



## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*Aside from Shanghainese food, I love to eat Continental Cuisine, but only when I am certain that the cook knows what is meant by Continental Cuisine. Many Chinese cooks claim to know about the foods of Europe, but most of them tell lies, just like many Legislative Councillors and Executive Councillors of Hongkong. The other day, however, I discovered that there is a truly wonderful European chef – and he is good-looking, too. He is working at one of the star hotels in Wanchai (It would be wrong for me to mention his name because, otherwise, Grandpa might get the wrong idea). Unfortunately for you, this European, already, has a girl friend, who is destined to be his wife, later this year, I have been reliably told. Pity, really, because this is the type of man that a single girl should marry. To begin with, marrying a man, such as this cook, guarantees that a wife does not have to concern herself with the messy business of preparing meals or even cooking the food because, not being able to compete with her chef-husband, she could claim ignorance in respect of culinary skills – and have him do all the work in the kitchen. Her spouse's house-husbandly duties, of course, would be preparing meals for his wife, cleaning up after making a mess in the kitchen, and, then, expanding his duties to other chores, such as dusting and cleaning the entire house. In the case of this Australian-born cook, he has been trained in the art of preparation of Continental Cuisine so the rest should be easy for any woman, who decides to gather him under her little wing. Of course, it is true that he is an Australian, but one cannot have everything, can one? On the other hand, the good thing about Australians is that, by and large, they are an humble race, and for good reason, too. I suppose you know that the current batch of Australians is descendants of English and Irish criminals who, on conviction of various offences in the United Kingdom, were transported for life to Australia. Being at the bottom of the earth, so to speak, the British of the Seventeenth Century thought that most of the criminals, who were transported to Australia, would die from the harsh climate of the country. However, here we have another miscalculation of the British, because, today, some 20 million Australians, who have managed to survive, populate the earth, and are spreading their seeds. In the words of that famous British naturalist, Dr Charles Darwin, only the fittest of a particular specie can survive in a given climate. So, today, the descendants of those Irish and British crooks of centuries ago, now known as Australians, must be the fittest of the fittest. That means that this cook's wife will inherit good and strong sperm, sifted down from one generation to another and, now, reposed in this handsome chap who knows, exactly, how to dish up some good tucker, in the vernacular of Australia. There will be a bit of a problem, with which his wife will have to contend, however, because the climate of Australia varies greatly, from region to region, ranging from tropical in the north to temperate in the south. That means that the Australian tends to be a little temperamental at certain times of the month and at certain times of the year. As Australian males age, so this innate idiosyncrasy becomes more pronounced. There is a cure for it, I have been told: Rub their hair in caterpillar juice, once a month. Also, I have been told by Grandpa that Australians, from time to time, go on walkabouts. This is the time when they go into a bit of a trance and start wandering, here and there. But, there is a remedy for walkabouts, too: Tie a string around his most tender spot and, occasionally, give it a little tug. That is bound to give him a shock. Also, because Australia lies in the earth's southern hemisphere, the seasons of the year are in reverse to what we, civilised people, are used to enjoying. What this means to his prospective wife, assuming that she is not cut from the same cloth as her*

*prospective mate, is that her new husband may, on occasions, do things in reverse. Which may be tricky if she is having a shower with him and she drops a bar of soap and, then, bends down to retrieve it. Getting back to food, no kidding, this male is good. The key ingredients in the preparation of good tucker ('tucker' is that funny Australian expression, which is derived from the English verb, to tuck – to put into a snug spot), as everybody knows, are appearance, smell and taste. He does it all, my dear. His food has the appearance of a beautiful painting, from which magical odours permeate the entire room, titillating one's taste buds until one cannot stand it any longer and so, it is down the proverbial hatch. His food is, also, sexually titillating, so be a little careful when you eat it ... just in case you start to get the wrong vibes. Ah! His food is what I would call a true, culinary coup-de-mâitre, if it were possible to use such a simile. The one thing that he cannot do, properly, is to make a soufflé. Soufflé-making is not common 'down under' so I do understand and appreciate his limitations. After all, he is Australian. After his last abject failure at trying to make a soufflé, he ran away from me in order to hide his shame. When I found him, I told him straight: 'Chef, you may run, but you cannot hide, forever!'*

*Giving credit where it is due, this Australian does have a wonderful teacher. He is his immediate boss, the Executive Chef of the hotel. Naturally, the Executive Chef is better than his assistant, but that is because, among other things, he is Austrian, and, as a result of his ancestry, he was born to be a cook. I suppose you know that all Austrians are known to be second-class Germans, don't you? They are the race of people, who go to bed with a rock and a box of matches: The rock is to be thrown at the light bulb; and, the box of matches is to be used to see whether or not the rock found its mark. When one compares the physical sizes of the Executive Chef with the Australian helper; one knows, immediately, who is the master chef and who is the pupil, just by the profile of their tummies. It is a well-known fact that one of the dangers of being an excellent chef is that it tends to cause one to become a little rotund. Grandpa, of course, suffers from this problem, but that is not because of his cooking skills (of which he has none), but because he is used to sitting too long in one position. That is what happens to business people and diplomats, you know. But, anyway, this Austrian chef is out of the marriage market, having been scooped up long ago by a Burmese lady, who was looking for a domestic cook, as well as ... you know what, I don't have to explain, do I?*

*Well, I could go on and on about the food of these lovely people, but I am hungry, now.*

*Love you.*

*The Chief Lady of Hongkong*

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