



## SAINT AND RAGAMUFFIN

On New Year's day 1924, Harold Child wrote Margaret whom he had met at Wantley in 1920

Harold had moved with Hugh to Sand Pit, from which he again commuted daily to London. When Margaret sent him a New Year's card from New York signed "with love," he answered immediately

That card was a most delightful surprise. And with Margaret's love, too! It made me very happy, because I so feared I had lost sight of you—what with your work, and your getting married, and my work, and one thing and another! And I often think, with curses loud and deep and horrible, of the last meeting of ours—the lunch at the Monaco. Shall I confess? Yes! I was hideously jealous. You were just rushing off to catch a train, and I said to myself that of course as she's going off with Havelock Ellis she's counting every minute till it's time to start, and she isn't enjoying herself a bit and the whole thing is a failure. So when there came a card with your love, I just bucked up like anything. And if only you'll come over here again soon, and have lunch or something with me, I shall be ten years younger and six inches taller.

Margaret did not answer his exuberant letter at once, the annual February issue of the *Review* honoring Ellis' birthday had her in a flur-

ry of activity This issue contained tributes by such well-known people as Ruth Hale Broun, Ellen Key, and Ruth St Denis, as well as an especially reverent article by Hugh As usual, Margaret considered Hugh's article the best and told him so She had also succeeded in finding an American publisher for his novel, *One Little Boy*

Any kind of publication delighted Hugh, and when Margaret was able to get a review of his book in *Physical Culture*—a review she had written and the only one it ever got—he became ecstatic

She tried to be ecstatic too But she had begun to complain of insomnia, headaches, and constipation, plus overweight from joining her husband at his abundant meals In a few months her weight had gone from 115 to 131 pounds, her waistline from 20 to 29 inches As a result she didn't like either the way she felt or her image in the mirror

Also, now that news of her divorce and remarriage was out, she was terrified that the Catholics would use it as a new weapon against her Then the papers had given her vanity a stiff blow when they revealed that Grant was sixteen and Stuart twenty-one She could no longer subtract years from her own age and claim to be any age she pleased

But it wasn't long before she did a turnabout When spring came to Willowlake she described the place as "a gem " The newly planted annuals had started coming up and she wrote Hugh that she was "simply mad with joy " She added that she even occasionally went into a cathedral and knelt down "just because I feel like it " As to J Noah, he was a darling who "gives in to my every wish "

J Noah was indulging himself as well With Margaret away so much, he went off to luxurious hotels like the Homestead in Hot Springs, Virginia, where he could socialize, ride horses, and eat very well indeed

Soon he was begging her to join him at these luxurious places, but Margaret had arranged her life so that she could come and go as she pleased She used "doctor's orders" and new lecture engagements as excuses to stay in New York or Willowlake, and tried to mollify J Noah with notes that started "Darling of my soul," and ended with "All my heart is thine, beloved My heart belongs only to you "

As Margaret wouldn't come to J Noah, he had no choice but to go to her Time and again he would suddenly pack up and go home because he found himself lonesome as ever To placate him, she made him treasurer of the Birth Control League, the kind of job he enjoyed He at once got busy trying to organize the league's finances in a businesslike

way by breaking Margaret of the habit of raising money when she needed it, then spending it as fast as it came in. But aside from letting him become treasurer she kept him out of her cause. That, she insisted, was hers alone.

With the thought of Françoise still disturbing her, letters from Havelock and Hugh soon were not enough. She told J. Noah in June 1924 that she simply had to take a quick trip to England to see them. She had persuaded J. Noah to stay home the last time she went by using the argument that he was needed to personally supervise the building of Willowlake. But this time J. Noah was adamant, he insisted on going along as he wanted to meet Hugh and Havelock himself. But when he did, to his surprise, he was not the least bit impressed. After Hugh admitted he was willing to come to America and give poetry readings just for the expense money, he dismissed Hugh as "impractical and wholly sentimental." And he couldn't see the greatness in taciturn Havelock at all. He might have been impressed with Harold, who at least was a businessman who kept regular hours and held an important job on a famous paper, but Margaret never phoned Harold to say they were there.

