

Sam's Silver Lining



by Hilary Walker

“BLESS ME, FATHER, for I—”

“Sam, you were here yesterday!”

“That was before I really messed up.”

“If it’s about your streaking episode at the football club—”

“Hey! How do you know about it?!”

“Bad news travels, Sam, you know that. Just wanted to make it easier for you to tell me, that’s all. Sorry. We’ll just forget it, shall we?”

“I’d rather you did! Anyway, this latest thing is much worse.”

“I’m listening, Sam. Would you be more comfortable turning your chair away from me, and towards the altar?”

“Thanks, that’s better. Well, if you already know about that other incident... it’s to do with my being drunk again. You’re keeping a straight face now, Father, but wait till I finish.”

“I’m not here to judge you, Sam, that’s not my province. Keep facing the altar and I won’t look at you.”

“O.K., here goes nothing. Last night I drank—er—a lot of gin and tonic. Unfortunately without eating dinner.”

“No comment. Continue.”

“Well, I wanted to send Elaine an e-mail, and I didn’t have the courage while I was sober. After each drink I’d ask myself whether I was ready, and the answer ‘yes’ only came after the fifth glass.

“So I staggered upstairs to the computer and one thing kind of led to another. Somehow I ended up surfing the net. Boy, there’s some really bad stuff out there, Father.

“Trouble is, I was too drunk to stop. By the time I got round to writing my e-mail, all these lewd images were swirling round my mind.”

“Isn’t Elaine the young lady at work whom you’re trying to court? With, shall we say, limited success?”

“That pretty much sums it up. She doesn’t know I exist. I wanted to impress her with my wit and erudition, but it just didn’t happen that way.

"I sent off my e-mail at around 3 a.m. this morning. Then I went to bed, convinced that by morning she'd discover me to be an educated model of manhood. I set my alarm for nine o'clock—you know that's early for me on a Sunday—and stumbled out of bed, dying to know whether she'd read it and sent an answer.

"Father, my message had been returned, plus an angry note from the recipient—my mother! I'd sent it to her by mistake. It gave me the perfect opportunity to read my foolishness in a more sober state. Awful things I wrote, Father. About the wicked things I wanted to do to Elaine, like—"

"O.K., Sam, I catch the drift—spare me the details!"

"But I didn't know I had it in me to write such filth! Mother now does. She's threatening to tell Dad, and he's got a weak heart already. You know how he is: he won't have the courage to do the readings in church any more. Neither of them will want to come to Mass again and be seen in public. What am I going to do? I've discovered my basest self, turned my parents away from the Church and as good as killed my father!"

"Sam! Guilt's letting your imagination run riot. Nothing of the sort will happen. You're behaving as though the whole world's already found out what you did. No one else is going to know and you'll make your peace with your mother in time. I'm sure she'll not tell your father."

"You really think so?"

"Of course. Come, I'll give you your penance and absolve you."

"Before you do, I think I'm ready to tackle that football incident now."

"You sure?"

"Yes. You see, it all started with a hamster."

"And possibly a spot of alcohol?"

"Well, Father, our team did win!"

"I trust the hamster came to no harm?"

"No, it was a hypothetical hamster."

"A hypothetical hamster?"

"Yes, father, you see..."



"FATHER, BLESS ME, for I have sinned."

"Sam, I only saw you a week ago. And you do realize you don't have to say it like that any more?"

"Habit, Father, sorry."

"How's that week been? Your mother talking to you again? Both your parents were in church on Sunday, so things can't be as bad as you feared."

"Well, Mother hasn't told Dad, but she's giving me the cold shoulder."

"Give her time. She'll relent."

“I don’t suppose she’s talked to you, has she?”

“Now, you know very well I’m not at liberty to divulge anything if she did. But if she were to visit me, I would, of course, advocate forgiveness.”

“I suppose I’ll have to wait, then. Er, Father, this week I got my company banned from the hotel it uses for management training programmes.”

“Sam! How did this happen?”

“Well might you sigh, Father. I’d had a few drinks with the lads downstairs...”

“Did you at least eat dinner first, this time?”

“Yes, we had a rather—um—boozy dinner beforehand. Elaine was there, looking beautiful, of course, and ignoring me as usual. If only she’d look my way sometimes with those limpid blue eyes of hers and that perfect face with its little turned-up nose...”

“Ahem! You were saying about a ban?”

“What? Oh sorry, drifting a bit, wasn’t I? Well, I got to my hotel room around 2 a.m. and went to bed. An hour later I badly needed a p—, er, I needed the bathroom. It was dark and I had trouble finding it. Eventually I did and the door closed behind me. Only I wasn’t in the bathroom but the hotel corridor, at 3 a.m. with no clothes on.

“Father, don’t laugh, this isn’t funny.”

“Sorry, Sam—slip of the lips.”

