaret insisted on going back to Provincetown to join Emma She took her sister Ethel along to help look after the children, explaining that taking Ethel would give her time to go to the libraries in Boston and New York and start reading up on contraception to enhance what little she knew

Ethel was happy to have a vacation at the seashore, and Margaret soon started running to libraries (The Comstock law stopped information only from going through the mails, it did not include articles in medical journals or medical books, nor did it remove anything already on library shelves) Never trained in research, Margaret seemed to have missed much of the available material It didn't matter too much, anyway As for recent material in medical books and articles, she knew as much as they did As for the old material, she knew more But the very fact that the material was resting quietly on library shelves meant that the mass of uneducated people, who needed it most, didn't see it It would take someone like herself to bring the whole subject of sex and birth control into the open, where she felt it belonged

It is almost certain, too, that during the summer of 1913 she began to put her sex theories into practice by taking a lover. Later, musing on her life, she told a confidante about "an affair in Provincetown in 1913 that really set me free."

It is difficult to determine who Margaret's 1913 lover was because the Provincetown group almost always referred to each other by initials. There are, however, several letters in the files from a journalist, Walter Roberts, who wrote Margaret saying how surprisingly wonderful it was to wake up in the morning and find her lying close beside him.

In any event, Bill was furious when he came up to Provincetown weekends and almost never found Margaret at home. A delightful picture shows six-year-old Grant and four-year-old Peggy dressed in Greek costume for a local pageant. But Bill had dressed them, and Bill had taken the picture because, as Grant said, "Mother was seldom around. She just left us with anybody handy, and ran off we didn't know where." Margaret was not around even when Peggy caught polio in Provincetown, leaving her with a permanently damaged ankle and a shrunken leg.

Bill and Margaret quarreled violently over her taking a lover and her neglect of her sick child. They decided to make up on a second honeymoon in Paris, with the children going along.

The trip, they hoped, would accomplish many things. First, Bill, who knew nothing about medicine, thought the sea voyage would restore Peggy to perfect health. Second, Paris was the artist's mecca, if he could paint anywhere, it was there. Third, Margaret could learn more about contraception. Bill Haywood had told her many times, "If you want to know about contraception, go to Paris. The French have known things for years that we don't." So Bill Sanger began planning how to get the cash for the trip.

His problem was solved, when Fishel, the man who had bought their Hastings home and who had been extremely irregular in mortgage payments, came across with a large sum in August. Bill received it in Boston where he was working on a drafting project for his firm, a job he hoped would be finished in October, when they planned to sail.

It is probably just as well they had to wait until October, because Bill's mother died in September. He came to New York from Boston, alone, for the funeral. While there had never been any tension be-

tween his wife and his mother, Margaret was, as usual, off somewhere else. Back in Boston, even while mourning his mother's death, Bill wrote Margaret almost every day.

I just love to have you near me. Loved one, you are a real woman. I wish we could see all the lovely and the beautiful together. Sidestep New York and the radicals for awhile, and get a healthy point of view not mixed up with sexuality under cover of Revolution. If you will get out of the quagmire of mysticism, you will cast your sunshine again.

A week later he was despondent because Margaret had not answered him.

The Sangers sailed to Europe at the end of October, going by way of Liverpool instead of straight to Paris, because at the last moment the *Call* had commissioned Margaret to do some articles on Glasgow, a city then experimenting with socialism in the form of municipal low-cost housing for the poor. But Margaret found that the new development contained very small apartments, large families were not accepted. And since the majority of the poor in Glasgow had large families, the housing was not available to them. Margaret was more sure than ever that without contraception no socialist scheme had a chance for success.

The Sangers left Glasgow in mid-November, traveling by third-class train to Dover, then, after a miserable Channel crossing, went on to Paris. Exhausted, they stayed at a Left Bank hotel until Bill could find a cheap studio. Margaret, who had always hated and feared the cold since her early TB flareups, found Paris almost as cold as Glasgow. But she felt better when she and Bill began to meet important painters like Monet, Matisse, and Modigliani. She felt even better when she heard that Bill Haywood and Jessie Ashley were in Paris, eager to introduce her to old-time radicals like Victor Davé. Through Victor Dave she met doctors, midwives, and druggists who were willing to talk to her about contraception. From them she learned that French women had long known about certain simple chemicals which slowed the passage of the sperm after it entered the vagina. Many Paris druggists were making and selling glycerin suppositories containing these chemicals, while women in rural districts were making their own, handing down the instructions to daughters just before their wedding day. Margaret also

learned about diaphragms, the rubber contraceptives that fitted over the neck of the uterus. Though these had originated in Holland, they had been used in France for over forty years. She got hold of some diaphragms and experimented with flattening them and hiding them under her girdle. This way, she believed, she could smuggle them past the U S customs.

Though they had been in Paris only a month, she told Bill she wanted to return to the States immediately to spread this exciting new information. In fact, she had already booked passage for herself and the children. Bill had counted on their staying away six months at least. They had another violent quarrel over this change of plans, and each stood firm. Bill refused to go home, Margaret refused to remain.

Though it meant spending the Christmas and New Year holidays on board ship instead of with her husband, Margaret sailed for home on December 23, 1913. Bill waved them goodbye as cheerfully as he could, though with deep foreboding and a heavy heart.