Back at Willowlake within a month, Margaret rested, then began thinking of a new plan to publicize her cause. After a few weeks she hit on it, she would hold not merely a national conference, but an international one the following year. There had just been a big breakthrough in contraception. Hannah Stone and James Robinson, working together, had perfected an anti-spermicidal jelly which, when put inside a diaphragm as well as around the rim, doubled its protection. She would demonstrate this jelly to doctors from all over the world. She would also hammer home her statistics on self-induced abortions and tell how, out of a sampling of 1655 women who had come to the Bureau, 1434 had admitted to regularly aborting themselves, one woman had done this forty times.

But to hold a successful international conference with doctors attending from many countries, she needed internationally known Big Names, and Big Names wouldn't come unless they knew that other Big Names would also be there. In addition, many European doctors would expect their travel expenses to be paid. She realized that an international conference was going to be both difficult and expensive to put together, she would have to look for Big Names in England first.

In the fall she sailed for London, this time writing in advance to Harold "I've got to bag two or three important men for my Conference Can you help me? Will you be in London? It will be glorious to see you again" She added a significant *p s* "No husband will be present"

Margaret took Juliet along now to meet Hugh and Havelock, and this time she persuaded J Noah to stay home, using the argument that if he didn't supervise the landscaping at Willowlake he would be cheated for sure Besides, they could cable each other every day from the ship

Just before she sailed, she received an unexpected letter from her old friend Alexander Berkman She had often thought of Berkman and tried to find him, though to her friends she never mentioned either socialists or anarchists because such people, she insisted, were part of her distant past

Berkman had written her from Berlin, addressing her as Peggy, the name the I W W 's used

My dear Peggy, You will probably be surprised to hear from me, and perhaps even more so at the familiar appellation But that is the way I think of you, an old habit (do I hear you say "a bad one"?)

The occasion of this writing? Well, since my letters to you—one to London, and later on one to N Y—remained unanswered, I stopped writing But now a letter of yours came to hand

I see by your letter that you have not forgotten me, and that pleases my—shall I say vanity? Anyhow, I am pleased to know it, though I have heard that you have proven unfaithful to me and went and got married The nerve of you! Without consulting or even telling me! Seriously, is the report true? I am so generous-hearted, that I should forgive you even if it were true And if he is a decent fellow, then you have probably done a very sensible thing

But I cannot think of you as anyone's "wife," and I am writing to you as to the Peggy I used to know of old—the one I used to take dinner with at that Hungarian restaurant in the basement of Second Avenue, or spend time with somewhere else in the old environment I wonder whether you still remember?

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He went on to say he was completely broke, as he had written a book about Russia that no one would publish. He signed himself "As of yore, 'Sasha'"

Margaret answered Berkman immediately, and he replied

My dear Peggy It was no small pleasure to get the letter from you, dear friend. It is like talking to you in the days gone by.

You say in your letter, "Well, well, I've found you again!" Did you ever lose me? You will not lose me again, will you, dear? I am happy to get a line from you now and then.

Berkman's book on Russia was finally published, but it turned out to be a dismal failure. A few years later, despondent over both the book's failure and the fact that he couldn't get readmitted to the United States after being deported during the Big Red Scare, he committed suicide in Nice. Though he had gone to Nice with another woman, it was still Emma Goldman who mourned him most deeply, hurrying down from Paris to arrange his funeral. As she had been permanently exiled from America, too, Emma in time wandered back to Canada and died there.

Meanwhile Margaret arrived in London to find an encouraging letter from J. Noah. He was doing something, of which he was sure she would approve, to increase the supply of diaphragms. Vito Sillichia, having saved up enough money to open his candy store, had dropped out of the rum-running business, and J. Noah had hit on the idea of having German doctors send diaphragms to the Canadian factory where he was manufacturing Three-in-One Oil more cheaply than he could in the States, he was getting these European diaphragms across the American border in a way he'd tell her about later. "Dr. B. has already gotten thru 275 pessaries to me from Berlin at a dollar each," he exulted. Then, in an abrupt change of thought, "I hate B. C. that takes you away."

