

The Woman Who Walked in Sunshine: No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (16) (No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series)

By Alexander McCall Smith

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In this latest installment of the beloved and best-selling series, Mma Ramotswe must contend with her greatest challenge yet—a vacation!

Business is slow at the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, so slow in fact that for the first time in her estimable career Precious Ramotswe has reluctantly agreed to take a holiday. The promise of a week of uninterrupted peace is short-lived, however, when she meets a young boy named Samuel, a troublemaker who is himself in some trouble. Once she learns more about Samuel's sad story, Mma Ramotswe feels compelled to step in and help him find his way out of a bad situation.

Despite this unexpected diversion, Mma Ramotswe still finds herself concerned about how the agency is faring in her absence. Her worries grow when she hears that Mma Makutsi is handling a new and rather complicated case. A well-respected Botswanan politician is up for a major public honor, and his reputation is now being called into question by his rivals. The man's daughter has contacted the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency to investigate these troubling claims, but, as in so many cases, all is not as it seems. In the end, the investigation will affect everyone at the agency and will also serve as a reminder that ordinary human failings should be treated with a large helping of charity and compassion.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review
Praise for Alexander McCall Smith and the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series:
"Enchanting. . . . An inspiration to us all. . . . The sweet, chuckling voice of Precious Ramotswe falls gentle on the ear." ***The New York Times Book Review***
"McCall Smith's characters are quick to find joy in small things. . . . In its own way, McCall Smith's world is as stylized and hermetic as those created by P.G. Wodehouse or Damon Runyon--a sweet and timeless bubble with its own morality, language and customs. Entering it can be a source of great comfort in these uncertain times." *The Seattle Times*
"Happiness is a key part of the charm and attraction of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. . . . Real-life problems intrude, but they do so gently." ***Edmonton Journal***
"In his character of Precious Ramotswe, McCall Smith created a stunningly moral and intelligent woman detective whose views of life in Botswana--and, in fact, the world--are simple yet profound. Mma Ramotswe solves crimes and, in the same breath, she solves the questions of love, life, happiness and human kindness." *The Globe and Mail*

About the Author
ALEXANDER McCALL SMITH is the author of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, the Isabel Dalhousie series, the Portuguese Irregular Verbs series and the 44 Scotland Street series. He is professor emeritus of medical law at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and has served with many national and international organizations concerned with bioethics. He was born in what is now known as Zimbabwe and was a law professor at the University of Botswana. The author lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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It Is Important for Children to Learn About Electricity

Mma Ramotswe remembered exactly how it was that the subject of taking a holiday arose. It was Mma Makutsi who started the discussion, with one of her inconsequential observations—those remarks she made à propos of nothing—remarks that had little to do with what had gone before. She often said such things, quite suddenly making a pronouncement that seemed to come from nowhere, her words dropping into the stillness of the afternoon air like stones tossed into a pool.

It was mid-afternoon in the offices of the No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency in Gaborone, in late October, one of the hottest months in what was proving to be one of the warmest years in living memory.

“It is very hot, Mma Ramotswe,” observed Mma Makutsi, as she leaned back in her chair, fanning herself with a wilting copy of the Botswana Daily News. “When it is this hot, it is very difficult to work.”

From her side of the room, where, if anything, it was slightly hotter because of the pool of sunlight that penetrated the window and fell directly across her desk, the begetter and owner of Botswana’s only detective agency cast a glance in the direction of her erstwhile secretary, later assistant, and now, by dint of the latter’s sheer tenacity and perseverance, her colleague. In normal circumstances, if a member of staff said that it was too hot to work, an employer would interpret this as a strong hint that it was time to close the office and go home. When it came to Mma Makutsi’s utterances, though, one could quite easily be wrong, and so Mma Ramotswe merely said, “Yes, it is very hot, Mma—very hot indeed.”

She knew that there was no reason for Mma Makutsi to stay at work if she felt inclined to go home. Following her marriage to Mr. Phuti Radiphuti, proprietor of the Double Comfort Furniture Store and owner of a substantial herd of cattle, Mma Makutsi had no need of the modest salary Mma Ramotswe paid her; indeed, had that salary stopped for whatever reason, she probably would not even have noticed it. Nor was she technically obliged to keep certain hours: her contract of employment with the agency was a very informal one—so informal, in fact, that there was even some doubt as to whether it existed at all.

“People who trust one another do not need to put things in writing,” Mma Ramotswe had once said. “It is enough that they should have given their word.”

