



THE CONFERENCE THAT HURT

When Margaret arrived at the Villa Bachlyk to spend Christmas of 1926 with her husband, she invited Hugh to be their guest

In the twenties, the French Riviera was full of writers, poets, and painters who thought it the most glorious place in the world. Margaret, J. Noah, and Hugh were soon caught up in its excitement. They took long drives on the Grand Corniche, ate at the most deluxe restaurants, gambled at Monte Carlo, bet on horse races, drank magnums of champagne, and altogether had unforgettable weeks.

Hugh even ingratiated himself with his host. One morning as J. Noah was emerging from his bathroom, Hugh placed a wreath of lemon-vine leaves fresh from the garden on his head, dubbing him "the poet in blue pajamas." After that J. Noah was sure that Hugh was a charming gentleman, impractical or not.

Hugh pleased Margaret as well by finding out how much money Françoise earned and arranging to pay her an equal amount from Margaret, so she could devote herself full time to Havelock.

Back in London, Hugh received a letter from Françoise that showed both her gratitude to Margaret and the fact that she had not gotten over her feelings for him. "Big Brother," Françoise wrote

I am not dead. Only too many beautiful things are happening.

It almost makes me ill So excuse silence and silly letters I will see you soon

The fact that through Margaret I may give up my post at Easter, giving notice next week on Havelock's birthday I can't be articulate I will explain when I see you I am knocked silly It is all *through you too* Life is too much at times So this is my poor love, rather silly, stunned Still! La Petite Soeur

Ellis also thanked Margaret, but he put his literary efforts into his books, his letters, especially now that he was getting older, tended to be brief and rather businesslike Besides, he was so shy that generosity and praise bothered him, and at the moment, he was at the height of his fame Two laudatory biographies of him had recently been published, bringing him letters from all over the world Margaret's offer, even though made through Françoise, made him hesitate at first Then he capitulated, and wrote her with more fervor than he had done for a long time Margaret wrote Hugh a glowing letter "Hugh old thing—darling—the King accepts the secretary Now isn't he a lamb?"

Yet in spite of her love for Havelock, she was upset when she read that he had made some derogatory remarks in public about Jews and Americans She wrote Hugh

It shocked me to have *him* speak in that way A real shock—an inside thing jumped and left me sad After all is said, it was in Puritanical Philadelphia that his studies were published And in America by Americans and Jews, too, that his works were and are most appreciated I know he appreciates this fact, and doubtless his sentence was written in one of those moods when he likes to be considered "smart" in the sense of being in the "push" or in line

Then she returned to an old theme wouldn't Hugh write her biography, "The Life of Margaret Sanger the Typical American—no Irish, too, to make it worse"

Hugh once more was smart enough to decline True, he needed whatever profit it might bring, but he knew he was not the man for the task Margaret and J Noah celebrated the New Year of 1927 at the Suv-

retta House in St Moritz, skating, skiing, and eating, for Margaret liked good food and wine as much as J Noah did. Indeed it was one of the few enthusiasms they had in common and they had chosen to stay at the Suvretta House because it was famous for its international cuisine. There Margaret indulged herself in her favorite foods, especially caviar, to her soul's content, and washed them down with endless bottles of the champagne that made her laugh.

Yet, as often in the midst of gaiety, her mood changed quickly. On January 17, she recorded in her diary a frightening dream.

Dreamed last night that a large glossy, spotted snake lay full length in my bed, head up, looking defiantly at me. I looked for a weapon and found a large saw which I took and struck at him with, but alas struck the baby who was in the bed—hurt it severely—cut him. The snake glided away—the baby cut and in a fever I awakened anxious and worried.

Ellis had written a book on dreams, and she was now more eager than ever to see him, both to celebrate his birthday and talk about her anxiety. She planned to leave for London alone as soon as possible, sending J Noah on to the Villa Bachlyk at Cap d'Ail. As a further inducement, she added that she would also try to get Ellis a series of lectures in the States so that he could earn some big money. "I shall begin rounding up a proper agent as soon as I get home—one who takes on *Important Englishmen*."

