

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

When the Iran Air check-in counter opened at Vienna International Airport with regard to Flight IR716, bound for Teheran, prior to the first passenger, presenting a ticket to the Airport's employee, 2 tall Iranians in black lounge suits entered through the narrow passageway of the check-in kiosk and stood behind the Airport employee, almost menacingly. The lounge suits started to interrogate the first passenger – after shaking his hand, of course. It was Saturday, January 3, 2009, and the Iranian-owned aeroplane had bookings, amounting to it being about 26 percent full – or 74 percent empty, depending how you looked upon the situation. I found it strange that the Airport's employees had been upstaged by these Iranian lounge suits so, when they left with the first passenger in tow, I went over to have a talk with the Airport's check-in employee. What I learned was very interesting. He told me, quietly – he kept watching out for the return of the Iranian lounge suits, by the way, all the time that he was talking to me – that this situation is quite common because Iran does not want certain people, sneaking into the country and causing trouble to the Administration of the Muslim leadership. 'They (meaning the lounge suits) are very strict,' said the employee, 'and I have to do everything that they tell me, otherwise I will not have a job by the next morning.' The employee, then, said that he had been warned never to go against the lounge suits in any decision that they make, right or wrong. 'They are a kind of political "police", you know,' the employee explained. Then, the lounge suits returned and I was waved away with a facial gesture of the employee lest the lounge suits caused the employee trouble. At this point in my story, along came a family of 3 people, all Iranians, wanting to check in. The materfamilias was holding a new electric kettle, made in Japan, which was, still, in its original cardboard box. After weighing the family's check-in luggage, the Airport employee was just about to hand a boarding pass to the paterfamilias when one of the lounge suits quickly interceded, snatching away the boarding pass and demanding to know what the materfamilias had in the cardboard box, the outside of which was a picture of an electric kettle. Having received a response as to the contents of the box, the lounge suit said that, since hand-carry luggage is restricted to a weight, per person, of 8 kilogrammes, then, the cardboard box would have to be included in the overall weight of the hand-carry luggage. The materfamilias, then, turned to her husband, quizzically, as though to state: 'What am I to do?' The paterfamilias suggested that the new electrical kettle and its box be checked in with the other single suitcase in order to avoid being overweight and, thus, incurring an added cost, with regard to the limit of the hand-carry bag. This suggestion was rejected by the lounge suit who, after learning that the weight of the electric kettle plus its box was less than 2 kilogrammes, demanded that the family pay a certain sum of money as a penalty for being overweight with regard to the hand-carry luggage. Then, with another handshake, a lounge suit escorted the family of 3 adults to another window on the opposite side of the Airport where a cash payment was made. The trio of Iranians plus the lounge suit then returned to the Iran Air check-in window, escorted by the lounge suit where, after another handshake, they were issued with a boarding passes and they all disappeared into the bowels of the Airport. The 2 lounge suits looked at each other as soon as the passengers were out of sight as a sign to the effect that they had done their duty well.

At this point, My Dear Grandchild, I suppose you are wondering as to the reason that I have told you this little story. It should be obvious to you that the lounge suits were, in fact, intelligence agents, checking up on

everybody, wanting to enter Iran. They reminded me of the situation in Germany, prior to the outbreak of World War II, when Gestapo agents were stationed at every point of entrance or egress of Nazi Germany. It is well known that very few Iranians, relative to the estimated, human population of the country – thought to be about 65 million, men, women and children – have the wherewithal to travel out of the country and, even for those with the available funds, the privilege of exit from the country is engrossed in an exit visa, only permitted to be issued by the appropriate authority of this fundamentalist country. Which means, of course, that there is no freedom of movement in Iran. And people complain about China! Huh! China is absolute Heaven, compared with the situation that exists in Iran, today, it seems to me. So what, exactly, do you think that the lounge suits were doing in Vienna on that Saturday afternoon at about 2 p.m.? It is simple, actually: The lounge suits had 2, diametrically opposing tasks: Determine who is to be permitted to enter Iran; and, who is to be permitted to enter Iran – permanently. In respect of the first consideration, the only question to be answered by the lounge suits is whether or not the passenger is wanted in Iran; and, in the case of the second consideration, the question is whether or not the passenger is wanted to enter Iran on a permanent basis – in prison, perhaps, or, underneath 6 feet of sod. How different this is to the way in which the Chinese Government operates. China does not employ lounge suits, just armed policemen who are very visible. China has more than 1.30 billion people so that lounge suits would be inefficient and far too costly whereas the Wujing (), with their weapons, dangling from their belts, strike fear into the hearts of those who would be naughty, given the opportunity. Also, at border crossings in China, there is no reason to question people as to the reason that they want to enter or exit the country because it is much easier to interrogate suspicious people in the quiet of a private room – and where there are no witnesses to view the proceedings. This is, approximately, what happens in Singapore at a place called, Hill Street, which is the headquarters of the (not-so-secret) police of the country. Singapore has its *modus operandi* with regard to wanted and unwanted people down to a fine art. Iran, clearly, still has a lot to learn about policing and being secret police. But one thing that the lounge suits have that China and Singapore does not have: They strike fear into everybody and anybody that shakes their hands. It is akin to the lioness, licking the flesh of the animal – that she is just about to eat.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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