Mma Makutsi had been quick to agree. “That is very true, Mma,” she said. But then, as she began to think about the proposition, she started to discern the problems that might come from a failure to reduce understandings to writing, no matter how well understood they might have been. “Except sometimes,” she added cautiously. “You can rely on somebody’s word in many cases, but not in all. That is why it is safer to have everything in writing.”

“I’m not so sure .?.?.?,” began Mma Ramotswe.

But Mma Makutsi was just getting into her stride. “No, you must almost always put things in writing. This is because people forget what they said and then they start to rewrite history and end up blaming you for not doing something they think you said you’d do, but haven’t done. They never accept that they may be remembering things incorrectly.” She looked at Mma Ramotswe reproachfully, as if the other woman were widely known to be one of the very worst offenders in this respect. “That is why you should have everything in writing—preferably in duplicate, in case you lose the original.” She paused, still looking at Mma Ramotswe, as if now challenging her to disagree. “They always taught us at the Botswana Secretarial College to put everything in writing. That is what they said, Mma. They said: ‘What’s written down on paper is written down in stone.’?”

Mma Ramotswe frowned. “Stone and paper are very different, Mma. I’m not sure—”

Mma Makutsi cut her off. “You see, Mma, when something is written in stone it means that it cannot be changed. They do not mean to say that you have to copy everything down from paper and then carve it in stone. That would take a very long time.”

“Very long,” muttered Mma Ramotswe. “And every business would have to have a secretary and a stonemason. That would not be practical.”

The joke passed unnoticed, and now, on that hot October afternoon, the conversation suddenly took an unexpected slant.

“I met Mr. Polopetsi the other day,” Mma Makutsi remarked. “He was walking along when I saw him. You remember how he used to walk? Those small steps of his—like an anteater. You remember how he walked, Mma?”

Mma Ramotswe looked up with interest. She had never thought of Mr. Polopetsi as resembling an anteater, but now that Mma Makutsi had mentioned it .?.?. “Mr. Polopetsi? Now there’s a good man, Mma.”

Mma Makutsi agreed. Mr. Polopetsi had worked in the agency a few years ago and had been as popular with

clients as he had been with those with whom he worked. He had been recruited by chance after Mma Ramotswe had knocked him off his bicycle while driving her white van. When she heard the story he had to tell, she had been moved to offer him a temporary job to make up for what she saw as the shocking injustice of his undeserved conviction for an offence of negligence. Mr. Polopetsi had been a hospital pharmacist who had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for a dispensing mistake made by somebody else—a grossly disproportionate punishment, thought Mma Ramotswe, even if he were to have been negligent.

He had survived the unwarranted sojourn in prison, and although his dispensing licence had been taken from him, after he left the agency he had been able to find work in a chemist's shop. That job had not lasted long, as the business had run into financial difficulties. Fortunately his wife had recently been promoted in her civil service post and her increased salary meant that the family was comfortably enough off. Mr. Polopetsi, Mma Makutsi revealed, had found a part-time position that suited him very well—teaching chemistry in a high school. The regular chemistry teacher there, a man of great indolence, was only too pleased to have an energetic and popular assistant to take over on those afternoons when he wanted to watch football matches on television. The full-time teacher never bothered to enquire as to the reasons for Mr. Polopetsi's popularity with his pupils; had he done so, he would have discovered that there was nothing Mr. Polopetsi liked more than to end a chemistry lesson with as loud and as spectacular an explosion as he could get away with, given the resources—and fragility—of the school laboratory. The inner pyromaniac that lurks in most boys was present in him as much as it was in the male pupils, just as it was, perhaps to a slightly lesser degree, in the girls, who enjoyed any experiment that generated coloured smoke in any quantity.

"He was very happy," said Mma Makutsi. "You remember how he liked to smile? Just like a nervous rabbit? Well, he was smiling like that when I saw him the other day. He was walking along with that strange walk of his, smiling just like a rabbit."

"I'm glad that he's happy," said Mma Ramotswe. "He deserves to be happy after what happened to him, poor man."

Mma Makutsi looked thoughtful. "I'm not sure if we get the happiness we actually deserve," she said. "There are some people who look very happy but certainly do not deserve it. Look at that woman .?.?."

Mma Ramotswe knew exactly whom Mma Makutsi meant. "Violet Sephotho?"

Mma Makutsi nodded. As she did so, a small ray of sunshine caught the lens of her large round glasses, sending a flash of dancing light across the ceiling. "Yes, that is the lady I was thinking of," she said. "If you look at her, she seems to be very happy. She is always smiling and .?.?."