“You can imagine I sobered up pretty fast! I had to get a new key from reception downstairs. There was nothing in the corridor to cover myself with, so I walked to the elevator stark naked.

“When one finally came to my floor, the doors opened and out stepped Elaine! She looked disgusted. There was a sofa by the wall, so she picked a cushion off it and handed it over, carefully looking the other way, of course. I covered my private parts p.d.q., I can tell you. She walked off without a word. It was humiliating.”

“Poor Sam! What a way to court a lady!”

“And it didn’t stop there. When I got down to reception, I discovered they have CCTV’s operating on all the corridors. The whole thing had been filmed!

“Mercifully the night staff were very polite and didn’t laugh at me. They gave me another key and lent me a coat from lost property—a long, dark mackintosh thing that made me look like a flasher, but at least it covered me up.”

“So you managed to get clothed and back into your room. All ended well.”

“No, it didn’t. Next day I was called out of the morning training session. The Human Resources Manager wanted to see me. Apparently the hotel had asked the company to please look elsewhere for facilities in future, due to my escapade that night. I told him they were being unreasonable and I’d go and set things

right. Anyone can make a mistake, and I couldn't be the only person this had happened to.

"He thought I shouldn't, unless I wanted to see a film of myself urinating on an antique chair worth about two thousand pounds—or rather, formerly worth that amount. It was outside my room, and I must have relieved myself before realizing where I was. I don't even remember doing it!

"Father, why me? Why don't these things happen to someone else? Now Elaine will never be interested and I'll be the laughing stock of the whole company if that HR manager spills the beans."

"Sam, you know what they say: Bad publicity is still good publicity. Anyway, I don't think he'd tell anyone. Don't despair so easily. Ask God for assistance, especially, perhaps, in the drinking department?"

"That does seem to be when the trouble starts, doesn't it?"

"It's a rather common theme running through your mishaps. Now for a suitable penance, my friend, and absolution—unless you have any more hypothetical animals to discuss?"

"Very funny, Father."



"WELCOME, DEAR LADY!"

"Good evening, Father. I'm afraid I haven't set foot in church since leaving convent school—about—to be honest—ten years ago."

"God is pleased to see you in His House again."

"I wish I could believe it. I'm struggling with a really horrible problem. I can't get rid of a positively demonic image in my head. I'm desperate for help. It's got to be exorcised!"

"I'm sure we shan't need to take such drastic measures. Would you like to explain your problem?"

"I'll try, but I'm not used to this open way of sitting with the priest near the altar—we always used confessionals at school. This is weird—it's so...so close-up."

"Times have certainly changed in the Catholic Church since you've been gone, my dear. We're trying to be less impersonal. But we can use a confessional, if you prefer. And if you're too embarrassed to talk to me in it, since I know who's on the other side of the barrier, I'll get another priest to listen, if you like."

"No, you're very kind, but I've come this far and I'd rather get it over and done with."

"As you wish. Take your time."

"Thank you, Father. You see, about a month ago, I was at a conference in a hotel—a training thing for work. One night I stayed up rather late—you know how it is at these functions. Around 3 a.m. I finally took the elevator up to my

floor. When its doors opened, I was confronted by one of my male colleagues standing there completely nude. I was flabbergasted.

“Apparently he’d locked himself out of his room while looking for the bathroom, so the whole incident was perfectly innocent.”

“Doesn’t sound too bad to me.”

“I agree, Father, but the problem is, I haven’t been able to get him out of my mind since then. I’d never noticed him before. But after seeing that magnificent body of his—I’m sorry, Father, I can’t help it, he’s gorgeous! I have to pass by his office on the way to mine every day and all I see is a hunky naked man sitting there. Now you know why I’m here.

“Why are you smiling? This is terrible!”

“My dear, you’re too hard on yourself. Is this man married?”

“No.”

“Then my penance is this: get to know him and learn to accept him as a dressed person, and your situation will soon improve.”

“Do you really believe that, Father?”

“Totally. Now for absolution.”



“BLESS ME, FATHER. I haven’t sinned, but I’ve some great news!”

“We all sin constantly, Sam, but I’ll overlook that small point. What’s your news? I haven’t seen you in confession for a while.”

“Can you believe it—I’m going out with Elaine! She suddenly showed an interest in me. After all those failed attempts to impress her and the awful things that have happened to me recently. We’ve been seeing each other for a whole month! I can’t believe my luck. Father, there is a God after all!”

“I’m horrified you should ever have doubted it.”

“You won’t tell her about the antique chair, will you? I don’t think she knows about that.”

“Of course not, Sam. Tell me how you got together.”

“She saw my hamster.”

“The hypothetical one?”

“No, I bought a real one.”

“I see. And she was impressed with it, was she?”

“Yes. It’s big and furry and—”

“I’m sorry I asked. God bless you both, Sam. May you all be very happy.”

“Thank you, Father!”

THE END