

# Diplomatic Relations

by Gita M. Smith

The truth about our marriage is not pretty. Hamilton took a lover after our second child was born. When I got my figure back, I initiated an affair with the Brazilian attaché and a year later, I dropped him for the second-chair violinist in our city symphony. (He looked marvelous in tails and black tie.) And what quick strong fingers he had. They never tired.

Then Hamilton was transferred to Bogota, and I dragged the children along behind him, but I resented every hour of our miserable three years there.

You might think the world of embassies and international relations is glamorous. Well, it's not. It is a world of petty bickering, social climbing, secrets and third-rate wines poured from cut-glass decanters to make them sparkle like Grand Cru.

One is expected to make small talk, night after night, at dinner parties where one is seated next to flatulent perspiring foreigners who slide their hands below table to squeeze one's thighs.

After Bogota, Ham was asked to take a small role in making friends with an Iranian business conglomerate, and so we were sent to Tehran. There, at least, one could eat well and shop with abandon. I spent many happy days in the rug bazaars in the company of an eager young translator with lovely muscled shoulders. Some afternoons, he would take me to drink tea in small cafes far from American eyes. We found a room — no more than four walls and a cot — and pleased each other for hours under a slow-turning fan. Then one morning, Hamilton called me to the breakfast room and asked for a divorce.

"Here? In Iran? Are you *crazy*?" I asked.

"You've been unfaithful," was all he said.

"But I could be punished with *stoning* or imprisonment!" I said, panic rising.

"Then go back to America, and we'll get around to it later, in a year

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or two when my work here is done.”

“What about the children?” I asked.

“They will stay with me and continue here in school. I want them to learn Farsi and Arabic. It's a changing world.”

I wasn't ready to give up without a fight. “You've been unfaithful too, and I can name them all, your mistresses and whores!” I shouted.

“Not for YEARS! Not since my hiatus hernia operation,” he snarled.

Hamilton snarled well, I'll give him that. It was one of his successful negotiating tricks at world trade conferences. But I was having none of that.

“Please pour me a drink,” I said, adding quickly “but not the embassy wine.”

How, I wondered, does one end a marriage? It's not as if there are classes one can take to prepare for exigencies like these. I imagine evening classes with names like, “Parting shots for beginners” and “Keeping a neutral expression when you are seething inside.”

Ham poured me a drink — Bombay gin and limes — and we sat civilly and listened to parrots chattering in the plum trees above our terrace.

“The buggers will have eaten all the fruit before cook gets his lazy bum out there with a basket,” Ham murmured.

I picked up a basket then, smiled at him conspiratorially, and dashed out to the garden to rescue what plums were left. Each one, pinkish-purple and soft, felt like a testicle in my hands. When I had picked a bowlful I went back inside, hoping to flirt with Ham about the resemblance to his own testicles. Instead, I found him weeping in his wing chair by the window.

“We've screwed everything up, haven't we?” he said. “It's a bridge too far.”

I wasn't sure what that meant, but I sensed he was on the cusp of reconciliation. I mean, weeping with remorse is better than open-mouthed shouting, isn't it?

I maneuvered myself onto his lap and fed him bites of plums and made fingertip circles at the edges of his hairline (something the

violinist had taught me).

"Darling," I reminded him, "there are worse things than marriage to a slightly unfaithful spouse."

"Like what?"

"Like being stuck with a bore. Or a wife who corrects you in public."

"True," he said. "True. We could be like the Marchioness and Duchess of Lichtenstein who have two teeth between them and those dreadful Pomeranians."

I could have corrected him and said Pekingese, but why spoil the moment?

We had reached *détente*, which is a term used in the diplomatic corps to mean both sides are fucking exhausted and ready to agree to anything just to get out of the conference room and away from their opponent.

So, as I said, our marriage isn't pretty, but we are staying together. I have my reasons: a birdie told me Hamilton's next posting will be in Manhattan at the United Nations. It will be spectacular all around with never, *ever* a dull moment. I am positively sure I won't so much as LOOK at another man, I'll be so fulfilled.

Those lovely Persian rugs from the bazaar will go down in the new apartment. And I fully intend to show Hamilton the delights of soft Oriental carpeting and a delicious new position I learned not long ago. It involves a silk scarf, a leather strap and some aromatic herbs. I wish I could remember its name in Farsi.

Roughly translated it means "finally reaching your hoped-for destination."

