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SCRIPT SAMPLE

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**THE AMAZING MRS. SLEE**  
**By Margaret Brian**

CHARACTERS

In Order of Appearance:

(\* May be doubled:)

Dr. John Rock

\*Clerk

Judge Harry Rosenbluth

Richard Hogan, Asst. District Attorney

Morris Ernst, Counsel for the Defense

Margaret Sanger

\*William (Bill) Sanger

\*Emma Goldman

\*Havelock Ellis

\*Dr. Louis Harris

\*Policewoman Mary Sullivan

\*Noah Slee

\*H.G. Wells

\*Agnes Riordan

\*George Lewis, Detective

\*Grover Whelan, Commissioner of Police

\*Dr. Hannah Stone

\*Father Francis Talbot

\*Heywood Broun

Staging for Mrs. Slee may be a minimum. At CENTER REAR STAGE a raised Judge's chair and table. Then, two witness chairs, and a table and chair for each opposing counsel. At STAGE RIGHT is the Waiting Room, a few chairs and table will suffice. STAGE LEFT is Margaret's apartment: a table with papers and books, a clothes pole with her coat and a suitcase beneath. With a lighting and slight set change this may also serve as Havelock Ellis' living room. Costuming is minimal, perhaps women's' dresses suggestive of the "20's. Many of the witnesses may be seated in the audience, especially Father Talbot.

THE AMAZING MRS. SLEE

PROLOGUE

(DR. JOHN ROCK ENTERS.)

ROCK: Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. I'm Dr. John Rock and I'm here tonight, together with all of you, to celebrate a very great Lady. She has given us Birth Control, Clinics, Planned Parenthood –

MARGARET (Entering:): Come, John, I'm not dead yet.

ROCK: -- And, because of her continuing financial support and her constant belief and encouragement---

MARGARET: Please, John!

ROCK: -- Dr. Gregory Pincus and I reached our goal - the discovery of a Pill - an oral contraceptive. And so I want to take this opportunity to thank her, to let the world know-

MARGARET: Is this really my eulogy?

ROCK: Indeed not! Ladies and Gentlemen,-- Margaret Sanger! -- May your many coming years be filled with joy and peace and health. You have given us so much, never counting the cost ---

MARGARET: Have I, John? Have I actually given anything?

ROCK: You've given us your life!

MARGARET: Or was it the others? My Children - Noah, the finest gentleman I ever knew. Always waiting, so patiently.

I don't know, John. Somehow it all looks differently now. I remember someone saying that - a long time ago.

If only I could have seen it then - if only I had known what he meant. -- There were other roads-- other ways I could have gone.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(April 21, 1929. COURTROOM, New York City. The Courtroom will consist of a JUDGES'S chair and table and other chairs and tables for witnesses and attorneys.)

At CURTAIN RISE, CLERK OF THE COURT intones:

CLERK: The City of New York against the Clinical Research Bureau and Mrs. Margaret Slee. The Honorable Harry Rosenbluth presiding. Will you please rise.

(All rise. ROSENBLUTH ENTERS, takes seat at table.)

Be seated! Court is now in session!

ROSENBLUTH: (Looking over papers;) Mr. Hogan, do you still wish to ask for a continuance?

HOGAN: No, Your Honor. I withdraw the request. We are prepared to proceed.

ROSENBLUTH: Counsel for the Defense--- (Scanning papers:) Uh - yes, Mr. Morris Ernst - ?

ERNST: We are ready, Your Honor.

ROSENBLUTH: Thank you, Gentlemen. Before we go further, I must emphasize this is a hearing not a trial! And I will conduct these proceedings with as much latitude as possible. Therefore, I urge Counsel to interject any lines of questioning they feel are not thoroughly explored - always keeping within the bounds of pertinency, judicial respect and decorum. Is this still agreeable to the parties concerned? --- Good. Then we are ready to proceed. Mr. Hogan, will you present the People's complaint, please?

HOGAN: (Addressing Audience:) Your Honor! The People of the City of New York charge that the Clinical Research Bureau, located at 46 West 15th Street and Margaret Slee, its Director, are in violation of Statute 1145 of the New York Penal Code.

This Statute clearly states that contraceptives may be prescribed to a MARRIED woman as a PREVENTION or in the PRESENCE of a DISEASE!

