

Sammy and My Bishop

by Brock Andrews

LIKE MOST VICARS, I looked forward with dread to the Visitation of my Bishop. But not for the usual reasons.

I knew what would happen as soon as my Bishop's car pulled up the drive. A TRII 7. Nothing fancy, just a black sports-car to match my Bishop's gaiters. A car that would remind every self-respecting boy in my neighborhood at that time of a certain American TV series. The one about the computerized black sports-car. My Bishop always did choose well.

“Ah, Naseby!” he greeted me cheerily as he climbed out. In his full rig he looked an exotic contrast to the car. “Splendid, isn't it? Helps me get about, you know. Large diocese and all that.” But he wasn't all humbug, and he knew he wasn't fooling *me*, as he gave me a wink: “Must keep up with the times, mustn't we? Eh? Hum! Ha! Any tea going?”

Alas, my Bishop and I had a certain tacit understanding. I always found his Visitations a trial. For two reasons.

The first: that of all the parishes in the diocese I didn't want mine to become the center of a major scandal.

The second reason was Sammy.

I must say at this point that now and then I have been a little bit naughty. What they would call at a trial “abusing his position of trust in the community”. I have always been gentle (well, mostly), loving, considerate and – above all – discreet. I'm a cautious soul; unlike my ebullient Bishop. I like a quiet life, which is why I enjoy the peaceful backwater that is my semi-rural parish.

I have also always discriminated. The choir and the youth-club I run are not in moral danger with me.

Well, not more than one choirboy or youth at any particular time.

My choice invariably falls on one who appreciates the values of proper discipline, something which is sadly lacking nowadays. A lad who comes forward to mend his ways through the administration of a few caresses of my slipper upon his bottom after choir-practice. All the better if the path to righteousness is paved with pleasurable feelings on behalf of both the administrator and the recipient. To see the little posterior pinken under the slaps of my slipper and hear the gasps of

pleasure-pain with each blow does excite and exalt the faculties, I've always found.

In Sammy's case the feeling was more than usually reciprocated. He would bare himself in the vestry without being bidden, and sometimes sought me out between choir-practices because our punishment sessions didn't occur often enough for him. I've never been sure whether it was the punishment Sammy enjoyed most or the consolation offered over his tears afterwards. We had begun when he was eleven, and the practice had increased now that he was twelve. Sammy really was adorably ideal, and not simply because he was so charming to look at. A truly humble nature when it came to reckoning his sins and suffering for his numerous little misdeeds.

The trouble was that he was too ideal, for I had to put a stop to it when I saw that the continued soreness of his bottom would surely come to the notice of his mother the next time she saw him undressed. Not to speak of the P.E. teacher at Sammy's new secondary school. So I issued a temporary ban. It *was* only temporary, but the young are so impervious to the notion of self-restraint. Sammy hung his head, uncomprehendingly. He pleaded that no one would notice his bottom. He asked if there were not an appropriate cream that would unpinken his cheeks. But I was adamant. And it was after that that I saw him beginning to drift away from me altogether, as if looking for some new outlet for his expiation.

"Promising little chaps in the sopranos this year," murmured my Bishop as we readied ourselves for the service the next day. As he hadn't yet heard this lot sing it couldn't have been their music he was referring to. "I wouldn't be surprised if that tallish little fellow with the brown hair didn't become an alto before long, eh? They will shoot up so quickly! What was his name?"

"Er – which –?"

"Don't be obtuse, Naseby. The tall lad with the brown hair, in the sopranos." My bishop was pulling rank.

"Sam," I sighed. "Sam Dixon. Answers to 'Sammy'. One-parent child. His mother works at the local general shop."

"One-parent, eh? Such a pity. So much of it these days," ruminated my caring Bishop. "Needs a masculine hand in his up-bringing, I shouldn't wonder. Be sprouting a little hair before long, too," whispered my Bishop as he glided out the door. Indeed, a slight, wispy hair or two were already circling the boy's rather nicely-hung member. My Bishop knew his boys.

What with the flurry of activity that morning, occasioned by my Bishop's visit, I had more than enough to do, and it was only when I saw Sammy – lone child amongst a party of elderly and middle-aged parishioners partaking of tea and biscuits with my Bishop – that I realised something was already afoot. *I* had not invited Sammy to this somewhat dull and grown-up gathering and his mother hadn't come to church that day. So who had?

The object of my suspicions claimed my attention without difficulty: the avuncular pink-faced episcopal figure at the center of attention: here laughing a booming ha-ha, there bending down with an expression of concern to hear the problems of a small, wizened old lady communicant. My Bishop was the most popular the diocese had ever had and was even rumored to be destined for higher things.

My concern was that he arrive at higher things in one piece and not be balked of his deserved reward in my particular parish.

