



THE JUBILANT DAYS

"Life is sad," said Edith Wharton "It is the saddest thing there is, next to death. But it is only the years that are sad. The days can be jubilant. I've had many jubilant days."

Margaret too had had many jubilant days, and there were more to come. In 1959, when she was eighty, she still wrote to Katherine McCormick about the progress of the pill which Dr. Rock and Gregory Pincus were trying to improve. Mrs. McCormick always answered, recounting stories of her visits with Rock and how elated he was over his work on a possible male contraceptive as well. "He was rather shocked," said Mrs. McCormick, "when I told him I didn't give a hoot about a male contraceptive, that only female research concerned me."

Margaret agreed with her friend. Helping women concerned her most too. She was furious at President Eisenhower for sending money and ammunition to foreign countries but denying foreign women birth-control information on the ground that "this would be interfering with their private affairs." She announced she was thinking of starting a new world population campaign "to persuade rich people to leave their money to B.C." The Ford Foundation had at last capitulated and given the Worcester Institute a million dollars for a world-wide study on population control, and Margaret was jubilant because it set an example for an elderly gentleman she knew. As a result she had persuaded this gentleman to change his will and leave his money for

birth-control study Also, she was eagerly awaiting a visit from Gregory Pincus who was coming out West to see her, after stopping in Washington to try to get help from the World Health Organization

But she could not keep up her interest in anything for long The Demerol, plus the breakfast daiquiris, plus half a bottle of wine with lunch, would send her into a deep sleep for the rest of the day, and when she awoke, she was not always coherent Her brother Bob once telephoned her in the evening and, knowing little about what was happening, was surprised when someone came to the phone and said that the Maggie he remembered so fondly could not speak to him "That made me think you were ill," he wrote "'Cause when you can't speak somebody else's got the hall "

By April, she was neither speaking on the phone nor answering letters, except through a secretary She was in bed almost constantly or wandering about the house touching familiar objects as if to recall that they were hers

Soon she received news that shook her badly Angus was seriously ill with a combination of Paget's disease, arthritis of the spine, leukemia, tuberculosis, and congestive heart failure He tried to be cheerful, writing

The approach to my 76th birthday seemed rather perilous, but now that goal has been reached, I am looking forward to my 77th in the inspiring company of your spirit I have so many new plans for my business that bed-rest is just a waste of time

He was taken to the University of Virginia hospital a week later for an operation The only letter he wrote from the hospital was to his Glorious Margaret "I am as full of plans as ever Without your example I would never have had the courage to fight on "

She answered

Dear of the dearest—Such a letter!!! But off to the hospital is too sad Angus, if my friendship has meant much to you, yours in the background of my life has been comfortable & even exciting You have not known much of that side from me as I held it rather sacred and precious There seemed to be nothing we could do about it, but to let it grow as it has Do you understand this at all?? I trust you do & ever did

Think of me often as I do and will think of Angus, the great lover

Angus never received this letter, as he died almost immediately after the operation. It was returned by his secretary, unopened, with the news that he had gone. "We all miss him very much. He was a good man." And his wife Amy added "I took your letter to Angus but he never became oriented after the operation to see it. Love to you. You meant so much in his life."

Margaret wired his wife, Amy "Nothing I can say or think could possibly comfort you, as I am too unhappy myself to be helpful to anyone desolate and unhappy."

In June 1962, things came to a climax. Dr. Lindsay E. Beaton examined her and declared

Mrs. Sanger is senile, with advanced arteriosclerosis of the brain, resulting in poor memory, forgetfulness, failure of judgment concerning money and personal matters, irritability, confusion, disorientation, misidentification of persons, and periods of great agitation. In my professional opinion, she must be protected against her own physical and mental incapacities.

Dr. Beaton went on to say that a legal guardianship should be appointed for her, a proceeding that usually requires attendance in court. Under the circumstances, however, he felt she should be spared the strain of such an appearance.

On July 2, 1962, therefore, a psychiatrist was brought to her home to examine her, and the Superior Court of the County of Pima, State of Arizona, appointed Stuart Sanger her legal guardian. At first he tried to have her cared for at home, but this didn't work out, so he had to move her to a nursing home called *The House By the Side of the Road*.

As she was riding in Stuart's car with her granddaughter to the nursing home, she got suspicious, clapped her hands in her old imperious manner, and ordered Stuart to stop. "Take me back immediately. Take me back to my own home," she commanded. But it was too late. Margaret II held her hand tight as the car moved on.

Immediately a great cry went up from some of her Tucson friends who told everyone that Stuart had "railroaded his rich, famous mother into an insane asylum so he could steal all her money." Actually the

opposite was true. As her legal guardian Stuart had to account to the court for every penny received on her behalf and every penny spent. Some of his harshest critics were those who had fattened their purses on her largess. Dorothy McNamee stormed into his office and hurled an accusation of theft directly at him. His answer was a furious, "Get out!" The musician who had been happy to play for her guests at no fee when he attended her lavish parties now sent in a bill for several thousand dollars for playing for her while she was ill, figuring his time at fifty dollars an hour. Stuart gave him some money to get rid of him. Other people spread the gossip that Stuart had deprived her of the comfort of being surrounded by her familiar furniture, when in fact he had sent along to the nursing home some of her fine small Oriental rugs as well as her beautiful bed. And in any event he had his hands tied. As a doctor he could not divulge information about his mother's condition or speak publicly in his own defense.

