

# A Good Wife

by Gita M. Smith

I just needed a little more time, a moment only, to answer Melek's question. I did not have to make up an answer -- I had that ready. I always had the answer ready because the question was always the same.

I needed the time to compose my face into a mask of perfect submission. He expected me to be submissive.

I turned away from the window and faced him, my eyes downcast and my posture stooped, and whispered, "No, my husband. I do not know the name of the man in the market who bumped into me and said 'Excuse me.' He was nothing. He was a nobody."

I knew what his next accusation would be; by then, I could have recited this tired, familiar script in three languages, in full costume, with an orchestra playing Mahler behind us.

"How did you know he was a nobody if you didn't look at him, eh? Did you raise your eyes and look him in the face? Are you my wife or a whore?"

Cue the kettledrums. Cue the dancing bears. This was where I lowered my head and wailed a protest of innocence to be followed by a walloping slap and a punch to my ribcage.

Soon after, he left to meet his cousins in a cafe. I removed my head scarf, shawl, sweater, blouse and the precautionary extra padding I kept taped to my ribs, and I slipped into a warm bath. Leisurely, I washed my limbs, my hair, my face. Leisurely, I perfumed myself.

Leisurely, I re-read the note that had been slipped into my sweater pocket that morning: "I breathe and live another day in the hope of seeing you."

