

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

It seems that everybody and his cat are talking about drinking red wine, these days. I do not understand the reason that, suddenly and for no apparent reason, rich people want to buy red wine, mostly from France, and drink it in public in order to demonstrate to friends how savvy they have become of late. At a dinner party, recently, would you believe it but the main topic of conversation of the evening was French red wine. I sat quietly at the dinner table, daring not to say anything about red wine because, to tell the truth, I know absolutely nothing about the subject, especially those expensive red wines from France. I felt completely left out of the conversation as other people talked about the texture of certain expensive red wines, the acidity of them, the floral essence of them, the mellowness of the tannins, and so on and so on. I had no idea what these people were trying to say so I just sat still, occasionally nodding my head as though I agreed. When I was asked which wine I preferred, I replied that I liked to cook certain dishes with wine, but I usually used Chinese rice wine because it fitted Chinese cuisine so well. As for the name of the wine, I said that I bought it at the open market under the name of Chinese cooking wine. That caused the entire table to laugh for about 3 minutes. I smiled, thinking that I had cracked a good joke. But, that evening, Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, told me that the people at the party were laughing at me – not with me. I felt very depressed on learning this, of course. After that dinner party, The Frog said that, for the sake of fitting in with modern society, he should learn something about French wines. So, every time we went out to dinner, The Frog would order a bottle of French wine, mostly reds ('reds' is one of the new words that I have, recently, learned). I did not like the wines, at all, but The Frog said that I had to taste the reds in order to be able to gain a little knowledge of the subject. So, now, I know a whole lot of new words; Burgundy; Champagne; Bordeaux, Petrus; Penfolds; Pinot Noir; Moet et Chandon (also known as Mao Tse Tung []); Chateau; Pomerol, Bin ends; rosé, fins de clear, finesse, post-fermentation maceration (this has nothing to do with menopause, I hasten to add), fruity (this has nothing to do with homosexuality), and many other words, too. I, even, learned the Chinese names of many wines: Bordeaux (); Chateau Lynch-Bages (); Chateau Beycherelle (); Chateau Figeac (); Chateau Mouton Rothschild (); La Tache (); Chateau Talbot (); Chateau Angelus (); and, Meursault ().

Just the other day, I had a delivery of 10 cases of French reds, addressed to The Frog. I was informed, that evening, that all successful Hongkong people are collecting French reds, these days, and that the 10 cases that The Frog had bought was the result of his successful bid at a toffy wine auction. The fool paid more than \$HK500,000 for the reds. Can you imagine my anger at learning this! That is my budget for new dresses for at least 6 months. With dresses, I just secrete them in my closet and The Frog is never the wiser. But I did not know where to put the 10 cases of reds that The Frog had bought. They certainly cannot go in my closet: They would take up entirely too much room. A few evenings later, The Frog told me not to fret about finding a place for 'his' wines because he would be building a wine refrigerator in the home in order to store the reds. He said that he would be buying another 20 cases of wine in due course in order to increase his knowledge of French reds. Now, every few days, I am receiving telephone calls from wine merchants, suggesting wines that The Frog should buy, as well as supposed, wine-cellar experts, wanting to come to our home in order to decide the best position for a custom-made, wine cellar to be fitted to one of

the walls in 'my' living room. It was during one of the visits of one, wine-cellar expert that I learned the name 'Sub Zero'. This is an American manufacturer of very expensive refrigerators. In the past, I had thought that most refrigerators were made in Japan, but, now, my knowledge has been broadened to include the American-produced, Sub Zero brand. After the bespoke wine refrigerator was installed, The Frog was in his element. He had, by that time, purchased about \$HK2-million worth of French reds and spent another \$HK500,000 on the wine refrigerators. Now, The Frog can rattle off an entire vocabulary of French words and phrases, including, 'Oh! La La!' Mersay (that means, 'thank you', in French), kanyard (this means, 'duck', in French), mon amee (that means, in French, 'my friend'), bona swah (that means, in French, 'goodbye'), kraype soozzete (this is, in French, an orange-flavoured pancake), rouge (this means, in French, the colour, red), moost (this, in French, is nothing more than grape juice from which wine is made – or something like that), premier kroo (this is not the name of a prime minister and means, in French, the first press of the grapes – or something like that), and so on and so on. It is really very funny because, at one dinner at the house, The Frog was talking, sometimes in Shanghainese and, then, he would break out, using part of his French vocabulary. When one of his guests asked whether or not the wine refrigerator was Sub Zero, The Frog retorted in English: 'No, I keep the temperature at about 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Nothing so cold.' Even I knew that that was a terrible mistake so I whispered to The Frog that Sub Zero is the name of an American company that makes expensive refrigerators. Poor dear Frog! He turned, first white, then, a little shade of pink.

My Dear Grandchild, I cannot understand the reason that people in Hongkong want to stock up on French wines in their houses, almost as though the wine was a trophy that they had acquired. The Frog is married to me: That should be enough of a trophy for him. If your husband starts to talk to you about wine, beware! Because it could lead to him, spending a great deal of your money on the fermented grape juice. Also, I can assure you that the wine will take up a great of your wardrobe space. Stop him while you can! Otherwise you will be lost. There will be no more closet space left.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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