

Introduction

Precious Ramotswe had become used to being the only private detective in town, in fact the only one in the whole country. She had not expected competition. But she was not a woman to give up easily.

... 'There's one other thing,' said Mma Makutsi. 'These detectives are men.'

'Ah,' said Mma Ramotswe. 'That is a good thing, and a bad thing too.'

Life at the No.*1 Ladies' Detective Agency becomes more difficult with the surprising arrival of a new detective in town. *Ex-CID*†, *Ex-New York. Ex-cellent!* reads the sign outside the new agency, and the owner certainly sounds experienced. But will he be able to solve the kinds of cases that come to Mma‡ Ramotswe? Daily life in Botswana is not like New York, and the people are not the same either. Mma Ramotswe has the advantage because she understands the local people, their traditions and their problems. But competition must always be taken seriously ...

And Mma Ramotswe is not the only one with problems to solve: her secretary, Mma Makutsi, has difficulties in *her* life too. First, there is the question of how to earn more money, and then there is the problem of finding a husband. Time is running out if she wants to meet a man of her own age. So where should she look, and what sort of man is she looking for?

* no.: short for *number*

† CID: a group of police detectives that were feared in South Africa under white governments

‡ Mma: *Mrs* or *Madam* in Setswana, the language spoken by most people in Botswana

In *The Kalahari Typing School for Men*, Mma Ramotswe needs all her intelligence and understanding to bring satisfactory solutions to her clients, and Mma Makutsi finds that the simplest ideas are often the best. With the help of many cups of red bush tea*, life at the No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency continues in its gentle, unhurried way, guided by the wise and sensible Precious Ramotswe.

Alexander McCall Smith was born in Zimbabwe, and grew up there until he left to study at university in Scotland. He returned to Africa to teach law at the University of Botswana, and his love of the country comes through clearly in his books. His characters are not just invented; he has known many people like Mma Ramotswe, Mr JLB Matekoni and their friends.

He returned to Scotland to teach medical law at Edinburgh University. During his working life he has written more than fifty non-fiction books, but *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* was his first mystery story. It appeared in 1999 and was an immediate success. Other books followed. McCall Smith has said that he could not leave Mma Ramotswe at the end of the first book. 'It seemed rather rude,' he says. 'Like getting up in the middle of a conversation and leaving the room.'

The books have been translated into thirty-nine languages and have sold over fourteen million copies around the world – including in Botswana, where they are very popular. In 2004, the *No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* books won two prizes for British writers. There have now been nine books about Mma Ramotswe's detective agency. McCall Smith's millions of readers wait for each new book to appear, happy to read as much as he wants to write about Mma Ramotswe and her friends. 'People enjoy the books,' McCall Smith has said, 'and it's almost

* red bush tea: a South African tea made from red leaves

unkind to say that I'm not going to write any more.'

Alexander McCall Smith now lives in Edinburgh with his wife Elizabeth, a doctor. He has also written other fiction, including the *44 Scotland Street* and the *Portuguese Irregular Verbs* books.

Many people have learnt about the beautiful country of Botswana through McCall Smith's stories. It is a small country in southern Africa with fewer than two million people. Most of Botswana is covered by the Kalahari Desert, and it is home to many different animals and birds, which tourists come to see. Britain governed Botswana from 1885 until 1966, when Botswana became independent. Now, the economy is growing and the capital, Gaborone, is the fastest-growing city in Africa.