One happy circumstance was that when Dr. Roland Murphy took over at the nursing home, he succeeded in getting Margaret off Demerol. She told him, "I am glad." There still were many other things from which she got pleasure. She enjoyed the one brandied egg nog allowed her a day, she enjoyed her daily ride around the grounds in a wheel chair, putting on for the occasion a white straw hat trimmed with a stuffed red lobster that Stuart's wife had given her. And she enjoyed her daily face massage, insisting that only Elizabeth Arden creams be used, saying, "Remember, Elizabeth Arden was my friend." In particular, she enjoyed her visitors, among them Madame Nehru and John Rock. Indeed, she had so many visitors—old birth-control workers, famous people who were passing through—that they had to be limited to two a day. Since senility comes and goes, however, she did not always immediately recognize them. When Dr. Alan Guttmacher, President of Planned Parenthood, visited her she stared at him uncomprehendingly, but the next day announced proudly to her nurse "Do you know who came to see me yesterday? Alan Guttmacher!"

A jubilant occasion was the dinner given in her honor in Tucson, arranged by Jack Spieden and Mrs. Barry Goldwater, though Margaret was too ill to attend. An even greater honor was the gold medal she received from the Emperor of Japan for her birth-control work in his country. She was the second Western woman to receive such a medal, the first went to the tutor of his son. She hung it around her neck over her nightgown, refusing to take it off even at night.

But the greatest day of all came when Margaret II flew out to Tucson with her husband to show Stuart her first child. In the Sanger family, the names Margaret and Peggy were used alternately, so this little girl was named Peggy. Stuart wasn't sure his mother would recognize Margaret II and the baby, yet he thought they should visit her on the chance she might.

When Margaret II, her husband, and the baby entered the room, Margaret looked at her granddaughter and exclaimed at once "Hello, Margaret. I've been waiting for you."

"Hello, Mimi dear," Margaret II replied. "And this is my Peggy."

Margaret took the baby in her arms and began to sob as she rocked it back and forth. "I knew my Peggy would come back to me. This is my Peggy! My own little Peggy come back!" She felt the baby's head all over, her motions going back to her early belief in phrenology. "See, she even has the right bumps. Do you have enough milk in your breasts to feed her? I didn't. Mine were too small. Besides, Bill and I were afraid of her catching TB so he got a wet-nurse. But you make sure she gets plenty of milk. Yes, it's my little Peggy. My own little Peggy come back."

She kept rocking and stroking the baby, then, suddenly turned to her son-in-law. "And who is he?" she demanded. "I never saw *him* before." She held on to the child until they had to take it from her because it was time to leave.

Toward the end, Grace Sternberg and Dorothy McNamee came to visit her bringing with them the chicken sandwiches and champagne she particularly enjoyed. They brought along an embroidered tablecloth to make the occasion festive and set out the refreshments. Margaret was fast asleep when they arrived. They waited a while, hating to wake her, but the nurse said she would be upset over missing them and gently shook her. She woke, looked at the laden cloth and laughed. "Chicken sandwiches and champagne! A party! Let's have a party!" then dozed off again.

Two days later on September 6, 1966, she died quietly of leukemia, just short of her eighty-seventh birthday. She left an estate of only one hundred thousand dollars out of her original five million. She had almost succeeded in "blowing it all in."

There were funeral services in the Episcopal Church in Tucson where she occasionally attended with J. Noah and memorial services in fashionable St. George's Church in Stuyvesant Square in Tucson.

the Reverend George Ferguson gave the eulogy. In New York Hobson Pitman spoke of her love of art, and Morris Ernst told of what was perhaps her greatest achievement—the fact that she gave women hope, assured them, for the first time in history, that it was within their power to decide how many children they would have, told them that conception is not something that “just happens”—that they could make important decisions about their own lives.

Doing this hadn't been easy, Ernst said. It had involved a long uphill struggle that had taken over forty years, during which she had never stopped fighting. Since it was a day of pouring rain he ended in a ringing voice: “And so a stormy day ends a stormy career.”

No one spoke about the guilt she experienced over someone she had wronged or her attempt to make up for it. Yet, after her burial in the family plot in Fishkill, Stuart found a letter in her safe-deposit box marked “For Bill Sanger, to be sent after my death.” As Bill had died several years before, a fact which she was never told, Stuart and Grant opened the letter. As they described it, it was full of humility, pleas for forgiveness, and tender memories of their early love. The letter was dated 1954, the year she had double pneumonia, possibly this made her think about the father of the child who had died of pneumonia, as well as fear she might die too.

Something—maybe pride—had kept her from sending the letter after she recovered. Yet obviously she had wanted it sent, it was, in a sense, an Act of Contrition. And how it would have eased Bill Sanger's last difficult years had he been able to hold it in his hands.