Now, I fully recognize and accept that a diaphragm, the contraceptive most commonly prescribed, will prevent venereal disease!

However, from the large number of women who daily attend the Clinic, are we to take it that such a great percentage of the Ladies of our City are in danger of, or actually infected with such a disease? If so, Your Honor, our women are indeed the unfortunate victims of a plague and the Department of Health is remiss for not instigating drastic measures! If there is no such plague, and I for one have not heard of it, then what other disease could a diaphragm be said to cure or prevent? Tuberculosis? Cancer? Heart Disease? High Blood Pressure?

No, Your Honor, I do not believe that even Mr. Ernst, noted for his rather extreme beliefs, would make such a claim. And yet these are the devices routinely dispensed at the Clinical Research Bureau!

Your Honor! The doors of the Clinic must be shut! Not only is the Clinic illegal in its operation, but, of far greater significance, its continued operation constitutes an insidious affront to the decency of our People!

MARGARET: (Rises. To Audience:) An insidious affront!!!

(ROSENBLUTH throws her a look. She quiets.)

HOGAN: I repeat! Its operation constitutes an insidious affront to the decency and moral sensibilities of the People.

MARGARET: I'll tell you of a plague! Women dying! And their babies! And not only in New York City but in the whole of the United States.----

ROSENBLUTH: Mrs. Slee!

HOGAN: Now, if I may continue----

MARGARET: --- Come down to the tenements of this fair city –

ROSENBLUTH: Mrs. Slee!!!

MARGARET: I was a nurse and when I delivered their babies I wrapped them in newspapers because they had no blankets. And that afflicted my sensibilities, Mr. Hogan. Grievously! But even worse, far worse, was watching those poor women bleed to death. Believe me, Mr. Hogan, I found it an unbearable moral affront to watch women die in agony from self-inflicted abortions because they could not feed another hungry mouth.

HOGAN: Mrs. Slee! Are you inflicting another retelling of your famous Sadie Sachs deathbed scene? Because if you are, I for one recognize it for exactly what it is - a drama you've used ever since it happened. 1912, Mrs. Slee! Seventeen years ago. When Sadie Sachs, poor, unknown, immigrant woman had the misfortune to die. And then - ah her death! It has been exploited as the springboard for the Birth Control Crusade and as a highly emotional defense for flouting the law. But it won't work. Not today. This is a Courtroom not a theatre! Your Honor, the People of the State of New York charge that the Clinical Research Bureau is in direct violation of Statute 1145 of the New York Bassoonist Code and request, most urgently, that it be ordered to cease its illegal, even harmful operations immediately!

ROSENBLUTH: Thank you, Mr. Hogan. Mr. Ernst?

(MORRIS ERNST comes to podium.)

ERNST: Your Honor! Ladies and Gentlemen! Mr. Hogan, the very able Counsel for the People of this great state of New York has presented us with a most edifying example of theory and opinion presented as legalistic jargon.

However, nowhere in his most interesting statement has he presented the actual basis for the case we are hearing today.

On April 15th of this year, 1929, eight police men and two policewomen arrived at the Clinical Research Bureau. They arrested its Medical Director, Dr. Hannah Stone, a staff physician, and three nurses.

Then, herding them willy-nilly into patrol wagons, they were booked! Jailed in actual cells!

As you know, Your Honor, there was great public outcry when the press –

HOGAN: I object! What the public reaction is and what the newspapers print or do not print is outside the province of this hearing!

ROSENBLUTH: Objection sustained. Mr. Ernst, please confine our self to facts, not opinions.

ERNST: I claim, Your Honor, that the District Attorney does not know the law on which he is resting the People's case!

Judge Rosenbluth, I would like to place in evidence Defense Exhibit #1. A copy of this newspaper, (Holds it up.) *THE WOMAN REBEL*, dated July 1914.

HOGAN: 1914! That was 15 years ago. Your Honor, I protest again!

ROSENBLUTH: Mr. Ernst, I confess I too am unable to see the relevancy of something that happened fifteen years ago.

ERNST: If the Court will bear with me, I will prove exactly how direct and pertinent this little paper is. The ostensible basis of this suit, as Mr. Hogan would have us believe, is Statute 1145 of the New York Obscenity Code. However, and this he did not mention, that Statute is directly tied to the Federal Comstock Law. Now, at one time, my client was indicted under that law ---

HOGAN: I object! This is a waste of time

ROSENBLUTH: (To Ernst:) Is it?