Sammy was wandering about the room, his hands in his pockets, marking time while all this was going on. Now and then I saw the small blue eyes of my Bishop stray over in the boy's direction. It was a gloriously hot summer Sunday, and Sammy had worn his old school shorts with long gray knee-socks and black shoes for the occasion. He'd always liked wearing shorts but was now denied them in school term, so Sunday provided a release. And there were no other children around now to laugh at him. As I looked at the leggy boy I saddened at the thought that such views of innocent bareness would become more and more infrequent. Perhaps my Bishop was thinking similar thoughts, for our eyes met as we caught ourselves both staring in Sammy's direction, whilst busily talking vacantly to ladies and churchwardens.

I took malicious advantage of my Bishop's being hemmed in by old ladies to sidle over to Sammy and ask him what he was doing there.

"His lordship asked me to come," said Sammy, after one or two blushing regrettable attempts to evade my question.

"You shouldn't keep the truth from me, Sammy," I said in a warning voice.

"I know, sir," said Sammy, instinctively playing up to it. But when he saw my resolve a wave of resentment seemed to overtake him; he turned away and gazed at my reluctantly voluble Bishop, murmuring "anyway, *you* wouldn't do anything about it."

"After this excellent luncheon," said my Bishop through a piece of Mrs. Makins' succulent beef, "by popular request... Hm! Excellent wine this, Naseby. '82. Not bad for a vicarage table. By popular request, a

tour in my wondrous TRII 7. Er, young Samuel expressed an interest in the controls.”

“More his sort of car than yours I would have said, Bishop?”

My Bishop's eyebrows rose slightly; his shade of pink grew darker, due no doubt to the wine. “I *have* noticed a degree of interest expressed in the vehicle by the younger male population, yes?”

I pulled myself up and looked him straight in the eye: a gaze he kept trying to avoid, like his new young protege before him. Alluding to boys with a fellow-votary was one thing: having to admit to an actual pick-up quite another. “Don't let him drive the thing, Bishop,” I said. “You know what boys are. He'll beg and say he can. But don't *let* him!”

My Bishop sighed and looked sheepish. “I thought perhaps only a back road somewhere in the countryside. I refused him even a minor paved road, anything public, I swear!”

“Bishop,” I said pointedly, “the consequences could be most dangerous.”

He shrugged. “I am aware of the dangers.” A nasty gleam came into his eyes. “In any case he'll be on my lap when he takes the wheel, so I shall be in control at all times, I can assure you.” And with a deep chuckle he poured the rest of the wine into his glass.

In due course Sammy arrived at the vicarage door, changed into more casual wear. I had never seen him more alluring. He had dressed himself in a *very* old pair of athletic shorts from early schooldays, so that the tan of his normal exposure of thigh paled as one looked ever upwards. Nor did his T-shirt adequately cover his smooth little navel. In other words, Sammy was looking wholly and deliberately indecent.

And gave me a scornful backward glance as he flounced down the drive arm-in-arm with my bouncing Bishop to the fabled car. I could have thrashed him, God help me.

As it was, I refused to wave them goodbye or to look, but even so the roar of powerful engine mocked me as my Bishop and little friend drove off into the afternoon together.

The old bastard! Such unerring instinct for what was rightfully mine! Which only proves that great ecclesiastical minds think alike. I should have known it wouldn't be my day.

It got worse. I tried to attend to various tasks but my mind wasn't on them. I thought of my Bishop's self-satisfied smirk of quiet triumph, guiding the novice motorist between his stout, gaitered legs. I couldn't bring myself to imagine Sammy at all.

Oh, well, I'd just have to remember happier times. I'd had many

moments of pleasurable authority over the boy. The boy had been adequately reprov'd and corrected in the course of his young life. What more natural than to move on to a higher authority? In any case, my Bishop would soon be gone again and then Sammy and I could return to...

But would anything ever be the same between us? Would Sammy speak to me again if *I* didn't produce a spanking new sports car out of my miserable stipend? Why couldn't I have become a bishop? Ah, because I preferred the backwater and the boys!

Yet my Bishop had both for the choosing. Some people always come out on top, so to speak.

As the afternoon wore on my sinful envy turned to apprehension, my apprehension to fear. It came to be past teatime; it wasn't like my Bishop to miss tea under any circumstances. Wasn't he aware it was growing late? Or was he himself out of control? I smelled danger; I whiffed abominable scandal. BOY, 12, DISCOVERED ON BISHOP'S LAP screamed a headline running through my mind as I leafed through the *Church Times*. At five o'clock I had a phone call. It was Mrs. Dixon, Sammy's mother.

"I was only wondering, Vicar, if you'd seen my Sammy today," her plain country dialect betraying her anxiety.

