

The Gentlemen's Paradise

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Alien backgrounds had not hampered an instant meeting of minds in the fall of 1920 when Margaret met the Baroness Shidzue Ishimoto. Although the baroness was the hothouse flower of Japanese culture, trained in calligraphy, correct posture, elaborate rituals, and obedience to her husband, she was in New York trying to convert her stylized perfection into utility. Beyond that, her aim was the same as Margaret's—to help the forgotten women of her country.

Her transformation started at the suggestion of her husband, a leader of the Kaizo or Young Reconstruction League, who thought that Japan's progress depended on rejection of medieval customs, including the role of high-caste ladies. Trained as an engineer, he had taken his bride to live in a squalid coal mining camp where he worked for nearly three years. After she had produced her second son, he told her to leave the children with his mother and follow him to New York, where he was then studying Western ways.

In New York, he enrolled her in a YWCA business school and left her for a tour of Europe. He counseled her to "swim abreast the world's new tide," but she had never learned to swim, in fact she had not even learned to speak English. Nevertheless, with great dexterity she managed to survive. With her unpracticed English, but a bright mind and hard work, she mastered all of her studies with the highest marks. This success was so exhilarating that she developed a confidence and initiative usually suppressed in Japanese ladies.

In her autobiography, *Facing Two Ways*, Baroness Ishimoto says that her "God of Fortune" brought her in contact with Margaret Sanger, "one of the greatest women of the world" At once she wanted to emulate the American, although she feared that she lacked the courage She underestimated herself, for she became a somewhat parallel figure for her country

Margaret gave a tea for the Baroness, who, used to rigid protocol, was surprised when the hostess opened the door herself She also marveled that so important a person was not built in "manly proportions" Instead, she saw "a delicate little figure with charm of a thoroughly feminine type—with bright shining eyes, thick shining hair which gave a touch of eternal youth to her appearance"

Margaret too, admired her guest, "tall for her race, equally beautiful by our standards, very smart in her American dress" The Baroness was compassionate about the women in the mining camps and she grasped the possibility of birth control, not only to relieve personal tragedy, but to raise the status of Japanese women She wanted to establish a birth control league and asked Margaret about visiting her country This possibility seemed remote, but the Baroness left with a supply of literature, much of which was translated and used in the Kaizo journal

In the summer of 1921 Margaret received an extraordinary invitation The Kaizo had scheduled lectures by three leaders of Western thought, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, and H G Wells Would Margaret Sanger be the fourth, the only American and the only woman? Aside from the honor, she would have a chance to introduce birth control to the country which in Western eyes represented the Yellow Peril with its exploding population and warrior tradition At that time Margaret herself was predicting that Asia's teeming millions were the chief threat to world peace So she gladly signed the contract, which required a late February departure

Meanwhile, the first weeks of 1922 were fully booked with Midwestern lectures, a schedule which became frantic when the Town Hall hearings were prolonged In the rush, Margaret postponed several decisions, but at last resolved to take Grant with her This meant a new passport and with the time so short, she asked that it

be sent to San Francisco, where she would also secure her visa. All went smoothly until she appeared at the Japanese consulate. There, with many apologies, she was told that she could not have a visa. Was this a personal ban, she asked, or a ban on her subject? "Both," was the reply.

Because she had no visa, the Japanese liner promptly canceled her reservation, and the story exploded in the press. Some journalists claimed that the exclusion of Margaret Sanger was an official retaliation for the United States Exclusion Act. In the midst of this hullabaloo, a Japanese, returning with his country's delegation from the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference, suggested that Margaret take out a Chinese visa. The ship's last stop was Shanghai, but he thought that her presence on the passage over would create enough support for her to gain clearance for Japan. Taking this chance, she and Grant sailed as originally planned.

Noah Slee sailed also. According to most evidence, his future was one of the decisions that Margaret had postponed. For the last two years, bouquet in hand, he had usually seen her off on trips and often had materialized en route. What his exact status was at this time is not certain. Even the family is in disagreement. Grant Sanger, who was on the spot, believes that they had been married in Paris the previous year. Noah's obituary said that they had been married in 1920. Most of the evidence contradicts this. On the Japanese trip they carried separate passports, which are today in the Library of Congress, and although his was for Mr. and Mrs. Noah Slee, the picture of his wife was not of Margaret.

