



NEW PROBLEMS

Jaunty or not, Margaret came out of prison with many problems. With the boys away at school, her first task was to find an inexpensive, centrally located apartment. After tramping the windy streets for days, she found two high-ceilinged rooms on the parlor floor of an old remodeled brownstone at 236 West Fourteenth Street, a tacky area on the fringes of Greenwich Village. It had neither heat nor hot water. A gas stove, sink, and tin bathtub standing in a corner of the living room served as both kitchen and bathroom, the bedroom was so small it could hold only a bed and dresser. But after she had placed a Japanese screen around the bathtub, hung bright curtains at the windows and built a coal fire in the open grate, it looked cheerful. In any event, it would do, especially since Jonah Goldstein, a not-too-prosperous bachelor who had undoubtedly become her lover and was begging her to marry him, was paying the rent.

Ethel moved into an empty apartment on the floor above. Ethel was good company, besides, she knew how to hold her tongue about lovers, as she had several of her own. Ethel and Goldstein got along well, and as for the boys, Goldstein enjoyed taking them to Coney Island in his Stutz "Bearcat" during school vacations.

But once again, Margaret needed money for what she now referred to simply as "her cause." She had finally realized that the working

class were interested only in fighting for higher wages and shorter working hours, not for birth control

She found she could expect no real help from the I W W 's either. One evening after pleading her cause earnestly on a speaker's platform she shared with Big Bill Haywood, Haywood got up and argued with equal earnestness against her. He drew a rosy picture of his dream state, one of whose glories would be that people would have enough money to have all the babies they pleased. Margaret was aghast. She jumped up to argue that enough money was not the answer, the real issue was women's biological slavery. She regaled the audience with stories of Hannah Grimshaw, a Quaker evangelist who had traveled through the mid-West in the 1870's holding "call meetings" on birth control in friends' homes. This mother of four, a paltry number for those days, had shocked the church elders by retorting when they criticized her "If you are not going to believe in and practice family limitation, then practice polygamy. It is better to have a dozen wives than to kill one." But by the time Margaret went on to another story, the audience was filing out. Haywood's dream was so much more satisfying.

She next turned to the social workers for help, assuming that, as they knew firsthand the misery of the poor, they would surely help her. But they too refused, saying that their job was to relieve the misery of those already born, not to prevent new births.

She realized that her only hope lay in the educated women of the upper and middle classes, many of whom had worked for causes like civil service reform, pure food and drug laws, better public libraries, and stricter child-labor laws. These women were searching for a new cause, since most of what they had struggled for had been achieved.

Margaret had the new cause to give them, but in order to do so (her apartment was not adequate), she needed an office or headquarters. She established one in another old building at 104 Fifth Avenue, near Union Square. Again, it consisted of two small rooms—one she used as a combined office, reception room, and library, the other as a consulting room for the mothers who were sure to flock to her for advice.

Again, the rent was cheap. Margaret cleaned and painted the musty old place, then had the door lettered with the words BIRTH CONTROL. She got friends to donate a desk, typewriter, and a few chairs, and set about looking for a secretary through the classified columns in the *New York Call*.

The secretary she found was Anna Lifschiz, a tiny, timid seventeen-year-old who had never worked before. A cousin of hers had put a want ad in the *Call* for her without her knowing it. The ad read "Wanted, an honest job of any kind." Anna had gotten exactly one reply: "If you'd like to do interesting work for very little pay, knock on the door of the top floor of 104 Fifth Avenue." When Anna nervously did so, she was greeted by Margaret, who spoke kindly but briefly: "The job I have to offer is interesting but dangerous. You may even be arrested. It consists of answering letters about birth control and sending out unlawful literature on the subject. The pay is twelve dollars a week."

"That's all right," Anna answered. "My mother has ten children, and anything to do with birth control interests me. I can spell, but I can't type. Are you sure I'm worth twelve dollars?"

Margaret was sure, especially when Anna promised to go to night school and learn how to type. Meanwhile, writing by hand would do. Anna's main job was to send out copies of a newly revised pamphlet on *Family Limitation*, for which Margaret had already been receiving two to three hundred requests a day.

Together they devised a scheme for answering the requests while eluding the post office authorities. They would send a personal reply to all inquiries, asking the women who had sent in requests to now send a handwritten self-addressed envelope, preferably stamped, and also if possible include a twenty-five-cent coin. When these envelopes arrived Anna would slip the pamphlets into them, at the end of the day she and Margaret would run around and drop batches into all the mailboxes they could find. Because of the varied hand writings on the return envelopes, the plan worked perfectly, they were never caught.