The day after she landed in London, Margaret as usual rushed down to Sand Pit, noting in her diary

Hugh was perfect. He seems to have a new look in his eye, a look which means he has seen through the mist and beyond to the

light Juliet was very silent most of the visit I was elated and noisy Sunday evening I saw Havelock and he toned me down

Now she was ready to start seeing the men whom she hoped to get for her conference The first of these was John Maynard Keynes, who said he would help indirectly by publicizing the conference, but that he was terrified of coming to America since he wasn't a public speaker

Next, she saw Harold Cox, "a perfect angel of a man who has been to America before but would make no promises" Then she received a much-desired invitation to lunch with the distinguished Sir Thomas Horder, who said, "maybe he'd come and maybe he wouldn't" After that she met with J O P Bland, who definitely promised to come "but only to smile"

If only as a change of pace, she began seeing much more of Harold Child By now they had undoubtedly become lovers "My Margaret," he wrote on October 9,

I want to cover this whole page with sweet names for you but they are all summed up in just that—My Margaret It's so lovely to think that there is a My Margaret—no one else's—a real whole lovely being, a woman, friend, that is mine because you give it to me But the mystery of what you can see in it and why you're so gracious as to accept it is beyond explaining

The intensity of this letter surprised her She had started a mild flirtation with Harold and she found herself receiving an adoration so complete it reminded her of the early days of Bill Sanger's courtship, she was walking on air

She was also continuing her affair with Wells In an undated note sent from Easton Glebe he begged

Please keep as much of your time as possible for me, because I want being taken care of just now I shall be back in London (Flat No 4 Whitehall Court) on Thursday night Can't I carry you off somewhere for a day or so? Anyway Friday belongs to me, and Saturday—and I can stop in London Sunday also

In another note he wrote

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What are you doing next week? Will you have Monday or Thursday evening free? For perhaps a little dinner somewhere about 7 15, and afterwards we could see how we wish to spend the evening A music hall or so forth?

And on October 8, 1924, he sent an unsigned note from his London flat that consisted of just two words "Wonderful! Unforgettable!" Their affair had evidently reached a peak

It added up for Margaret to a free-love dream—three English lovers at once, plus an ardent husband waiting at home Not long before, J Noah had met a reporter at a party who asked him why he had married a woman like Margaret He replied testily, "That's an impertinent question, young man " But a moment later he called the man back and said, "She's the adventure of my life Nothing interesting ever happened to me before "

To her lovers, too, Margaret was an adventure She was beautiful, charismatic, and involved in important work The child who had been the plainest of the four Higgins sisters had blossomed into a bewitching woman who was famous worldwide

All was not perfect however, for soon, his affair with Françoise practically over, Hugh was again on the prowl, making a play now for Juliet True, Juliet had thyroid eyes, a fluttery manner, and the annoying habit of always dressing in flaming red or pink But she was extremely rich, extremely bored, and quite obviously taken by Margaret's Noble Lord Hugh decided Juliet would do

Margaret sensed what was happening and countered by spending more time with Harold On October 10 she told him she wanted to see Oxford where she'd never been He promptly rented a car and they drove there, lunching at the famous Mitre Hotel and having a drink afterward at the Monks' Retreat pub They had barely returned when Harold sent around a note by messenger to her hotel "I've been kissing my own hands! Can you guess why? They smell of *your* perfume 'Golden Sunshine,' was it called? or 'Margaret's Laughing Eyes?'"

