

Bess Smith

“A woman, if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.”
-Jane Austen

There you go. Everything's vacuumed in the house, spic and span. You even got the windows shined without streaking after reading about adding ammonia to the cleanser in Hints From Heloise. The cookies are in the oven, slowly browning, and you should have a wonderful dinner all prepared for Harold and Margaret tonight. You probably should drop by Mrs. Stutter's house; she has that wonderful angel food cake recipe and she's promised to let you copy it.

By Bethwik, you hate this planet. Not just this planet. All of the people on it, with the men's slimy, manipulative ways and the women's docile acceptance of a role of servitude. Disgusting to the core. Sometimes you just want to take Harold and pop his head off for getting you stuck for *five years* on this horrible, insignificant, repulsively inferior planet.

Sigh. But it's not really his fault. Being a member of the Thwarkian Diplomatic Command means that one has to have experience in espionage, and Harold took this job in the fear that no new one would come up until he was behind everyone else on the promotion track. And when he took it, you were happy for him. You've risen through the ranks like a titanium rocketship, leading troops into battle to conquer inferior worlds and generally giving a fearsome reputation to the 32nd Lighting Strike Marine Corps you led. Harold was stuck pushing paperwork until he got some field espionage experience.

So when the time came to come to Earth, you were happy. Sure, it would mean leaving your command for two years, and your daughter Margaret would be out of the prestigious Berkin Academy for a while. But it meant a lot to Harold, so you and Margaret went along with him. He told you that the entire mission would be over in two years.

That was five years ago. Everything that could go wrong went wrong. Supply missions that were supposed to give Harold the funding he needed were disrupted by Commonwealth patrols. These humans turned out to be a secretive and suspicious lot, making Harold's job of assessing how far their research has progressed a near impossibility. Margaret nearly blew your cover by showing her teachers exactly how smart she was; Harold convinced the teachers that Margaret had merely learned a lot from watching science-fiction movies, but you still had to move before word got out too far.

All the while, you had to play the nice housewife. Your idea of subtlety is only using one fusion grenade to blow down a door, so you simply couldn't help Harold out with his job. All you could do was study Earth culture and figure out what was expected

from you so that you could fit into society. So you spent your time watching television. *I Love Lucy, The Burns And Allen Show, Leave It To Beaver*, and other such fare. And you learned what humans expected of their wives.

Complete and utter docility. A woman who would spend her days slaving over a hot stove, cleaning the house until it looked like a museum, and never once complaining. It has been an extremely hard job to keep the act up. Luckily, when no one else is around, you can drop your act and let Harold know exactly how fun you find cleaning the house and cooking all of his meals. He apologizes profusely, but says that you have to keep it up until the mission's over. You began to wonder whether he was ever going to finish the mission, or maybe he was just dragging it out because he liked the thought of you waiting on him hand and foot.

But two nights ago, he finally broke the joyous news. He had contacted High Command, explained that this planet holds no threat to the Thwarkians, and recommended its destruction. At 6:00 pm tonight, a Thwarkian Battle Cruiser should show up and pick you, Harold, and Margaret up and speed you back to Thwark, where you can finally get back to crushing inferior races who try to defy the will of the Thwarkians; Harold can get a promotion to Senior Consul, and Margaret can finally get back onto the higher education track. That will be bliss.

You've even been getting back in practice with your Sondran (the tri-bladed weapon that all Marines are trained with). Of course, merely trying it out on the shrubbery behind the house doesn't present much of a challenge, so you waylaid a few humans late at night and took them on. Each time, you cut them to shreds without even getting a scratch. It's nice to know you still have the touch. Harold would throw a fit if he knew you had done that, but the planet's going to be destroyed soon anyways, so who cares? Although you are upset by one thing. Last night, coming home after the latest kill, you saw a huge creature, something that looked like a wolf but was as big as a bear. It was running through the streets, and by the time you saw it, it was too far away to catch. Pity. It looked like it would have been a tough opponent. If only you had known that such things existed on Earth.

You'll also need to have a talk with Margaret before you go. She's been hanging around these humans for too long. She seems to think of them as actual real beings, with feelings and intelligent thoughts. It disturbs you to see her associate freely with an inferior race. Maybe she has forgotten the superiority of Thwarkians. Perhaps she is starting to assimilate. Well, pretty soon there won't be anyone left to assimilate with, and you don't want any sort of scene when you're gathering the family together to go back to Thwark. She'll sulk and she'll pout, and she'll claim that she doesn't want the planet destroyed and that she wants to stay here with her friends. Well, best to get those ideas out of her head before you're on a tight schedule.

You'd better keep an eye on Harold, too. Oh, sure, he hasn't tried to assimilate with these humans. But he's promised you things before that didn't quite work out the

way he said they would. And you wouldn't be too surprised if he had told you that everything was fine when things were actually falling apart. So you'd better keep a watch and make sure that everything's as nice as he says it is.

Or else he'll be sleeping on the couch for the next three months.

Stock quote: "Oh, I just *have* to get that recipe from you."

Mannerisms: Bess is the combination of every '50's sit-com wife. Cheery, perky, always full of good advice, and always correcting her husband's mistakes. Underneath, she is a fierce warrior, ready to rip someone's tongue out for the slightest perceived insult. She has that under control. But she also has a list of people to get personal revenge upon just before the planet is destroyed.

People You Know:

Margaret Smith: Your daughter. You love her, and will do anything to protect her. She acts like a bit of an airhead in public to keep people from suspecting her true genius. You worry that she's assimilating too well into human culture.

Harold Smith: Your husband. You love him, but sometimes you want to beat some serious sense into him.

Dr. Gerald Forbes: You used to spend time with his wife, talking about recipes and the various foibles of your husbands. She was the only human you met with even a half-way decent brain. It's too bad that she died in a car accident two weeks ago. Not that it matters; she would have died soon enough when her planet gets destroyed.

Goals:

1. Keep up pretenses. Pretend to be the loving little housewife for as long as possible. After all, something may delay the cruiser, or Harold may have done something really bone-headed. The last thing you need is to reveal your true identity and then end up stuck here for another several months. That would be very bad.

2. Prepare for leaving. Have a long, serious talk with Margaret and make sure she's ready to leave. Practice with your sondran a few times (but not on anyone whose death would cause waves). Get what recipes you can from Pops Turrelli down at the Malt Shop. You like cooking occasionally, after all; it's just this every night, night after night thing that wears you down.