



A MOMENTOUS MEETING

Back in London, Margaret renewed her relationship with Havelock and told him excitedly about her work's progress, her continued grief over Peggy, and her great plans for the future. He told her about his books in progress and his plans for books to come. She felt as if their five-year separation had never occurred. Havelock, at sixty, was no longer with Amy Barker, making Margaret more welcome than ever. And, in turn, Margaret was always at her best in England. At home she felt constantly that Mrs. Grundy or the Church was peering over her shoulder, so that as a result she must present as serious a public image as possible. The columnist Heywood Brown once accused her of a lack of humor in her lectures. "To the people to whom I speak, birth control is not a humorous subject," she retorted. But in England she could laugh as much as she pleased. "Margaret is fond of teasing," Havelock wrote to a friend, "very Irish and playful." In England she was indeed.

Soon Havelock was planning a trip to Germany for her, he had heard that an anti-spermicidal jelly had been perfected there, which would make the diaphragm far more effective. Margaret would have to find out about it. But first he wanted to introduce her to some of his chief admirers. They had formed a group called the Wantley Circle, led by the dashing handsome man Hugh de Selincourt.

Hugh de Selincourt was of French descent. His father, founder of the

well-known firm of de Selincourt and Sons, furriers, was, however, an odd combination—a strict Baptist who made his seven children take turns singing hymns with him on street corners, he was not above seducing the family cook. As a result Hugh developed a lifelong hatred of what he called the "hypocrisy of organized religion" and turned into a hedonist instead.

After studying at Dulwich College where he was captain of the cricket team, he went to Oxford determined to become a writer.

He wrote one commercially successful novel about cricket, followed by a few unsuccessful novels with sexual themes. The last were either too frank for the times or written in such florid style that no one was sure if they were meant for children or adults. Soon he married Janet Wheeler, a former concert pianist whose substantial income rounded out his small family allowance, and settled down to the leisurely life of a country gentleman devoted to literature, sports, and music. Janet continued to play the piano while Hugh became engrossed in poetry, especially the romantic poetry of Shelley and Blake. By good fortune, he found the perfect romantic home to rent—a thirteenth-century stone house in Storrington, Sussex, called Wantley—which had once been owned by Shelley's father. Wantley, with its handhewn beams, deep recessed windows, hand-wrought hardware, and sunken gardens filled with roses and fine old trees, made Hugh feel an authentic country squire.

Early in their marriage, Hugh and Janet had agreed that each would be free to have outside affairs, jealousy was an ignoble emotion they would never permit to enter their lives. In doing this they were following the example set by the original Shelley Circle of a century before, Shelley had a lover named Claire Clairmont who later became Byron's lover, while Shelley's wife Mary took on Jefferson Hogg. Hugh and Janet were happy to follow the Shelley Circle's practice. After their marriage Janet had taken one or two lovers, while Hugh had taken as many as he could find, reciting poetry to them while he flashed his romantic good looks.

He intrigued Margaret by first appearing to disdain her, then suddenly capitulating to her charms. On her first visit to Wantley, Hugh made fun of her feet, shoes, dresses, hands, and voice. Yet, as she told Havelock later, she had a "whisper inside her that kept on liking his laugh, even when he objected to everything I said and did." On her next visit they had a long quiet talk in which she told Hugh "If you like my religion—birth control—we shall be friends." He replied with

his favorite line from Shelley "The good life consists in living as if life and love are one" To him, the highest kind of love was sexual love, which suited Margaret perfectly

Soon she was begging Hugh for another meeting, preferably in London He replied that he had no plans for going up to London in the near future, but invited her to come back to Wantley soon

She couldn't go at once, however, because she had a series of speaking engagements in Scotland that had been arranged for her by the Neo-Malthusian League After her first lecture there she wrote Juliet Rublee, now the chief financial backer of birth control and Margaret's most intimate female friend "Oh Juliet, never was there such a Cause Those poor, pale-faced, wretched wives The men beat them They cringe before their blows, but pick up the baby, dirty and unkempt, and return to serve him"

In Glasgow she gave lectures on birth control, the problems of marriage, the hygiene of pregnancy, and the dangers of abortion Following Havelock's advice, she had changed her public stance on abortion She gave no more outcries about "the right to destroy," only about the right to create or not create new life