ERNST: It is not only relevant and timely, it is vital if this Court is to make a fair judgment in this proceeding. Your Honor, in 1914, Mrs. Slee, in response to her experiences as a nurse - and with the help of a few friends, started her Crusade. She printed and mailed, through the United States Postal System, six monthly copies of this paper. They themselves wrote the articles - on politics, labor reform, women's' rights and even, believe it or not, the injustices of motherhood! Now, I'm the first to grant their tone was ill-considered, even inflammatory. They did indeed live up to the slogan on their masthead: "NO GODS - NO MASTERS!" But this small group of women innocently assumed that the First Amendment, Freedom of the Press, protected their right to speak on issues they felt so strongly about. Instead, Your Honor, they found they did indeed have a Master! The Iron Hand of Anthony Comstock. My Client, Margaret Slee, was indicted under the Comstock Law of sending obscene literature through the mails.

## SCENE TWO

(LIGHTS FADE. COME UP on Margaret's apartment. A couch, chairs, table suffice. On the table is an old typewriter, untidy piles of paper. A coat hangs on a hook, a small suitcase next to it. Margaret, 30's is despairing, weary. From OFF-STAGE, A MAN'S VOICE:)

BILL: (O.S.) Peg? -- Peg? --

(She ignores him. BILL SANGER ENTERS carrying a rose. He is worried, concerned.)

BILL: Peg, it's going to be all right. --Look, look what I brought you.  
(He holds up a rose).

It's for good luck, not that you'll need it. But you can take it with you ---

MARGARET: I'm not going to jail

BILL: Of course not. We've been telling that for weeks. Tomorrow morning you'll walk into

that courtroom and in ten minutes the whole thing will be over. I guarantee it! It'll be like a bad dream, something that never really happened.

MARGARET: No! I've been telling you! There are nine charges in here. ---  
(Flips pages of legal document.)

--- The Postmaster General! The District Attorney! The State of New York! They add up to 45 years, Bill!

BILL: For six issues of that nothing screwball paper you put out? Never!

MARGARET: Nothing screwball paper! You'll never change, will you!

BILL: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. You know I don't mean that! But it's not worth it to them, not worth the money or the time. Honey, face it, *THE WOMAN REBEL* is not the New York Times!

MARGARET: It doesn't matter. Not to them. Bill, I'm not going in there tomorrow.

BILL: What do you mean?

MARGARET: I'm going to England.

BILL: What!!!

MARGARET: There's a boat leaving this evening. I'm going to be on it.

BILL: You can't

MARGARET: I've bought the ticket! I had enough money to get there and I'll worry about getting back. I'll find the money ---

BILL: Money! What about your children? What about them?

MARGARET: Bill, please ---

BILL: What happens to them?

MARGARET: I have to do this! -I've thought - I've prayed - and Bill, my instinct tells me - I have to do this. (Coaxing:) Bill, you can take care of them. You've done it before.

BILL: For the odd weekend! Not for months, Margaret! Or are you by any chance thinking about years?

MARGARET: Bill, please! Please help me. Do you think I want to do this?

BILL: Yes, that's exactly what I think! You'll get money? From where?

MARGARET: I'll get a job.

BILL: How?

MARGARET: In a Clinic. They have them there. After all, I was a nurse. I'll visit them, see how they work—

BILL: You'll get off the boat and walk into a Clinic! Right? In London? A place you've never been?

MARGARET: I have names. People to call.

BILL: Of course! All figured out! I should have known. People to call? Naturally! Sure, I understand. London? A lot better than jail. And a helluva lot better than here! Taking care of your children!

MARGARET: You're their father, aren't you? Why isn't it your job as much as mine?

BILL: I work all day.

MARGARET: So do I!

BILL: Because you want to! Because your "instinct" tells you! Well, I pay for this house! And the food you eat! And the clothes you wear! I have to work!

MARGARET: And so do I! For something bigger! More important!

BILL: Than money?

MARGARET: Bill, please. Let's not fight. There's nothing to fight about. I can't take care of them in jail, can I? You say it won't happen, but what if it does? Who'll take care of them then?

