

Chapter Twenty-eight

THE WORLD IS MUCH THE SAME EVERYWHERE



A FAVORITE sales promotion method of astrologers is to send partial readings to people whose names appear in the papers, in the hope of piquing their curiosity to the point of demanding fuller details regarding their future lives and conduct. From time to time I used to receive these and paid no attention. But just before I had sailed from California a friend of birth control had sent me one based upon arrests and prison. This forecast told me I would have a great deal of difficulty in starting, and that on a certain day in May the same signs would prevail over my House as at the Town Hall Meeting—that I should, therefore, be prepared for police interference.

While packing in Shanghai I was looking through my briefcase and happened to note that the date was one on which the *Silver State* would still be at sea, she was not due at Hong Kong until the next day. I laughed to myself and said, "Here's where I prove it wrong." As it turned out, however, the ship was ahead of her schedule and arrived in Hong Kong twelve hours early.

We were steaming up the long reach towards the Kowloon piers when, to my utter surprise, the immigration officer who had come on board handed me a notice instructing me to visit the Chief of Police.

"Is this a special invitation for me, or is everybody included?"

"Only for you, Madam," was the smiling response.

The harbor was crowded with junks and fishing boats. Children in

sampans were holding out nets for whatever might come overside, fishing up each bit of refuse from the water. Adjoining ships were being coaled by women coolies, hundreds of them, their faces strained and bodies stringy as though made up entirely of tendons. They carried their two baskets on bamboo poles across their shoulders, and clambered like ants in their bare feet over the barges—not singing as the men coolies of the North, but making much *wallah-wallah*—jabbering and shouting.

After settling Grant in a hotel I took a chair from around the corner, because police headquarters was part way up the Peak, and rickshas could not negotiate the steep ascent. The Chief was not there. I inquired whether anything were wrong with my passport. Since my British visa was perfectly correct, they said there must be some mistake, they had no information about any summons. I left my card.

The next day the Chief called at my hotel but we missed each other because I was out with Grant ordering his first pair of long trousers. When I returned I found a calling card and another request to come to headquarters that afternoon. Again I obeyed, and again I found no Chief and no message for me. I left another card and the officials whom I had seen before laughingly reiterated they still knew of no complaints.

“Well, I’m going tomorrow morning. If the Chief wants anything he’ll have to come to the hotel.” He never did.

Once more we were off, this time on a British liner. The sea was smooth, the air cool. It was the ideal ocean voyage I had always longed for. I was relaxed and enervated but it was good to be so. I had nothing to do all day but sit in the glorious breezes on deck and watch the romping children, about fifty of whom were on board. Many had been born in the Orient and were accompanying “pater” who was going home on leave. One little boy might come tearing by pursued by another, both followed by anxious Chinese amahs, thin, dark, slick-haired, wearing glossy, black trousers and coats buttoned down the side. They seemed in constant distress over the antics of their energetic charges.

When we dropped anchor at Singapore, agitation and excitement were again manifest among the inspectors at the sight of my passport. I was politely asked to stand by while they consulted, and then was

ushered off the ship to an upstairs office where I was questioned by a pleasant young Englishman as to my intentions in going to India

"But I'm not planning to stop in India "

"Lectures by you are announced in Bombay and Calcutta "

"This is the first I've heard of it," I assured him "But if I were to go, would there be any objection?"

"That would depend on the subject of your lectures "

"I'm interested in only one subject "

He pressed a button. Miraculously, almost like a scene from a mystery play, and as though everything had been rehearsed in advance, an attendant entered and placed on the desk a large, closely typewritten paper

"Am I on the blacklist?"

"Not exactly, but you said you were interested in only one subject. Then what about this?" He actually read me from that document details of a small reception I had given five years before in my own apartment in New York for Agnes Smedley after her release on bail

For a moment I was speechless with amazement. Then I ejaculated, "Why shouldn't I be interested when she was arrested for a cause that is my own? Besides, you must remember the charge was later dismissed."

"Then what about serving on the Committee for the Debs Defence and for the Political Prisoners Defence?" He mentioned other gatherings I had attended during that parlor meeting era, such as when Mary Knoblauch had had Jim Larkin talk on Irish Home Rule or Lajpat Rai, the Indian sociologist, express anti-British tendencies. Wherever my name had appeared on the stationery of any committee he had it on his record. My public life was there spread out, showing how careful was British espionage.

I brought forth from my arsenal some of my most trusty arguments, and the official ultimately agreed that if the vast millions of India wanted birth control he was all for my going there and would visa my passport. However, since I did not propose to include it in my trip the discussion was purely academic.

