



## The Betty Letters

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*When I was a younger girl, I always thought that, as soon as I got married, I would have a live-in partner to help in the matrimonial home, wiping the dishes after eating the evening meal that I prepared for him, helping me to make the bed in the mornings, cleaning the air-conditioning filters, from time to time, taking out the garbage in the mornings, doing the shopping when I was busy, and so on. But I have learned, over the years of my marriage, that, being a housewife has, in fact, increased my workload, considerably. When Bo-Bo comes home from the office, he plonks himself down in his favourite chair, turns on the television, and watches his programmes – while I am in the kitchen, giving orders for HIS evening meal. After dinner, what do you think Bo-Bo does? He goes right back to his chair and watches even more television – while I am in the kitchen, making certain that Gloria, the Filipina domestic, does the dishes properly. I talked to Bo-Bo just once about my displeasure as to my ever-increasing workload and he responded by explaining that it was the man's job to earn the money in order to keep the house, running smoothly, and it was the woman's job to supervise the house as she sees fit ... in the interests of harmony for all. Harmony, as far as Bo-Bo is concerned, is The Frog, being permitted to relax in the home in his favourite chair while I do all the work in the house. When we had our first child, it occurred to me, almost immediately, that the work gap had widened, considerably. Here was I, at least 3 times per night, changing the baby's nappies and/or breast feeding her – while Bo-Bo was complaining that I and the baby were making too much noise. He once said, to me: 'Betty, I must get at least 8 hours of sleep per night otherwise I cannot function in the office, during the day. So, keep it quiet in the middle of the night and tell our daughter to cry only in the daytime when I am at work, will you?' So, one day, I wrote down on a ledger all of the time that I spent in the home, working for Bo-Bo and our daughter and answering letters sent from various government departments about this and that. I, then, multiplied the resultant figure of hours, spent in household pursuits, by the average hourly wage of a person, engaged in menial tasks, such as gardening, cleaning, etc. To my astonishment, I discovered that I am worth at least as much as Bo-Bo, in terms of bringing in money to run the household, and, in some cases, his financial contribution to the home is, in fact, a deficit, compared with my input.*

*I presented my findings to Bo-Bo. He studied my calculations. He frowned. Then, he burst out laughing. Eventually, when he saw that I was furious, he said: 'I earn more than enough to run our house, clothe you and our daughter, pay for holidays, prepare for my retirement when I can no longer work, as well as save a sufficient amount of money to pay for our daughter's university education. Your contribution to the family, as you have scribbled on paper, is merely a notional value for menial tasks that you do around the house in accordance with your contract with me to be my wife and cleave unto me. What do you expect? Being paid for being a wife?' Now, I was furious, once again. So I said: 'Yes@! I want to be paid for my services because I am not appreciated, at all!' Now, Bo-Bo was getting very angry so I went to Phase II of my plan: I cried, loudly and hysterically. That did the trick. Men are lost when faced with a woman who is in tears. Two hugs and a few kisses later and Bo-Bo was mine. Having feigned to have washed my face and wiped away my tears, I sat down opposite my frog of a husband and told him a few facts about life. I told him that, when a woman gets married, her workload increases while the man's workload decreases. The female's*

*workload continues to increase disproportionately to that of the male in a marriage. And it was not fair. I told The Frog, at this point: 'I want equality. I don't want to be paid for my work, but I do want you to share the responsibility of running the home. And you are not doing very much to help me. You complain that you are tired the very moment that you return from the office. But I am not permitted to complain that I am tired – because you want your dinner within a certain number of hours that you return home.' The Frog was listening, intently, so I determined to consolidate my position a little more. 'Bo-Bo, if we hired a sufficient number of people to take the load off me, you would have to employ at least 3 additional people. At a monthly cost of, say, \$HK10,000 per person, it would cost you \$HK30,000 plus holidays, Mandatory Provident Fund contributions, and so on. I do the work, gladly, for no pay. But I am not appreciated by you. You say that this is a wife's position in the home ... and that is that. OK, then, I want you to stay at home and take up my responsibilities and I shall go out to work. Then, you will understand!'*

*Now, The Frog was worried because, among other things, I decided, once again, to allow a few tears to run down my cheeks. I was preparing to institute Phase II again – that is the Cry Phase – but he stopped me, saying: 'Let us continue this discussion at a nice restaurant, shall we?' (That meant Champagne, my favourite foods, and, since we would be passing some of my favourite shops, perhaps, even, a new diamond necklace and some new clothes.)*

*That night, after I had won the day, I nestled against The Frog's back and started to imagine life with my husband, sharing part of my workload. It was going to be Heaven on earth, I fantasized. The next night, however, there was The Frog, seated in his favourite chair, watching television – while I was in the kitchen, working my fingers to the bone, preparing HIS dinner. Nothing had changed with the exception of the jewellery that he had bought me the night before.*

*Where is justice in this world?*

*Talk to you next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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