

It had been 22 years since I last heard from Bobs and Ba Bradshaw. Were they still in Alvechurch? Were they even still alive? Well, yes and yes, although they had downsized from Muy Linda to a town house in Shirley and a flat on the Costa del Sol. When I contacted them, they were in Pueblo Blanco, celebrating their golden wedding anniversary, so I arranged to meet them on their return.

I spotted them easily. Two suntanned, Clairol blondes, one in a dress, one in a linen trouser suit, sitting in the Happy Days Coffee Nook

LG: As you're dressed 'femme' today, do I call you Bobs or Bebe?

BB: It's up to you, pet. We're old friends. I only insist on Bebe when it's people who don't know me. When it's people who'd get confused, seeing a woman and then hearing a bloke's name.

Ba winked at me. Whatever he believes, you'd never mistake Bobs for a woman.

LG: Do you cross-dress all the time now?

BB: It depends. When it's just me and Ba, I like to dress 'femme'. But if we're seeing the nippers, I'll wear slacks and a blouse, or something like Ba's wearing today. Unisex.

LG: The nippers being?

BA: The great-grandchildren. Our Roxy's got three boys. Hudson, Cameron and Logan. Little blighters. They're into everything.

LG: My readers and I have a lot of catching up to do. The last time we heard from you, Roxy was just a little girl. She was recovering from leukaemia.

BA: Blummin' nightmare that was. But she never had no relapse so we've been lucky. Cracking girl, she's turned out, hasn't she, Bobs?

BB: Smashing. Married to a plumber. Sean. He's got his own business, heating and plumbing. And he's built like a brick shithouse.

BA: As you can hear, the language still isn't very ladylike. Even when he's dressed 'femme'.

LG: Now, as I recall, Roxy had a baby brother.

BA: Blair. He's not a baby no more! He's, what, 22, 23? I lose track. He's a nurse, at the Queen Elizabeth.

BB: Lovely lad. He's a homosexual, so there won't be any great-grandkiddies from him.

BA: You don't know that. They can work miracles these days.

BB: They'd need to.

LG: Tell me about Melody. Her wedding to Andrew featured quite a lot in *The Dress Circle*.

BA: Don't remind me. She's divorced. Inreck... what is it, Bobs? Unrecognisable differences?

BB: Couldn't stand the sight of each other.

BA: Mind you, Andrew dragged it out. You see, the Godbolds, didn't want her getting her hands on his money, so whenever there was talk of a divorce, Andrew's old man'd tell him to stick it out and try harder. And Andrew'd never say boo.

LG: But in the end they did get divorced?

BA: Yes. Soon as his mum and dad were dead and gone.

LG: Any children?

BA: No. She miscarried a few times and then I think they stopped trying. Not a happy person, is she, Bobs? And she's put up a lot of weight.

BB: Very discontented. She's got a nice house, new car every year, plenty of holidays, but no. She's a glass half full type of person.

BA: You mean, half empty.

BB: That's what I said.

LG: And what about your son?

The moment I'd asked, I sensed what was coming. Bobs took Ba's hand.

BA: Jason passed away.

He'd had a heart attack on the golf course. Only 43 years old.

LG: I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

BB: Don't worry, pet. You weren't to know. It's been a while. Was it three years ago, Ba? It gets easier.

BA: No, it doesn't.

LG: But you'd patched up your differences? I remember you weren't speaking for a while, after he found out about the cross-dressing?

BB: Oh yes. He didn't like it, but credit to him, he learned to put up with it. Same thing when Blair come out as a homo. Jason didn't like it, but he loved his lad, so he lumped it.

BA: After they done the post-mortem, they said his arteries was all furred up. And then Diane told us he had been having chest pains, only he thought it was indigestion. We was in Spain when it happened so of course, we flew straight back. Longest three hours of my life.

BB: The way I try to look at it, he never knew what hit him. A nice Saturday out with his mates, he was at level par, got to the 14th hole and that was that. Out like a light.

LG: Didn't your old friend Scouser go in much the same way?

BB: You're right, he did. Coming out of the clubhouse. Poor old Scouser. He wasn't no age, neither.

LG: And did his widow ever remarry? Mary, was it?

BA: I'll say she remarried. She's Lady Astley now. Married to Clive Astley.'

LG: But he already had a wife. What happened to her?

BA: She left him. Bad timing that, because a year or two later he got his gong. Della must be spitting nails.

LG: Why did he get knighted?

BB: Bugged if I know. Services to codology.

LG: So, you two are the great survivors.

BA: Married fifty years. Not bad, eh?

LG: Will it last, do you think?

BB: Well I've just re-upped for another ten. Ba's still thinking about it. Playing hard to get, as per. I'll get some more coffees in. I've got a mouth like a budgie's sand tray.