The next day another note arrived "It's exactly nineteen hours since I've seen you and touched you It seems like nineteen years Are you alright? And do you love me? Oh, but I love you, sweet sweet girl "

At the same time she was receiving almost daily letters from J Noah who insisted that she come home and never leave him again



Margaret as a nurse probationer, when Bill Sanger first saw her



Margaret Higgins, the Irish colleen, with Corey, her first beau at Claverack College





Margaret Sanger with Stuart,  
her first-born son



Grant and Peggy Sanger in  
Greek costume



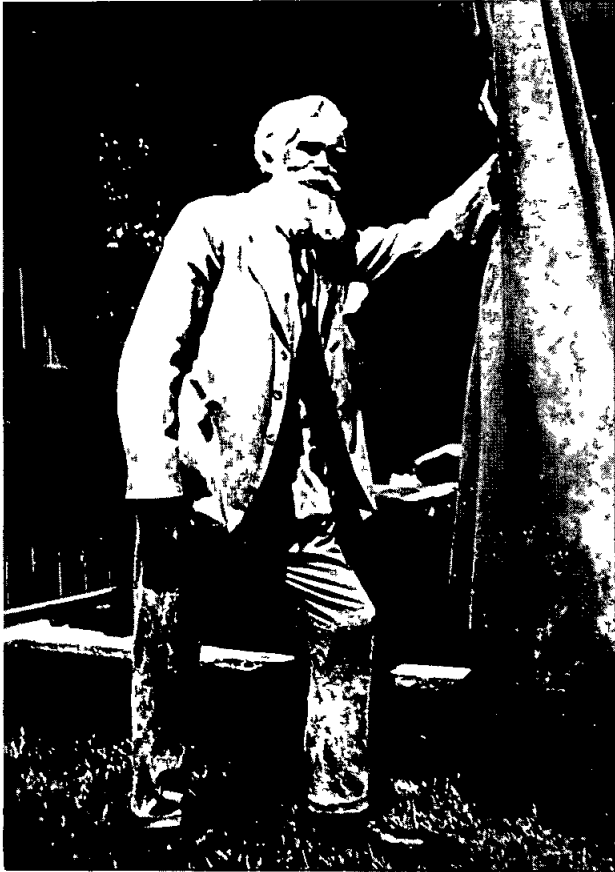
Bill Sanger Margaret's first husband Though he adored her, their stormy marriage finally ended in divorce

Margaret mourning for her daughter Peggy



Margaret in smart British costume awaiting trial with her sister Ethel after the Brownsville raid of 1916