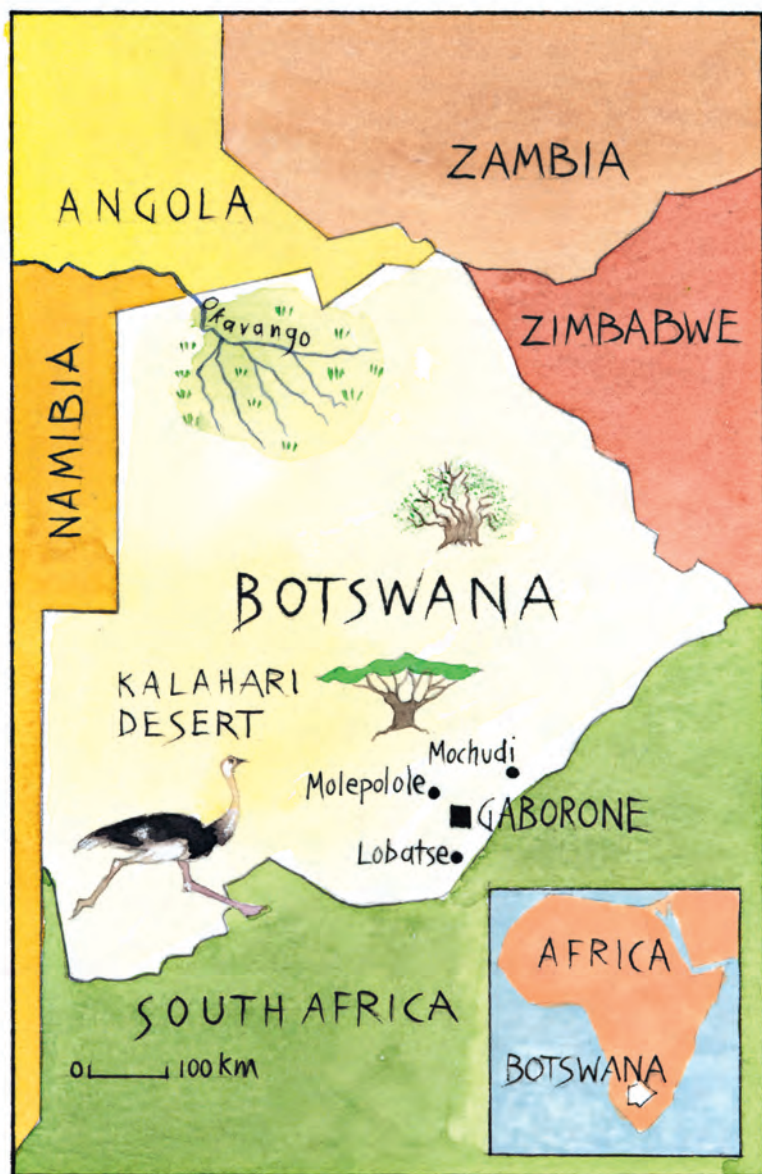
But like all African countries, Botswana has its problems. Many people suffer from AIDS*. There is more crime than before. As the country becomes more modern, the traditional way of life is disappearing, and the attitudes of younger people are not the same as the attitudes of their parents and grandparents. Change is happening quickly.

Mma Ramotswe and her friends are proud of modern Botswana, but they try to live by the traditional values. Away from Gaborone the real Botswana can still be found, and Mma Ramotswe loves her journeys out into the country in her little white van.

Africa is an important part of these books, and it is impossible to imagine the stories placed in any other part of the world. Thanks to Mma Ramotswe, many people have learnt about Botswana, and understand what makes it such a wonderful country.

There are other Penguin Readers about Mma Ramotswe and her friends. Look for *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (Level 3) and *Tears of the Giraffe* (Level 4).

* AIDS: a very serious disease that often causes death



Chapter 1

How to Find a Man and a Business Idea

‘I must remember,’ thought Mma Ramotswe, ‘how lucky I am in this life.’ Sitting in the garden of her house in Zebra Drive, and looking up at the high, blue Botswana sky, Precious Ramotswe thought about the things that made her life so fortunate.

She was the owner of Botswana’s only detective agency, the No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency, which successfully kept almost all of its clients happy. (There were some clients, she knew, who could never be satisfied.) Still only in her late thirties, Mma Ramotswe had her house in Botswana’s capital, Gaborone. She had two orphan children, a boy and a girl, to bring life and fun into the house. With these things in her life, she could honestly say that nothing more was needed.

