



A Story Can Only End One Of Two Ways, Truthfully Or Artfully

by Sho Botham

“Are you two gossiping again?”

“No, we’re not,” said Elspeth huffily as she turned her head quickly to deliver an irritated comment straight into her father’s face.

She’d lost the thread now of what Babs, her BFF, was telling her. She tried to remember if Barnie, the boyfriend, who was more off than on, was still off or back on.

“If I wasn’t so stupid,” moaned Babs, “I would give him the heave-ho once and for all.”

“Nah, you wouldn’t. You love all the drama. You would be bored without it.”

Babs looked at her bestie, sighed and said, “yeah, you’re probably right. I would.”

“Are you two still gossiping?”

“No dad, we’re just catching up,” smiled Elspeth reaching out a hand to ruffle his slightly greying hair as one might with a child.

“Evening, Mr Elspeth,” said Babs dropping her chin and peering at the man through long, fluttering, black eyelashes. Her friend playfully punched her arm asking her, “what’s with the - Mr Elspeth?”

“Well he is, Mr Elspeth.”

“No he’s not. You can’t have a Mr Elspeth. He’s Mr Bramble.”

“What, Mr Elspeth Bramble?”

“Now you’re just being silly. I’m Miss Elspeth Bramble and he’s Mr Iain Bramble. And you my dearest are a right pain in the arse when it suits you.”

The two young women slide down the wall laughing and landed on the floor with a bump.

“Will you two always find something to gossip about?”

“Oh Mr Bramble, you know us. Never short of something to say.”

“You’re right about that my girl,” said Mr Bramble raising an eyebrow at the two smartly dressed young women in navy business suits and matching two-inch high, heeled court shoes.

“Do you want me to make you a cup of tea Mr B before I set off home?” Babs said smiling broadly.

“That would be nice, but only if it won’t hold you up too much from getting home.”

“She’s only got to go next door,” said Elspeth giving her dad a knowing look.

“Still gossiping girls?”

Mr Bramble, shuffled slowly past his daughter chatting brightly to Babs on the phone. He didn’t hear the chirpy voice of Babs, shouting her reply. “You’d better watch out Mr B, we might be gossiping about you.”

Elspeth looked over to see her dad safely settling into his wing-backed armchair. She signalled to him that Babs was saying hello and chatted for another moment or two before saying goodbye to her BFF. Walking across to her dad she bent over him close to his ear to ask to ask if he was alright. He nodded stiffly.

“I’ve got to go and pick the girls up from Babs and Jack. It was easier when they lived next door but I should only be twenty minutes. Bill might be back, before I am. But if he isn’t, you’ll be okay until I’m back?” She nodded at him looking deep into his watery, grey eyes.

“Yes,” he said, the voice sounding stronger than the old man looked.

“Are we still gossiping?”

“You must miss him?”

“I do. We all do. He’s been there for us through everything. It’s only now I realise how hard it must have been for him after mum died. Where did all the years go?”

“He was like a second dad to me,” said Babs. “It feels different now I don’t hear his voice when I come in. For some reason, I keep thinking about that scene from Dinnerladies that he loved so much. You know? The one where Victoria Wood was talking about Scotland and said something about, because everywhere in Scotland is spelt Ecclefechan and pronounced Kirkcudbright.”

“You’re definitely a chip off the old block,” said Babs to Elspeth sympathetically.

“What will our lot say when it’s our turn? Will we leave them with our favourite quotes to share?”