Margaret, caught in a rare moment of peace, in 1932



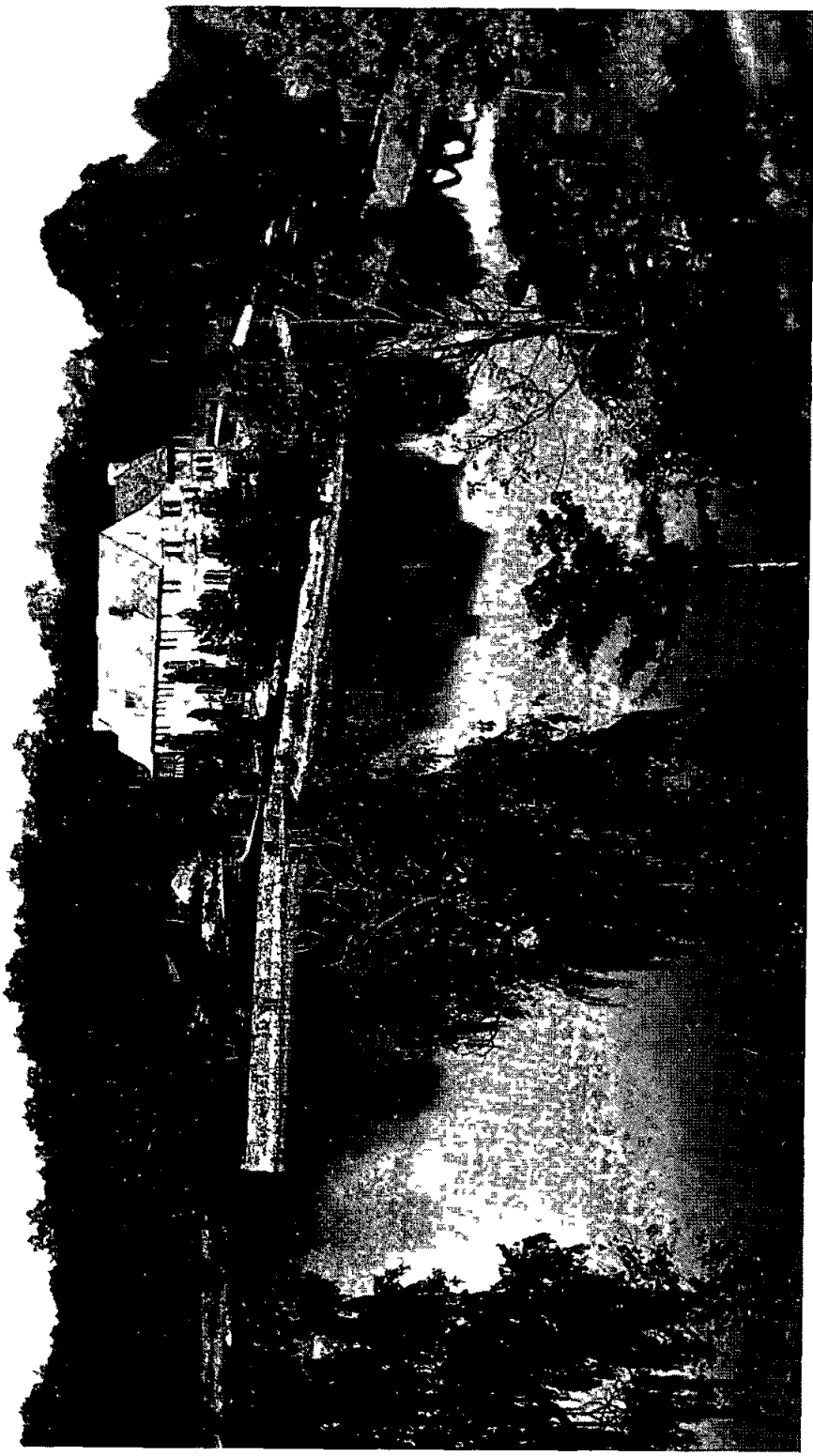
Havelock Ellis, the famous British proponent of "free love" He was Margaret's mentor and lover



Hugh de Selincourt, the would-be poet, in 1925. His intimate, passionate relationship with Margaret lasted for many years.



J. Noah Slee, Margaret's wealthy second husband with Michael Higgins, her father, at the Truro cottage.



Willowlake, painstakingly designed and built by Bill Sanger for Margaret. He sold it with deep regret when she tired of it



Margaret, living in Tucson, the wealthy hostess of elegant parties

"or I might do something foolish due to my utter loneliness"

But Margaret wasn't planning to return home She had told J Noah she was going abroad for only a week, but she was having far too good a time to keep her promise She answered that she was too busy pursuing Big Names, she never knew when one might consent to be a speaker at her conference J Noah would simply have to wait

Wells, eager to help, gave a big dinner for her on October 15, seating Bernard Shaw on her left and former Chancellor of the Exchequer Lord Buckmaster on her right The novelist Arnold Bennett and the playwright St John Ervine were among this distinguished group

Her particular targets that evening were Shaw and Buckmaster But Juliet so monopolized Shaw's attention that Margaret couldn't get in a word More, the conversation moved so fast she couldn't get Buckmaster's attention either, even though Wells leaned over and whispered, "Have you got Buckmaster yet? You're an American Go faster!" She had to content herself with writing to them later, and while Buckmaster replied cordially that he thoroughly believed in birth control, the date of her conference conflicted with the opening of Parliament, making it impossible for him to go Shaw, who couldn't go either, wrote her such a classic statement on birth control she ran it as the lead article in the next issue of the *Review*

Birth Control should be advocated for its own sake on the general ground that the difference between voluntary and irrational and uncontrolled behavior is the difference between an amoeba and a man, and if we really believe that the more highly evolved creature is the better we may as well act accordingly As the amoeba does not understand birth control, it cannot abuse it, and therefore its state may be the more gracious, but it is also true that as the amoeba cannot write, it cannot commit forgery Yet we teach everybody to write unhesitatingly, knowing that if we refuse to teach anything that could be abused we should never teach anything at all

