



## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*It has been an absolute horror fortnight for me! I had to arrange everything for The March of The Discontented. These are the people of Hongkong who, once a year, take a walk down my streets, yelling this and that. It is, in reality, quite harmless, you understand, a type of carnival, an annual function for these little people. It has been going on for some years, but, quite unexpectedly (and without my permission), on Tuesday, July 1, 2003, while Grandpa was having his usual afternoon nap, he was raised from his slumbers by his aide de camp, who informed him that about one half a million people had taken to the streets – without his approval! Well, Grandpa could hardly have accommodated so many people in detention centres and prisons in Hongkong so he informed his ADC to let the matter ride. This year, however, I was well prepared for the annual walkabout of The (so-called) Hongkong Discontented. I had arranged for all traffic from Causeway Bay to Central Hongkong to be stopped between the hours of two o'clock and eight o'clock in the evening in order that the walkabout could take on the appearance of a carnival, or a charity walkabout. It worked much better than I had expected, actually. I had arranged, also, for there to be designated rest stops for the marchers because it was very hot, about thirty five degrees Celsius, during the height of the day. Also, at the designated rest stops, I had to arrange for medical treatment to be available, as well as the opportunity for the marchers to take pictures of themselves, as well as their co-walkers, in front of flora and fauna that lined the route. One of these designated rest stops was at Pacific Place where, my friends informed me, the restaurants and coffee shops did a roaring business in victualling and selling bottled water to the marchers. I had arranged for anybody, who looked too red in the face, to be given, freely, one bottle of water by my police, who patrolled the walkers ... just in case any of them became a little too vocal or fainted or .... Grandpa was all in favour of my efforts to make the walkabout a family affair, but he forbade me to be visible on the walkabout. I suppose the poor dear was concerned that I would become too easy a target for democratic terrorists. Also, he reminded me that, when I went to visit the patients of **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)** at the hospitals in April, last year, wearing my newly designed bubble gown – so that I would not catch any of those horrid germs – nobody appreciated my efforts. I was, I suppose you could say, the female Éminence Grise (of the walkabout: The woman behind the man, if you will).*

*What disturbed me a lot though was that horrible Legislative Councillor Emily Lau Wai Hing, who went on television to state that she hoped that as many as one million people would follow her in the walkabout. For what reason would so many people want to follow her? Now, if I had called for one million people to go for a walk with me, I would imagine that most of the population of Hongkong would turn up. But follow the fifty-two year old Emily Lau! Huh! And she only sits on two public service panels, too: The Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Council and the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council. I, on the other hand, have so many positions and functions that I have to fulfill that I have to have a personal secretary to inform me of which day I have to go where. Life is very difficult when one sits atop the pile, you know. I hope that this walkabout can continue to be an annual affair so that it will attract tourists to Hongkong. As it was, I noted that there were some Europeans among the marchers. Unluckily for me, however, they did not join in the singing and dancing of the other marchers. On the other hand, I was happy that they took the time to snap some photographs*

*of themselves, as they walked through the streets of my town. I, also, had the police take pictures of the marchers in order that, in the future, I may look back at my handiwork. The March of The Discontented will be the only time of the year that I can block off large slices of the territory in order that the walkabout may proceed, unencumbered. I suppose, in the fullness of time, The March of The Discontented will be looked upon, internationally, in the same way as the New York Marathon is considered a time for fun and games as well as an athletic competition. I was a little perturbed, however, to learn that less than half a million people turned up because, really, I had been well prepared for a much greater number than five hundred thousand boys and girls. I am happy to report that nobody died or was badly damaged in the walkabout. For my people, the walkabout, which I estimated to be about ten miles in length in all, it was a time to give thanks for all that I and Grandpa have done for our home.*

*And, with that, I must close for the day because your Grandpa wants to take me to dinner with one of the richest men in town. This is my one chance to see whether or not a Shanghainese can out-bargain a Canadian Jew. I'll tell you how I do in one of my subsequent letters.*

*Love you,*

*The Chief Lady of Hongkong*

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