Although Singapore when we reached it seemed to combine so many nationalities that it was like Europe, America, and the Orient all mixed together, Malays, whose land it once had been, appeared to be in the

minority and their dialect little used I could not escape that fatal horoscope, because when their language was described to me as easy and simple, the example given was *mata* By itself it meant eye But, *mata mata*, in addition to being the plural, also meant policemen, who were the eyes of the government, and *mata mata glap* meant secret eyes, hence detectives

How Europeans made themselves understood in Singapore was a wonder to me The Chinese ricksha boys apparently comprehended no tongue, nor knew where any place was You stepped into a ricksha and pointed to where you thought your hotel was, praying your finger was extended in the right direction If you did not point he ran in any direction of the compass Even so, at the first corner he was inclined to turn into a more shady street After a while, since he seemed to be arriving nowhere, you spoke to him sharply and he pulled up to a traffic officer, who told him where to go Still pointing and saying "hotel" loudly, you eventually were delivered in front of the door by a much pleased coolie, grinning from ear to ear at his own cleverness The poor fellows were so cheerful and willing that you could not help smiling, too

The weather continued balmy to Penang, to Ceylon, to Aden I had been dreading the heat of the Red Sea, but the passage was surprisingly cool, the facing wind was really enjoyable

At Cairo, where we made a longer pause, Grant came down with dysentery and his temperature shot to a hundred and four degrees A Czechoslovakian doctor spent three nights with him but could not reduce the fever Each morning when I rose early to act as nurse, I stumbled over about six natives, our own guide Ali among them, kneeling on prayer rugs in front of his door All the fortune tellers had said a death was pending in Shepheard's Hotel and were assuming he would be the victim The fourth day, after the doctor had gone to his office, I ordered a dish pan full of ice and sponged Grant off with the frosty water Two hours later his temperature was normal and he began to show signs of recovering I never divulged that cold bath to the doctor

Ali was a handsome, dark-faced Arab with large luminous eyes and fine-cut features which made American ones seem crude and weak in comparison Wearing his long black robe to the ground and topped by a red fez, he used to come to his duties bearing great armfuls of

flowers from his mother We held lengthy conversations "Have you been married?" I asked

"Yes, five times "

"Weren't any of them happy?"

He began enumerating The first one had been young and inexperienced, she had not been properly brought up and did not know her position as his wife Although she had cost him a hundred dollars, he had dispatched her to her parents because she was too independent Number two had not been clean and had been too old for his mother to train, he had made amicable arrangements with her father for her return, and had lost no money on this transaction Number three had been sickly, and a great expense, she also had gone back Number four had not loved him, it had been shortly evident her heart was with another man and the agreement had been broken by mutual consent Number five, the latest, he had sent home because she would not wait on his mother

"Why should she?"

"Madam, my mother carried me in her belly for nine months Should I have a wife who would not work for her after that?"

He was now casting about for his sixth

Ali haunted our footsteps and, in order to collect his five percent commission on all our purchases, noted every place we went Merchants made a social affair of their customers' calls You went to a perfume shop in the Bazaar The proprietor said, "Yes," sat down, and handed you a gold-tipped, aromatic cigarette He lighted it for you, took out a pile of letters from a bag, and opened them for your inspection They were testimonials that a certain gentleman had sent similar cigarettes to Hartford, Connecticut, or Pelham, New York Of course, you bought some Then a cup of Persian tea was brought you, and you wanted some of that At last you recalled that you had come for attar of roses By this time he had sensed your "aura" and knew what you could pay He was willing humbly to mention the price

Our tour had been a wonderful experience for Grant He had studied the Baedekers, planned our trips when we were coming to a new city or country, looked into their histories and, although he was only thirteen, shown a highly awake and intelligent attitude towards everything we had seen

He had had all sorts of wares hurled at him—ostrich feathers, fans, baskets, sapphires, scarabs. He was satiated with strange sights and lore—Buddha's Temple of the Tooth at Kandy, caravans of bullocks, the English club at tiny Port Swettenham in Malaya, the enormous porters of Egypt who picked up trunks as though they were handbags, women veiled and women unveiled, mosques, the Coptic church where Joseph and Mary were supposed to have hidden Jesus from Herod, the date trees along the road to Memphis, the underground Temple of the Bull, the remains of an old proud world at Alexandria where Cleopatra had once held court, the primitive ferry-raft on which we had crossed the Nile to see the place where Moses had been found in the bullrushes, the wonderful ride, weird and lovely, across the Sahara to view the Pyramids and Sphinx. On his way to Switzerland he had traveled by gondola along the canals of Venice, had been trailed through the art galleries of Milan.

After a few weeks at Montreux Grant was fully recovered, but he was now homesick for the first time since we had left New York eight months before. All he wanted was to see Tilden play in the tennis matches at Wimbledon, and then go home. Because I did not think he should miss the reception which H. G. was giving, I had him fly across the Channel to London, and afterwards, appreciating his longing to be among his own age and kind, I shipped him off on the maiden voyage of the *Majestic* to a camp in the Poconos. By the time he was back at Peddie he was up with his class, his mind vastly enriched, and able to approach his studies in a more mature manner. I have never regretted taking him with me.

I myself remained in London for the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference to be held July 11-14. The inclusion of the words birth control was a definite concession on the part of the Neo-Malthusians to the new trend of thought. It was a delight to be amid conditions where tolerance reigned and the atmosphere was unblighted by legal restrictions. The scientific candor of the discussion was reported in the newspapers with sincerity and sobriety.