But there was more. Some time ago Mma Ramotswe had agreed to marry Mr JLB Matekoni, the owner of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. He was thought to be the best mechanic in Botswana, a good man and a gentle one.

Mr JLB Matekoni could not be described as an exciting man, but he was not dull either. Mma Ramotswe had been married once before, to a man who many girls would think of as exciting, and she did not want excitement again. No, she thought, Mr JLB Matekoni was perfect; you could sit with him for hours and although he might not say anything very important, he was certainly not boring. Of course he talked a lot about cars. He thought they had their own personalities, and he could tell just by looking at a car what sort of owner it had.

Mma Ramotswe and Mr JLB Matekoni had met thanks to her little white van. He had repaired it for her, and afterwards she had often visited him at the garage. Then one morning the little white van had refused to start, and Mr JLB Matekoni had

spent a whole afternoon at Zebra Drive with the engine in a hundred pieces. After he had put everything back together and they were drinking tea in the house, Mr JLB Matekoni had asked Mma Ramotswe to marry him, and she had agreed.

It was a great surprise to Mma Ramotswe when Mr JLB Matekoni became ill. His illness was not one of the body; instead, it was his mind that was affected. He had become sad and had lost interest in the Tlokweng Road garage. It seemed to Mma Ramotswe that the real Mr JLB Matekoni had simply left his body and gone somewhere else.

During his illness Mma Ramotswe's assistant, Mma Makutsi, had kept the garage running. She had made great improvements to it. She made the lazy apprentices work harder, and a large number of women started coming to the garage. More and more women had their own cars now, and they were pleased to take them to a garage run by a woman.

Thanks to Dr Moffat, and the drug treatment he suggested, Mr JLB Matekoni's health had slowly improved. He started to smile again and his familiar personality returned. He began to take an interest in the garage business and talked of returning to it.

'What are we going to do to thank Mma Makutsi?' asked Mma Ramotswe. 'She's put so much work into the garage, and when you are back she is just going to be an assistant manager and an assistant private detective again. It will be hard for her.'

'I would not like to upset her,' said Mr JLB Matekoni. 'You are right about her work. She has paid all the bills on time, and organised everything in the office. Even the garage floor is cleaner.'

'Her life is not very good,' said Mma Ramotswe. 'She is living in that one room with a sick brother. I cannot pay her very much. And she has no husband to look after her. She deserves better than that.'

Mr JLB Matekoni could help financially by allowing her to continue as Assistant Manager at Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors, but he could not help with the question of a husband. This was women's business, he thought. Surely Mma Ramotswe could tell her how to find a husband?

Mma Ramotswe was not at all sure about this. 'You have to be careful what you say,' she said. 'You can't just go and tell someone like Mma Makutsi that they know nothing about how to find a husband. She got ninety-seven per cent in her final examination at secretarial college – she's an intelligent woman.'

'It doesn't matter about her ninety-seven per cent,' said Mr JLB Matekoni. 'You could get one hundred per cent for typing and still not know how to talk to men. Marriage is different from typing. Quite different.'

Mma Ramotswe was wondering when she and Mr JLB Matekoni might get married themselves. But Dr Moffat had warned against making too many decisions too soon, so she said nothing about wedding dates. It was clear that Mr JLB Matekoni was worried about Mma Makutsi, so eventually Mma Ramotswe agreed to speak to her some time soon about finding a husband.



During Mr JLB Matekoni's illness they had moved the No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency into the back office at Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. It was a successful arrangement. There was a separate entrance for Agency clients, and the garage could easily be organised from there. Sometimes, clients arriving for one business found that they needed the services of the other one too.

Now, with the day's post of four letters attended to, Mma Ramotswe suggested to her assistant that it was time for a cup of bush tea. Mma Makutsi made the tea and put a cup on her employer's desk.

‘Mma Makutsi,’ Mma Ramotswe began, ‘are you happy?’

