

KEN AND BARBIE

So, what happened; Richard didn't go with you last night, Angie?

No, Bobby, he just said I should go by myself and enjoy the evening.

Any reason?

Yea, he said it just wasn't something he was interested in.

But I thought you'd convinced him it was something you'd both enjoy. Especially since I'd watch little Marissa and give you two a night out.

Yea, I thought so too.

So, again, what happened ... he come down with something?

Chuckling, Angie nods her head.

Oh, yea ... cold feet ...

... said he didn't want to go back to first grade...

HI, Tony here. This morning finds us in a neighborhood hotspot; one we've never been before; the Kurle Up n' Dye Salon and Day Spa. It's owned by one Bobby Jo Kurle. The quintessential southern belle, Bobby Jo hails from Crystal Springs, Georgia, just outside Warner Robins Air Force Base, and came here when her husband, Warren, retired from the service and moved back home to the neighborhood he grew up in.

"The Kurle," as everyone calls it, is Bobby Jo's dream. The largest and unquestionably best salon in these parts, it has an extensive clientele, especially among the parishioners at St. Kate's. Employing five

stylists, and several freelancers, “the Kurle” is popular not only for the excellent service, but also for the ever-present table with coffee and treats from Sam’s Bistro, and Mama Cristallo’s pizza parlor and Italian deli. And, having three stylists adept at men’s grooming, many of the neighborhood gang can be found here on any given day. That’s why I’m here. Angie, Bobby’s “right hand man,” keeps me looking sharp.

It's a beautiful Wednesday morning. Bobby, Angie, and another long-time stylist, Vivien, are setting up for the day, and the morning’s conversation turned to last night’s adult-ed program at St. Kate’s Angie attended with her steady boyfriend, Richard. Except, it seems Richard is no longer interested.

Why? Well, I think we’re about to find out.

Let’s listen in.

So, Angie, I thought you were sure he’d like the program.

I did, Viv. Angie says, setting out a drape for her morning’s first appointment. One of the things I love about him is he enjoys meeting new people and exploring new ideas.

So, why the change of heart?

Well, everything was fine at first. The people at our table were interesting and really friendly and Richard seemed to agree.

So what happened, Bobby Jo asks, arranging the pastries Sam sent over.

Well, we finished our meal ... well, snacks actually, and the program started.

And ...?

The leader, a Ms. Stallone ...

Sylvester's wife? Vivien interjects, chuckling softly.

Yo, Adrienne ... Bobby Jo adds, doing a passable imitation of Rocky Balboa.

Laughing, Angie continues.

Anyway, Ms. Stallone announced it was time for the praise and worship portion of the evening's program, and asked us all to stand.

Uh oh ... Vivien says.

Yea, Viv, uh oh. Anyway, the lyrics to some self-written hymn nobody's ever heard of, appear on the big screen, and some guy with a guitar who thinks he's the reincarnation of Stevie Ray Vaughn - that's what Richard called him - starts warbling away. That's the best way I can describe it. And everybody's supposed to sing along.

And ...? Bobby Jo says, her tone, wary.

Well, I looked over at Richard and he looked like he'd just run over a skunk.

Not impressed? Vivien asks.

Obviously. And honestly, neither was I. I felt as uncomfortable as he did.

So, what did you do?

Well, we stayed for the rest of the program. And as he was taking me home, we talked about it. And the more Richard said, the more I understood his feelings.

How so? What did he mean ... going back to first grade?

Angie chuckles. Well, he said, ‘the last time I did something like that was first grade. I had to stand next to his little desk and sing ‘I’m a little teapot’ or maybe it was ‘the itsy-bitsy spider.’ Anyway, I hated it then and I like it even less now,’” he said.

What’d you say.

I laughed.

You thought he was being funny? Vivien asks.

No, Viv, I pictured him, six foot three, two hundred twenty-pounds, with broad shoulders and six pack abs, singing I’m a little teapot.

And doing the hand gestures? Bobby Jo asks, shaking her head and chuckling.

Angie nods. Yea, really.

Then what?

I asked him if he thought the whole idea was a bad one. And while he was uncomfortable, I was surprised by his answer.

Surprised, how?

Well, he said he didn’t think the singing portion of the program was a bad thing; just that it was ... ‘misdirected,’ was the word he used.

Pausing to sip her coffee, Angie continues.

He said, something like, that was for women and children. He called it a “girly” thing. And if the women and children like it, then it’s a good thing. It’s just not something a guy like me is comfortable with.

Then he held my hand and looked me in the eye.

Angie, you know who I am and what I do, he said. I’m a guy ... a stone mason, a bricklayer, a working stiff. I work with other guys like me, outdoors, sweating in the sun; in the heat of the day. Call us rednecks. We’re guys ... we take our coffee black and our whiskey straight. We like football, pretty girls, and we don’t cry at chick flicks. And standing next to some desk singing some silly song isn’t something any of us are going to be caught dead doing.

Pausing to arrange some accessories, Angie continues.

You know, looking at him, I could see how sincere he was, and how afraid that he’d disappointed me. Seeing the look in his eyes and the sound of his voice, I realized how deeply he felt about it and, honestly, I found myself agreeing with him.

Silence ensues as the girls finish their tasks.

You know, Angie, Bobby Jo says after a moment, Richard’s reaction is a good example of a problem in many churches.

You mean St. Kate’s?

Yes. And probably most Catholic parishes, actually; at least most of the ones I know of.

What’s that?

It’s run by women.

So, you're telling me there're women priests somewhere I don't know about? Angie says, a playful grin ambling across her face.

No, not that, Bobby says, laughing gently. But look at St. Kate's. Except for Joey in adult ed, and Randy, the maintenance supervisor, all the staff positions are filled by women.

And that's a bad thing?

No, not necessarily. In some ways it's really good. But if those women only present their programs in a way it appeals to them personally and don't consider their audience, then there's a problem.

How do you mean?

They become like a teacher who fails her students, because she, or he, presents things in a manner causing them to lose interest.

Like Ms. Stallone did last night?

Exactly. I've seen men attend a function ... once, and never come back, Bobby Jo says, continuing her thought. Why, because it's structured in in a way that satisfies the leaders tastes and preferences; without any thought as to how they're received by her entire audience.

Nodding gently, a look of understanding appears on Angie's face.

Men, especially married men with kids, have little time for themselves. It's safe to say attending something that makes them feel uncomfortable, or act childish, isn't going to be something they want to continue doing, or even do in the first place.

And Richard's reaction last night was typical of that?

Yes.

So, you're saying, if church functions are to appeal to all parishioners, they need to be tailored in a manner attractive to everyone; men and women alike?" Angie asks. And not presenting things that create an uncomfortable environment; a "girly" environment, as Richard called it?

Yea, Bobby Jo, chuckles. Those who are responsible for activities in a parish have to be careful not to try ...

... to turn Ken, into Barbie.

A recent statistic finds, when fathers are the spiritual leaders of their families, over ninety percent of those families actively practice their faith and participate in the life of a church. Given that, the influence of a father is maybe the most important factor in the healthy growth of the family, and the parish.

Maybe the best example is a carpenter whose stepson was born in a stable a long time ago?

When it comes to tailoring faith formation and education programs, isn't it important to do so in a manner appealing to all, particularly men; and especially fathers?

And doesn't Bobby Jo make a good point. How successful will you be if you try to ...

...turn Ken into Barbie?

Thinkaboutit, I'm Tony Baggz.