

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*When I was a little younger, I recall seeing ethnic Indian men, sitting on stools, outside jewellery shops, goldsmiths and factories in Hongkong. They, nearly always, held hockey sticks. These ethnic Indians, some of whom were very dirty, old, and very fat, were supposed to be the security men for the shops, goldsmiths and factories. I suppose, in those days, they would have been considered the armed security personnel, the hockey sticks, being their preferred weapon of choice. (Hockey is a very popular game on the Indian subcontinent, you know, and a smack from a hockey stick can knock out an eye.) In those days, there appeared to have been a kind of hierarchy among the ethnic Indian residents of Hongkong, somewhat along the lines that, at the top of the Indian tree, sat the Indian policemen. He was empowered by law to kill if needs be such. Then, down the tree to the next bough was the shotgun-carrying ethnic Indians, sitting outside banks. They were permitted to kill, also, if they could get within close range of a bank robber because, usually, they had poor eyesight and, anyway, the cartridges in the shotguns were known to contain only half the usual amount of gunpowder, recommended by the manufacturer. Then, down the tree to the lower bough, the hockey stick-carrying ethnic Indians sat outside jewellery shops and goldsmiths, leading to hockey stick-carrying Indians, sitting outside blocks of flats and factories, acting as security personnel (when they were awake, that is). And, at the very bottom of the tree were the ethnic Indian cleaners who carried brooms and mops. They were prevented by law from hitting anybody with their brooms and mops. In days of yore, ethnic Indians were feared by Chinese residents of Hongkong because, as policemen, they were, usually, very brutal, even though the English raj of Hongkong did not, exactly, subscribe or condone to such rudeness. However, what the eye does not see, the heart does not yearn. But you must cast your mind back about 50 years and visualise a hirsute, brown-skinned, ethnic Indian, either walking the beat or riding on a motorcycle, all bearing pistols, and consider how teenaged girls or boys must have perceived them, especially at crepusculum when it is difficult to identify dark shapes very accurately – except when the dark shape showed its teeth. And, then, if, suddenly, that dark shape were to display a set of large, gold-looking teeth from a distance, it would be enough to frighten the knickers off a young, impressionable girl – after she had peed in them, first, out of absolute fear. Today, gone are the days when fat, old and very sluggish ethnic Indians sat outside jewellery shops, or even acted as guards at factories of the territory. Actually, I am not sorry that those days are relegated to history. I was, always, very afraid to walk too close to those people. I used to think what would happen to me if one of those people were to grab me by the neck and drag me into his den. Yipes! I mentioned all this in passing to Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, one evening, and he said that the ethnic Indians had been replaced by modern methods, such as electronic surveillance equipment, pinhole cameras and silent alarm systems which, when activated, informed the local copshop of any unauthorised intrusion into an area or of any other kind of emergency. Also, he said that swami-looking Gurkhas, in some cases, have been employed as inside security people because they are very adept at using the kukri, a curved and very lethal knife which is the weapon of choice of all Gurkhas. The Frog said that a Gurkha with a kukri is a very dangerous foe. The Frog, also, murmured that some of the older ethnic Indians had left Hongkong, after having received British passports from the outgoing Hongkong Government under Governor Chris Patton. He, then, said something that was very funny. He explained that some of the young ethnic Indians, who had come to Hongkong over the past decade or so, had traded in*

*their traditional hockey sticks for motorcycles. ‘Somebody has to deliver the pizza, don’t they?’ The Frog said, jestingly. Then, I recalled that The Frog was correct. Nearly every day when I return home up Magazine Gap Road, there are ethnic Indians, straddled aboard motorcycles, scooting up Cotton Tree Drive, going in and out of the motor cars and, on what was once meant to be a seat for a passenger, there was an advertisement for pizza, emblazoned on a large tin box which, I suppose, is the storage box for hot pizzas. The reason that these ethnic Indians have to go quickly up and down Cotton Tree Drive is that they have to get to their assigned destinations while their cargoes of pizza are still hot. So, The Frog, for a change, is correct: The ethnic Indians of Hongkong have traded in their hockey sticks for motorcycles. This makes sense because, in India, more young men ride motorcycles than play hockey. When I was in Bombay, as it used to be called, some years ago, I noted seeing young and old men, riding locally made motorcycles, shooting up and down the dusty streets of this horribly dirty city, just dodging pedestrians by millimetres. They are very accomplished riders of these motorised contraptions. No wonder the owners and managers of Hongkong restaurants employ this type of person to make deliveries of food, using motorcycles. Having learned their art on the Indian subcontinent when they were teenagers, they must find, driving motorcycles in Hongkong a piece of cake (forgive the pun, it was quite unintentional).*

*But, then, I also recalled that some, not many mind you, ethnic Indians of Hongkong are employed by construction companies, digging up roads, laying down water pipes and sewage pipes, and pushing wheel barrows, laden with rubbish or bricks, during the heat of the day. I asked The Frog for an explanation. He said that the ethnic Indian, by and large, use a great deal of salt in their daily diet and that the high concentrates of sodium in their brown bodies – sodium is salt, by the way – means that they are able to retain more water than white-skinned people or even yellowish-skinned, Asian people. Also, because their skin is darker than most other races, this natural attribute has a tendency to permit them to withstand more heat than other homo sapiens, not to mention, of course, that they require less fluid intake, during the hottest times of the day, than many other races. This is something like a camel, The Frog explained. For employers of these ethnic Indians, there are the financial gains of having less work stoppages because these people do not have to stop work as much as others in order to hydrate themselves: Less water intake equals fewer work stoppages equals financial benefits for employers. The Frog said that he had read this from a scientific publication so he knew it must be true: Scientists, like English people, do not lie. It all makes admirable sense and the fact that it all has come from science and the annals of sociologists means that, as Charles Darwin claimed in the 19th Century, changes in species are the result of natural selection.*

*I wonder what the next development for Hongkong ethnic Indians will be. Something to ponder, don’t you think?*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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