Mma Makutsi was surprised, and worried. She lived in fear of losing her job and it seemed to her that this question might be leading in that direction. Life was unfair, she thought. The best jobs went to the beautiful girls, even the ones who only got fifty per cent in their examinations at secretarial college.

‘I am very happy,’ Mma Makutsi said, sadly. ‘I am happy with this job. I don’t want to go anywhere else.’

Mma Ramotswe laughed. ‘Oh, the job. We know you’re happy with the job, and we are very happy with you. Everyone knows you are our right-hand woman.’

Mma Makutsi felt more relaxed now as she drank her tea.

‘But are you happy in yourself?’ continued Mma Ramotswe. ‘Are you getting what you want out of life?’

‘I’m not sure what I want out of life. I used to think I would like to be rich, but I’ve met some rich people now and I’m not so sure about that.’

‘Happiness and money are not connected,’ said Mma Ramotswe.

Mma Makutsi agreed. ‘Now I think that happiness comes from somewhere inside,’ she said. ‘Happiness is in the head.’

‘And in the heart?’ Mma Ramotswe suggested.

There was a silence. Mma Makutsi looked down at her desk. ‘The heart is the place where love happens,’ she said quietly.

Mma Ramotswe took a deep breath. ‘Would you like to have a husband? Someone to look after you and make you happier?’ she asked, gently.

Mma Makutsi took off her glasses and cleaned them with her handkerchief.

‘I would like to have a husband,’ she said. ‘But there are many beautiful girls. They are the ones getting the husbands. There is nobody left for me.’

‘Perhaps you should be doing a bit more about it if no men

are coming your way,' said Mma Ramotswe. 'Try to find one.'

'Where?' asked Mma Makutsi. 'Where are all these men?'

Mma Ramotswe waved a hand in the direction of the door, and of Africa outside. 'Out there. You have to meet them.'

'Where exactly?' asked Mma Makutsi.

'In the middle of the town. You see them every day sitting about at lunchtime. Men. Plenty of them.'

'All married,' said Mma Makutsi.

'Or in bars,' said Mma Ramotswe, feeling that the conversation was not going the way she had planned.

'Bars are full of men looking for bad girls,' said Mma Makutsi, and Mma Ramotswe had to agree.

'It is kind of you to think of me like this,' said Mma Makutsi. 'But you and Mr JLB Matekoni must not worry about me. I am happy enough, and if there is someone out there for me, I am sure we will meet one day.'

Mma Ramotswe let the conversation end there. But she thought that Mma Makutsi should make more of herself. She was a citizen of Botswana, which was a very fine thing to be, because Botswana had never done anything to feel ashamed of. She had passed her examination at the Botswana Secretarial College with ninety-seven per cent. She lived in the capital city, Gaborone, far from the little village where she was born, so she had progressed.

Mma Ramotswe looked up at Mma Makutsi, who was now busy typing a letter. 'Mr JLB Matekoni and I must try to help her,' she thought. 'She is a fine woman with many great skills. She deserves a better life, and we must help her to find one.'



Things were returning to normal at Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. Mr JLB Matekoni was at the garage by seven each morning and his two apprentices were there by eight o'clock.

He could see that they had improved under the careful eye of Mma Makutsi.

‘Those two boys are working much better,’ he said to Mma Ramotswe. ‘The older boy still talks all the time about girls, but their work is cleaner and more careful. I think they learnt something while I was away.’

There were other changes too. Charlie, the older apprentice, said that the younger boy had become very religious. He had stopped thinking all the time about girls, and was now an enthusiastic member of a local church.

The apprentices were a mystery to Mr JLB Matekoni. He didn’t understand them and would be glad when their studying ended and they left him to get a job at another garage. Life was much more complicated now for Mr JLB Matekoni. In the past it had been simple: he had been alone at the garage, and had only himself to think about. Now there were two apprentices, Mma Makutsi and Mma Ramotswe – and that was without the two orphan children at Zebra Drive. He had arranged for Mma Ramotswe to take them as foster children, so in a way he was responsible for them too. It was a big step, from one person to six.

