

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: ALF GARNETT AND THE GHOST OF BOBBY MOORE

“Till Death Us Do Part” was a much-loved TV sitcom in the 1960s. The first episode was screened on BBC TV in 1966. Its main character was Alf Garnett, an old fashioned, working-class Tory, and always at odds with the modern world. He and his wife Elsie lived in London’s East End. The story focuses on the day England won the World Cup and the team captain Booby Moore.¹

Setting:

Alf Garnett’s living room, July 30th 1966. The black and white television shows scenes of celebration at Wembley. The England football team has just beaten Germany 4-2. It’s the first time England has won the World Cup. It’s a cause for national celebration, watched by a TV audience of 32 million people. Alf stands triumphant, beer in hand, West Ham scarf around his neck. Elsie sits quietly in her chair, knitting.

Alf: *(shouting at the TV)* That’s it! That’s bloody it! We’ve won. We’ve shown them Germans again! Just like we did in ’45. Churchill would’ve been proud, God Rest His Soul! Four-two England! And our Bobby...my West Ham hero Bobby Moore lifting the World Cup!

Elsie: Sit down, Alf. You’ll give yourself a heart attack.

Alf: Heart attack? I’ve never been more alive, you silly moo! This is what England’s about. Proper English lads showing the whole world what we’re made of! Not like these bloody foreigners coming over here taking our jobs...

Suddenly the room darkens and goes cold...a shimmering figure appears...it’s Bobby Moore in his England’s captain’s arm band, the World Cup in his hands.

Bobby: Hello, Alf.

Alf: *(drops his beer and staggers backwards)* Bloody ‘ell, Bobby? Bobby Moore? But you’re on the telly? What you doin’ ‘ere?

Bobby: Yes, it’s me, Alf. You called me your hero, just now...

Alf: *(recovering, very emotional and confused)*. My hero? You’re every West Ham’s hero, is what you are my son! You’re England’s hero. You showed them bloody krauts, just like what we did in the war!

Bobby: Did I Alf? Is that what you think this is all about?

Alf: What d’you mean, is this what it’s all about? Course it is! England against Germany! Us against them! Just like it’s always been. And us always winning!

¹ Booby Moore died of cancer, aged 52

Bobby: *(shaking his head)* No, Alf. It's about football, not the war. Eleven men from England playing eleven men from Germany. Good men, all of them. Their goal keeper -Tilkowski – he shook my hand at the end of the match. Called me a worthy opponent.

Alf: But they're bloody Germans, ain't they? They're the enemy!

Bobby: Alf. Listen. The war ended twenty-one years ago. Those German lads weren't even born when Churchill was fighting Hitler. They're just footballers, like me.

Alf: *(confused)* But...but we beat them. We showed 'em who's boss!

Bobby: We won a football match, Alf. That's all. And d'you know...some of the best players I've ever faced aren't English. There's this lad Pele, from Brazil. Poetry in motion; unstoppable player! And Eusebio from Portugal...what a striker.

Alf: *(dismissive)* But they're bloody foreigners. That's what they are!

Booby: *(firmly)* They're footballers, Alf. Just like me. Just like the German lads we beat today. The beautiful game doesn't care about your passport.

Alf: *(getting agitated)* Now you listen here, Booby Moore! This is about England! About being English! And showing the world what we're bloody made of!

Bobby: And what are we made of, Alf? What makes us English...?

Alf: Well...we're...we're better than them, that's for starters...And we won the bleedin' war. And we built an Empire! We...

Booby: *(interrupting)* We're made of fairness, Alf. Fair play; that's what they call it – the English way. I wiped my hands clean this afternoon before I shook the Queen's hand. That's respect. That's what being English should mean.

Alf: But what about all these immigrants coming over here? Taking our jobs. Changing our country?

Bobby: *(looking directly at Alf)* I'll tell you something, Alf. There's a young lad at our club, at West Ham. He's called Clyde Best. He's from Bermuda in the Caribbean. Black lad. One of the finest players I've ever trained with. He works twice as hard as the rest because he knows he has to. That's the English way too – hard work.

Alf: *(uncomfortable)* That's...hmmm...well, that's different, that is.

Bobby: Is it? He wears the same claret and blue football strip as me. He gives everything for West Ham, just like I do. What makes him less English than me?

Alf: *(long pause, struggling)* I ... well, I don't know, do I? It's just the way things are. Always 'ave been.

Bobby: That's the way things were, Alf, not the way they have to be. You saw me lift that Cup today. You felt pride, didn't you?

Alf: Course I bleedin' did. Proudest moment of my life seeing West Ham's own son lifting the bloody World Cup for England!

Bobby: That pride, Alf... was that because we beat Germany? Or because we played with honour as a team? Because we showed the world what we could achieve when we work together?

Alf: *(thinking)* Hmm...? I...both I suppose.

Booby: Then hold onto that second feeling, Alf. That's the England worth fighting for. Not the England that looks backwards with hate, but the England that looks forward with hope.

Alf: But Bobby... 'ow am I going to change? I've been this way all my life. It's all I know, to be honest with you, Bobby.

Bobby: *(gently)* You don't have to change everything at once, Alf. Look...just...hmm...Well, next time you see someone who looks different, or speaks different, maybe think about our Clyde Best at West Ham. Maybe think about those German lads who congratulated us today. Maybe think about what Churchill really fought for. Not to keep people out, but to keep freedom alive.

Alf: You really think we can do that? I mean, be better?

Bobby: I know we can, Alf. We just won the World Cup today! England's capable of anything when we put our minds to it. But we have to include everyone, not leave people behind.

Alf: *(after a long pause)*. I'll try, Bobby. Well...for you; for West Ham; for England.

Bobby: *(smiling)* That's all any of us can do, Alf. Try to be better than we were yesterday...

The ghost of Bobby Moore begins to fade, but his voice remains clear.

Bobby: And Alf? Last thing. Before I go. When you watch the replay of today's match, don't just watch me lift the Cup. Watch how we all celebrated together. All of us. That's the England I want to leave you with...

Booby Moore disappears. Alf stands alone, scenes from the World Cup still playing on the television. Elsie looks up from her knitting.

Elsie: You alright, love?

Alf: *(quietly)*. Yeah, Elsie. I think...hmm... suppose so...well I think I might be. For the first time in a long while.

He slumps into his arm chair, looking at the television screen with new eyes, as the celebrations continue.

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