

The Bishop

by James Lynn Smith

It was in the late 1940's, and the United Methodist missionary family had been in Burma (now Myanmar) for a short while. They soon found out that the regional bishop would visit their small congregation. The minister and his wife wished to invite him to their home for a meal before showing him around the church. They were concerned that their four children, two boys and two girls, might be a bit much for the elderly bishop's nerves, so they began lecturing them on behavior, exaggerating consequences of misconduct. Joy, the youngest at four years of age, overheard stern warnings to the boys about the bishop's temper, and that they should not run through the house or laugh loudly. The mother told the older girl that she was expected to act ladylike, and be careful what she said or the bishop might "snap her head off." She didn't want him provoked into angry outbursts for it would be an embarrassment for all of them.

What Joy overheard fostered a mental image of powerful, angry jaws snapping and chomping. She wondered if they would have enough food for him. She felt apprehension, but also curiosity and wanted to see the bishop as soon as possible.

"No dear," her mother said. "When he comes, you'll have to wait until we've invited him in and introduced him to the others in the family."

The day finally came. The trishaw had arrived with the bishop, and he was coming up the walkway. Everyone but Joy scrambled into their assigned places. She was told to wait in the kitchen.

"Do I have to, Mommy," she whined.

“Yes, wait here. We’ll call you when it’s time to come into the living room and see the bishop.”

Joy pouted, but obeyed her mother. She heard the front door open and exclamations from others in the family. Her curiosity burned, but she waited...and waited. Would they ever finish the first introductions? Had they forgotten her? She was tempted to sneak in, but memories of what her parents said about the bishop restrained her. Finally, she heard footsteps approach the kitchen door and her mother said, “Okay come in now.”

Joy slowly walked into the living room and her mother said, “This is our youngest daughter. Joy, I want you to meet Bishop Gordon.”

The bishop smiled and confusion washed over Joy’s face. Forgetting the need to speak softly, she blurted, “Is that the bishop? I thought the bishop was an alligator.”

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