While Mr JLB Matekoni imagined that he was responsible for others, they imagined that they were responsible for him. Mma Makutsi had thought a lot since her conversation with Mma Ramotswe, when she had feared her job was in danger. The No.1 Ladies’ Detective Agency didn’t make much money. The garage did better, but the apprentices had to be paid, and that took a lot of money each month. The banks were charging more and more, so the businesses had to make more money. In her opinion, they needed a new business idea. One morning, she suddenly thought of something. Mma Ramotswe and Mr JLB Matekoni were both out of the office, so she took her cup of bush tea into the garage and spoke to the two boys.

‘I have a plan,’ she said, ‘and I wondered what you thought of it. It’s a simple idea.’

‘I have simple ideas too,’ said Charlie, the older apprentice. ‘I have ideas of girls. Simple. Girls, and then more girls.’

Mma Makutsi pretended that she hadn’t heard him.

‘There are many people wanting to learn how to drive, are there not?’ she asked.

The younger apprentice spoke. ‘They can learn on the bush roads. There are lots of places for them to practise.’

‘But that won’t help them drive in town,’ said Mma Makutsi quickly. ‘There are too many things happening in town. There are cars going this way and that. There are people crossing the road.’

‘And lots of girls,’ said Charlie. ‘Lots of girls walking about. All the time.’

‘So,’ Mma Makutsi continued, ‘I have decided that we should open a driving school. I do not think there are enough of them. We can start a new one, and give people lessons after work. We could charge forty pula★ a lesson. Twenty pula to Mr JLB Matekoni for the garage and for using his car, and twenty pula to the teacher. It would be a great success.’

The older apprentice was not interested. ‘I want to see my friends after work,’ he said. ‘I do not have time to take people for driving lessons.’

Mma Makutsi looked at his friend. ‘And you?’

The younger apprentice smiled at her. ‘You are a very clever lady, Mma. I think this is a good idea.’

‘There!’ said Mma Makutsi to Charlie. ‘You see your friend has a more positive way of looking at things. You are no use at all. Look what has happened to your brain with all those thoughts of girls.’

★ pula: the money of Botswana

‘I will have to think of a good name for the school,’ Mma Makutsi continued. ‘The name is very important in business. That is why the No.1 Ladies’ Detective Agency has been a success. The name says everything you need to know about the business.’

The younger apprentice looked at her. ‘I have a good idea for the name,’ he said. ‘We could call it Learn to Drive with Jesus.’

There was a silence. The older apprentice looked at his friend, then looked away.

‘I am not sure about that,’ said Mma Makutsi. ‘I will think about it, but I am not sure.’

‘It is a very good name,’ said the younger apprentice. ‘It will bring us more careful drivers and that will mean we have no accidents.’

‘I will talk to Mr JLB Matekoni about it and see what he thinks,’ said Mma Makutsi. ‘Thank you for the suggestion.’

Chapter 2 Problems with the Children

Mma Ramotswe completed her shopping. Before the two orphans came to stay, shopping had been easy and she had rarely had to shop more than once a week. Now it seemed she was shopping much more often. The girl, Motholeli, liked to bake cakes, and her brother, Puso, certainly liked to eat them. As soon as Mma Ramotswe bought more eggs and sugar, they were used, and the resulting cakes were eaten almost immediately. All this extra food cost a lot of money, and it was only thanks to Mr JLB Matekoni that she was able to afford it.

It had been Mr JLB Matekoni’s idea to foster the children. He had not been able to say no when Mma Silvia Potokwani, Matron of the orphan farm, had asked him. She had probably realised that the children would actually live in Mma Ramotswe’s house in Zebra Drive, instead of Mr JLB Matekoni’s house near the old Botswana Defence Club. Of course, after the marriage