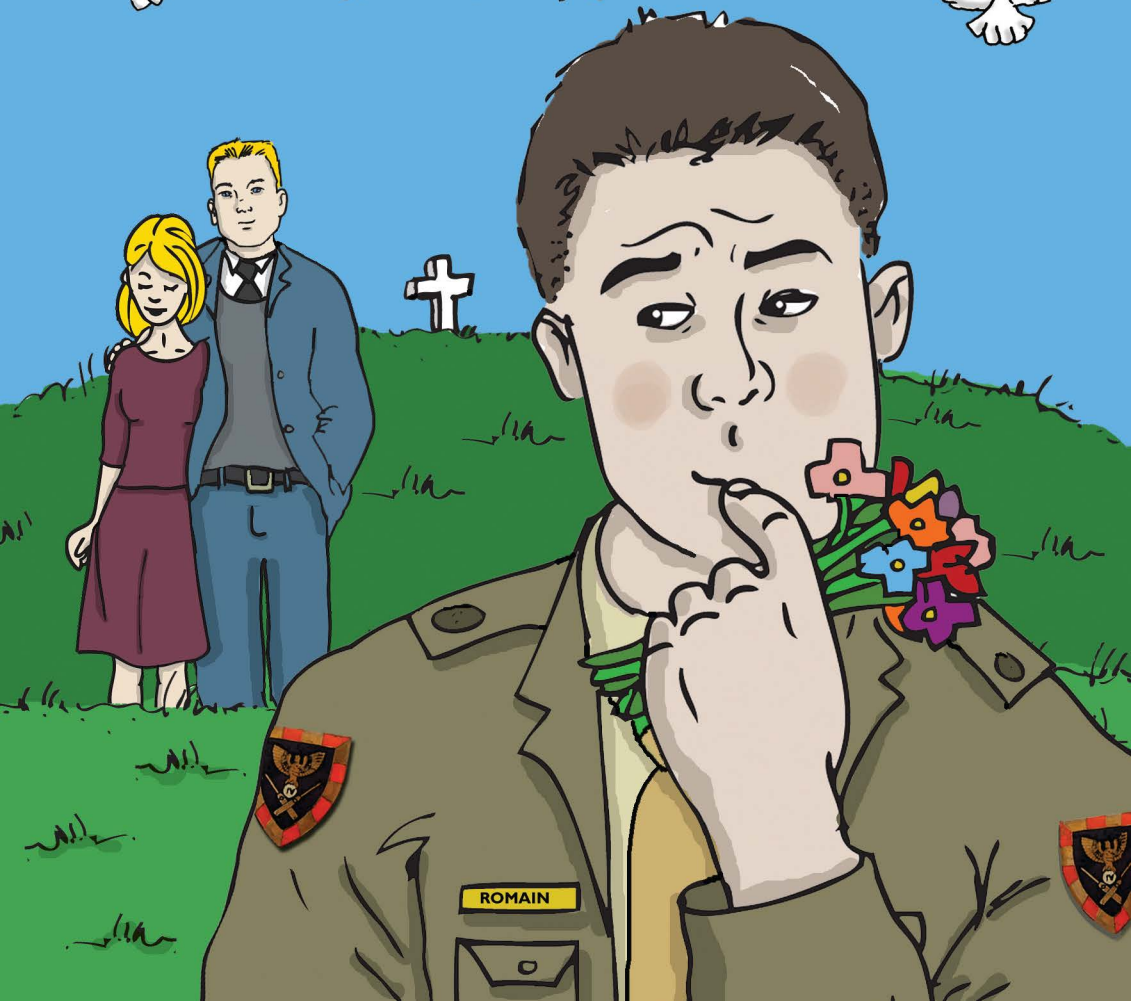


From the author of the Random Kak series

Blind Date at a Funeral

Memories of growing up in South Africa

Trevor Romain



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at a Funeral

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*The stories in this book are based on real events.
They may not have happened exactly the way I have described them.
But that's the way I like to remember them.*



Blind Date at a Funeral

(Soundtrack: 'Hold the Line' by Toto)

Her eyes were as blue as the sea around the Greek isles.

I was in love with her.

In my mind we were already married. The whole idea was quite absurd because I had not even met her yet.

As a youngster, I did some pretty dumb things when it came to dating.

I once went on the Breakfast Run on the back of a motorcycle driven by a girl I fancied. She dropped that bike so low on corners that I just about had a heart-a-fit. I clung to life for three hours, and I almost needed a crowbar to pry my fingers loose from the back of the seat when we finally stopped. Upon arrival she threw herself all over a huge Hells Angels dude who was crisscrossed in home-made prison tattoos. He was packing a smirk and a snarl that would have made a pit bull run away whimpering.

I hitchhiked back to Johannesburg.

I once helped a girl secretly move out of her boyfriend's flat while he was at work. I had high hopes of being her future boyfriend. Not so. I got

the old 'I love you but I'm not in love with you' story from her. I also almost got turned into a eunuch by her ex-boyfriend when she moved back in with him and told him I had helped her move out!

No, I did not help her move back in.

The one that really takes the cake happened when I was at Fourth Field Regiment in Potchefstroom during my army days. One of my tent-mates showed me a picture of his cousin and I fell in love. She was an Afrikaans girl studying at the teachers' training college in Potch.

I kept the picture of the girl in my wallet and almost convinced myself I was already dating her before we even met.

My friend tried a few times to organise a chance meeting, without her knowing that it was all a set-up, but those opportunities never came to fruition.

Finally, one afternoon, he came rushing into the tent and gave me the thumbs up.

