

THE NO.1 LADIES' DETECTIVE AGENCY

By Alexander McCall Smith

Book Review by Catherine Ndinda

The cover of this book has an African theme with a photo of two traditional huts made of mud and thatched with grass with a view of dry region with a sparse population depicting the true picture of West Africa. A cowshed and a cow grazing can also be seen in the background indicating the major source of income of the community. The cover also has a subtitle "The Miss Marple of Botswana." Which portrays a fictional character in this mystery short stories.

The No.1 ladies Detective Agency is the first book written by Alexander McCall Smith a Scottish author born in Zimbabwe but worked in Botswana as a Lecturer hence the good knowledge of Botswana and its surroundings.

Alexander McCall Smith 'The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency' is a novel aimed at women striving to excel in a male dominated community/career and the struggle for gender equity.

The No.1 ladies detective Agency is a novel with the lead character being Precious Ramotswe better preferred to as Mma Ramotswe the only lady private detective in Botswana. After her father's death she takes her inheritance and moves from Mochudi to Gaborone the capital city of Botswana to set up The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency with the proceeds' from the sale of her father's cattle. She has no professional training but she has a manual which she relies on of Clovis Andersen "The principles of private Investigation." She starts the business with a tiny white van, two desks, two chairs, a telephone and an old type writer. But she does possess the intangible assets of intuition and intelligence and this is seen when quoting Agatha Christie "women are the ones who know what's going on, they are the ones with eyes." She has great love of people and mostly the people of Botswana- "They are my people, my brothers and sisters. It's my duty to help them to solve the mysteries in their lives. That's what am called to do."

At first the detective agency is not doing so well with few cases which cannot even pay her overheads. Mma Ramotswe cases vary with her first case being that of exposing a fake father, to that of a missing husband, the boy thought to have been kidnapped for witch craft which was thought to be a taboo in Africa, the wayward Indian daughter, finds proof of a cheating husband, solves the case of the insurance fraud to that of a doctor who sometimes seems highly competent and sometimes seems to know almost nothing about medicine.

But the most interesting and funniest case is that of the Indian daughter called Nandira who Mma Ramotswe is hired to track and find out whether she has a boyfriend only to realise that Nandira has been inventing a social life for herself. She made up a boyfriend for herself just to bring a bit of freedom into her life. Mma Ramotswe advised her father to give Nandira a bit more time to lead her own life because if he didn't then the imaginary boyfriend would turn to a real one.

While the most intriguing case that lands her in great danger is that of the missing 11-year old- boy who was kidnapped by a witch doctor and taken to work in a lonely place where he could not run away for two years until Mma Ramotswe found him and took him to his father at Katsana village where he was the school master.

Later on, her long term friend, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, a professional mechanic proposes to marry her and she says "of course I will." She had earlier declined her proposal and at that time she remembered her failed marriage with Note Mokoti a musician she had met on a bus on the way back from Mochudi when she was 20 years old and living with her dad's cousin. When she had been married to Note Mokoti she had been conscious of a deep, overwhelming unhappiness that followed her around like a black dog. That had gone now. She even regrets not listening to her father and the cousins' husband, if she had she would never have married Note and the years of unhappiness would never have occurred. But they did because she was headstrong, as everybody is at the age of twenty, and when we simply cannot see, however much we may think we can. "The world is full of twenty-year-olds, she thought, all of them blind". She said yes to Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni hoping that this time her marriage will not be a mistake again.

CONCLUSION

The author clearly shows Mma Ramotswe's intelligence, her sense of humour, her insights and most of all her undying love for the people of Botswana. It also portrays a clear picture on the nature of Africa and its beauty. On the other hand, the novel follows the format of a short story and could really be confused for the same, with a few spelling checks' and grammar here and there.

All in all, the novel is really captivating and I would really recommend it to young readers and everyone who has interest in mystery stories or detective background.