During the trip there was no public mention of Noah's presence. It seems likely that Margaret took Grant with her to act as a disarming chaperon, in case her elderly admirer might come along. To the latter, a slow boat to China must have seemed the ideal spot to press his suit. He had even made preparations. Learning that Margaret loved to dance, the devout churchman, who had never even waltzed, signed up for ten lessons at Arthur Murray's Studio.

More than 150 Japanese were returning from the Washington conference, among them the two official delegates, Admiral Kato, later prime minister, and Masanoa Hanihara, vice minister of for-

eign affairs and future ambassador to the United States Shortly after sailing, they made Margaret's acquaintance and during the next weeks often questioned her about birth control

The scheduled stop in Honolulu allowed Margaret to speak to a large meeting, where she inspired the organization of a birth control league, as well as boosting her stock throughout the Orient Two Japanese journalists scooped all others with their reports, immediately the conference delegation asked her to address them in the ship's dining room Then on their own initiative, the official delegates cabled Tokyo in her behalf

As in the United States, the attempt to suppress Margaret's message had increased public interest, and protests were deluging the Japanese government Editors regretted her exclusion, while the foreign press condemned it For a fortnight the official position fluctuated First it suggested that Margaret Sanger might land but make no talks The protests mounted All right! She might talk, but not in public No one was satisfied The final rumor was that she might talk, but not on birth control Meanwhile, radio invitations poured in for her to address medical, cultural, business, and labor groups

On shipboard Margaret was besieged with interviews and questions Noah did not resent this, for he wanted her success, but he must have rejoiced at his precautions In the evenings when the orchestra struck up dance music for the Occidentals, he monopolized her Together they fox-trotted, holding the Orient at bay

On reaching Japan, Margaret was lengthily questioned by officials who finally said that she might land on two conditions (1) She must not lecture publicly on birth control (2) The American consul must make a formal request for her Although she had already asked the consul's help, she sent him a second message, which, like the first, was ignored After many hours of delay, she was at last grudgingly admitted

Next morning the *Japan Times* reported

Mrs Sanger was allowed to land in this country after a series of negotiations that made the diplomacy of the Washington Conference look like child's play An army of star writers from Tokyo—the authorities said that they had issued seventy passes to these men alone—a dozen

regular waterfront reporters and a few foreign correspondents swarmed up the gangway of the ship. The eager newsmen scurried about in search of a notable story. Was it Admiral Baron Kato they sought? It was not. A dozen disgruntled shorthand men dropped out of the herd to take notes on the Envoy's address in the dining room, but the others flocked onward until they found the modest quarters wherein abode a modest little American woman and her handsome young son. Mrs. Sanger and the cause of birth control were what the press of Japan was interested in. The Peace Conference was an old story.

Shidzue Ishimoto was waiting to welcome and drive the Sangers to her home in Tokyo, Noah lingered discreetly in Yokohama for business talks. The Kaizo group had been both angry and humiliated at the treatment of their guest, but they had come to realize that if the government had deliberately tried to focus interest on birth control, it could not have done so more effectively. The dramatic entry had made Margaret Sanger big news.

To clarify the situation and if possible remove the last restrictions, Margaret called on the chief of police, who had made the original decision. He met her with a courtesy, a cup of tea, and a flash of humor. In their language, he explained, her name sounded like "Sangai San" or "destructive to production." At this time there was before the Japanese Diet a bill called Dangerous Thought, which would exclude from the country all ideas not conforming with tradition. Since birth control came under this category, he could not let her lecture publicly. Later she learned that it was also rumored that she was a secret agent commissioned to deplete the Japanese population before an American invasion.

