



MORE FRUSTRATIONS

Margaret's need to be the sole leader of birth control created conflicts with men as well as women. When she hired Frederick Blossom as a fund raiser and office manager in 1917, it did not occur to her that he would try to replace her.

He had seemed, at first, a lucky find. Because his wife had money, he could afford to work for a smaller salary than other men. He also had a great deal of experience in office management. In a very short time, he drafted a series of form letters that reduced Anna's need to answer each incoming letter separately, he also organized the many volunteers who had heretofore dashed haphazardly in and out of the office. His social connections made him a first-rate fund raiser, and he understood the intricacies of politics well enough to direct a campaign to nullify the Comstock Law in New York State. Remarkably, he even found the time to coedit the *Birth Control Review*.

Still, Margaret chafed, because it was soon evident that he had the ability to take the leadership away from her. And with his handsome face, polished manner, and excellent cultural background (he had done some translating of Proust), it looked as if he would succeed.

The antagonism between them grew rapidly. It climaxed over a comparatively small matter—a difference of opinion about a *Review* editorial Margaret had written. In a fit of anger Blossom moved out of

104 Fifth Avenue late one night, taking with him all the office records and vouchers, and even some of the furniture

When Margaret arrived the next morning she, too, lost her head. Though she had long since resigned as an organizer for the Socialist Party, she was still a member. In this situation it would have been customary for her to lodge a complaint with the Socialist special-investigating committee. Instead, she went straight to the office of New York City's district attorney, though dealing with the government was something no good Socialist was supposed to do.

While the D A was willing to try to help her, she realized her mistake might alienate her from Party support. She went now to the Socialist committee only to find that Blossom had also gone there. The result was a series of charges and countercharges that went on for months. Eventually she won, but the Socialists, angry because she had gone to the government, formally ousted her from the Party. She found herself without both a first-rate office manager and whatever benefits Party membership might bring.

This threw her into a particularly deep depression. She could neither work nor sleep. She declared she could not even *think* about birth control.

Her depression lifted in January 1918 when Jonah Goldstein won a strategic victory for her. He got the New York State Court of Appeals to declare that the law permitting information on contraception to be given to men "for prevention or cure of disease" applied to women as well. The court's opinion was so broadly stated that doctors could now give advice to any woman, provided they found even the smallest evidence of bad health.

It was a stunning victory, and had Margaret followed through on it, she could have immediately opened a legal clinic in New York. Since New York and California usually set the legal pace for the rest of the country, such a clinic would probably have been followed by similar ones throughout the country.

But for reasons that are not clear, she did not follow through. Perhaps at the age of thirty-nine, her small taste of battle and fame had left her with a taste for larger battles and greater fame. Perhaps she enjoyed the kind of plotting and planning it took to work illegally—to continue to defy the Postmaster General and sneak pamphlets through the mail.

Most likely, however, she simply did not have the funds. Opening a

clinic where women could be helped individually by competent professionals would take a lot of money, and Margaret's income was barely enough for her own needs. She had given up nursing, her main source of income was her lecture fees. And while Goldstein may have still been paying her rent, she certainly couldn't ask him to contribute clinic expenses as well.

Then there was the continued cost of the private schools in which she insisted on keeping Grant and Stuart. Though she claimed the private schools gave them a better education, the truth was she had neither the time nor the inclination to keep them at home, and she knew it.

Indeed, time after time she disappointed the boys by failing to visit them as promised. In February 1918, Grant, ten and as shy as ever, wrote wistfully from school that he knew how busy she must be or he was sure she would have come down when she had promised. He had waited in for her all day and she had never arrived. A month later he wrote to ask if he had permission to come home for the Easter holidays, or if not, would she come to see him instead? And in November he was wondering where he was supposed to go for Thanksgiving. All the other boys were going home. Where was he supposed to go?

As for Thanksgiving, she told him to go to her apartment in Greenwich Village where Daisy, the black maid who had replaced her Irish helpers, would cook him a nice dinner. It was the answer of a crusader who didn't have time for her own child.

Stuart took the matter of her visits more firmly in hand. At fifteen, he was already an outstanding athlete, and the admiration traditionally showered on athletes made him into a different kind of boy. While at the Peddie School on an athletic scholarship he got the mumps, and promptly used this as a reason to ask his mother if he could come home to visit her. "Dear mother," he wrote,

I am glad you are sending down some magazines as it is tiresome laying in bed doing nothing. As soon as I am well, can't I come into the city for a day or two. All the fellows (regularly) go home for three or four days.