".?.?. and looking at men," supplied Mma Ramotswe. "You know that look that some ladies give men. You know that look, Mma?"

Mma Makutsi did. "It is a very encouraging look," she said. "It is a look that says, If you are thinking of doing anything, then do not hesitate to do it. It is that sort of look." She paused. "And yet she's happy. All that smiling and laughing looks very happy, I would have thought."

They both fell into silence as they contemplated the sheer injustice of Violet Sephotho's apparent happiness. Mma Makutsi opened her mouth to speak, but thought better of it, and closed it again. She had been about to say, "But God will surely punish her, Mma," but had decided that this was not the sort of thing that people said any more, even if it was what they were thinking. The trouble was, she thought, that God had so many people to punish these days that he might just not find the time to get round to dealing with Violet Sephotho.

It was a disappointing thought—a lost opportunity, in a sense: she would very willingly have volunteered her services to assist in divine punishment, perhaps through something she would call Mma Makutsi's League of Justice that would, strictly but fairly, punish people like Violet.

Mma Ramotswe's own thoughts were far from retribution, divine or otherwise. She returned to the subject of Mr. Polopetsi.

"So what did our friend have to say for himself?"

Mma Makutsi shrugged. "He said that he likes being a part-time teacher. He works three afternoons a week, at the most. He said that he was teaching the children how to make a battery and they were enjoying it."

"That is a very useful skill," said Mma Ramotswe. "It is important for children to learn about electricity."

"Yes, Mma, it is. But then he said that he had just been on a week's holiday. He said that he was still feeling the benefit of that."

Mma Ramotswe was interested to hear this. But even as she pictured Mr. Polopetsi on holiday—she had no idea what he would do—she began to ask herself whether she knew anybody else who had been on a holiday. Had anybody she knew been away, or even stopped working and stayed at home? Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni had certainly never had a holiday, at least not as long as she had known him. She was certain, too, that Mma Potokwane, the indefatigable matron of the Orphan Farm, had never taken a break from her post, with the exception of the few days when she had gone away following a dispute with the Orphan Farm's management board. That had not been a holiday, of course—it was more of a retirement, even if a very short-lived one.

"What did Mr. Polopetsi do on this holiday of his?" she asked.

"He said that he did nothing," answered Mma Makutsi. "He said that he just stayed at home and lay down on his bed for much of the day. He said that it slowed his heart down and that was a good thing because it had been beating too fast for many years. He said that you cannot make a truck go at sixty miles an hour for too long. Eventually, he said, it gets tired and stops."

That was very true, observed Mma Ramotswe. "But was that all he did? Stay at home and lie down on his bed?"

Mma Makutsi did not answer the question. "He also said to me that people who take holidays live much longer than people who do not."

"Well, that sounds very interesting," said Mma Ramotswe. "But what about people who are running their own business? What do they do about holidays?"

There was a brief silence as Mma Makutsi considered the question. Then, rather tentatively, she gave her reply. "Somebody else in the office takes over," she said. "Most businesses have more than one person working in them, you know, and so when the owner goes off on holiday, one of the others takes over."

"I see," said Mma Ramotswe.

"So," Mma Makutsi continued, "if there is, say, a manager at the top and he—or she, of course—needs to go

off on holiday, then it will be the deputy manager who takes over. It is usually a very smooth process—no bumps or hiccups—and the customers never know that it is the deputy manager in charge."

Mma Ramotswe looked up at the ceiling, her occasional resort when Mma Makutsi was in full flow. "I am sure they don't," she muttered.

Mma Makutsi's spectacles flashed again—a shard of steely light. "And I believe that this is sometimes how deputy managers become managers." There was a long, meaning-laden pause at this point, and then she continued, "It is because they do the job so well when they are given the chance. Then somebody says, 'Oh, that person—that deputy manager—could just as well be a full manager.' That sometimes happens, I believe."

"Really?" said Mma Ramotswe.

* * *

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ollie Nadeau:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their leisure time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they carrying out activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Will you something different to fill your own free time/ holiday? Might be reading a book is usually option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing that you ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the guide untitled The Woman Who Walked in Sunshine: No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (16) (No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series) can be fine book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

Stephanie Gilley:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Are you aware? Many a lot of people spent that they free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent the entire day to reading a publication. The book The Woman Who Walked in Sunshine: No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (16) (No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series) it is very good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book provides high quality.

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