Margaret had to scrap her prepared lectures and improvise new ones on war and population, using European examples. The contract called for eight to ten lectures of five hours each, although she had reassured herself that the latter was an error. It was not. She found that standing five long hours was in itself an endurance test. Translation took half of the time, and the freewheeling questions might have gone on forever had it not been for the five-hour clause, which she now considered a protection. Otherwise, the lectures were a pleasure, for Margaret had never known more intelligent and appreciative audiences. She talked to the ex-

clusive Peers' Club, the Tokyo Medical Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the large Y M C A , and, in all, made thirteen major addresses

What puzzled her at first was that she spoke chiefly to men In some places, where the Baroness, who always accompanied her, was the only other woman, she felt cut off from her own sex And yet people always asked her about the American woman Was it true that she was all things to her husband companion, mother to his children, mistress, business manager, and friend? This, Margaret tried to explain, was the ideal, however imperfectly fulfilled Slowly she realized that it was not the ideal in Japan

Living in a Japanese home, Margaret gained insights on the family structure and the role of women Trying to "face two ways," her hostess was putting her new skills to work With a triple purpose, she had opened the Minerva Yarn Shop, which helped to finance a leper colony, taught women to make useful articles, and gave a precedent for ladies to work outside the home Mostly her friends looked askance at a peeress in this revolutionary role Tactfully, Shidzue conformed in matters which did not interfere with her major purposes

Japanese girls were brought up to believe that a husband always came first, a wife second because man was superior A husband represented Heaven and one who disobeyed Heaven incurred a righteous punishment Girls were taught to smile, listen, and say little When they spoke, it should be in a soft, fluttering voice Sacrifice and endurance were their lot and it was a matter of honor that even in childbirth they should suppress all sounds The feudal code required that a wife should rise early, retire late, and never pamper herself with naps or excess tea or sake At dawn, after her own bridal night, Shidzue had risen at five to serve her mother-in-law

Although marriage was predetermined for girls, all laws and customs favored the husband A wife had no property rights since even her dowry was turned over to her in-laws Concubines were common, and a man might rid himself of his wife by stating that she did not "meet the needs of his family" Like a broken mirror, a divorced woman had no value

Margaret came to believe that in Japan the upper-caste lady was an exquisite work of art created by the imagination of generations of gentlemen. The confection had no personal will and in her pitiful need of security, merely reflected the stereotype men had prescribed. Shidzue, with her own mind awakened abroad, was more blunt. Her countrywomen, she wrote, were either "toys, petted by men or slaves driven by their masters."

Grant's presence constantly highlighted the fact that Japan was a man's country. Wherever they went, hotels, restaurants, or private homes, the servants hovered about him, trying to anticipate his wishes, while his famous mother trailed unnoticed behind.

But the chief evidence of its being a man's country was the number of girls dedicated, without choice, to male pleasure. In extolling the perfection of the geisha girls, Count Keyserling, in his popular *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, described an atmosphere of harmless cheer, like that of children around a Christmas tree. Shidzue saw it differently. These children, whose training started very young, were often whipped into their seemingly artless charms. The top ones earned more than any Japanese professional woman, but their managers and clothes took most of their pay. Nor was it reasonable to suppose that young girls, virtually imprisoned in the pleasure enclaves, and often serving fat old men several times an evening, felt the spontaneous joy of children around a Christmas tree. Some geishas only sang, danced, and flirted, others were licensed prostitutes.

In her *Autobiography* Margaret says that some missionaries escorted her through the Yoshiwara red light district, starting with the unlicensed quarter where the muddy, unpaved alleys were lined with huts. Dark eyes peered through slits in the screen walls, while outside, as at a restaurant, prices were listed for each girl per hour and per night. When a man entered a house, the light below went off and another went on upstairs. Thousands of lights behind paper windows flickered on and off like fireflies while crowds of workmen seemed like swarming insects, driven by sex needs.

The licensed quarter was the most modern and attractive part of the city. Trees, festooned with gay lanterns, lined boulevards where luxury hotels presented lobbies gay as Broadway theaters,

with photographs of pretty girls. In some empty frames was the notice, "Just arrived. No time for pictures." These were the new ones, fresh from the country, very young and most desired. They might have eight or nine visitors an evening.

Everyone, from the police chief to high-caste ladies, had told Margaret that the trouble with birth control was the effect on public morals. In the Yoshiwara she wondered what they meant. Physical pleasure in Japan was relieved of all responsibility just as the men wanted.