She did have one bit of success however She managed to heal, at least temporarily, the rift between Havelock and Hugh caused by Hugh's affair with Françoise When Hugh told Harold about it, Harold wrote Margaret joyously from Sand Pit



I've been walking round and round the little pool in the sunken garden the place was full of you Who but you could have planned that meeting between Havelock and Hugh, and who but you could have brought it off? I can see you to the life—sly, mischievous, triumphant, bubbling with inner laughter, then serious all at once—as enchanting a picture of a great and exquisite woman and an adorable little girl as ever I've seen or imagined

Finally she told J Noah bluntly that she was delaying her trip home, though she tried to soften her letter with fibs and endearments

Today I received your cable for \$300 You said you had sent another too It is perfectly adorable for you to send them on so quickly I dislike asking you for money and only sheer desperation made me do it Had I come to London alone without Juliet I would have gone to a boarding house, but having started in style I got into the ways of London before I knew it I am here tongue-tied and lonely I want my sweetheart husband more than I want anything else But work detains me, and the treatment on my neck can only be gotten in London

J Noah had no choice but to bear it Lonelier than ever, he busied himself with birth-control work, tackling again the problem of the dwindling diaphragm supply He succeeded in persuading the German manufacturers to lower the price of the diaphragms from fifteen to twelve cents apiece Though Margaret was delighted by this news, something else had begun to upset her

Not long before she came to London to look for her Big Names, Janet de Selincourt had taken a trip to Paris with Harold, and Hugh had approvingly told Margaret, "Old Harold is in Paris having, I hear, a high time with Janet He is more a darling than ever"

But soon afterward Harold told Janet of his love for Margaret On October 17 Margaret received a distraught letter from Janet

Darling Margaret—Do you remember once at Wantley when you said you would like to hold me in your arms? Perhaps you have forgotten, but you were being Heavenly to me I should like you to hold me now, and tell me you love me

When Harold came to me all glowing to tell me about you, it

gave me a great pang & opened up an old wound that I thought I had cured I forgot everyone but myself & everything turned to bitterness inside I was rebellious that new life & happiness came to others while my own had come to hopeless grief & felt there was never to be anything more for me but being glad for others And I went all dead & frozen & hurt Harold Can you forgive me? So much love is poured out over me, I should be satisfied you would think, but the old longing came pushing up again It is awful to feel dead I am coming alive again now & I do love you & Harold

On October 20, feeling better, Janet sent a second letter

Darling lovely Margaret You have got hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether & if I can't make you feel that you have, I shall curse myself forever for writing that letter Either there was no need for me to have told you of any pain or I should have been much clearer There is *no hurt* to me in the fact of your love for Harold My pain didn't spring from that, it wasn't his having found you & your love that hurt, but that I had lost someone to whom I had gone out in the same way Why you adorable lovely person, what man could help falling in love with you?

Don't, don't go (home) on Saturday if you can possibly stay Hugh is longing to see you quietly & it would be *heavenly* if you came back Thursday

Margaret stayed on in England gladly, she ran down for a quick visit to Sand Pit, and on October 25, she received a note from Harold "You are love incarnate You incredibly darling mixture of the Saint and ragamuffin "

Saint and ragamuffin! He had caught her to a T To her admirers she did seem a Saint, sparkling and gentle, one letter had reached her merely addressed to "Saint Margaret, New York " But to her lovers she was a ragamuffin, always hungry for sex and love

Years later when she was an old woman she told her sixteen-year-old granddaughter

Kissing, petting and even intercourse are alright as long as they are sincere I have never given a kiss in my life that wasn't

sincere As for intercourse, I'd say three times a day was about right

Undoubtedly one reason for her interest in birth control was its connection with sex She enjoyed sex so much that she wanted all women to enjoy it too—without having to bear children they didn't want