She stopped her packing long enough to write Hugh, and beg him again to write her life, adding a few glimpses of what he would discover to entice him.

Yes, you will write the life—I shall begin to toss things together for you as they come along. Won't you be shocked to know me really! How I smothered my innocent little sister with a pillow when ever my mother left us alone! Goodness, but you will shudder. How I stole money to buy flowers to put at the feet of the Virgin Mary! Oh—oh—what fun we shall have. You must promise not to publish it while I live—or at least while I am young enough to care.

Margaret arrived in London and saw Hugh and Havelock immedi-

ately Hugh again declined to write her biography, and Havelock cautiously interpreted her frightening dream. Actually, he might have told her the dream could be symbolic of castrating a male child, possibly one of her sons, as the snake in psychiatry is equated with the penis. But knowing how much this would upset her, he said it was another of her "distressing night thoughts," and let it go at that.

Reassured, she plunged energetically into work on her conference, planning a trip to Paris to round up French delegates. She wrote J. Noah

The flu is raging in London and I am taking all precautions against it. I am trying to push things here so I can leave for Paris Sunday or Monday. I must have a preliminary meeting of the Conference Council and these busy people lecture at universities and are engaged months ahead in their work. Someone has got to put time and intelligence into the thing or it stops. Huxley said yesterday, "You are wasting your time if you think we can go on without your constant direction. It won't go with less and if you can't do that you had better not attempt it at all." So there it is.

From Paris she wrote

I went to an expert on headaches and several of them agree that my hair is absorbing all my strength. Do you think you could stand it if I had it cut? I'll await until Tuesday to hear and if I have courage I'll go ahead. Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Delafield (Acting President and Vice-President of the American Birth Control League during her absence) are greatly upset because you have cut down the *Birth Control Review* (money) to \$300 a month. They think it is hard on them. I think Paris is lovely tonight, tho' wet and not too lively. I wonder why we live in the U.S.A. at all! It is nearly midnight. I'd like to have a long talk to you on the Conference. I've simply got to dig in and take hold. It's such a burden to carry, but I can make it if you will help me. No one can take your place in this world.

I attended a lecture on Population by Jean Bourdon (lecturer at the Sorbonne and Director of International Studies at the Medical Musée) and have my eye on him for the Conference. If only I spoke French I could help to change public opinion here. I must

wait to see the man with the flu, and if he can see me Wednesday, then I'll have started something here anyway

It will be heaven to see you I'll be home soon and make you as happy as you make me

Soon she was on her way to Cap d'Ail to spend a few days with J Noah There she received the shocking news that she was no longer president of the American Birth Control League She had been away so long that the league, unsure when or whether she would return, had elected Mrs F Robertson-Jones president for the current year Margaret was beyond herself with rage over the defeat, but tried to pass it off lightly "I can devote more time to play and J N and to you," she wrote Hugh

She left for Geneva alone a week later to arrange for a conference hall and accommodations for the hundreds of delegates and secretaries who would attend This done, she hurried back to Cap d'Ail for a few days, then to Paris once more From there she wrote Hugh

Hugh, dear—Paris is cold I am *discouraged* Not because the Conference does not go faster, but because I am so torn between the things I want to do Harold did not come to the train (the last time I left England) and I was blue and horrid Of course I realize that one with only one idea like myself should shut myself up in a convent and never come out! Attractive minds like Harold's get no stimulation from mine, and all the darling can do is *listen* to my prattle I shall miss you horribly at the Villa at Cap d'Ail I have no right to miss you but I shall just the same!"

Grant, now nineteen and a premedical student, missed her too In February she received a series of letters from him In one he said he'd heard she had bobbed her hair, and if she hadn't she shouldn't because she was too old The last word was underlined, which she didn't like a bit

Another letter called her ridiculous for expecting him to remember how he'd spent his pre-Christmas allowance He'd kept accounts for a month and showed them to Pater who had a fit because they were fifty-eight cents off, without a doubt her younger son was going to the dogs But if she and Pater insisted on spending their winters three thousand miles way on the Riviera, what was he to do?

