



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I am writing to you, today, from aboard The Crystal Serenity, a luxury cruise ship, owned by the Japanese shipping company, NYK Line. Now, NYK Line is not as big as Grandpa's shipping company, but it is not a bad size, considering the average stature of the Japanese. The Crystal Serenity is eight hundred and twenty feet long and moves through the water at twenty knots. I am one of one thousand passengers, but, of course, the commoners pay homage to me when I enter the Crystal Dining Room, which is where I make my grand entrance in the evenings in order to let the commoners know that The Chief Lady of Hongkong has arrived. (It is always a good idea to allow subjects to see their queen, because the queen cannot see all of her subjects). This newly built ship is reputed to be the finest vessel of its kind, plying the oceans of the world. I, of course, demanded, and obtained, Penthouse Suite 1101A. While reconnoitering the ship in Los Angeles, California, there was no such number as Penthouse Suite 1101A, so I had the ship's Hotel Director, Mr Herbert Jäger, change the number of the largest penthouse accommodation, measuring about two thousand square feet, to my number. I was shocked on the first leg of the journey, which was the voyage, named The Polynesian Tradewinds, because the sea was very rough, with swells of more than six feet at times. At the bon voyage dinner at the Beverly Hills Hotel, on the eve of our departure from Long Beach, Los Angeles, I had a long talk with the Captain, a Mr Glenn Edvardsen, whom you might have realised, by the sound of his name, is not a Chinese, and instructed him, very assiduously, to make certain that the ship maintained a smooth, straight and level course through the water because I do not like to get seasick. When I travel on Cathay Pacific Airways, I always talk to the head pilot and tell him to be certain that there is no jerking of the aeroplane: Maintain a straight and level course, I order. Cathay Pacific is a Hongkong airline and, I, being the Chief Lady of Hongkong, have a great deal of clout on this carrier. But Captain Glenn Edvardsen, who is a Norwegian (Norwegians are that hardy race of people who take baths in the snow, start life fishing and sailing in the fjords, and are known to drink to much on occasion), is not one of my people and, as such, I cannot order him around in the manner that I can command pilots of Cathay Pacific, or my other people of Hongkong who work in the civil service. That was, probably, the reason that this Norwegian became rather rebellious, at first, as soon as we started to leave American waters. I met him in one of the corridors on a rough night when the ship was rocking around, much too much, with many senior passengers, having to take seasick pills, cancelling their dinners, and I had very harsh words with him. I said: 'You don't keep your promises to the Government of Hongkong! Do you have any idea as to the importance of the passenger, now residing in Penthouse Suite 1101A? You change your ways ... or else! You know, I have important friends in Beijing.' Captain Glenn Edvardsen replied: 'I shall try to do better in the future, Chief Lady Betty. I promise, faithfully.' And he did. I assume that my stentorian outbursts resulted in his realising who I was and the power that I could wield. In the North Pacific, The Crystal Serenity cut through the blue waters as a hot knife cuts through soft butter. I saw Captain Glenn Edvardsen in one of the fancy restaurants aboard the ship. The restaurant is named Prego. It was just after we passed the equator. I said to him: 'Well done! Your driving skills are improving. Keep up the good work, Captain!' He bowed and then replied: 'Your wish is my command.' And, with that, I dismissed him, permitting him to kiss my hand on his departure.

So you see, My Dear Grandchild, even foreigners can be trained and tamed, just like any other man, Grandpa notwithstanding.

*I shall be writing to you in the weeks to come, telling you of my sea voyage aboard this floating five-star hotel.
Love to all of my people,*

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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