



BICKERING WITH J. NOAH

With time hanging heavy on her hands now that she was not able to travel, Margaret felt she had to look for new interests. Giving elegant parties seemed a good idea, but first she wanted to organize her household so she wrote out careful instructions for the way she wanted it managed

All servants on duty at 7 A M *regularly*
8 00 A M Breakfast for guests and Madam
8 30 Butler go for mail
9 15 Mr Slee's breakfast served by butler
Maids to vacuum clean one room each day
Windows of one room cleaned each day
Silver cleaned on Friday
All groceries and meats and vegetables
ordered *only* through Madam daily Bills
to be checked with each delivery
Luncheon—1 P M
Tea or Cocktails—5 P M
Dinner—7 P M
Telephone—Take name and number & message
in writing Be courteous Keep voice
soft and patient

Note Dishes are choice, heavy antiques
Request care in washing Avoid nicks
and cracks and breaking

Tucson, originally a small silver-mining town, had by 1938 become an expensive resort with fabulous jewelry shops lining Main Street and the Arizona Inn charging a hundred dollars a day Margaret started playing the social hostess by inviting visiting celebrities who stayed at the Inn When the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski stayed there, he and selected guests were given a dinner at her home When Eleanor Roosevelt came by, she was given a formal tea When Louis Schenley, head of the Schenley Liquor Company, decided to add wines and champagnes to his line of hard liquors, it was Margaret he consulted during a luncheon in her dining room

But the stumbling block was J Noah, neither she nor her guests could find much in common with him He didn't read, so he had little good conversation to offer He ate more than ever He no longer rode or even walked, he mainly sat and was content to chat about the small events of the day

Margaret then had another bright idea She would take a course in watercolors, and use her painting as an excuse to run off on frequent trips to Mexico where there were colorful villages just across the border J Noah tried hard not to complain about how lonesome he was when she was away, but he exploded when she criticized him for repeating the word "lonesome" so often in his letters to her

I won't spend my efforts in answering your stupid reactions to my being so lonesome Humans change as years are added You go back and back—and still wave the same flag of my being lonesome At least I can enjoy staying put and not live in *trunks and bags*

Then he seemed to change his mind about trunks and bags and began to talk again about taking the trip to South Africa he had dreamed of for so long When Margaret flatly refused to go with him, he told her angrily "I can travel alone and make friends myself just as I did before meeting you "

He didn't take the trip, mainly because he wasn't up to it To pass the time, he again wrote detailed letters concerning his health and diet

Margaret retorted to one of these "I'm glad your examination proved you're alright Why if your health is so good are you always so irritable and impossible and cross?"

He tried to be less cross One evening on her return from Mexico she passed a place showing a romantic movie, she had already seen this film twice but on impulse, she ran in to see it again, J Noah waited up for her until after midnight, opened the door himself in his billowing nightshirt, and folded her tightly in his arms On another occasion after she returned from a run-away trip to Mexico, he started to chide her for coming home late, and she stopped him with "J Noah, you're English and I'm Irish, and you know those two can never agree So simmer down!" He did simmer down Clearly he could neither live with her nor without her

But by February run-away trips to Mexico weren't enough to satisfy her, so off she sailed to England to see Hugh and Havelock She went to Sand Pit to see Hugh first as always now, and was relieved to find him more relaxed and reasonable about Havelock, with the bitterness of their old quarrel over Françoise gone

And Havelock as usual had a soothing effect on her Her visit with him, she wrote him later, had "helped to clear away a lot of fog and solved several B C problems for the future Thanks for being in the world and bless you "

In gratitude she sent Havelock an especially large check so he could buy a car, his health was failing fast, and he could hardly totter to the gate She was sure one of Françoise's sons could learn to drive it

But back in Tucson, the old restlessness took over, she started commuting by plane and train to New York, claiming she had to make repairs on Willowlake so that it could be rented, if not sold She also said she needed to raise new money for birth control as the Bureau on Sixteenth Street needed repairs and refurbishing as well

From New York she wrote J Noah a letter that took him by surprise She told him she was thinking of leaving him for good

If Willowlake is not rented by June first we had better take it on ourselves—*unless* you are contented to live by yourself, as I believe you must be It's always peaceful for us both to live apart, even though it is lonely at times We are both too determined & independent & unable to change our ways of life Consequently we should be frank with ourselves and decide if life together is

what we need, or is worth the cost on our nerves and disposition
So think it over & make all allowances for age & temperaments
and let us decide I know how I feel for I want you to be happier
than I am able to make you, & I want happiness also which can
not be had together All this will depend upon renting the house
If we rent it I'll stay in New York & visit with friends or get my-
self a flat