BILL: You're not going to jail! I keep telling you ---

(A knock on the door immediately followed by the entrance of EMMA GOLDMAN. She stamps in, not waiting for an invitation.)

EMMA: Jail? Jail? What talk is this? Has something happened all ready?

MARGARET: Emma!

BILL: Sweet Jesus! The little Mother of Russia!

EMMA: And you! The Little Father of Parlor Pinks! (Wheels on Margaret.) Tomorrow is the

day, is it not? (Margaret nods, weary.) That is what I thought. It is tomorrow we fight!

BILL: We fight! You're not getting in on this. You're not going to use my wife - Margaret, are you going to let her in that courtroom? Because if you do ---

MARGARET: Oh, God!

EMMA: No, not God! Emma Goldman! For weeks I wait for you to call me. To ask my advice, my help—

BILL: Why should she want your advice? You're nothing but trouble! If it weren't for you she wouldn't be in this spot.

EMMA: You listen to me, Mr. William Sanger. I am not the one who sits at dinner tables, with the wine, the good food, discussing the misery of the world. I act! And so I have tried to teach your wife. Now! (Back to Margaret:) Where is your lawyer? I must meet with him, talk to him --- (Margaret shakes her head wearily.) No?? What does that mean? We must plan, make strategy.

BILL: (Heavy sarcasm:) She means she doesn't have a lawyer! And she means she's not going into that courtroom!

EMMA: What! But that is an indictment on your desk! You have another delay?

BILL: Go on, tell her. She might even approve. Tell her, Margaret!

EMMA: Tell me what? You intend to hide? To run away?

BILL: Bully for you, Comrade Dear! You got it in one! That's exactly what she intends!

MARGARET: Damn you!

BILL: Tch tch, such language! But not run away -- sail away! That better? England, Comrade Goldman!

EMMA: England!

BILL: She's taking a little cruise! This evening! After all, every Mother needs a change, a rest now and then. Even you can understand that, can't you, Emma?

EMMA: (To Margaret:) But you can't!

BILL: For once we agree. Now, if you would just explain to my wife –

EMMA: But why? Why do you do this?

MARGARET: I won't go to jail! I can't!

EMMA: And why not?

MARGARET: Because I can't be locked up! I can't do it!

EMMA: You are afraid? Of what? Prison is not bad. I have been there many times and I find it an excellent place -- to rest, to study, to make plans.

MARGARET: No! Sitting in a cell! Locked up! Keys jangling! Bars everywhere!----

EMMA: And Czarist Cossacks perhaps? With lighted matches under your nails?

MARGARET: ---- And while I'm sitting there - locked in - what about my Cause!

EMMA: Your Cause! The movement does not depend on you. Jail? England? What difference where you are? The movement goes on - with you or without you. But if you fight now - then at least you are of some use - some help!

BILL: You want her to go to jail, don't you! Because it will mean newspapers! Headlines! For you and your Anarchist friends!

MARGARET: He's right, isn't he? You want me and you want my Cause! That's why you're here! But I won't let you! Birth Control is mine! I named it! I worked for it! And I fought for it! - I watched Sadie Sachs die!-- She begged me - "please, no more babies!" - And what could I tell her? - "Jake, he should go sleep on the roof?" -----

BILL: Stop it! I'm sick of that poor woman!

MARGARET: (Over him) ---- Sadie Sachs shouldn't have drunk turpentine! Jennie Malloy, living in two rooms, shouldn't have had twins! And Rose, with eight children, shouldn't have used that knitting needle -----

BILL: Ah! The great awakening!

MARGARET: ----- We're prisoners!! From the day we're born! Prisoners of our bodies! And that can't be God's Will! Not when He gave us brains too!

EMMA: Stop it! Both of you!

BILL: You don't want to hear about her great awakening?

EMMA: People are starving, dying, and you - nothing! Nothing but petty, squabbling ---

BILL: Congratulations! For once you're right! (To Margaret:) You use that poor woman just as your anarchist friend here uses you! Ye Gods! Can't the poor woman find peace even in her death? You use her to justify everything and anything you want! Including getting rid of me!