On May 31st his tone changed He doubled-headed his letter PEG-

GY'S BIRTHDAY and admitted he had been depressed all day He was also worried about whether Margaret was coming home for Christmas He had heard both that she was and was not

In her answer Margaret dodged his complaints and tried to placate him in her usual way—sending him money She added that he should be sure to hear Toscanini "as he is a genius, and music becomes spiritual beauty under his direction " She also became motherly enough to remind him to wear his fur coat at football games so he wouldn't catch cold She didn't say a word about Christmas, as she had no intention of coming home The Geneva conference was too much on her mind

In April, after more conference-planning trips to London and Paris, she and J Noah closed the Villa Bachlyk and set off to Geneva to open permanent headquarters there

At first she was intoxicated with Geneva, reporting to Hugh

I have had my hands kissed by every nation of Europe and Asia except Italy (whose ambitions are not ordinary) I got close contacts with Mussolini and have now decided never to live in U S A longer than I can help it I adore Geneva! One grows and expands there and lives but does *not* grow fat

Still, news of trouble in Pennsylvania upset her Dr Stuart Mudd, who was battling to have the local Comstock law repealed, had at first been promised help by Dr James J Heffernan, a member of the Pennsylvania legislature When Heffernan received countermanding orders from his Cardinal, he began to lobby against the bill, calling it "the abortion bill " Heffernan claimed the bill was sponsored by druggists who wanted to sell more contraceptives and by the Ku Klux Klan Dr Mudd was sure Margaret could have scotched such accusations with stirring speeches and well-placed publicity, but he could not

Margaret was having romantic trouble too She had not heard from Harold for a long time, and when she did, his letters were disturbing For the first time he was questioning the ethics of their relationship Hugh was her confidant as always

Harold is a difficult darling Comes the question shall we let (our love) be known? That in the negative seems to disturb Englishmen and delight American women We like the secrecy

We like keeping the secret until it grows out beyond our holding it back

Then always foolish men will bring up the husband "He should know—I don't like taking something which belongs to him He's a decent fellow and it's rotten of us to butt-in, etc , etc " All nonsense and spoils everything this babble Too much talk and too little feeling spoils romance

As if this wasn't enough, the entire board of the ABCL (American Birth Control League) had become angry with Margaret They did not think international work was their function, they were having enough trouble raising money for work in the States without taking that on too

As usual when emotionally disturbed, Margaret got ill, this time with more pounding headaches She decided to make a quick trip to New York to try to settle matters with ABCL Sailing with J Noah on the *Olympic* on May 22, 1927, she wired Grant that they were coming He wired back "Will be home this weekend All hopes, prayers, dreams and love "

Arriving in New York, she learned that Bill Sanger had recently remarried His wife, Vidia, had been a member of the Provincetown Players but Bill made her quit, announcing he would have no more "career women" in his household To ease her various aches, Margaret began toying with a new religious cult called *Unity* which advertised for the first time that summer in the *Review* *Unity* described itself as a "mental treatment that was guaranteed to cure every ill the flesh is heir to "

She put off joining *Unity*, however, until after she returned to Geneva in July The conference dates had finally been set for August 31 through September 3 With her assistant, Anne Kennedy, a redoubtable woman who had long been active in the cause, she now started vigorously planning the publicity without which the whole Geneva affair would mean nothing

First, however, she would run back to England to see Hugh, as she found being on the European continent too tantalizingly near to resist seeing him again At the last minute, however, she almost changed her plan in favor of a visit to Wells Wells had told her how he had been staying in Grasse near the Villa Bachlyck with a young woman named Odette Kuhn who fell in love with him sight unseen, through his writ-

ings, and invited him to visit her, naming an evening. Unable to resist any woman who promised the excitement of what, at sixty, he still called "the glittering black magic of sex," he had gone to her house and found it quite dark. When he knocked, a voice had called "come in." He soon found himself in a bedroom which was almost completely dark, though he could make out a form lying in bed. "Get in," the voice commanded, and there in the blackness, without either having so much as glimpsed the other, they immediately made love.