In Glasgow, too, she spoke to two thousand male shipyard workers and was amazed at the size of the turnout But it was the poverty of Scotland that made the strongest impression "Oh, I am busy and tired," she wrote Juliet "Things are hard here—*terribly* hard Try to move a mountain with a shovel and you have an idea what it is like here—but it is *moving*"

A week later she wrote Hugh a letter headed "Glasgow, a damn cold dirty place," continuing,

Yes, dear Mister Man love and life are one You will like to learn that every meeting here this week has been packed Oh, the sorrows of womankind, Hugh, really it's enough to want to die When I see these women always carrying a baby in a shawl, when I see them crowded up before windows where trinkets are displayed (It's my own weakness) I *know* that the hunger for beauty and charming things is just as great in them as in me

This is a gloomy place—but then your house is the only place where I loved it to rain

On July 12, she made a laconic diary entry "Nice letter that J J and Harriet were married in London on their way to Poland" Getting

this news after a hectic lecture schedule may have accounted for her entry the following day "Left for London, very tired and weary" Margaret never seemed to understand that at least half her fatigue was emotional. She may have refused to marry Jonah Goldstein, but the fact that he had married someone else hurt badly, she felt lonely and abandoned. She tried to counter her loneliness by making another terse diary entry "I am the Resurrection and the Life"

Back in London she tried to shake off her depression by writing again to Hugh

To think you were in London only a day or two ago and I have missed you. Came back from Scotland almost ill—too messy in head and neck to leave London until I saw my X-Ray specialist today. I must get a rest and live in the open before I go to Germany. But I will not come down now, Hugh, to Wantley. I will wait and see how the plan for Germany works out. If it does not go well, I will hope your plans will allow of my coming for another weekend sometime later. But I don't like these weeks slipping into months and not seeing you at all. I long to lie in the sun quietly while some one nice—very nice—reads Shelley to me.

When Hugh didn't answer, she consoled herself by accepting an invitation to visit Easton Glebe, the country place of H. G. Wells. She had met Wells briefly before, but this was the first time he had invited her to his home to meet his family. A weekend there bounced her back. In her diary for July 25 she notes "Most heavenly day. Walk with H. G. in garden. Most interesting chat." And on July 26 "H. G. took me to the train in his car which he calls Pumpkin. He has twinkling, laughing eyes and is a sort of naughty boy-man."

She described July 28 as "a big day. Breakfast with Mrs. How-Martin, an old-time suffragette. Lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Clinton Chance, wealthy Britishers most interested in birth control. Tea with Harold Cox, former member of House of Commons and now editor of *Edinburgh Review*." And on July 29 she told of having a delightful tea at Rebecca West's, followed by a dinner with Havelock.

Again a reaction set in, however. After two more days of running to luncheons, teas, and dinners she noted, "Dreams of night bad and disturbing ones. Hope all is well."

When the dreams persisted, she consulted a "psychic" who told her

"Uncle Tom is here, signing a paper to your benefit " The remark of the "psychic" about a benefit she took as a good omen, she brightened up, called Hugh, and invited herself to Wantley for the weekend When she got back to London she underlined a new man's name in her diary "Mr Harold Child Had a nice visit with him on the train on the way back to London from Wantley "

She wrote Hugh telling him how delighted she was to meet Harold Child, and how Havelock had read some of Child's poems to her in front of his fire "I liked the swing and run of the first two poems very much and wish your lovely Janet would put them to music If I were a painter I'd do them in colors, such were the emotions they stirred in me "

Harold Child, a friend of Hugh's, was a small, plain-looking man with bright eyes, a hooked nose, and a winning smile He had been first an actor, then a feature writer for the *London Times*, and was now editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* For years he had been keeping his mentally disturbed wife in a private sanatorium He lived at Wantley and commuted to London more as a matter of economy (Hugh didn't charge him much) than because he shared all of Hugh's views When the talk in the garden turned to the kind of sexual freedom in which Hugh so strongly believed, Harold would draw aside quietly and puff at his pipe

