

By **Anna Rich**

# A recipe for success

About a year ago, we interviewed homegrown author Sally Andrew and ran an extract from her first novel – which you (and we!) loved. Her warm and wise (but troubled) character, Tannie Maria, is a delight, and we're happy to spend more time with her in this, her second book. Here's a taster of the first two chapters of *Tannie Maria & the Satanic Mechanic*.

# We

know how to pick a winner! Sally's first book, *Recipes for Love and Murder*, has been doing really, really well.

The rights have been bought by 21 publishers in 14 languages so far, and

it was chosen as one of Oprah.com, *Kirkus Reviews* and *Wall Street Journal's* best books of the year. Here at home it's a bestseller, and won the Nielsen Booksellers' Choice Award, which means that booksellers voted it their favourite South African book.

In case you missed it, let's get you up to speed. Set in the Klein Karoo (which is also home to Sally), the novel centres on Tannie Maria, who works at the local newspaper as a food columnist and agony aunt. Her own life hasn't run smoothly, so she has the empathy it takes to advise others on their troubles. And her rounded shape is down to the fact that she's a comfort eater. Yes: a lovely, imperfect heroine.

If you loved Mma Ramotswe and *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, you'll likely love Tannie Maria too. In fact, if you need more of an endorsement, the author of the No. 1 series, Alexander McCall Smith, no less, called Sally's first novel 'a triumph'.

In the latest instalment, Maria needs counselling herself... As she begins a new relationship with the handsome Detective Henk Kannemeyer, she finds it difficult to shake the ill-effects of her previous marriage. Will Henk's love prove the salve she needs?

Of course there's a murder in the mix too, but before we let any spoilers loose, here's the first couple of chapters to get you going.

Here's what Sally's doing this holiday.

**I'm taking my folks** to the Drakensberg for a week. Then I plan to head up to the wilds of Botswana with my man. **Over the holidays**, I'm looking forward to reading Marianne Thamm's 'sort-of memoir', *Hitler, Verwoerd, Mandela and Me*. (We're so on the same page! Turn to page 42 for our interview with Marianne ...)

**I'll be baking the out-of-this-world Venus Cake** (a coffee-chocolate cake with a layer of peanut butter and apricot jam) from *Tannie Maria and the Satanic Mechanic*. (And so will we! Turn to page 61 for the delicious recipe.)

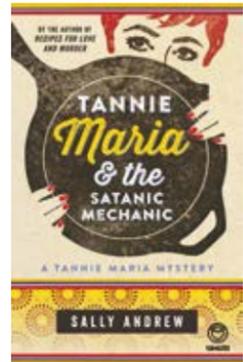
**My idea of a perfect day on holiday** is waking early to the sound of leopards sawing and woodlands kingfishers trilling. A long walk (avoiding elephants and lions, of course!) down to the giant fig trees on the Shashe River for a swim and picnic.

**On my wish list?** I always like a nice pen. And a torch with a DNA-sampler and a 700 000 volt shocker. **The family tradition that I specially love** is the Land Rover breaking down (with a minor easy-to-fix-problem) only after we've reached our destination.



**THIS PIC** Sally Andrew (in grey) and her friends dancing in the Karoo veld.

**Tannie Maria and the Satanic Mechanic** by Sally Andrew (Penguin Random House South Africa)



**CHAPTER ONE**

Have you ever wanted something really badly? You can't just wait till it lands in your lap, but if you chase it too hard you might chase it away from you. Or catch something you didn't expect. I was maybe too hungry for love and ended up with murder on my plate.

It was a warm Saturday afternoon in March, and I was getting ready for dinner with Detective Lieutenant Henk Kannemeyer.

A bokmakierie sang out in my garden, and a bird replied from a thorn tree in the veld.

I put a bowl of salad onto the stoep table. 'Ag, you look beautiful,' I told the salad.

I had made three salads and two puddings, for just two people.

I guess that shows I was trying too hard.

Henk was bringing the potjie for the fire. The potato salad and coleslaw were in the fridge; the rocket salad with Brie, red figs and pomegranate pips was on the stoep table. There had been some gentle rain the day before that made the air so clean that I could see the red rocks on the Rooiberg and the purple folds of the Langeberge. But now was not the time to enjoy the view. There were still the butter dumplings to make, as well as the icing for the peanut-butter coffee chocolate cake.