"I didn't care if he was fat or thin, a giant or a pygmy," Odette had told friends. "I wanted him at any cost." He had been staying with her on and off for a year, describing her to Margaret as "an interesting Levantine writer who adores me and is a little too desperate to be jealous." Some time ago he had invited Margaret to Grasse, calling her, "My dearly beloved," and adding, "Please keep this address a perfect secret as almost no one else knows I am here."

Margaret hadn't answered Wells' invitation because she was too busy with her conference. Now just as she was about ready to accept, Wells wrote her canceling the date, he was leaving for London because

my little wife has to die of cancer & I want to spend what time remains of her life with her. My wife's illness came upon us all very suddenly. I left her in London not three weeks ago, smiling & alert, but looking a little tired. Then came an X-ray examination & this. Odette will keep on with the home, but I shall have to leave her very much alone for a time. Come to see her if you pass this way again.

So Margaret went to England to see Hugh. When he heard she was coming he wrote her in his effusive way "Darling Lovely Pet. How I rejoice that you are coming! Be forever blessed! I'm bivvering to know if I shall like your hair. I did so adore your great rolls. Oh joy! Oh joy! Margaret is coming." He arranged music-and-poetry evenings, nights of sleeping on the lawn at Sand Pit as they had at Wantley, and told his best stories to make her laugh. Still, she sensed that something was troubling him.

Back in Geneva, she wrote him

I recognize you as one of my adolescent dreams, the man I looked for in books—on the stage—but never found. Always you

send out *Beauty* I was amazed at that fact when I first felt the thrill of you on the way from the (London) station years ago What is it lovely one that troubles you? What friendship? Do I know him or her? That is why I am so happy in a cause, Hugh All the world of human beings are a passing show They come and go—but the ideal of human freedom grows ever closer around one's heart and comforts and consoles and delights Oh Hugh! Do send me word that you are not troubled or grieved at the loss of a friend New ones come as old ones fulfill their places in our lives—that's all Let go in order to get seems to be the Law My love to you *Ever and Ever Amen*

After this, as time was getting short, she paid strict attention to the business of the conference At the last minute, she couldn't get the man she most wanted, Lord Dawson of Penn, to chair her conference So, possibly impressed both by his title and the fact that his wife was a Lady in Waiting to the Queen, she got Sir Bernard Mallet instead Mallet was correct as only a minor British lord can be, complete to monocle, waxed mustache, jaunty cane, and gray spats Although Margaret did not agree with him on the speakers, the central theme of the conference, or, indeed, on anything, she took him on in desperation She did get Julian Huxley and John Maynard Keynes to agree to come as English delegates, and she also persuaded Dr F A E Crew of Edinburgh University, a man whose hormone experiments in making hens crow like roosters were making headlines, to come from Scotland From America she got Dr C C Little, President of the University of Michigan, Professor Henry P Fairchild of New York University, and Professor Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins It began to look like an impressive list

She was less successful in getting the men she wanted from countries like Spain, Italy, and Germany The Siamese Minister in Geneva, though known to be interested in eugenics, graciously declined Margaret wrote across his note "From a charming Prince, father of eighty children "

Serious trouble about the subject matter of the conference began brewing in mid-August Dr William Welch of Johns Hopkins, another delegate from the United States, warned Margaret

* * *

You may think everything is settled but it isn't Sir Bernard Mallet has undercut your invitation to liberal Italians like Guglielmo Ferrero, and allowed the Fascist government to substitute the arch-conservative Corrado Gini instead The same thing is happening in Spain, Belgium, France, and Catholic Germany Sir Bernard wants no confrontation on the crucial issue of birth control

Still another blow was to come A few days before the August thirty-first opening, the proofs of the official conference program came in Margaret had put her name on the front page in bold type as the chief organizer, followed by the names of her associates As she was reading the proofs, Sir Bernard leaned over her shoulder, picked up a pencil and crossed out all the women's names, including her own They did not belong on the program, he insisted, only the names of the actual delegates should be there

