



## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I have always maintained that the higher up the ladder of success I go, the more humble I must appear to be in front of my underlings. Humility of appearance has, always, been one of my strongest points, you know. I maintain that even if one does not feel humble in the presence of inferiors, one should, nevertheless, give an appearance of humility. In politics, it is dreadfully important to appear to be humble, otherwise one will never be pushed up the hierarchical ladder. How in the world do you think Grandpa got to his present position? It, certainly, was not because of his ability or his good looks! It was I, his mentor, who drummed into him: 'Try to look humble and bumbling, otherwise Beijing will be frightened of you!' What I never imagined, however, was that, in addition to the appearance of humility, Grandpa was very deserving of that nomenclature. I married him, just the way he is, today, with all of his foibles and other faults. I should not complain about my lot. It would be correct to state that the finished product is not too dissimilar to the sample that I received some years ago. It is his luck that he has a wife to lead him down the road to success. As the saying goes, the success of a man relies on the woman who stands behind him, pushing him in the correct direction. Now, it would be fair to state that Grandpa and I share similar opinions about most things, my dear. If ever he does not agree with me over an important issue, all I have to do is to wave my little index finger in his direction in a gesture which, when translated, means: 'You have but one minute to agree.' While people, such as we, are innately humble and never flaunt knowledge and erudition, not all professionals share this same philosophy. Recently, Mary, who is my manicurist, told me of her experience with a solicitor. Mary was attending some kind of briefing in Hongkong and had the choice of many seats in the briefing room because it was not very well attended. Being a polite Chinese lady, she enquired of a gentleman, seated in one row, whether or not a certain seat was occupied. The Chinese man, who turned out to be a solicitor, she discovered, roughly said to Mary: 'Go and sit somewhere else!' Mary was shocked, but, being a lady, she quietly went away, reasoning that just because one solicitor was uncouth and rude, there was no reason for her to stoop to such a low level. After she told me of her unfortunate experience, I asked Grandpa if such things were common in Hongkong. To my surprise, he told me that the solicitors of Hongkong, as well as many of the barristers, too, are among the rudest of the rude in the territory. At first, I doubted the veracity of Grandpa's statement, but, then, I remembered that turncoat barrister and his trip to Washington D.C., and determined that Grandpa could well be correct. This is a shocking state of affairs, really, because, although solicitors are only tradesmen, in point of fact, barristers are supposed to be professionals and, as such, they should set an example in the same way that I and Grandpa set an example for others to follow. I shall not dwell on the rudeness of barristers, today, but I shall tell you something that I do know about Hongkong solicitors. To begin with, most of them are terrible spellers of the English language. Their knowledge of sentence syntax is, also, appalling, most of the time. Grandpa calls their language 'Chinglish' because it is somewhere in between English and Chinese, but leaning more on Chinese than English. Since language is the principal tool of a solicitor, it seems to me that Hongkong solicitors have good and valid reasons to be humble. As I always maintain: The professional person who is humble has good and valid reasons to be so; and, the professional person who is proud, has to have a very good and valid reason to be so. When I first went to school in England, a few years ago, I was given the school rule book, which contained such things as the dress*

*code for certain occasions, the manner in which one had to address one's elders and seniors, what one was expected to do in the company of elderly people, while riding on public transportation, and how to eat politely in restaurants and in the school cafeteria. That little booklet set the pace for me and my schoolmates and, even today, I recall the importance of such simple rules as: Respect one's elders; Be polite to all people; Observe etiquette, decorum and social conventions, etc, etc, etc. Just because I have risen up through the ranks of Hongkong society, it does not give me licence to be rude or insensitive to the feelings of others, does it? The learning of good manners starts at home with one's parents, who should influence their children by example. When I heard about the rude solicitor, it struck me that (a) maybe he never had a family education, having been born into low-life by circumstances of birth (b) he never had a mother or father, but was strained through a linen handkerchief (c) his mother and father were, always, as rude as he is, and, as such, he adopted his parents' acerbity, or (d) he had adopted certain personality attributes, most common in cities, such as London, England, where the so-called upper class are devoid of chins. In an effort to be constructive in my criticism, I had a thought: Would it not be a good idea to send a letter to the Hongkong Solicitors' Guild (or whatever they call themselves), suggesting that either the Guild's Secretary General gives solicitors rules of social etiquette or, alternatively, publishes a booklet on the rules to be followed by members of the Guild. After all, when a solicitor goes to Court, he is required to dress in a certain fashion, is he not? And he is required, also, to show respect to the Court and its adjudicator/magistrate/judge. For what reason, therefore, should not a solicitor observe social convention outside the Court? Let me put it to you this way: If your son or daughter acted poorly in the street, would you not come down hard, immediately? Of course, you would! And Hongkong should come down hard on solicitors, who act more like ruffians than gentlemen and gentle ladies. Think about it, My Dear Grandchild, and know that I only say this because I love you and my people ... in reverse order, of course.*

*The Chief Lady of Hongkong*

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