



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

My people want to build a magnificent statue to commemorate the good works that I have done for them. When a deputation of Legislative Councillors came to see me, the other day, and told me of the grand plan, I asked for details about the statue before I consented to sit for the sculptor. On looking at the plans and realising that the many tens of millions of dollars would have to come out of the public purse in order to erect the monument, as a joke, I held out my hand and said: 'The pedestal is waiting!' You should have seen the look of their faces! They did not know how to react to my statement. I, then, told them that it was meant as a joke and that neither I nor Grandpa would consider taking a penny out of the coffers of Hongkong without a valid and genuine reason. Anyway, there is precious little money left in the coffers, in any event. However, that little incident reminded me that I should tutor you about having a sense of humour when faced with what is, clearly, a suggestion of corruption. The first lesson is: Do not get upset! People of a lower caste than we are bound, from time to time, to try to take advantage of us. Let me give you an example of the time that one of my Filipina maids attempted a fast one. It was one morning, not long after I had returned from London where I had had an audience with Queen Elizabeth in respect of trade between Hongkong and the United Kingdom. I was jet-lacked, you see, so, when Imelda Roxas came to me and asked for my assistance in bringing to Hongkong one of her distant cousins from Manila to work for Grandpa, I asked if there were any other of this cousin's friends, or family in Hongkong, already, and whether or not I could meet one of them. That afternoon, a Mr Pedro Cuevas showed up at the Residence. By that time, I was feeling much better and I realised that I had no need, actually, to meet this driver. However, a promise is a promise. When Pedro Cuevas came into the parlour, suddenly I had an idea. I said: 'Mr Pedro Cuevas, how much commission were you willing to pay to Imelda Roxas if I agreed to cut a few bureaucratic corners and brought in your relative?' Pedro Cuevas studied me for about ten seconds and, after a little frightened cough, said: 'Eight thousand dollars, Lady Betty.' 'And is this relative a good worker; an honest one?' 'Oh, yes, very much honest, Lady!' 'Alright, then,' said I, 'we shall bring in this relative and you may pay me the eight thousand dollars instead of Imelda.' After Pedro Cuevas had left, I called for Imelda, who promptly asked what had been my decision. I said: 'I think that you have made a terrible mistake. You had better find another relative. That one turned out to be my cousin, not yours.'

Then, there was the time that I was suspicious about my Filipino driver, whom I was forced to let go after he tried, once too often, to take advantage of my good nature. Well, one day, as I was getting ready to go to the Convention Centre to cut the ribbon, marking the opening of a new hotel, I noted that the driver was having a talk with a bunch of Filipinos and Filipinas in the parking lot. I merely stored the information in my memory banks because, from time to time, I have been accosted by people, wanting this or that and or trying to get me to open this door or that door. Well, on the way down to Central, the driver informed me that he thought that there was some little noise in the engine and, as such, he had better pull over to look under the bonnet of the motor car. He stopped at the corner of a street and, Lo and Behold! There was that same bunch of Filipinos and Filipinas, coming down the street. On the pretext that I wanted to stretch my legs, I told my police companion (I, always, travel with an escort) to stay near the motor car as I walked over to the driver who, by this time, had his

head down, looking at a bunch of wires and things, under the bonnet. I said to him: 'How much are you being paid to stop here?' He replied that he was being paid nothing. I, then, said: 'Then, I should get half, at least, if you want me to talk to these people.' He paid up two thousand dollars ... and, then, I sacked him. Of course, I gave all the money to Grandpa so that he could give it to the poor of Hongkong.

The lesson for today, my dear, is that one should face life as though it were a wonderful joke. If you are about to have an operation, ask the surgeon, first: 'In which medical periodical will this operation be mentioned? Do I get first billing? How much?' And, when you are about to die, your last words should be, something along the lines: 'Dear me! I must be turning into a god.'

My dear, I must go now.

Love you.

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

***While TARGET makes every attempt to ensure accuracy of all data published,
TARGET cannot be held responsible for any errors and/or omissions.***

If readers feel that they would like to voice their opinions about that which they have read in TARGET, please feel free to e-mail your views to editor@targetnewspapers.com or targnews@hkstar.com. TARGET does not guarantee to publish readers' views, but reserves the right so to do subject to the laws of libel.