Another problem was to find a safe place to store the huge bundles of pamphlets until they could be sent out. The printers wanted them out of their hands as soon as they were run off, and keeping them in the office was too dangerous, it was difficult to guess when an innocent-looking woman who came for one in person might turn out to be a decoy. Margaret hid as many as possible under the beds in her own and Ethel's apartments, and if a large lot came in at once she asked Anna to take some home, too.

"Aren't you afraid?" her cousin asked when Anna confided the scheme to her.

"Of course I'm afraid. But if Mrs. Sanger asks me to do something, I just have to do it, that's all."

Anna's wages were a problem, too. Some weeks she got paid, some weeks she didn't. Often there was not even enough money for notepaper and stamps, but somehow the money eventually came in. Poor women who dropped by to pick up a pamphlet unexpectedly left a dollar instead of twenty-five cents. Wealthy women left fifty dollars. Anna's mother also brought in a little cash by translating the pamphlet into Yiddish and selling it to the women who were hawking vegetables and other cheap things from Bronx pushcarts. Margaret began at last to believe her boast that the universe was on her side.

With an office in operation, she turned her attention to a new medium. Remembering Ellis' advice not to duplicate the shrill tone of *The Woman Rebel*, she founded a new magazine, the *Birth Control Review*, in March 1917. It had a professional staff, shares of stock which sold at ten dollars each, and Margaret voted herself a salary as editor-in-chief. The *Review* was a long cry from *The Woman Rebel*. Instead of ranting on many subjects, it ran serious articles, on birth control only. Through the years it would publish pieces by such outstanding men and women as Karl Menninger, Pearl Buck, Julian Huxley, Fannie Hurst, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Stephen Wise on such topics as the global consequences of birth control and the better health of women who practiced it.

To raise more revenue, Margaret featured her own book *What Every Girl Should Know*, now in hardcover, at two and a half dollars, and for four dollars she offered the book combined with a year's subscription to the *Review*. Nor was she above selling a pamphlet by James Waldo Fawcett on *The Trial of William Sanger* for ten cents. The magazine also included in every issue pathetic letters from readers asking for contraceptive information, and a Calendar of Events telling how "Mrs Sanger lectured at Convention Hall in Atlantic City to an overflow audience," or "Mrs Sanger held the Women's Club of Passaic, New Jersey, spellbound," and her name alone was splashed across the front page as editor. But the chief value of the *Review* lay in the publicity it gave to the cause. Because the very words birth control were shocking, no newsstand would carry the magazine. It had to be sold either by subscription or on the streets, it did better on the streets. Seeing these words displayed day after day in crowded places, like the front of Macy's department store or the entrance to Grand Central Station, helped make passersby think about the issue, at the very least.

On the streets the *Review* was held up silently by a tall handsome blonde who stood at her post day after day Born Rosa Schneider, in Germany, she had a stern Prussian father who heaped guilt upon her both because her mother had died in childbirth and because she was a girl The severity of her Catholic upbringing, along with a confessor who kept asking her questions like "Do boys try to put their hands up your skirts?" long before she had thought of such things, forced her to run away At fourteen she left home and Church and managed to get to England, where she changed her name to Kitty Marion In London she sang briefly in music halls, then became a militant suffragette who had been imprisoned so many times and undergone so many hunger strikes and forced feedings she could hardly remember them all

At twenty she had emigrated to America and shifted to the cause of birth control, where for a small salary she stood on the streets holding up the *Review* in rain, shine, or snow Old ladies shook their umbrellas at her, policemen ran her in, only to have to release her because there were no charges against her they could sustain A few men and women bought copies and hid them in their pockets or under their arms while they hurried on As the years went by, Kitty Marion became such a familiar New York sight that one day a small boy, seeing her standing tall and silent as ever with her hand upraised, exclaimed, "Oh look! There's the Statue of Liberty!"