Like a dog worrying a bone, she couldn't get away from the subject of their separation once she had broached it, and when J Noah didn't answer she tried to justify her position, shifting the blame for their marriage failure onto him

There is not much use writing what I feel as we get *no where* If leaving you to your own friends & family gives you contentment & peace of mind, I'm going to make it as easy as possible for you to have that peace You will have to help in a mutual plan of action We will both be miserable for a while, but you will at least not have to worry about the price of butter & meat or what it costs to give my friends a cup of tea That will be a relief & it's the only way I can help you, Noah dear—the *Only* way

The remark about giving her friends "a cup of tea" was pure sarcasm, as before her last trip to England she had given an elaborate tea at the Hotel Plaza in New York for fifty guests, for which as usual he paid the bill

He was again so taken aback he did not answer her letter She wrote once more telling him that she was planning to fly to San Francisco in June to get up a protest meeting because the Birth Control Federation had rented a booth at the coming San Francisco World's Fair, but after accepting a check for eight hundred fifty dollars, had returned the money and canceled her out

"About San Francisco," she wrote, "we'll both have to decide I dislike to go out there as you know, but it will give me an opportunity to stop over in Tucson to talk with you and formulate plans for our future "

Noah still did not answer This was partly because his son and daughter-in-law were visiting him, something they had not done for a long time, but mainly because he was so shocked he could think of

nothing to say Evidently she was holding him to the agreement he had made when he married her that she could come and go when she pleased She had threatened to leave him before, boasting she could live at the clubrooms of the Woman's Party on an orange and a glass of milk a day, but she had never before threatened in quite this way He was so shaken it took until May 4 before he replied

I feared I would never write you again after your most *unusual letter* of Apl 25, too much for me to fathom God help me for having married a cause" 23 yrs dif in our ages & you calmly state you cannot change, & yet you expect me to Such reasoning is *beyond comprehension* Anymore such letters & I will leave you forever & spend my remaining years in Cape Town S A & you can live your own life, which you have up to date done fully 75% I am more than weary trying to please you & from now on I am not even going to try" My days are numbered & I should be considered I want peace, & not a lot of children or B C advocates running around my house Your tired and faithful husband

When Margaret received this letter, she wrote across the top of one of its pages, as if explaining things to herself "Noah's son Lincoln & wife were trying to get him to go to Cape Town Africa & influence him to their affairs I was furious"

Soon she sent him another indignant and self-pitying letter

Yours of May 4th is here before me and the first page reveals what I have long suspected and have felt Now it has been stated so plainly that there is no further need to discuss anything except what is the best thing for us both to do You are more than weary trying to please & from now on I am not even going to try! If that is your attitude then it is the end of our love and our marriage

You don't want a lot of children or B C advocates around, meaning my two lovely sons who have loved you better than your own children ever loved or respected you You say you will leave me "forever " That can all be arranged, Noah, dear, and now that the house in Tucson is full, I shall not stop there on my way to or from San Francisco as I had planned to do

I'll ask you to send Pepper (her dog) to me at the plane on my return from S F to N Y You are a vain and foolish man to act so

proud toward one who has loved you & given you richness & beauty of companionship & affection for eighteen years! You love only yourself these last few years & no one can make you happy except "yes yes" people & servants who do your bidding & have no brains

She continued with a statement that echoed her accusation against Bill Sanger—that he had insulted her in public

That evening at the plane an affectionate remark of mine brought forth a brutal brisk insulting attack which left me cold & sad ever since You have forgotten it I dare say, nor do you care if you hurt me lately It's just "too bad" if I or anyone else is hurt by your brutal & unkind jibes

Our lives are rather complicated but all can be properly adjusted if it is your wish to go away to S A (South Africa) But you will come back—*and to me!* A man of your age (still attractive) will be a pawn for every golddigger & baby face that's in the game to catch such fish You had better think things through clearly and act not on impulse but on reason Best wishes and my love

When she did finally leave New York it was not for either San Francisco or Tucson but for San Antonio, Texas, where she had heard there was a rich lode of gold to be mined for the birth-control cause From San Antonio she started her barking letters again, speaking of the delights of wealth, social position, and husbands young enough to dance

Men of all ages, even yours, danced last night at the club

These men have not grown old & several of them are seventy-five & over They mix with young people & have kept young by saying kind & thoughtful, even flattering things to people, so that their companionship is greatly desired by all the ladies & men as well I'm having such a nice time

Her next few letters were a mixture of good and bad news She had raised a total of only \$123,000 toward her goal of \$310,000 for the funding of new clinics, although the foundations had not yet been heard from and might send in \$60,000 more Bill Sanger was ill and had to have a pristolc operation (her spelling) but she had told her

sons he was their responsibility now "I am glad I am out of it, thank God"

J Noah did not answer her San Antonio letter because he could not, he had little choice except to let things ride For while his health in general was excellent for his eighty years, it was difficult for him to get going in the morning, and even details like planning meals were a hardship for him Indeed, without Margaret who knew his every idiosyncrasy, he was all but lost

Margaret, ready at last to go to San Francisco, had an unpleasant shock, she heard that Heywood Broun, one of her oldest and staunchest supporters, had joined the Catholic Church She wrote him in utter dismay

Oh my God! This is all I could breathe after reading in Time (magazine) that Heywood Broun will be received into the Roman Catholic Church late this month!