'My great-uncle died,' he said, smiling.

'I'm so sorry ...' I began.

'It's perfect,' he said. 'You can meet her at the funeral.'

And that spelled the beginning of something very special.

I honestly tried talking my way out of going to the service. I truly did. I told him I would stick out like a sore thumb. A Joburg joller in a Herman Charles Bosman story. An Orange Grove boy at nagmaal. But he would have nothing of it.

'You're going! Finished and klaar,' he said.

So, I put on my army step-outs. Polished my shoes. Made sure my beret sat nicely on my head (and didn't look like a chef's hat). And I went to the memorial service.

And not surprisingly, my suspicion was validated. I did indeed step into a Herman Charles Bosman story. The memorial ceremony was actually a wake. It took place at a farmhouse outside Potch.

I felt more out of place than Keith Richards at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting.

I must say, I was welcomed with open arms, even though my Afrikaans

wasn't nearly good enough to understand most of what people were saying to me. (My Afrikaans did improve immensely during my stint in the army.)

Within ten seconds of my arrival, a shot of witblits, home-made alcohol, was shoved into my hand. And we drank in the old man's honour. The rest of the night was pretty much a blur.

I do remember a few pertinent details though:

The first and most sobering one was that the girl was indeed stunning. She was gorgeous. But she arrived with a date. I do believe his name was Rampie and he was a genuine farm-raised provincial rugby player. The guy's paws were enormous. He shook my hand so firmly that my eyes almost popped out of my head and I think my tongue popped out too. But that may have been because she was so beautiful.

The second thing was the incredible story her other great-uncle, the one who hadn't died, told me. And, not surprisingly, it was a Herman Charles Bosman story.

The old oom looked like one of the characters in a Bosman book, with booze-flushed cheeks, a magnificent white moustache, a freshly pressed safari suit and long socks with veldskoene, topped off with a felt hat with a leopard-skin band around it. He took a long swig of what looked like peach brandy and recited the first paragraph of the Bosman story, verbatim.

'Leopards?

'... Oh yes, there are two varieties on this side of the Limpopo. The chief difference between them is that the one kind of leopard has got a few more spots on it than the other kind. But when you meet a leopard in the veld, unexpectedly, you seldom trouble to count his spots to find out what kind he belongs to. That is unnecessary. Because, whatever kind of leopard it is that you come across in this way, you only do one kind of running. And that is the fastest kind.'

I must say, I really wanted to run away from that gathering when I first arrived and saw the burly rugby player between me and my future with the pretty girl. There would be no connecting with her – no dating, and no enduring romance.

But I'm glad I stayed around and settled into a long drunken night, happily sitting on a riempie stoel on the veranda, listening with fascination and awe to the old uncle who shared story after story by Herman Charles Bosman.

The style of storytelling swirled through my brain that night and made an everlasting impression.

When we got back to the army base I handed the picture of the girl back to my friend.

'Ag sorry, man,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'That guy was big, hey.' I smiled.

'Don't worry,' I said. 'I found a new love tonight.'

'Who?' he said.

'It's a secret,' I replied.

'Oh okay,' he said. 'Lekker.'

And so began my life-long love affair with short stories.



Death for Dessert

(Soundtrack: 'Wanted Dead or Alive' by Bon Jovi)

During a romantic candlelit dinner, a scantily clad woman, drinking brandy straight from the bottle, usually foreshadows some sort of trouble.

And trouble there was. Big trouble.

We were in her little flat in Turffontein. She had invited me for dinner and we were sitting at the table after eating our meal.

She was a very good-looking woman. The room was dark except for the candles on the table. The flickering light twinkled in her lovely green eyes.

She looked at me and pointed the bottle in my direction.

'Why do you like me?' she asked, slurring a little.

Thank God I never had to answer that question. Truth be told, I liked her because she was a bona fide nymphomaniac and I was in my early twenties and, like most boys, I had a one-track mind.

She was a jilted divorcee who was looking for love in all the wrong places and I just wanted a friend with benefits. I was certainly way too immature to fully understand the nuances of her emotional neediness,

let alone provide her with the stability she needed to rebuild her post-divorce life.

She took another swig from the bottle and played with the wax on the candle. She dipped her finger in the hot liquid on top of the candle and grimaced slightly.

‘So?’ she said, looking up at me with a sexy smile.

I chuckled, trying to buy time before I got myself into deep water with my reply.

My mind darted around, looking for an answer in the swirling wine-induced fog that was clouding my brain. All that was working exceptionally well inside my head was the childish little voice that was telling me to hurry up and say something that would get her naked as soon as possible.

She was a little older than me. A lot more rough around the edges and far more experienced in many things, especially in the art of hanky-panky. I met her through my brother. He went out with her first and she fell for him much too quickly. Her self-medication with liquor created all sorts of drama. He assessed the situation and wisely extricated himself post-haste.

She phoned me for comfort and poured her heart out about how my brother had dropped her.

I’m no fool. All it took was a sympathetic ear and lots of tissues, and before I knew it, I had replaced my brother.

I should have read more into his raised eyebrows and wry smile when I told him what was happening. But she was exceptionally pretty and he had shared stories about his visits to her boudoir, which had got my attention.

The physical part of my short-lived relationship with her was great and I was in hog heaven while it lasted. But when she got insecure and the bottle came out, things went south very quickly.

And so, there we were, having a candlelit soiree in her flat.

I wanted nothing more than to head to the bedroom for dessert. She, with bottle in hand, wanted answers that I could not readily provide.

She asked me again. ‘Seriously. Why do you like me?’

Before I could answer, all hell broke loose.