



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

It is getting to be even more difficult, being the Chief Lady of Hongkong. I, really, don't know how many times I should wear the same dress, frock, shoes, etc. I read that First Lady Imeldo Marcos of the Philippines, when she was running the country for her husband, used to own about three thousand different pairs of shoes. I can understand how that happened, actually, now that I am in the same position as she: You cannot wear the same pair of black shoes twice in a week with a green, blue or grey outfit because it would bring the country into question and, possibly, into disrepute. People would look at me and say: 'Hey! The Chief Lady is wearing the same shoes, twice in two days!' The same is true of dresses, suits, evening gowns, and all the other clothes that I have to wear in order to represent my country: I cannot wear them twice in one month. Also, I don't know if you realise this, but I have to have at least three different wardrobes: One for Hongkong; one for Beijing; and, one for travelling in the West. Also, it could be claimed that, by not shopping more for shoes, coats, dresses, etc, I was not helping the local economy. Consumers, be they corporate consumers or just housewives or househusbands, are the lifeblood of any economy, be it in their consumption of capital goods or of durables. (A little lesson in economics for you, my dear) As it is, you know Hongkong is suffering, badly, from deflation. Can't have that, can we?

Talking about clothes, the wardrobe for Hongkong is the best, naturally, because I have to set the pace for all the other tai-tais of the territory. When I go to Beijing, however, I must not look too grand for fear of upstaging the tai-tais (up north, tai-tais are called, ai ren) of the Beijing elite circle – you know, Mrs Chen Chi Chian, Mrs Zhu Rong Ji; Mrs Li Peng; and, now, the new addition, the nouveau arrivé, Mrs Wu Jin Tao. Travelling in the West requires a wardrobe that is elegant, easy to wash and iron (for my present Filipino half-a-deck, but she will be replaced, soon, with a Chinese half-a-deck in order to move with the trend), but, at the same time, my wardrobe must be better than those of Mrs Blair Witch, the wife of the Prime Minister of England, who carries her own dirty clothes to the local laundry, or Mrs George Bush, who only knows about riding clothes, being a Texan where only jeans are worn. I have engaged the services of a Shanghainese seamstress to come to the capitol residence on a weekly basis in order to discuss the making of new clothes for me. Oh! My goodness! What a lot of work it is to choose the fabric, the style, the colour of the buttons, etc, etc, etc! For men, of course, nobody looks at them, anyway. They can wear the same old thing, all the time. A Mao Jacket and brown or black trousers is enough for most of them when they attend official functions. For what reason should a wife waste money on men, anyway? But, for a Chief Lady, she must be outstanding and be fully understood. Kwan Gung, the specialist God of Warriors, made women to be outstanding and men to serve them, you know. Your Grandpa is a believer in Confucianism and will confirm that when you talk to him on your next trip to Hongkong – if you can keep him awake long enough.

You know, when I met the wife of the Pope in the Vatican, she was wearing a long white dress, just like Pope Whats-His-Name. When they stood next to each other, one was not quite sure which one was the male and which one was the female. Come to think of it, these days, it is often difficult to tell a female from a male when they

have clothes on, unless you have a good look at the hips of a person, or of their other physical attributes. And, even then, one could make a mistake. Plastic surgery is capable of nearly anything. These days, of course, Catholic priests have been found to be sadly lacking. Don't ever allow a young boy to bend over in the presence of a Catholic Father because, otherwise, the boy may well get a rather rude awakening. It is a wonder, I suppose, that none of those young bugged boys never got pregnant. Perhaps, Catholic Fathers' sperm count is low and not very mobile? They only work one day a week and, for the other six days, they drink and eat far too much, I am told. That must be true because I ask you: Have you ever seen a skinny Catholic priest? Talking about mobility, have you noticed how fat Catholic Fathers appear to waddle rather than walk like ordinary folk? Clearly, they eat too much and exercise too little, except when they are bugging boys. (Actually, I could never understand the reason that a man would want to put his appendage in the dirtiest and smelliest orifice of another boy/man) Maybe alter boys should wear protective clothing, such as a corselet. What do you think? It is only too clear to me that if one has unlimited funds and an unbridled appetite, one never has to worry about one's next meal and, hence, one tends to over-indulge.

Lastly, on the matter of my appearance, there is, also, the matter of my make-up. I think that I should not wear too much make-up, and I have instructed (I can't tell you her name because that is my little secret, but I assure you, she is local and legal. I have to be careful, these days, because I advise your Grandpa on new labour laws and which new laws should be drafted in order to control the proliferation of half-a-decks) her to go easy on applying the make-up base and powder to my sensitive skin, otherwise it could cake up when it dries, completely – and, then, the game is up. At forty six years of age, one's skin is not as elastic as a young girl or boy of fifteen years, you understand.

Ah! I think that is the little dear, now, come to give me a facial. Must rush.

Love you,

Chief Lady of Hongkong

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