Heywood darling, are you sick? Are you depressed? Has someone given you a spiritual blow? Can't you run away? Can't you do something? Can't some of your friends come and kidnap you and take you away? Someone has hypnotized you through your need and love

All that I can say is that I want to weep Perhaps you already know that the Archbishop of San Francisco refused to open the World's Fair there and threatened a Catholic boycott (unless the) management threw out the Birth Control Educational Booth

This is only one of the many indications that I have seen during the past twenty years that the Catholic Church is growing political and has ceased to be a spiritual influence in any country To have you join up with this force is in my estimation far more destructive to this nation's welfare and our future civilization than the Fascist and Nazi parties could ever be Heywood, with your brilliant mind are saying goodbye to your brains, to your logic, and will be like a good little adolescent boy scout that will swear not to think but just to obey

To say that we are devastated is to express it mildly Can't some of us do something to release you from this pressure until the siege is over? Faithfully and sadly, your friend

* * *

While indexing the birth-control papers Margaret had given the Library of Congress, Florence Rose found a carbon of this letter and typed a note at the bottom

We were informed by an intimate friend of Heywood Broun recently that of all the letters which he received criticizing or reproaching him for his conversion to Catholicism, Mrs Sanger's was the only one that really made him doubt his decision and saddened him for a long period

By the beginning of June, when J Noah's family had left Tucson, Margaret relented and went to see him There they straightened out their difficulties as they always would For the thousandth time they fell into each other's arms

Away on a short trip a bit later, she wrote him in a gentle vein

Yes, dear one, old people do talk of the past, of their *selves*, their doings, their dreams when they talk at all Sometimes they are silent, when they have the wisdom and intelligence and learn how tiresome others can be We will help each other

After this, J Noah gladly accompanied her back to Willowlake, which was now clean and habitable, and on June 30 she wrote Havlock a letter marked in capital letters CONFIDENTIAL

One thing I always wanted to tell you & will do it now as I feel you will find it of interest That is, although he is nearly eighty years of age his sexual activity has scarcely waned He is just as alert at the sight of a lovely shape & just as urgent in his desires as he was when I first knew him at the age of 63 Of course the frequency of desire has lessened slightly but not greatly Instead of an irregularity it tends to be regularity, with sustained satisfaction

When I am away for weeks or a month I find him old & stooped & reluctant to action But at sight of me & affection & harmony he awakens, becomes active & happy, thinks clearly, his memory improves, dresses up, puts on gay neckties & socks & feels young & happy

It interests me to watch the power of a love as his has been He's British born, too!

* * *

It was the last letter she ever sent Havelock, for he was dying from an inoperable cancer of the throat, and was using all his remaining strength to finish the autobiography he had been writing on and off for forty years. It must have been a book that tortured him to write, for while he called Edith "the most difficult woman in England," he went on to berate himself for his treatment of her and to take upon himself most of the blame for her unhappiness. He also dismissed Margaret merely as "M——an American nurse" adding "At times I wished I never had known her."

When the book came out in 1939, Margaret was shocked beyond tears. Yet she rallied to his support, writing Hugh

The reviews over here were devastating & cruel. His public felt cheated in that they had extolled a giant, a God in fact, who by his own pen had proven to be of adolescent calibre. I hope we—you & I & Françoise—can erase that impression. I know that Havelock had qualities beyond & above those shown in that book. We must revive the faith of people in him if we can.

Havelock died after much suffering in July 1939, and Harold wrote Margaret

I hate to think that I shall never see Havelock's smile and twinkle again, but it has left me strangely unmoved in the depths, because his merely ceasing to be alive in this sphere is just a small affair compared with the tremendous grandeur of having known a great man and being privileged to recognize his greatness.

When shall we see you? We are all well & happy. Write to me, Margaret

She wrote immediately, telling him of something she had done after Havelock's death to lift her spirits. She had asked Hannah Stone to continue to charge patients no more than five dollars at the Research Bureau, this five dollars to include an initial examination, contraceptive supplies, and consultations for a year.

It was Margaret's ultimate tribute to Havelock. Knowing his disregard for money, she thought it was something he would have been happy for her to do.