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# Rufus Takes Charge!



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## **Dedication**

To Jessie – My devoted Alsatian pal who lived and slept on my bed with me for the first fourteen years of my life.

## **About the Author**

The Author has in the past written several articles for South African and overseas magazines mainly in the transport and travel field. For many years he was on the editorial advisory board of Transport Management, a Thompson publication.

When he retired some years ago he was commercial director of a large national food group.

At present he runs his own recruitment company in Cape Town.

This book has been lying idle on scraps of paper and in the author's head for most of his life. It has finally made it to print.

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## Introduction

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To anyone who met them it was immediately apparent that Oupa and Rufus were inseparably close. They enjoyed each other's company like a pair of conspiratorial schoolboys. They went everywhere together and more often than not they were in trouble together as well, especially with Ouma.

She called them the terrible twins, not because of any look-alike but because of her conviction that any local or national catastrophe would find them both involved in it somehow.

Oupa and Ouma lived in one of those typical three-bedroomed, white walled, red roofed houses that still can be seen in Malvern today. This quiet and mostly peaceful suburb in the gold mining metropolis of Johannesburg has changed very little over the years. At that time in the 1950s Malvern was quite a small community of mainly English, Afrikaans and Portuguese-speaking families. Everyone knew everyone else and much of their personal and private business was common knowledge and gossiped about over neighbours' fences, on street corners

and at every social occasion. Oupa and Ouma were well-known members of that local community.

They had lived in the house in St Amant Street for most of their long married life. It was comfortable and spacious and had all that they needed. A big bonus for them was the fact that their married daughter Betty lived next door with her husband Andre and their twins Simon and Cathy. The ten-year-old grandchildren were the apple of Ouma's eye. She doted on them and spoiled them unashamedly at every opportunity.

Outside of the immediate family Oupa and Ouma were known simply as 'the Smiths'.

Ouma was Afrikaans-speaking, with Dutch ancestry, while Oupa was English, having emigrated as a young man from Kent in England. This led to some rather interesting interactions between them and also to the occasional conflict which was often compounded by their completely opposite personalities. They were both fluently bilingual and could easily switch to and fro from English to Afrikaans, doing this often during normal conversation and even in mid sentence.

Oupa had a far less serious outlook on life than Ouma. He was altogether a jovial and outgoing type, someone with whom you could always share a

good joke. His tanned, leathery face often gave the appearance of being deadly serious, but the deeply etched crow's feet lines radiating from the corners of his eyes to his greying sideburns were a noticeable give-away that he couldn't really be serious and was most probably pulling your leg. Once he had his bemused victim in his net he would suddenly relieve the tension with a broad grin and deep intermittent belly chuckles.

He was always ready with some friendly advice on any subject, even those on which he had no real knowledge or experience. He reckoned that everything one came across in life could be solved quite easily by using logic and common sense. If it couldn't he would have a ready answer for that eventuality as well!

His slight stoop made him look shorter than he really was. He liked to wear loose-fitting comfortable safari suits with shorts that always looked a size too big for him. Due to his skinny legs the long khaki socks he wore never seemed to stay up for long. They soon slipped down over his calves and bunched around the top of his shoes at the ankle.

Outdoors Oupa was seldom seen without his old well-worn floppy sun hat. He would have worn it indoors as well but for the sharp reminder from Ouma to remove it as soon as he came into the

house. Dutifully the hat would be flipped off his head onto a large brass hook behind the kitchen door. He was quite adept at whipping it off the hook and back onto his head again in one even motion as he went out.

Ouma on the other hand was completely different. She was ultra conservative in the old Afrikaans tradition. She loved her grandchildren, her house, her garden and her church. Her grandchildren usually came first. Apart from their sleeping hours they probably spent more time at Oupa and Ouma's house than at their own. In her subtle way Ouma knew that they just had to smell the aroma of fresh baking wafting across the fence to have them running across to her kitchen for a visit to see what was in the oven. She took great pride and silent credit for the blond, healthy, good-looking appearance of her grandchildren, saying to herself that they definitely came from her side of the family.

Ouma was slim, almost thin, and slightly taller than Oupa. Her face had a smooth slightly pallid hue, although she had naturally red lips. She never wore even the slightest touch of make-up saying that she had no desire to look like a common tart. When asked what colour lipstick she was wearing, she would say with some irritation, 'No lipstick has ever touched these lips!' Her greying hair was invariably tied up

at the back into a large round bun with different coloured pins holding it together. Without exception she always wore long dark-coloured dresses, often accompanied by a white lacy apron in front.

The third member of the Smith household was Rufus. In his dogwise opinion he was the main member of the Smith household.

His charming doggy smile and inquisitively cocked head with its half turned-down ears drew people to him instinctively. No one could resist the impulse to go up to him and stroke him and rub his soft furry ears. A gentle repeated nuzzle at your hand would ensure that you kept this activity going for as long as possible.

As a result of all this very welcome attention Rufus naturally assumed that the sole purpose for the earthly existence of this large human fan club was for them to come and visit him to enjoy his company and to play with him in his garden. Any hesitation would be encouraged by dropping a ball at their feet with the invitation, 'You throw and I will show you how fast I can fetch!' It was a sound dog philosophy that seldom failed.

Rufus was a medium-sized, reddish-brown, shaggy mutt of unknown ancestry. It was not easy to classify him accurately in the canine world of known breeds.

He was nonetheless a remarkably handsome dog in a scruffy sort of way.

One well known dog breeder said that Rufus resembled a cross between an Irish Setter and an Irish Wolfhound. This he concluded would account for his colouring and shaggy fur coat and possibly for the Irish devilment in him as well.

From his colouring Oupa had named him Rufus when he was a puppy, confiding to Ouma that this name also had just a slight hint of class to it. 'Do you know,' he said to her with a broad grin, proudly pushing out his chest, 'the Prime Minister of England, Winston Churchill, also has a dog called Rufus. That, without a doubt, places both Rufus and me in the same distinguished social class!' Ouma just raised her eyebrows and gave a non-committal grunt to indicate that she wasn't particularly impressed by this glib comparison.

However, because of his sub-pavement origins there were the occasional suggestions that Rufus could possibly be of the mongrel variety. Unwittingly, any such person was heading into dangerous territory on the subject if Oupa happened to be in earshot. The offensive remark would get an instant and quite heated rebuke from him, retorting quite emphatically, 'You are definitely wrong on that score. It is clearly obvious to any real expert on the subject that Rufus

comes from a royal bloodline. Just look at his strong neck and athletic build, and the way he carries himself. That shiny fur coat and the alert look in his eye just radiates class. No, I can assure you; this dog comes from distinguished stock and is a Champion in every sense of the word.'

These prophetic words were to be tested in the not too distant future.

But let us go back to the very beginning.