But a birth-control office and magazine were only a beginning Margaret also needed an organization behind her So on March 20, 1917, after much postponement, she founded the Birth Control League of New York, whose main purpose was fund raising She hired Frederick Blossom, an experienced fund raiser, to head it, asking him to raise a minimum of five thousand dollars to support the cause of birth control Blossom started to work fast In no time he had persuaded a number of influential organizations including Mary Ware Dennett's National Birth Control League to stand behind Margaret, but she refused to join hands with any of them

Mary Ware Dennett's organization had given a luncheon to which she was invited, but Margaret declined the invitation because by now she considered birth control her exclusive territory, it was as if she had drawn a magic circle around herself over which no one could step As Elizabeth Grew Bacon, a dedicated birth-control worker, put it years later "As far as her cause was concerned, Margaret Sanger counted 1,

3, 4, 5 She was number one, and there was no number two, she would let no one approach her that closely When Mary Ware Dennett had the effrontery to claim to be another number one, she became Margaret's enemy who had to be vanquished at all costs " For all practical purposes, Margaret's Birth Control League became synonymous with her cause

The new League grew fast She weathered public denunciations from Billy Sunday, the evangelist, from John S Sumner, head of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and even from ex-President Theodore Roosevelt who kept thundering about "race suicide " While Roosevelt admitted, when challenged, that birth control might perhaps be good for the poor, he was sure it was not good for the rich The rich, he declared, should breed as fast as they possibly could

Busy as she was, Margaret also proceeded with her negotiations to get a divorce from Bill Sanger On March 21, she wrote him a letter accusing him of publicly insulting her

I want to return your name to you in the same condition I obtained or accepted it, and I call your attention to the fact that in fourteen years of public life that name was not assaulted until you assailed it last Friday night

I will appreciate it if you will name your part in the support of the children And also to name any articles or property of yours in my possession I wish to wipe from my memory all thought of connection with you and shall appreciate any effort on your part to further that end

Bill answered her diatribe with only a short note In it he told her again how agonizingly lonely he was, following up his note with a bouquet of her favorite flowers Unimpressed, Margaret wrote again on March 24

Your flowers came this morning, and it is needless for me to say that I appreciate their beauty and the spirit in which you sent them But if you could only realise that such expressions from you, coming at this time, give me greater pain than the pleasure you hoped they would give If once you could realise this, I feel certain that you would try to co-operate with me in granting my last request for a complete separation Just as you say it is impos-

sible to be alone, so do I say it is impossible to go on like this. My work is piling up and it is impossible to do justice to it or to give the thought and attention it requires while I am in this unsettled state of mind. Won't you please help me? Won't you put yourself aside? Won't you let go that straw of hope that you have clutched to so long, and let me have the freedom and future happiness which I think is my right? Will you insist that I use all the cruellest means of society in order to protect my self-respect? If you continue to write me and attempt to see me, I must resort to this most drastic method. If the affection which you feel for me is deeper in your being than your love for yourself and the pity that you have for your own loneliness, you will either grant me a separation at once, or go away where we will not be tormented by the presence of each other.

Unless you can settle this matter (of our complete separation) immediately and to my satisfaction, I shall leave the country within the next few weeks and leave everything to those who are carrying on the birth-control work. My kindness to you has only prolonged an agony that should have been dealt with two years ago. Please think this over and let me have an immediate answer and a final one.

Bill replied by chucking his job, reminding Margaret that she owed him money from the mortgage payments on the Hastings house, and setting out again to Spain to paint.

But a few months in Spain made his spirits sink even more. In Vigo, broke and exhausted, he wrote angrily:

Whoever said one could live in Spain on \$4 a week? Yes, in a place full of filth, crying kids, bawling women, and food steeped in so much garlic it makes me sick. I've certainly had enough of poverty in America and Bank Street without going to Spain to get the local brand yet. *I want no more of it*, and I've quite decided I'd rather be without a penny in America than here in Spain any time.

He wanted the mortgage money she had promised him but not sent, and quickly. He needed fifty dollars immediately and fifty dollars a month allowance for the next few months—and would she please take

enough pains to find out about the steamer sailings to make sure he got the payments soon?

Margaret probably sent him the money on the condition that he give her a divorce on the grounds of desertion, because on August 15, 1917, she received an unusually formal letter from him in Spain

Dear Peg, let this be the last you shall hear from me It is best that you go your way and I go mine It is impossible for me to live with you I have thought it all through and have decided I shall live my life alone Yours, Bill

She did not hear from him again until December, when, weary and ill, with little work to show for his six months abroad, he was back in New York He offered to cooperate further toward a divorce if she sent him a statement admitting that the desire for a final separation came from her, not him "I do not want to hand down a heritage to my children that I took the initiative that we should pass out of each other's lives I want above all to abide in their hearts as love"

Margaret now bought a small inexpensive cottage in Truro and spent the whole summer there She didn't answer either of Bill's last letters as she had gotten what she wanted from him Across the envelope containing the statement that he was in effect deserting her, she wrote "This is the letter on which my divorce was granted" But she did not use the letter immediately She put it away and waited until it suited her purpose to use it, which was not for four long years