P.S. Please send the money to come home if you decide in its favor. I will need about two dollars and will give the change to you. I will be alright so you won't have to meet me. I will come right over to the office. What is the phone number there? Just send me a thought wave.

P S 2 I just looked at myself in the mirror and I am not a well boy

A week later he was thanking her for the two dollars she had sent, adding "I am glad I can come home and get fat I am very thin and a little pale It will be a change and I will have something to dream about and look forward to "

Yet Margaret could disappoint Stuart, too When Margaret didn't go to Truro for the entire summer, Ethel took charge there On a day that Margaret had written she was surely arriving on the early afternoon train, Stuart thought he would surprise her by walking to the railroad station to meet her, then share her taxi back It was a blistering day, and Stuart, blond and fair-skinned, set out in bare feet and bathing trunks The station was several miles away, and by the time he got there he was badly burned He waited for one train, then another, Margaret did not appear, and he had no choice but to walk all the way back As a result, when Margaret arrived a day later, she found Stuart in bed, badly swollen from sunburn and in great pain She felt sorry for him, she said, but things had worked out in such a way that she couldn't get there when expected, she would try to do better next time

At the end of 1918, the tubercular glands in Margaret's neck acted up again and required surgery While recovering, she decided to write a book With the help of a young newspaperman named Billy Williams, whom she met in Truro, she began writing the book called *Woman and the New Race* It was a far cry from the hysterical *Woman Rebel* or anything she had done before It used quiet language, quoted recognized authorities, and gave stirring historical material It told how allowing newborn babies to die from exposure had flourished in China and India for centuries with the tacit consent of the government, while on the other hand penalties for abortion in Japan, Greece, and Rome were so severe they included death for the mother She described how medieval Germany had added torture to the death sentence for abortion, the penalty being to throw a woman alive into a river tied into a sack that also contained a serpent and a dog who would struggle with her, and thus prolong her agony

She told, too, how in 1917 fifty-seven percent of American families had a yearly income of eight hundred dollars or less Here she used a quote from Senator Borah "Tell me how a man earning \$800 a year

can provide shelter for his family. He is an industrial peon. His home is scant and pinched beyond the power of language to tell."

There was also a recent report to the Public Education Association of New York: "An overwhelming proportion of classified feeble-minded children in the New York schools come from large families living in overcrowded slums." She concluded: "We must not permit an increase in population we are not prepared to care for. We must set motherhood free. For then motherhood, when free to choose the father, free to choose the time and number of children from the union, will refuse to bring forth weaklings, refuse to bring forth slaves."

It was the book of a zealot that based the entire progress and quality of the race on birth control. Published in 1920, it sold over two hundred thousand copies, a record none of her other books approached.

Aside from this, it was not a fruitful time for the cause. The First World War had just ended, and people were far more interested in eyewitness accounts of the war and the Russian Revolution that followed than in birth control. Margaret's lecture engagements were few indeed.

Yet there was one lecture of importance, this was in Elizabeth City, North Carolina—a landmark of its kind for the South. Eight hundred men and women turned out to hear her, some women had driven with their husbands fifty miles by horse and wagon to get to the lecture hall. Margaret spoke for an hour and a half, phrasing her material in such delicate language that no one could possibly be offended, and afterward so many women crowded around to ask specific questions that she requested the men to leave so that she could spend another hour discussing birth-control techniques, something she seldom did from the platform.

By now she was tired. On February 7, 1919, she wrote in her diary: "I must get away and out of the reach of the phone. J. J. (Goldstein) dear generous one, took me to the Hotel Commodore for a bite." Then she descended on Grant, scooped him up without notice from his school, and took the train to California.

"It is all a new world to Grant," she wrote in her diary as they rolled along, "especially the invention of making a bed out of a seat. It's good to lie down and rest. There is a joy in resting with the motion of the train." As she looked out on the snow-covered Rockies, she felt "just lazy. Nothing to do, and I don't feel like doing even that."