Tonight was a special date because Henk was going to spend the night. We had discussed where Kosie, his lamb, was going to sleep. The lamb was a gift from Henk's uncle Koos, the sheep farmer, and was not meant to be a pet. But although Henk loved

roast lamb, he didn't have the heart to do that to Kosie. In his own house, the lammetjie slept in the kitchen, but Henk agreed it was time the lamb learnt to be an outside animal, and it would sleep in the little hok behind the house with my chickens. It got on well with my chickens.

The idea of Henk spending the night made me nervous. I ate some of the potato salad with its cream-and-mint dressing. The bokmakierie was still singing in my garden. Most birds have just one hit single, but that shrike could make a double album with all its tunes. My favourite song is the one where it throws its head back, opens its beak and pumps its little yellow breast. It was singing that very song as I iced the cake with melted chocolate and coffee. Another bird that sings with such feeling is the fiery-necked nightjar. When there's a full moon, it sometimes sings all night. It makes a beautiful bubbling sound that is filled with such pleasure it can make you blush.

I cleaned the icing bowl with my fingers. Now I would need to scrub my hands before putting on my lacy white underwear.

White, like it was going to be my first time.

It would be the first time since my late husband, Fanie.

Henk arrived in his Toyota Hilux bakkie just before sunset. He came with a bag of wood for the fire, a three-legged potjie pot, a lamb and the lamb's blue blanket. Kosie wandered over to join my chickens at the compost buffet. Henk put the cast-iron pot by the braai spot in the garden. I stood on the stoep, watching him as he brushed his hands together and then wiped them on his jeans and looked up at me. He smiled that big smile of his, and the sun caught the tips of his chestnut moustache. He wore a white cotton shirt with some buttons undone, and his chest hairs glowed silver and copper. What had I done to deserve someone like him?

'Hello, Henk,' I said, smiling. I stood with my hands on my hips, in my cream dress with the blue flowers.

He did not answer but walked up the stairs onto the stoep.

He cupped my chin in his hand and tilted it up to him. He bent down (he is big and tall, and I am round and short) and kissed me. He smelt like fresh bread and cinnamon, and honey from the beeswax on his moustache.

He held his large hand in the small of my back and pressed me to him. I wanted to lead him inside there and then, and if I'd followed the wild blood of my father (who was English and a journalist), I would have done just that. But my mother was a respectable Afrikaans housewife, and she had fed me her morals along with all her good meals.

'I should light the fire,' said Henk, his voice warm in my ear.

'Yes,' I said.

The best potjie needs a few hours simmering on a low heat.

**CHAPTER TWO**

The frogs and toads were making music like an underwater marimba band. There's a spring near the Swartberge, behind my house, and a stream with little pools, where the frogs sing love songs to their mates.

The potjie was delicious. The meat and onions at the bottom were sticky and brown, and the layers of vegetables had that fire flavour.

'Leave some room for pudding,' I said. 'I have a special chocolate cake, and *botterkluitjies* with brandy sauce.'

'*Jinne*, I haven't eaten those since I was a boy. My brother gave me a black eye once, fighting over the last kluitjie.'

We sat side by side on the stoep, listening to the frogs, holding hands and looking out across the veld. His hand was warm, and wrapped all the way around mine. The moon was not yet up, so the burning stars filled the sky.

'The sky gets so big at night,' I said.

'It's big in the day too.'

'*Ja*,' I agreed. 'But I don't notice it so much. Now it's so full and busy. All those stars. And planets.'

'Look there, on the hilltop.

That's Venus rising.'

'So that one's Venus. When I can't sleep, I sit and watch it setting, early in the morning.'

Henk's lamb butted at his thigh with its little horns, and he fed it a piece of rocket. He wasn't bottle-feeding Kosie any more.

'You still having nightmares, Maria?'

'I'll go make the coffee.'

'What that man did to you ...'

'*Ja*,' I said, thinking of Fanie.

But Henk was talking about the murderer who'd tried to kill me. Henk and I had first met when we were investigating a murder, a few months ago. He didn't know the whole story about Fanie.

'You can get help, you know,' Henk said. 'Counselling or something.'

The problems I had were bigger than Henk Kannemeyer knew about. The kind of problems no one else could help me with.

'I'm fine,' I said.

'But sometimes –' His phone rang. 'Sorry,' he said, answering it.

I went to the kitchen, to prepare the dumplings and brandy sauce. I could hear him talking on the stoep.