By mid-autumn of 1934 J Noah was *demanding* that she come home, but she cabled him for still more money, saying she needed an expensive new nightgown He sent it, receiving studied and effusive thanks

I have been very, very soul-lonely, Noah darling I'm of course disturbed to know you have been lonely too It will be paradise to be in your arms again No other man could satisfy my urgent passion That belongs to you and to you alone

Nevertheless she insisted, she had to wait around to see Lord Dawson of Penn, the king's physician, because Dawson had recently come out strongly for birth control, he had startled a British medical meeting by declaring, "I'm sure you give birth control information to your rich patients, why do you withhold it from the poor?" But Dawson, who was off shooting grouse in Scotland, was not due back until the end of the month As she wanted him to be the keynote speaker at her conference, she would have to stay on

When finally Dawson returned, Margaret got her appointment

At last the hour came to see Lord Dawson I felt disgusted to think I had taken champagne for dinner the night before, fearing my brain would be dull and not respond properly But when his secretary opened the door and announced Lord Dawson and I saw him I felt all was well as far as champagne was concerned He is a handsome gentleman about forty-five *Marvellously* handsome He took me along the spacious hall to his private office where a fire burned cheerfully and he sat not at his desk in formal fashion like our American men would do, but lounged on a sofa and acted as tho there were hours and days in which to discuss B C (Yet) he would not promise to come to the conference He wants to have famous American doctors like the Mayo Brothers with him

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Getting the Mayo Brothers was hardly likely, so she caught a train to Southampton and made the next sailing of the *Berengaria*. Before sailing, she sent a goodbye letter to Hugh

Hugh, darling old thing, Harold came with me to the boat. What a friend and god that man is. I feel sad because I have not seen enough of you. Juliet took your time, Françoise your heart, Havelock your mind. Nothing left but a stingy little pecking kiss on the neck for ME.

Oh why can't we love & let our love grow unfettered? I am a poor one to talk of love, I know, but I am sitting at the feet of those who know. I want to cry because I could not get you on the phone today. I wanted to hear your "grunt" so I could laugh the cry away. Kiss me, hug me, good night.

Once on the seas, however, she suddenly felt homesick for J Noah, uncomplicated J Noah, who presented no problems. "I miss J N terribly," she wrote in her diary. "I've almost promised myself not to go anywhere without him again."

Once home, she had another bright idea. Havelock would soon be seventy, and she wanted to give him a special present for the occasion. Perhaps it would be possible for Françoise to give up her teaching and translating jobs, move in with Havelock, and become his full-time secretary. If Hugh could find out how much money Françoise was earning, she could give her an equivalent amount each year so that she could devote herself exclusively to The King.

Hugh did the detective work, and reported that Françoise was earning about three hundred pounds a year (fifteen hundred dollars at the time). J Noah, delighted to have his Margy back, promised to contribute the fifteen hundred starting in February 1925.

All in all, 1924 had been a good year, Margaret reflected. It seemed even better when she got a letter from Hugh telling how Harold had also told him of his love for her, and "it has made Harold not only look more dear and shining but *be* more dear and sensitive to me than he has been for years." The circle was seemingly going round and round, with love conquering all.

Hugh's letter so excited Margaret that she decided to celebrate by

giving an impressive Christmas dinner at Willowlake, inviting not only some of her wealthy friends, but Grant, Stuart, and her sisters Mary and Ethel

Everything went fine at first J Noah beamed in his best black Langdon suit at one end of the laden table, Margaret glowed in blue silk and turquoise jewelry at the other But just as the butler was about to serve a fine roast goose, Ethel, who had begun to drink quite heavily, saw a chance to get back at Margaret for excluding her from the birth-control movement Ethel babbled, "Remember how in Corning we had good things only at Christmas time? Just one little orange each?" Margaret tried to hush her, but Ethel kept repeating, "Just one little orange? And we ate it in hand-me-down clothes "

Margaret saw to it that Ethel was never invited to Willowlake when guests were present again