He may have been technically right Conferences of this kind are usually organized by scientific bodies or drug houses, not by individuals But there was no scientific association or drug house in the world in 1927 which would have organized a population meeting Besides, Margaret had raised the money, she had done the spadework, she had garnered most of the delegates No matter who she was or what her status, she argued that it was unthinkable that her name be kept off

Sir Bernard countered that her name was far too well known in connection with birth control to be used In fact, the term birth control would probably not be mentioned directly at all, because if it was, the whole conference might fall through

Margaret was livid, but she knew when she was beaten Her entire staff threatened to resign in protest, but she persuaded them to stay, and she did win a compromise that her name be listed in the final printed record of the proceedings as a member of the general council

There was still another temporary setback On the day of the opening session she had set up a table in the lobby of the conference hall on which any delegate could display a book he had written Naturally some of these were on birth control The men from the Catholic countries created a scene by demanding loudly that these books be removed But this time Margaret stood firm, with the imposing J Noah

at her side "This hall is for rent next week," she declared "Meanwhile, we will take no dictation from anyone as to what shall be displayed here"

The table remained as arranged

From then on things proceeded smoothly Not only had the liberal Lord Dawson of Penn joined the speakers from Great Britain, but Lord Horden and Dean Inge had done the same These men read papers arguing that their country needed fewer people, though at Mallet's insistence, they didn't say how this was to be brought about These papers helped offset those read by delegates from the conservative countries, Italy and Germany, which declared that they needed more people Surprisingly, the French delegates came out against limitation of population too Most French men practiced birth control in private, but since France was nominally a Catholic country, they refused to endorse it in public When the French paper was read, Margaret could do nothing but listen and grind her teeth

She felt better when, at the closing banquet, Sir Bernard stood up and congratulated her for her superb organization, and the entire assembly of some eight-hundred delegates and visitors followed him in rising to hail her The Englishmen burst into the traditional "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow," while the Europeans who understood hardly a word of the song, knew only that it was a gay tune, something to bang spoons to

Although she was very excited at having pulled off a prestigious meeting, and Albin E Johnson, the *New York World's* Geneva correspondent to the League of Nations, had been gracious enough to play up the full name she had given it *The Sixth International Birth-Control and Neo-Malthusian Conference*, still, the delegates from the League of Nations had not, as she hoped, been impressed

Nevertheless, ready to go back to work, she packed J Noah off to England and stayed behind to edit the proceedings Her diary reflects the highly nervous state in which she was functioning As she believed in astrology more strongly than ever, she was convinced that part of what had gone wrong was due to the fact that she had not listened to its voice

On August 21, 22, and 23 her diary records "Careful"

On August 24 "Poor period"

On August 26 and 27 "Strenuous criticism"

On September 11 through 15 "Start nothing new"

On September 16,17, and 18 "Careful, careful, careful "

On September 20 A rare "Good, good "

On September 29, 30, October 1 "Heavenly rest "

On October 7 "In bed all day "

On October 8 "Depressed "

Her letters to J Noah mirrored her feelings On September 21, she wrote him

I have been under great tension & high pressure What a woman needs is to be alone, absolutely alone with God for a few days or weeks, until she has filled up the reservoir of her soul again with faith, hope & courage I have been impatient I know and really horrid at times You have been tired and disappointed so I should have been kinder & dearer to you than ever, but I was too unhappy to be anything but miserable Now I shall get the papers to the printers & then go to the mountain top alone & meditate & think I need solitude as much as food & I thank you for making it possible at this time

On September 27 she wrote him again

Are you thinking about us and our future? I am It is not all clear sailing yet, I'm afraid, because we are so much alike and yet so different It is our interests that are so wide apart There are none that you have that I can take up so as to bring us into closer harmony, and you do not like me to expand my own Yet there is all the attraction between us that the world counts essential & necessary It's really complicated

