



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I suppose you know by now that Grandpa had to resign from the top post in his 'company' because his health is starting to fail him. For a man, age takes its toll, but luckily, for a woman, it doesn't really matter because, as with good wine, age makes it better tasting. The company's policy, which affects Grandpa, is that, when a man reaches the age of sixty five years, he should consider retirement and take up a position as a consultant in a toothless entity in Beijing. Grandpa has reached that level, now. It is no secret, any more, to tell you the reason I decided to take this cruise. I have been preparing Grandpa for the day when he stepped down in order to allow a younger and more vital person to place upon his head, the miter of office. Grandpa can, now, enjoy his life and not be bothered by the so-called democrats of Hongkong. He may, also, openly refuse to talk to this bunch of blowhards. As for me, I do not have to deal with so many complaints, complaints and complaints. And, nobody will be so ignorant as to laugh at my attire in visiting a hospital and looking at the people, infected by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

With the change in my life, I had to look at my own position as a Shanghainese lady of note in Hongkong. I have decided that it would be advantageous for Hongkong to move closer to Maldives. I intend to bring up the matter at the next session of the National People's Congress (I am familiar with many of the members, you know, with most of the well-informed, Shanghainese ladies, telling me what their husbands are planning). Grandpa is a member in good standing of the Chinese Communist Party and I am able to view his private communication with Beijing whenever I like – especially when Grandpa is asleep, which is quite often these days.

The Crystal Serenity stopped at Male, the Capital City of Maldives, on March 23, 2005, at three o'clock in the afternoon, and we all went on one of the one thousand, one hundred and ninety low-lying coral atolls (islands) for a bonfire evening's entertainment, sans alcohol. The Maldives' Government adheres, strictly, to Islamic Law, requiring the three hundred thousand inhabitants to pray five times a day, among other things, not to drink alcohol, not to engage in fornication, not to gamble, and not to steal – otherwise, off with the thief's hand. The country has only been independent for the past forty years, according to Mr Ismail Asim, Sales Manager of Dhivehi Raajjeyge Gulhun Private Ltd, which is the local telephone company, fifty five percent owned by the Government of Maldives and forty five percent owned by Cable and Wireless plc (of London, England). Mr Ismail Asim, if you have not yet realised it, is part of the Maldives' Government by virtue of his position. He was delighted to talk to me. As you can understand, there are many attributes of Maldives that are complementary to my thinking, as former Chief Lady of Hongkong. Maldives has a President and I have Grandpa, who follows my orders. Maldives has great potential because it only gets about six hundred thousand tourists per year. Hongkong, on the hand, boasts of having more than two million tourists per month. The average per capita income of Maldives is about two thousand American dollars. (In Maldives, a three hundred pound, yellow-fin tuna sells, directly, from the fishing boat at three American dollars). Would you believe it? If Hongkong took over Maldives, in a similar fashion as the Motherland took over the old, British Colonial Hongkong and renamed it the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, it could be made into a Special Indian Ocean Administrative Region and, naturally, Beijing would grant it a similar status as Hongkong: One-Country, Three-Systems instead of One-Country, Two-Systems. The history of Maldives is that, in 1965, it achieved independence as a sultanate, and, in 1968, the people of Maldives voted to establish a republic. The Maldives rejoined the Commonwealth of Nations in 1982. The Government of the Republic of Maldives, since independence, has been dominated by Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who first became President in 1978 and was

sworn in for his sixth term in 2003. Criticised by human rights organisations for his firm control over freedom of expression, and response to dissent, his long Presidency has not been without crises, including coup d'état attempts. A serious crisis flared up in 1988 when Indian troops were called in to foil a coup d'état attempt by Tamil mercenaries and, in 2003, a report by Amnesty International commented on the arbitrary imprisonment of political rivals and critics amid other accusations of human rights abuses.

Maldives only has political representation in five countries of the world so that China could show it the way forward. Grandpa, who is, now, out of actual work, could become Beijing's representative in Male. I could get back to being the Chief Lady, again, and could start to organise street clean-ups. This time around, of course, I would be Chief Lady of Maldives instead of Chief Lady of Hongkong. There would be many advantages to my new position, one of which would be to have quite a number of brown people, buzzing here and there, fetching this and that for me. As Chief Lady of Maldives, I would be chief of more than one thousand islands instead of just the few islands of Hongkong. I would have to do something about the shopping in Maldives, however, because there are no good departmental stores in Male. Wumart, the Beijing supermarket conglomerate, could move in, in order to monopolise the market, almost immediately. Which reminds me that I must buy some shares in Wumart Stores Incorporated, which are listed on The Stock Exchange of Hongkong Ltd. That would make me, not just the Chief (political) lady, but, also, the biggest and best business tycoon of Maldives. One problem that I envisage is the matter of language. Shanghainese has not yet been introduced to the mainly Sunni Muslim population, but I shall change all that. I intend to make it the second language in Maldives schools, initially, and the official language in a few years. I am not quite sure, though, whether or not the Q'ran can be written in the Shanghainese dialect and the brownies of Maldives may have trouble in learning this important language.

Well, must go to get a tan, now. I am in the Indian Ocean and shall write to you about Egypt in my next letter. Love you.

Chief Lady

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