



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Over the Christmas holidays, I dragged my frog of a husband, Bo-Bo, over to The Land of The Rising Sun and forced him to stay at a 300 year-old, Japan inn, called (ryokan) The Tawaraya. It is located in the commercial heart of Kyoto, about one hour's ride from Osaka. Of course, Bo-Bo objected and, then, screamed like the child that he is at the idea of going to Japan, initially, and to stay in a completely wooden structure, which is 300 years old and contains just 18 rooms, resulted in him pouting for the entire trip in the aeroplane from Hongkong International Airport to Osaka Kansai Airport. 'Japanese people don't speak English and they don't eat Chinese food,' he kept muttering under his breath, during the 4-hour journey from Hongkong to Japan. 'And they eat a lot of eat raw fish, most of the time. It gives me a lot of gas. I want my congee for breakfast with yuk sung!' However, when we arrived at The Tawaraya, his mood changed, appreciably. To begin with, a number of the ryokan's staff, all of whom, of course, were Japanese nationals, managed to speak a little English and, for those who could not speak English, they were able to understand the written Chinese word. Our set of rooms, named Midori, comprised a sitting room, a little garden room, a changing room, a toilet, whose seat was electrically warmed, a bathroom, complete with an hinoki bathtub (a bathtub, made completely of Japanese cypress wood), and an entrance hall. Everything surprised and delighted Bo-Bo – until I told him that the daily cost for the 2 of us was about \$HK11,000. Upon hearing the room cost, he flew into another of his stupid rages, stating that because of his status as a politician of the Middle Kingdom, he should have been accorded a free stay at the Japanese inn. I paid scant attention to The Frog's ravings and reminded him that things in the night change one's feelings. His eyes opened a little wider (silly man!) and, then, he continued with a huff: 'But it does not alter the fact that this wooden hotel is costing me nearly \$HK500 per hour!' When dinner was served on the first night of our stay, in addition to a number of raw fish dishes, there was a pot of duck stew. The Frog dived in lest the delectable duck stew vanished in a puff of Japanese smoke. And, I am happy to report to you, My Dear Grandchild, he fell asleep that first night with a full belly and a smile on his face.

The first morning saw The Frog up at 6:30 am, banging his head on the 5-foot archway that connected the tatami sleeping area of our rooms from the toilet. 'What is going on, here! Why is the ceiling so low?' I heard him scream out. After doing what comes naturally in the early morning, the next order of business was his wanting to learn what would be on the menu for breakfast. It turned out to be pickles, raw fish, steamed tofu, rice, a clam broth, and a little fresh fruit. His face turned ashen at the sight of the meal. As soon as our maid had left the room, he turned to me and was about to explode when I said: 'I know that there is this lovely bakery just down the road. I have been told that the cakes and coffee at this bakery are the best in the city.' He was dressed soon after learning about the bakery. Off came the yukata, which was supplied by The Tawaraya, and on went his Western garb, complete with a fur hat and anorak. Then, it was off in search of his second breakfast. About one hour later, I found a bakery-cum-coffee shop (I had lied to him that I knew of such a place, actually) and The Frog was hot to trot for his bread and cakes and hot coffee. While in the bakery, he had to go to use the toilet – he has a weak bladder, if you recall. He stayed in the toilet for the best part of 15 minutes. I thought that something was terribly wrong, but he emerged from the upstairs room with a smile on his face and told me of the toilet seat, which was electrically heated, and

of the warm water that, at the touch of a button, washed one's bum. It seemed that my dear husband had been sitting on his throne, playing with the buttons of a Toto toilet, washing his bottom and, then, drying it, electrically, with forced, warm air, blown around his nether region. What a child! I went into the toilet after him to confirm his investigations. For a change, he was correct. These Japanese! But The Frog's elation with a Toto toilet paled when he learned that The Tawaraya did not serve any lunch. 'What!' The Frog yelled at me. 'I am paying \$HK500 per hour for a set of rooms, a handkerchief garden, and I only get 2 meals per day! It's not fair! I am being cheated!' It was then that I told him that I had planned to treat him to a soba luncheon – with my money! 'Soba: What's that?' he asked. I told him that it was a kind of noodle, made from a soba seed (actually, it is a kind of buckwheat flour, but the name that I gave to the main ingredients of the noodle – soba seed – titillated The Frog's taste buds). Down by the Takano River that runs through Kyoto, there is a plethora of little noodle shops and it was there that I was able to placate my fat frog of a husband with his 'Shanghai-type' of Japanese noodle. On leaving the restaurant as the sun was beginning to set on the horizon, The Frog started to shiver. I did not blame the poor dear because the temperature had fallen to about 6 degrees Celsius. With the promise of a hot bath in a hinoki bathtub, he rushed back to The Tawaraya. After soaping himself down so that he looked like a naked, fat Santa Claus minus the traditional, red Santa suit and, then, rinsing off the soap, he jumped into the bathtub, causing about one third of the water to splash out of the tub. The temperature of the water was about 40 degrees Celsius, so, that, within minutes, The Frog had turned a bright red colour ... with the exception of one small appendage which seemed almost to have disappeared. His bulbous, red nose, floating on the surface of the water, was the most-prominent protrusion of his body because, sad to say, parts of him shrink when immersed in water for too long a period of time. He emerged from his bath, dried himself, and then changed into his freshly washed and ironed yukata. He sat down to watch the news of the day on a very tiny television set which was hidden in a little wooden box in the living room ... and he was at peace with the world.

Dinner arrived at 7:30 pm, sharp. It was a 3-hour affair, but the first course comprised only about a teaspoonful of raw fish, a bowl of clear soup and some pickles. He looked at me as though to say: 'You see this? Are you trying to starve me to death!' I just pointed my index finger at him and told him to wait because more food was on the way. And, as sure as most men are fools, more food did arrive, one dish after another. However, most of the dishes were of fish, all different kinds of fish, some of which I had never seen before. On the tenth course, The Frog's tummy was visibly distended: He had over-eaten – as is his wont. He was, also, nodding off – which was, also, his wont when he is satiated. As the table was being cleared of the dishes, we moved to the garden room and sipped on some green tea while our maid prepared our sleeping area on the tatami. The scene looked very inviting and it did not take The Frog very long before he fell asleep and was snoring loudly. Thus ended the second night at this charming Japanese inn.

Next week, I shall tell you of some of my other observations of Japan, the land of polite and very clean people, but where husbands do not say to their wives: 'I love you.'

Chief Lady

***While TARGET makes every attempt to ensure accuracy of all data published,
TARGET cannot be held responsible for any errors and/or omissions.***

*If readers feel that they would like to voice their opinions about that which
they have read in **TARGET**, please feel free to e-mail your views to
editor@targetnewspapers.com. **TARGET** does not guarantee to publish
readers' views, but reserves the right so to do subject to the laws of libel.*