John Maynard Keynes, who had become famous almost overnight as the result of his book, *The Consequences of the Peace*, presided at one of the afternoon meetings. Later, I had lunch with him. He was tall and well-built, with clear, cold, blue eyes, a fine shapely head, brow,

and face, a brilliant bearing and brilliant intellect I was impressed by the fact he did not smile Because he gave each question of yours so much consideration, he seemed constantly perplexed, but when he once started to talk you knew he had already put aside the thing as having been solved, and gone on in advance You were probably more puzzled at his next question than he at yours

In the two years that elapsed before I saw Keynes again he had married Lydia Lopokouva of the Russian Ballet He had become an entirely different person—his serious mien and countenance had been changed to a buoyant, joyous happiness His knowledge of the problems of money, population, and economics were of a nature far above the grasp of an ordinary intelligence, yet in his conversation with his wife he always implied she knew the subject as thoroughly as he, and answered her queries as though their minds were together He was the only Englishman, perhaps the only man, I ever knew to do this

Unlike Lydia Lopokouva, most women had a strenuous battle trying to prove themselves equal to men, this marriage conflict was inseparable from modern life I could sense it frequently when coming in contact with a married couple—on her part the years of rebellion, and on his of trying to put her down as a weakling

Sentiment has extolled the young love which promises to last through eternity But love is a growth mingled with a succession of experiences, it is as foolish to promise to love forever as to promise to live forever

To every woman there comes the apprehension that marriage may not fulfill her highest expectations and dreams If in the heart of a girl entering this covenant for the first time there are doubts, even in the slightest degree, they are doubled and trebled in their intensity when she meditates a second marriage

J Noah H Slee, whom I had known for some time, was what the papers called "a staid pillar of finance" He was South African born but had made his fortune in the United States In customs and exteriors we were as far apart as the poles, he was a conservative in politics and a churchman, whereas I voted for Norman Thomas and, instead of attending orthodox services, preferred to go to the opera

An old-fashioned type of man, J N yearned to protect any type of woman who would cling Complications, therefore, confronted us I

had been free for nearly ten years, and, for as long, had been waging a campaign to free other women I was startled by the thought of joining my life to that of one who objected to his wife's coming home alone in a taxi at night, or assumed she could not buy her own railroad tickets or check her baggage Nevertheless, despite his foibles, he was generous in wanting me to continue my unfinished work, and was undeterred by my warning that he would always have to be kissing me good-by in depots or waving farewell as the gangplank went up

I had to consider also that I had two boys to be educated, and that children were much more to a woman than to a man Yet I knew he would be kind and understanding with them Furthermore, he had faith both in individuals and in humanity, his naïve appearance of hardness was actually not borne out in fact He kept his promises and hated debts, we attached the same importance to the spirit of integrity

Hundreds of people who scarcely knew me were delighted when the news of our marriage eventually became public Within one week letters began to arrive from all over the United States and Canada One man wrote he had helped me get up a meeting at San Francisco and now needed a printing press—would I mail him the trifling sum of three thousand dollars? Another brought to mind I had had dinner at his home when lecturing in his city, and now that he had painted enough pictures to hold an exhibit, would I finance it? Dozens of ministers, old men, old ladies, writers, sculptors wanted me to set them up in business, musical concert work, bookshops, recalling the time they had taken me in cars to meetings, or that I had slept in their beds Parents requested me to send their children to schools, to Europe, to sanatoriums—heaven knows what I never knew people could need so much I longed with all the desire in me to make out a check for every lack and wave a magic wand and say, "So be it"

But all I could do was write back that I had no more wealth than before—my husband's was his own And I still required as many contributions to birth control as ever

I had not wanted the worry or trouble of handling money, nor do I want it today The things I valued then I value now, not for what they cost, but for what they are To me dollars and cents are only messengers to do my bidding, and nothing more To use them properly and get results is my responsibility

When I asked J N , "Why do you lock things up?" he replied, "I always do, don't you?"

"Never I haven't anything worth locking up"

That is the way I still feel

It seemed so final when again I started a home, but there had been a gathering loneliness in my life—not seeing the children except on holidays, never having time to spend with old friends or to make new ones, and with such rich opportunities constantly offering themselves I knew very well, however, what sort of a house I wanted—a simple one, something like Shelley's in Sussex

In 1923, with stones gathered from the fields we built a house near Fishkill, New York, cradled in the Dutchess County hills, beside a little lake. On it we tried out swans, but they did not work, although they looked picturesque, they were too messy. So we changed to ducks and stocked the water with bass. I planned a blue garden which grew up and down and threw itself about the house and altered with the seasons. Pepper, a cocker spaniel puppy of two months, came the first year and bounced and leaped around us as we walked through the woods or rode horseback over the hills.

Willow Lake was only sixty miles from New York. I could make out the menus for a week ahead, leave directions for the gardening, be in my office fairly early and back again for dinner at night. Later, for working purposes, we built a studio among the treetops on the edge of a cliff from which I could look far off across the majestic valley of the Hudson.

Domesticity, which I had once so scorned, had its charms after all