In San Diego the scent of the orange blossoms filled her with joy, reminding her of Spain

But no sooner had she rented a cottage in California than her mood changed "I am in the grip of despondency today Changes have their effect on me so often It may be the changing climate, but anyway it is a most awful anguish one suffers Peggy and (the sudden death of) Portet, everything seems to loom up before me like a nightmare Birds are singing and goodness knows one should be happy but I'm not "

On March 8 a "nice letter from J J " cheered her, leading her to speculation on love "These chemically fascinating men must needs be dismissed from our consciousness I often wonder if love is not based on chemistry, and that is why married people grow so indifferent as age advances "

A week later she was in Los Angeles trying to rouse interest for birth control "But B C seems to have fled from the minds of the people Russia is the all-important subject Louise Bryant (one of the old Village group who had just returned from Russia) is in Frisco speaking and drawing big crowds "

She had a moderate success in Los Angeles nevertheless, then gave several successful street-corner lectures in Fresno on April 1 On April 2 she gave several more Fresno street-corner talks, but these were interrupted when a group of Socialists in the audience heckled her "They repeat the same old argument that people can have all the children they want under Socialism It never dawns on them that women shall no more desire to be breeders under a Socialist Republic than they want to today "

In San Francisco, her next stop, she found upsetting mail from home She referred cryptically in her diary to "one letter in particular which makes a new look on the future imperative " This probably was a letter from J J asking her to finally decide if she would marry him If she refused, he would find someone else because he wanted to settle down Forced into a corner, she wrote in her diary "It did not seem one could suffer so intensely My heart is so heavy it seems difficult to go on at all "

She felt better when she got an answer to a letter she had written to Bill Haywood, who was in the Federal Prison in Leavenworth, Kansas, awaiting sentence for his part in a recent I W W strike

Your letter post marked Jan 27th is just received I first saw

the account of the death of Jessie Ashley in the papers and at once wrote to Anita (Block), realizing how deeply grieved she would be. Jessie was much like a mother to her, wish it were possible for me to see Anita—and offer the condolence and sympathy that is in my heart. I could never tell how much I will miss Jessie. Though I never wrote to her often I communed with her frequently in my thoughts. I knew where she was, occasionally heard what she was doing, could imagine what she was thinking. Jessie was the one best woman friend I ever had, a greater tribute I cannot pay her. I only hope I was as much to her life and being as she was to mine. A real friendship is a much more wonderful thing than passing love.

Margaret, all my dreams are coming true. My work is being fulfilled. Millions of workers are seeing the light. We have lived to see the breaking of the glorious Red Dawn. The world revolution is born, the change is here. Remember me kindly to any friends you meet. Come when you can.

But Margaret never did get to see him again. For after his release he was soon sentenced to a new jail term for his anarchist activities. Not being able to face the ordeal of still another prison sentence, he skipped to Russia, which turned out to be sadly disillusioning. His dream of a New Dawn unfulfilled, Haywood drank himself to death.

Margaret was homeward bound, arriving in New York in early May and being met at the train by Billy Williams. "Dear old Billy. One can be proud of such a loyal friend as he. Often I think we women scarcely deserve that men be fair to us—when men so big and generous and devoted offer their strength, labor, energy, talents, love at our feet."

On May 7 she was back in her apartment on West Fourteenth Street, trying to make a decision about marriage to Goldstein. When he called the next morning to ask for her answer, she told him she'd have to have more time to think about it. Then she sat down with Daisy and wept, knowing finally that she couldn't marry him even though it meant losing him. For though she knew she needed him and would miss him both emotionally and financially, she couldn't take the step. Marriage to her meant giving up her freedom, and she valued that freedom too much to give it up.

A few weeks later she was raring to go again. Because the movement

needed publicity badly, she began planning a national conference on birth control to be held the following winter. In the meantime she wanted to have a farewell dinner with Goldstein, and another dinner with a group of old-time radicals. "It was good to sing the old songs and get a message from Peggy. Old songs and old friends always seem to bring Peggy back."

She spent the fall and winter lecturing to any group that would listen to her, then suddenly had a longing to see Havelock Ellis and plan her new conference with him. Having saved what she could from her lectures, plus the little she had put aside from the salary she had voted herself as head of her cause, she got a passage on a small boat for England, bought a few clothes in the fashionable "boyish form" style that suited her slender figure, and wrote him a note saying she was happily on her way.