Harold was as quickly attracted to Margaret as she was to him, he was delighted to meet a woman who was both involved in a serious movement and radiated personal charm Not long after their first meeting, he began regularly inviting her to dine with him in small London restaurants, where they sat and talked for hours much as she did with Havelock

On August 22 Margaret left for Germany hoping to find the man with the anti-spermicidal jelly, though Havelock had forgotten his name She was shocked to find Berlin, two years after the war, still a dead city People spent most of their time searching for food, particularly potatoes, and when these couldn't be found, settling for turnips She was fed so much turnip soup, turnip salad, turnip coffee she began to hate the sound of the name

Even worse than the terrible food was the condition of the women and children Men came first, as always Whatever food was available was offered the men, women and children got only what was left At the same time the women were told they must produce as many chil-

dren as ordered to When Margaret spoke to several doctors about birth control, they shouted, "Nein, Nein! No birth control in Germany! It is abortions here only With abortions it is all in our hands Never will Germany give control of its population to women Never will it let women control the race " At last she met a doctor who told her there might be a firm in Dresden making the contraceptive jelly she was looking for But in Dresden they told her to try Munich, and in Munich they gave her an address in Friedrichshaven

In Friedrichshaven she was met at the station by a small, shabbily dressed man holding a bunch of wildflowers wrapped in newspaper as his greeting He admitted it was his father's firm who was making the jelly, but no, he couldn't take her to see the factory, and no, he couldn't sell her a sample The best he could do was to refer her to his sister in New York who might become the firm's agent there It might be possible for Margaret to make a deal with her if the price was right

When later she did contact the sister and get some samples of the jelly to test, they did not turn out to be particularly good But the search had exhausted Margaret again, she returned to England with a hacking cough She was also broke and had to cable home to Mary and Nan for a loan

Then as usual she made a comeback After a week's rest in bed she was enjoying a concert with Havelock given by the Italian opera singer Tetrzzini, which she summed up as "glorious", and lunching with Harold Child, whom she described as "delightful " She was also dashing down to Wantley for another gay weekend, after which she wrote Hugh

It was such a treat to be with you these lovely days, dear man This is the very first morning for weeks that I have felt well enough to want to get up when called When you come to London won't you let me know and let me have an hour or two with you while here? I am happy and grateful to know you

Another letter followed soon

Hugh, I'm in love with everyone in Wantley, even the cat Your grass smells sweeter than other grass anywhere You *are* making that force you spoke of—and it effects the bloom of the flowers

and the song of the birds as well as making you a—well—rather nice person—ahem ”

She had obviously fallen deeply in love with Hugh, so much so that she refused a second invitation from Wells so that she could go to Wantley once more instead. But Hugh pretended not to notice how Margaret felt about him. On October 21 she sent him a long letter shortly before leaving for home.

Those horrid words of yours keep teasing me. Do you remember? You said you would not care if you never heard from me or saw me again—you did say it—honest you did. Of course I know you were trying to tell me that you were master of your own destiny so far as other individuals are concerned—especially women. But I have tried to squeeze in a day to get down to see you in spite of your not caring. Now I know it can't be done.

I sail on the *Olympic* the 27th from Southampton. Won't you send me a note there and say you would like to see me when I return in the Spring? It has been a joy to me to be with you and to know Wantley too. It's all a delightful memory—a soul memory.

I send you my love and a hug to top it off. I'll be thinking of you often, far oftener than I'll write to tell you. But you'll know.

She relived her days at Wantley over and over as she sailed for home, though as she neared New York she was wondering in her diary whether “the darlings Stuart and Grant” would be at the dock tomorrow to meet her, adding “perhaps not.” And the day after that, November 12, maybe because thinking about her sons made her think about their father, her diary contained a single line “Bill's birthday.”

On impulse she invited Bill, Ethel, Stuart, and Grant, to a Thanksgiving dinner at her Fourteenth Street flat. The dinner was not a success. The boys were awkward with their father, whom they hadn't seen in a long time, and Bill became so upset he left early, writing Margaret, “Please don't invite me again. I sat across the table from you and still loved you so much I couldn't bear it.”

One man loving her to distraction while she was in love with another. It was a pattern that would repeat itself for the rest of Margaret's life.