

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Continuing with my adventures in The Land of The Rising Sun, when I was in Kyoto over the Christmas holidays, I learned that there is a special men's club, devoted to teaching Japanese husbands how to hold onto their wives and to save wonky marriages. It seems that Japanese husbands never, or rarely, say to their wives: 'I am sorry'; 'Thank You'; and/or 'I love you.' So, this club is a kind of school where the exclusive male members practice uttering those 3 declarative sentences. In The Tawaraya, the 300 year-old ryokan in which I stayed for 3 days, I asked my maid whether or not she was married and, if so, did her husband ever say to her those 3 sentences. First, she told me that she was not married, but she had been living with her lover for some years and that her live-in lover would never dream of saying that he loved her, would never say 'sorry', and he has yet to thank her for anything, during the entire time that they had been together. She said: 'Japanese men do not say such things. They expect their wives, or lovers, to look after them and, perhaps, from time to time, they may call them, "honey". But that is as far as an endearment goes.'

According to the report that I read, the father of one of the members of this newly formed gentlemen's club for the preservation of Japanese wives and marriages, he does not mind his son, telling his wife that he is sorry for some trivial matter, or even thanking his wife for making him a nice meal, but saying something, such as, 'I love you', is way over the top. Armed with this knowledge, I took Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, for a walk around Kyoto in order to ascertain whether or not the report about this men's club was accurate. I can assure you, My Dear Grandchild, it is true. Here are some of my personal observations. In a restaurant, specialising in serving grilled eels along the banks of the Takano River, I observed an elderly Japanese couple, just finishing their luncheon. The husband (he appeared to be about 50 years old so I assumed that he was the husband of the lady with whom he shared a table), having paid the bill, rose from his chair and started out of the restaurant – without looking back at his wife. She, quickly, packed up her things, grabbed her overcoat and followed her husband who, by this time, was about 30 feet from the table. Shocking! The Frog laughed at the scene: 'Now you see just how lucky you are being married to me.' After that outburst, The Frog learned to repeat, daily: 'I love you.' 'I am sorry.' 'Thank you.' This is a lesson for you, My Dear Grandchild: A lady has something that all men want and, if a lady threatens to withhold that thing, she is bound to win any fight. Anyway, to continue with my survey about Japanese men. In the train ride between Kyoto Station and Osaka Kansai Airport, we sat in seats in a reserved area in what is known as an Express Train. In Compartment Number One, there was an elderly Japanese couple, seated in the front of the compartment. They spoke not one word, during the entire trip. Then, just before arriving at their stop – the train stops 4 times before arriving at the airport – up jumped the man and stood by the door of the train, waiting for it to stop. The wife (I assumed that she was the wife), realising that she was missing something – in this case, her husband – quickly gathered her belongings, comprising her coat, handbag and a large plastic bag of goods, and followed her husband out of the train at a distance of about 20 feet to his rear. I thought to myself: 'My God! What would happen if the wife fell down? The husband would be unaware of the matter!' I turned to Bo-Bo: 'Did you see that?' He replied: 'I love you.' 'I'm sorry. Thank you.' At last, he had learned something.

Which brings me to the crux of the matter, raised in this letter: Is it time that we, in Hongkong, become proactive and form a club for the preservation of Chinese wives and their marriages? The Japanese, marriage model is repugnant to me, as it should be to you, and it seems obvious that many Japanese ladies are rebelling at their lot, having to suffer a subservient role in the Japanese feudalistic society of the 21st Century as well as playing second fiddle to the men of their lives. Women have the same rights as men, as far as I am concerned, and it is clear that men can be trained, just like any dog or other domesticated

animal. Look at Bo-Bo: He is fully trained now. If I look at him with daggers in my eyes, he, instinctively, says the 3 magic sentences: 'I am sorry.' 'I love you.' 'Thank you.' I have even been teaching him to take out the rubbish in the mornings. I did not have to threaten him, but just said something along the lines that I would appreciate his help ... 'if you are willing to volunteer it.' His response, invariably: 'Thank you for this opportunity.'

Well, think about starting a Hongkong chapter of the Japanese men's club, will you?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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