MARGARET: Because I've had enough! For twelve years I lived with your rages, your jealousy! Telling me what I should do! What I shouldn't do! But no more! You don't own me, Bill Sanger! Not anymore! ---

BILL: Own you! Who could? Do you think I've enjoyed the past two years, living in that room? Alone? Except when you need me -to pay a bill! To watch the kids!

MARGARET: (Over him:) --- All my life I've had to obey men! Knitting needle abortions? No more! Birth Control! The right to control my own body! It's my Cause! And I'll fight for it! I'll fight the Church and the law and you too, Bill Sanger! No one will stop me ever again!

EMMA: You? The Joan of Arc of your Cause! You who are afraid of prison? Ha! You sound like a bourgeois fishwife! Now, I tell you what you will do! Tomorrow morning you walk into that courtroom. And I will be there. I will think for you! I will act for you. And we will not be alone!

BILL: You're going to pack that courtroom, aren't you? That's your plan! You'll have the newspapers and all your crazy radicals -

EMMA: I will have those who fight for the rights of the people! Even Comrade Debs - he has promised---

BILL: Eugene Debs! He's going to be there!

EMMA: Naturally! And if they choose to call your petty articles - your petty newspaper obscene -

MARGARET: But I'm not fighting obscenity! I'm fighting for Birth Control! And that's not mentioned here-- (Holding subpoena.) -- Not once!

EMMA: Pah! Obscenity, Birth Control! What difference? We fight to speak and write as we wish! What good is your *WOMAN REBEL* if it cannot be mailed?

MARGARET: What good am I if I'm in jail?

EMMA: You are back in jail again? Then we do it for you. I promise - for the few weeks -

MARGARET: Or months -or years -NO! I won't do it! I'd be swallowed up! I'd die!

EMMA: You are a fool, Margaret Sanger. And even worse - a coward! I came to offer my help. Not to watch you weep and twist and turn like a rat in a cage! You refuse my help? That

is your right. It is my right not to be scorned. Perhaps you will grow up someday. I hope so. You could be of use - to ALL of us-- in OUR movement. Goodbye. I wish you luck. -- And I pity you from my heart.

(SHE EXITS. BEAT, then:)

BILL: Peg, Peg, Dear, you've got to listen. You can't do this, you really can't. You're under indictment. You can't leave the country.

MARGARET: Once I'm on the boat, what can they do?

BILL: I don't know. Not let you back for one thing.

MARGARET: I'll manage it. Somehow I will!

BILL: And while you're gone, while you're managing all this -what do I tell the children?

MARGARET: They'll understand. They're not babies anymore.

BILL: Will they? Or is that something else your VOICE tells you? Peg, you've told me about your Mother- eleven children! – how exhausted she was. But you knew she loved you. You always knew she cared.

MARGARET: And my children know I care! But if I have to earn their love - by being what my Mother was – a drudged to her children - a slave to her husband - then I'll do without it! No, Bill, I'll not be owned by anyone! Not you! Not my children!

BILL: All right, have it your way. But while you're in London, there's something I have to do. I have a life too, you know, and it's time I got on with it. Emma was right. I've been a gentleman long enough. While you're over there, I'll get the divorce. And then you'll really have the freedom you want so much.

MARGARET: (softly) All right, if that's what you want.

(She toys with rose.)

BILL: (EXITING) Goodbye. You'll let me know where you are?

(She nods. Bill pauses, looks at her sadly. Then as he's at door:)

MARGARET: (Coaxing:) But we'll still be friends, won't we? I mean, when I come back? After the - well -afterwards?

BILL: After the divorce? Friends? I don't think so.

MARGARET: I love you, you know that. I always have. Bill, I don't want it to be like this.

BILL: My God, Margaret! What do you expect of me! I've given you all the love I have and it wasn't good enough! You threw it away. Your friend? No, Peg, I'm not capable of that.

MARGARET: Won't you at least kiss me goodbye? Wish me luck?

BILL: (He gives in, kisses her.): Peg, if we tried again? If I helped more? Understood more?

MARGARET: Thank you for the flower, Bill. I won't be gone long, I promise. (Kisses him lightly:) Bill, the children--?

BILL: (Heavy sigh) They'll be all right, don't worry.

(He EXITS. Margaret stands a moment, then, resolutely puts on coat, picks up suitcase, EXITS.)

**END SAMPLE.**