

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I am not very happy, today, because Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, is, clearly, no longer the man that I thought that I had married. I have only just come to this conclusion – and it distresses me, greatly, I must admit to you. This is what happened to make it imperative for me to make this affirmation. It all started when I told The Frog, one evening after dinner: ‘You know, Bo-Bo, ideas come before execution.’ The Frog sat up straight in his favourite armchair almost to the second that I had uttered my statement. He looked precipitantly terrified. Quickly, he turned off the television and proclaimed: ‘We are married! I have, always, been loyal to you!’ Of course, I was shocked by this announcement and, immediately, I realised that he must have done something very wrong, something about which he felt guilty. I asked him if he would like to volunteer his concerns to me and bear his soul, using the term, ‘The truth will set you free’. But he just said that he had been surprised by my statement about ideas, coming before execution, and thought that I was referring to something that he did, that ‘something’, being that which he had forgotten or, in the alternative, a ‘something’ that he had failed to execute. Satisfied – but still suspicious, by the way – I continued with my proposition about ideas and the execution of ideas. ‘I recall when we were in Wellington, New Zealand,’ I started, ‘that we observed that seagulls, making a mess on the rocks on the seashore. At first, we thought that the birds were defecating, copiously, but, on closer inspection, we discovered that the “mess” was, in fact, the remains of various shellfish, their shells, having been splintered. Suddenly, if you remember, another shellfish landed on a large rock not far from where we were standing and, from a height of about 30 feet, down swooped a seagull to eat the meat of the unlucky but still alive shellfish. Obviously, what must have transpired over many decades past, was that one seagull, probably by accident rather than design, tried to pry open a shellfish with its beak from a height and, when the unfortunate mollusk fell from its beak and landed on a rock, its shell shattered, making it easy for the seagull to have its meal. The seagull, from then on, used this method of obtaining an easy meal and, most likely, other seagulls followed suit until, today, all of the seagulls in this part of New Zealand engage in dropping mollusks from heights in order to break open the shellfish’s shell. Hence, ideas precede execution.’ ‘What has that got to do with me?’ asked The Frog. ‘Nothing!’ I replied. ‘I just wanted to open up this discussion with you because I think that it is an important subject.’ The Frog was looking somewhat perplexed, but he continued looking at me, somewhat intensely, by the way, and listening so I continued with my little oral dissertation.*

*‘In 1904, Mr King C. Gillette of Wisconsin, the United States of America, obtained a patent for the world’s first safety razor. Prior to that time, men used what used to be known as “cut throat” razors or “straight razors”, being simply, a 5-inch, piece of steel, sharpened to the point that one could split a hair with it. Mr Gillette was a travelling salesman in the late 19th Century and, driving from one part of the country to another, he was forced to shave daily, you can understand. In a flash, one morning, he thought that it would be a good idea to have a razor that was completely safe and could not cut the user and, at the same time, the tool to cut the facial hair of an adult male would have to be fitted with a very sharp, inexpensive, disposable blade, sufficient for only a limited number of shaves. That was in 1895. It took Mr Gillette the next 6 years to find a producer of steel in the country to develop the required, hard, thin and inexpensive razor blade in accordance with his idea. It is said – and this is hearsay, by the way – that Mr King C. Gillette, one day turned to his partner, the man who had helped him to produce the disposable razor blade, and said: “Why don’t we give every one of our soldiers, fighting in the War (that is World War I), a safety razor?” Mr William Emery Nickerson replied that it was a very good idea, but a better idea was to get the US Government to pay for the razors. And so, by the end of the War in 1918, some 3.50 million razors and 32 million razor blades had been put into the hands of the US military forces, thereby converting an entire*

*nation to the Gillette safety razor. So you see, Bo-Bo, ideas come first; execution follows.'*

*The Frog was, clearly, feeling uncomfortable by this time and asked: 'OK, what did I forget? What have I done wrongly or not done? I use an electric razor not a Gillette razor. Do you want me to buy a different razor?' I laughed and explained that the story of the safety razor was just an example of my proposition that ideas always precede execution. 'And, now, my dear husband, I suggest that we should talk more of matters of pith and moment in order to explore new and exciting ideas because, only by careful and measured thought may we discover concepts, possibly buried in our minds over years.' Once again, The Frog looked at me as though, for the first time in our married life, he had discovered, Betty, The Thinker. He said: 'Look, I don't know about the bee in your bonnet, but we talk at every meal that we eat together. If you want ideas from me, then, you have to come up with the subject of the day. This is your idea, not mine, so it is up to you to decide on the subject and to execute it.' I replied that ideas are like the oceans of the world, being full of water. There is no shortage of water in the oceans and, similarly, there is no shortage of ideas in the world. But, in everybody's life, there are ideas of importance and ideas of unimportance. I explained: 'Ideas come in 3 categories: Useful; useless; or, potentially useful. We have to explore our mental worlds in order to make determinations as to which ideas fall into which categories. We can only do this by spending time, as we used to do, prior to our marriage, in talking about our life and the little future that remains to us. Don't you think that the impartial exchange of ideas is the prerequisite to friendship?'*

*The Frog just yawned and exclaimed that, henceforth, when he was not tired, he would consider talking to me about any and all new ideas that he had 'but, at my age, ideas do not come easily ... and I am too tired to think, now. I need to rest.' With that, he closed his eyes and, within minutes, he was producing the imitative sounds of a frog, telling the world that he is horny: 'Come to me, all you lovely little female frogs!' And this is the man that I married! A non-thinker!!! Now, do you understand?*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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