'*Sjoe* ... They got her? ... She didn't run? ... *Ja*, they'll keep her in Swellendam now. Maybe send her off for psychological assessment ...'

When I came back with the kluitjies, he was looking out into the darkness.

'What happened?' I asked.

Henk shook his head again. He didn't like to discuss work with me.

'Was it that woman?' I asked. 'Who stabbed her boyfriend in the heart?'

Jessie'd written about it in our Klein Karoo Gazette. I did the 'Love Advice and Recipe Column', and she wrote the big stories.

The woman was from our town, Ladismith, but the murder had happened in Barrydale. The man had been eating supper in the Barrydale Hotel with a friend, and his girlfriend had walked up to him and stabbed him in the heart. While they were trying to save the man's life, the woman had just walked out.

'They've caught her?' I said.

'Ja. She went back to the Barrydale Hotel, had supper at the same table ...' He shook his head.

'You think she wanted to get caught?'

'She must be mad,' he said.

'Stabbing him like that, in front of all those people ...'

'I wonder –' I said.

'And then going back ...'

'I wonder what he did to her,' I said to the pudding, as I dished it onto our plates.

'I'm sure her lawyers will have a story,' he said. 'But it's over now. The Swellendam police cover Barrydale. Let's not talk about it on a night like this.' He swept his hand out, to show the flowers on my dress and the stars scattered across the soft dark sky.

The *botterkluitjies* put an end to

the conversation anyway, because all that you can say when eating those cinnamon brandy dumplings is 'mmm mmm'. Then there was the cake. I didn't think my buttermilk chocolate cake could be improved, but then I invented another version with a cup of coffee in the dough, a layer of peanut butter and apricot jam in the middle, and an icing of melted coffee-chocolate. It was so amazing you would think it had come from another planet.

'*Jirre*,' said Henk, after a long time of speechlessness. 'What kind of cake is this?'

'A Venus Cake,' I said, wiping a little icing from his lip with my finger. Henk licked my fingertip.

'Kosie,' Henk said. The lamb was now lying under the table, resting its head on his foot. 'It's time for you to go to bed.' ❖

**THAT VENUS CAKE!** (Serves 10–12)

- 1½ cups freshly brewed hot strong coffee
- 3 cups (380g) all-purpose flour
- 2½ cups white sugar
- 4 t bicarbonate of soda
- ½ t salt
- 1 cup (110g) Dutch cocoa powder
- 1½ cups sunflower oil
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- 3 eggs
- 1 t vanilla extract
- approx. 9 T crunchy peanut butter
- approx. 3 T apricot jam

**Coffee-chocolate icing**

- 1½ t instant coffee granules
- 180g dark baking chocolate, broken into pieces
- 60g butter
- 3 T milk

**Topping**

- 1 t instant coffee granules, crushed to a fine powder

- 1.** Get your coffee started. Make it *lekker* strong. Preheat a convection oven on the fan setting to 180°C. Grease two 20 cm cake tins and line the bottoms with baking paper.
- 2.** Sift the flour, sugar, bicarbonate of soda, salt and cocoa into a large bowl and whisk thoroughly by hand or with an electric mixer. This mixes them together and lets in air.
- 3.** Gently add the oil, followed by the buttermilk and then the eggs, one at a time, mixing thoroughly after each addition. Stir in the vanilla extract.
- 4.** Put the hot coffee in a jug and add it to the mixture, pouring it down the side of the bowl.
- 5.** Divide the batter between the two tins and bake for 20 minutes, then turn down the temperature to 160°C and bake for a further 25–35 minutes, or until a knife inserted into the centre of a cake comes out clean.
- 6.** Allow to cool for at least 20 minutes before removing

- from the tins, then let the cakes cool completely on a wire rack.
- 7.** Once cool, if the tops of the cakes are bumpy and crusty, you can use a bread knife to cut them flat. (It is important the cake that will form the bottom layer is flat.)
- 8.** Spread a generous layer of peanut butter on the bottom cake layer and top it with a comfortable layer of apricot jam. Put the second layer of cake on top.
- 9.** To make the icing, melt the ingredients – except the teaspoon of crushed coffee – together in a double boiler. (You can also melt them in a mug inside a bowl of boiling water.) Use a fork to mix the ingredients thoroughly.
- 10.** Allow to cool and thicken, then spread the icing on the top and sides of the cake.
- 11.** Allow to cool some more (you can even pop the cake in the fridge for a while), then sprinkle over the teaspoon of coffee powder.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREA NIXON