

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, is too old to drive a motor car, any more. His knobbly knees, his swollen ankles, and his painful left hip makes it difficult for him to react quickly, any more. Age has caught up with him. He, nearly, had an accident, just yesterday, when driving out of our complex in Mid-Levels. I have told him, over and over again, to look left, then right, then left again before proceeding to turn left on Magazine Gap Road. Like all ageing men, he does not listen. So, I have decided to obtain the services of a chauffeur. I have started to interview young men for the position and, after talking to 6 candidates, I just cannot make up my mind. There was this young man from Shenzhen, who looked quite respectable, but he does not know how to brush his teeth. That is quite obvious. His teeth look horrible: Half yellow and half black. I could not make mention of the disgusting state of his teeth because that would have been contrary to Hongkong law. So, I asked him whether or not he smoked. He replied that he did. That was that! I told him that our household does not employ smokers because my husband suffers from asthma. It was a lie, of course, but I could not get myself into trouble with the Equal Opportunities Commission. Heavens! There may be such a thing as Habit Discrimination or, even, Smoker Discrimination, just like there is Race Discrimination, Religious Discrimination and Age Discrimination.

Another candidate for the position of chauffeur was a very good-looking young man of about 30 years. He spoke both Shanghainese and English, very well. He was, I thought at first, a very promising candidate for the job of the family chauffeur. (I cannot stand the nomenclature, 'driver', because it is such a common description of a servant, don't you agree?). But before I could continue with the interview, he asked: 'How much you pay me, ma'am?' Now, I was suspicious!!! He used the word, 'ma'am'. Only certain people would use that word. I asked him, immediately, if he could speak Tagalog, too. That is the national language of The Philippines, you know. He did not want to answer, at first, but, when pressed, he said that it was, in fact, one of the languages of the family. He turned out to be the love-child of a Chinese father and a Filipina mother. I questioned, in my mind: What Shanghainese gentleman would marry the family maid? I know that I was wrong to think in this manner, but I could not help myself. Shanghainese gentlemen are very proud and it is very rare that they would deign to fornicate with a servant, especially a Filipina one. Although, at the same time, they would not think twice to fornicate with a Shanghainese prostitute. As the proverb goes: Wood to Wood; Bamboo to Bamboo (). A person of rank would choose only a person of equal rank before indulging in anything, be it moral or immoral. Put another way in the language of The Frog: Noblesse Oblige – privilege entails responsibility. Also, I thought, it is said that the apple does not fall far from the tree so I decided that this candidate might have inherited some genes of his Shanghainese father, genes that I would consider unwanted ones.

That evening, I talked over the matter of employing a chauffeur with The Frog and asked for his opinion. 'Look, I don't think we even need "a chauffeur", as you put it,' he said. 'I am still able to drive. What would Beijing say if it leaked out that we had hired a chauffeur – while the Mayor of Shenzhen still has to take public transport or drive himself?' I replied by stating that the Mayor of Shenzhen is not 77 years old, he does not live in Mid-Levels, he does not have knobbly knees and swollen ankles and a bad hip. The Frog

could not be stopped, at this point, however: 'As for this Filipino from Mindanao, I see nothing wrong with the fact that he speaks 3 languages. What might be of some concern to you is that he might be like his mother who, clearly, enjoys – or did enjoy – indulging in horizontal exercises. By the way, does he know how to fire a gun?' It, then, occurred to me that The Frog was getting afraid that somebody might try to kidnap him and hold him for ransom. It was the first inkling that I had ever had that The Frog had a fear of being kidnapped. He had ordered, some time earlier, that steel bars be installed on all of our windows and doors as well as the balcony, having been enclosed. 'You are not sufficiently wealthy to be the target of a kidnapper,' I told The Frog. 'In fact, if you were kidnapped, you would be a terrible burden to kidnapper because you eat too much and talk too much.' I, then, went back to the subject of employing a chauffeur and asked if he had any preference. He said that it might not be a bad idea to talk to the People's Liberation Army because they are known to be training young females to join the army. 'I have no intention of allowing you to be near a strange female, in or out of uniform,' I said with firm conviction. 'This is Hongkong not the Shanghai of the 1930s.' The Frog was not amused at this remark. 'You claim that I am too old to drive,' he started up again. 'If you are correct, then, perhaps, I am too old to be a threat to your monopoly of my body, fat as you claim it is, knobbly knees and all.' I reminded him of the Scottish Jock-and-Jean joke that went along the lines that, on taking Jean home after a dinner at a posh restaurant, Jock stopped to kiss Jean and, then, embraced her close to him. Jean, promptly, pushed Jock away. Jock said: 'Is it the gleam in me eye that you're afraid of, my little Jean?' 'Nay!' replied Jean. 'It's not the gleam in your little eyes, Jock, it the little tilt in your kilt.'

Men are all the same, as far as I am concerned, and they should never be trusted when the sap is rising. 'No,' I decided, 'our chauffeur has to be male of about 30 years, good looking, respectable, muscular, well-mannered and willing to take orders from me, at all times. I shall be his boss and I shall keep a tight rein on him. And he must be single, too. He must fit into the uniform that I shall buy for him: I like slim, strong men. My mind is made up.'

I am certain, My Dear Grandchild, that you agree with me. After all, if it were your decision, what kind of chauffeur would you want to employ?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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