My heart is troubled to have you lonely & apart from life's activities but I should wither up & die to be shut off from the intellectual currents of my contemporaries All I want is a little more freedom That is not much to ask, but I must be able to feel that I can waste a whole night or day or week if I feel it good for me to do so without explanation or asking I'm too grown up & too developed to not be free My actions so far have been tempered with intelligence & I can't go back to chattel slavery For that is what it really is dear when a woman is not made to feel that she can act without asking her husband's consent Outside of financial affairs (which is & should be a joint affair between them) there should be

utter liberty for both parties to enjoy tastes & friendships utterly free from the other You will never see this I am certain, but until you can see it there will be no real happiness for the modern woman If you could only be made to see what riches a woman can bring into your life, not only in outside forces but in the joyousness of her own being when she is fully conscious that freedom & love, faith & respect are the foundation of her marriage

I know darling Noah that one must not expect you to plunge into the depths of these thoughts but think them over now & then & talk about them to me & we will make our future I want to make your every day one of golden sunsets Those are my desires I worry because I am failing (in them) so I am analyzing the causes which underlie the problem Now you can write me just as you think & what you feel about the difficulties It will help me to see the other side Devotedly & lovingly ever & ever—no matter what we say

This unusually articulate letter is the closest she had yet come to a statement of her personal credo

Slee answered wondering whether she would ever be at peace, then became irritable and said he obviously wasn't as young and spry as she was and so couldn't keep up with her She countered tartly by reminding him he was seventy-two and might as well make the best of things and not try

Any husband would undoubtedly have provoked Margaret, as well as been provoked by her, even her adored Hugh The best part about her relationship with her lovers was that they were in the main far away, she could take them or leave them as she pleased It was she who controlled the relationship It was lucky that her plan to have Hugh at Willowlake for an extended period to write her biography had fallen through, otherwise, she might never have maintained the passion for him she continued to have for the next twenty years, even after he had cooled

Alone in London, J Noah's patience had by now completely run out He knew no one there, owned all the made-to-order suits, coats, and hats he could possibly use, and had no interest whatever in museums or high culture (In all his careful records of expenditures, there is only one mention of a book) He became so persistent that Margaret realized she had little choice except to give in and join him in Paris

In Paris they went to the races and ate in the best restaurants, J Noah posing jovially in front of an outdoor cafe in his new finery, and Margaret looking absent-minded and sad. She soon persuaded him to visit Zurich, while she hurried back for the nth time to see Hugh in London. After a luxurious lunch of sole, grouse, and wine at the May-fair, she got from him a rather cool note of thanks.

I have visited Havelock and he is beginning to like me again, though Françoise is in a black swamp of misery because I didn't love her and she didn't know me, though of course you know I don't love anybody. I only enjoy being in the presence of people I'm fond of, a maddening sort of impossible male, as impossible to catch and hold and have as a smell.

A few days later she joined J Noah in Germany, in part to fulfill a speaking engagement with the Society of German Medical Women, in part to vacation some more. In Germany, feeling chipper because she was doing what she knew how to do best—lecture—she had a saucy picture taken with J Noah in front of the castle of Frederick the Great. On the back of it she scribbled, "Not bad this cottage. He was a great old boy, had a special room for Voltaire which shows his good taste and free mind." After this came a train ride back to the Suvretta House at St. Moritz to celebrate another Christmas.

Her Christmas letter to Hugh was nostalgic.

Never shall I forget the glory of the Villa Bachlyk with you there. It was like a dream. Do you remember the dull day when I had a tantrum? Several days I have had the same thing. It's a slump. J N is so patient. I am never well when loafing more than 2 or 3 days.

Her letter to Grant was mainly dutiful.

When this letter reaches you it will be 1928. We both wish you a happy & joyous & fruitful New Year.

We attended the Ice Carnival today, and as I have taken to skating, all their tricks and turns are more wonderful than ever. I am keen to learn how you enjoyed your holidays & especially to

hear just where you and Stuart went It will soon be time to think of returning But just now time hangs heavy on my hands I am no good as a loafer

Then, despite her protestations she proceeded to loaf some more To regain the energy that the conference had depleted, she settled in at the Suvretta House with her husband for another two carefree months