

Er, had we just gatecrashed... a funeral?

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR CLAUDIA CARROLL ON HOW ONE FRIEND FOUND LOVE IN THE MOST UNUSUAL OF PLACES

I'VE JUST written a book about finding love in the oddest, weirdest places, and when I was researching it, I remembered a particular beaut involving a pal of mine. Laura is a lovely, bright, successful woman who's always had wonderful things in her life, a job she loved and a great place to live in, plus family, great friends and disposable income.

But for years and years she was utterly and totally manless.

Now, the feminist movement did great things for our generation, but when you're alone, you're still made to feel it. I can sometimes imagine the ghost of Jane Austen rising from her grave, pointing a bony finger at us and saying, 'Ha! You lot thought the last two hundred years had changed things?'

And then, love found Laura in the most unusual of places. Flash forward to one Saturday a few years ago, when I was meeting her for brunch in this restaurant we both loved. Best Eggs Benedict in town, and the perfect kick-start to anyone's weekend.

So, there we were, patiently queuing for a table, both of us starving and needing a) caffeine b) eggs, bacon, anything and in my case c) a very large and chocolate-y desert to follow. We were so starving we were nearly getting ratty with each other.

"Ahh," the hostess at the restaurant told us, "bit of a seating problem, I'm afraid. We're completely full as you can see, so there'll be a bit of a wait."

A bit of a wait? Not with both of us almost violent with hunger. "But there's a free table for two right there!" I spluttered, pointing wildly at a cordoned off section. "Why can't we have that one?"

"Private party,"

she replied.

I'm not proud of what followed, but the smell of fries and eggs was beginning to waft our way and take it from me, I was powerless. "Erm...Yes," I answered back. "We're actually with the private group. Both of us. OK if we're seated now? Sorry that we're a bit late."

And so two minutes later, we were seated with food ordered, coffee was on its way, and we were slowly starting to feel a bit more human.

FRIENDLY

It was pretty much when we first took notice of the private party surrounding us. There must have been at least 50 people, predominantly young-ish, and all incredibly well dressed. Some chic, fashionista party, we wondered?

At lunchtime on a Saturday though? Unlikely.

And then just as our food arrived, a guy approached us. He was friendly and warm with an open smile, and shook hands and introduced himself as Adam.

"So how did you both know Harry, then?" he asked politely.

Harry? I thought. Who the hell was Harry? "It's just I thought I knew most of Harry's friends and I haven't seen either of you girls before."

Thankfully, Laura is a bit quicker off the mark than me. "Do you know, I was just about to ask you exactly the same thing," she smiled pleasantly back at him.

"Oh, I knew Harry from work," Adam nodded. "Although I've only been at the company for the past year, but we'd grown close in that time. I'm going to miss him."

Now an alarm bell was starting to ring in my head. He was going to miss this Harry guy?

Had we walked into an emigration party by accident, where the absent host had just headed off to the airport with a backpack and a one way ticket to Sydney?

"Tragic, wasn't it?" Adam went on.

Tragic? Had we just gate-

crashed... a funeral?

Yes, is the short answer. Harry had just passed away in his early 50s, a sudden coronary. Awful. Terrible. Just heartbreaking.

And there we were, trying to pass ourselves off as lifelong buddies to someone who actually did know the guy. And all for a plate of Eggs Benedict with a side of garlic fries.

Yes, of course we could have 'fessed up there and then. But Laura is made of stronger stuff than that and decided we needed to brazen the whole thing out.

We somehow, some way, got away with it. Lovely, friendly Adam seemed to buy the pair of us as childhood pals of the deceased who just hadn't seen him in years. So we chatted and we nattered and a few hours later, just as people were starting to leave, he shyly took Laura aside and asked for her phone number.

NAGGING

"I'll have to tell him the truth," she said. "And the sooner, the better." Easier said than done, however, because date one was just so perfect and lovely. So what was she supposed to do? Ruin an otherwise gorgeous night with the first genuinely lovely guy she'd met in years?

Anyway, date one turned into dates two, three and four and still she hadn't got round to telling him. Weeks passed, months passed, she was falling for him deeper and deeper all the time, and eventually the nagging alarm in her head could be silenced no longer.

So, over a quiet plate of pasta and a bottle of wine back at his apartment late one night, she plucked up the guts to come clean. "Remember the, emm... funeral we met at?"

"Course I do," Adam told her. "Vividly." "Well, there's something about it you need to know."

And out it all came. Then there was silence. Awkward, bum-clenching, tense silence.

Then, "I know," he smiled back at her. "I've known for ages. Since that day, in fact. I asked poor old Harry's family if they'd any idea who you were and they said no. Funny, I was wondering how long it would take for you to get around to telling me."

Three years later, and Laura and Adam are engaged since Christmas and getting married next month. Of course, I'm not recommending funerals. Who in their right mind would do something like that?

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A Very Accidental Love Story, by Claudia Carroll, published by Avon, price €12.99
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FASHION & BEAUTY NEWS
WITH DEE O'KEEFFE

TREAT FOR YOUR FEET THAT REALLY WORKS

> GIVE YOUR FEET A TREAT

In between pedicures or visits to the chiropodist, most feet need some TLC. And even if you are lucky enough to not require professional services, prevention is better than cure when it comes to dry, hard skin, particularly around the heel area. B-Line Beauty's Feet Treat is a highly concentrated, penetrating foot cream containing essential oils and fruit acids. This actually does what it says on the tin. Ideally, pop on a pair of 100pc cotton socks after application so that your skin can breath — larger Tesco stores sometimes stock these in their beauty aisles. Feet Treat is €23 per 150ml. To order: www.b-linebeauty.com.



> GETTING THE BOOT

The practical among us will already be preparing for the end of our pretend summer and be surveying our



wardrobe before the nation becomes Birr, Co Offaly.

Dropping temperatures will, of course, mean goodbye to open-toed shoes, but limited finances do not mean that you can't make the transition with style. We love these studded ankle boots from Penneys, €24, in brown and black. Aside from their affordability and comfort, they can be worn with the ubiquitous skinny jeans or a mini, offset with our favourite black, opaque tights — God bless winter and 60 denier tights!

> SHINE ON

This oriental Jacquard dress from Oasis, €119, is shiny like a holiday, not to mention ultra feminine and flattering, thanks to its cinched-in waist. The high neck gives perfect balance as the skirt is rather on the short side, but this can easily be worn with dark tights if you're on the shy side. The pattern is busy enough so keep accessories nice and low key.