"I haven't seen much of him," I replied; "he did pop in earlier, about two, but went off with friends, I suppose."

"I'm ringing from a callbox 'cause I don't have a phone at home," she said. "I don't know how I can ring round all his friends."

"Oh, you mustn't do that," I said in alarm. "I think I know who most of Sammy's friends are. I'll do the ringing."

"Oh, bless me, thank you vicar, that's ever so kind. And if you find him before I do I hope you'll give him a piece of your mind. Spank his bottom for him."

I coughed my goodbye.

As I climbed into my battered Fiat I pondered which road to take. Sammy knew all the country hereabouts and would guide my Bishop to the right sort of dirt road to try his driving on. The only problem was: which road?

Through late afternoon I drove up one road and down another. I explored all the obscurest lanes and farm-tracks I could think of, having a job to keep my own bearings. I must have covered miles. But no Sammy, no Bishop, no sports car.

By quarter-to-six I was in despair. It wasn't only scandal, now.

Would I be named accessory after the fact, with all that that implied? Would my little correcting sessions come out in court? I began seeing imaginary bars running down the windscreen in front of me.

But – what was this? At last, through the bars, in the distance, there appeared a little figure straggling along the side of the lane in front of me. It stopped, saw me and ran forward. Sammy! Praise the Lord, Sammy! As he came nearer I could see he was disheveled, his bare legs reddened and bleeding from thorns and brambles. “Oh sir, sir!” he cried breathlessly as he collapsed into my arms by the open car door. “I never thought I’d see you again!”

“What on earth happened?” I asked when he was settled in the front seat and we were driving home via my vicarage. “Did you have a nice time?”

“Nice time!” he snorted. “I took the Bishop to a road to tryout my driving, like he said I could. We drove around a bit, though his lap was all hard and made my bum ache. I wanted to sit by myself but he wouldn’t let me, saying I was too small to sit up and see. That’s rubbish! TRII 7s are ever so low-slung. While we were jabbering on about that I, er, ran the car into a tree.”

I laughed out loud.

“It wasn’t funny sir, honest! He got really mad, and I asked him if he was going to beat me, and he said ‘Beat you, beat you, boy?’ like that, like he didn’t even understand what I was talking about! *You* would’ve understood, wouldn’t you, sir? Anyway he kept going on about how it wasn’t my fault, and stroking my hair and that, while he tried to start the car and figure out what was wrong. But it *was* my fault really, wasn’t it, sir?”

“It undoubtedly was, Sam,” I said. “But we’ll do something about that later.” He visibly squirmed in the seat when I said it. “What happened then?”

“Well, that’s it, really. I said I was a long way from home and I’d have to go or I’d really catch it from Mum. She might even raise the alarm. That got him scared! He kept looking at the engine, all hot and flustered-like, but he didn’t know what to do. He kicked the tire once or twice. Honestly, sir, what’s the point in owning a car like that if you don’t know the least little thing about how it works? Then he said he’d have to get help. I said I’d go to get someone but he said no that would look bad. So I left him. He was feeble!”

I got Sammy back to the vicarage and cleaned him up a bit. We worked out a plausible story for his mum. Some- thing about going

exploring on his own and falling asleep. "You've brought this all on yourself," I told him severely. "You shouldn't have led his lordship on like that. You were really *very* wicked!"

"Was I, sir?" he asked, in a small, almost breathless voice.

"*Very.*"

Sammy's fingers were already fumbling at the elastic around his skimpy shorts, and in an instant the reason for the mild little protuberance was revealed in all its naked glory. With his shorts around his ankles (no under-garment, I perceived disapprovingly) he asked softly:

"Does that mean I deserve a spanking, sir?"

I tsk-tsked. "No underpants!" I said. "Another black mark against you. How could you be so shameless?"

The slipper was found and correction commenced. Never had it resounded so loudly nor lowered so many times. Never had I heard such cries of frankly ecstatic pain from the bent-over, plucky little chap. Finally he collapsed in my arms in tears as I gently soothed his pains and relieved the stimulation of my own exertions. Later I had the satisfaction of informing his mother that Sammy had been duly punished and was sorry. I was rewarded with a large slice of home-baked plum-cake.

Since then Sammy and I have drawn ever closer. He works in my garden in the holidays and on deliciously long evenings he stays with me, sleeping in the only habitable bed in the vicarage. I may never again know such a loving, humble, *respectful boy*.

And my lord Bishop? About ten o'clock that same evening a dusty and contrite figure emerged from a taxi in the drive. Anxiously he questioned me over Sammy's whereabouts and when I told him all was well he nearly threw his arms around me. Nearly. Actually he had a glass of my port instead.

My Bishop did indeed move on to higher things. And I, who have my slipper and my Sammy, wish him only the benefit of them. Love and forgiveness are all, as they say.