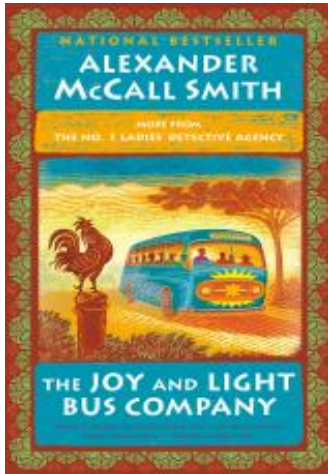


The Joy and Light Bus Company: No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (22)

by Alexander McCall Smith



About the Book

In this latest installment in the beloved *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, Mma Ramotswe is tempted to put the brakes on a business venture before it even gets rolling.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni attends a course hosted by the local chamber of commerce entitled "Where Is Your Business Going?" But rather than feeling energized, he comes back in low spirits, unsure how to grow the already venerable and successful Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. Then an old friend from school approaches him about a new business venture that could be just the ticket. When it turns out he will need to mortgage his property in order to pursue this endeavor, Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi wonder what this will mean for his current business --- as well as their own.

Even as she puzzles over mysteries on the domestic front, Mma Ramotswe's professional duties must take precedence. When a concerned son learns that his aging father's nurse now stands to inherit the family home, he begins to doubt her intentions and takes his case to Botswana's premier detective agency. Fortunately, Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi are committed agents of justice and agree to investigate.

Tricky as these matters may be, Mma Ramotswe knows that the most creative solutions are often found with the support of loving friends and family. Working together over a cup of red bush tea, she and Mma Makutsi will rely on their tact, humor and goodwill to ensure that all involved find the happiness that they deserve.

Discussion Guide

1. The setting of Botswana lends much to the stories in the *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. How do you think the characters would work in a different setting? What wouldn't work?

2. Who is your favorite character in this book? In the series? Why?

3. We are now on the 22nd book in this series. How does this later story compare to the earlier tales? How have the characters expanded or grown? Is there something that you miss from the earlier books?

4. When Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni listens to his apprentice, he thinks, "This was not the world that he and Mma Ramotswe inhabited --- a world in which people went about their business in an orderly way, drank tea at regular intervals, and retired to bed before nine-thirty at night. Yet there was a parallel universe in which people drove trucks into ditches, played the guitar, and went off with eighteen-year-olds. For the most part, these separate worlds never met, but every so often the inhabitants of each would look across the fence at one another and wonder how the people on the other side could live their lives as they did."

What do you think of this statement? Is Mr. J.L.B. too old-fashioned, or a realist? Is he a "past tense man," as Mma Makutsi would say? Which world do you prefer?

5. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is very kind. He is also very literal. What are some of the other traits/quirks he has throughout the series? Has anything about him changed? Is he a man you would like to know?

6. When Precious Ramotswe needs advice, she turns to her old friend. Why do you think she goes to Mma Potokwane instead of Mma Makutsi, who Mma Ramotswe sees every day?

7. What does T. K. Molefi offer Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni? Why does Molefi choose him? Why is Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni so set on putting the proposal in action?

8. What do you think Mma Ramotswe's reaction to Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's plan? How do Mma Potokwane and Mma Ramotswe view it?

9. What solution does Phuti Radiphuti come up with to help Mma Makutsi obstruct Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's investment idea?

10. Precious thinks: "If you accuse people of not liking you, then that, she felt, was the quickest way of making them not like you. Love was the answer, of course, to this, as it was to so many other problems. Love the people who did not love you; treat with courtesy those who did not show that courtesy to you, and they would realise what wrong they were doing. That was what she did, and she had found that in almost every case those who showed arrogance, or unkindness, or sheer malice, could be shamed into regret, and through regret came change. Of course, it did not always work. There were some occasions in which confrontation was necessary, and harsh words had to be spoken because some people seemed impervious to the pain they caused. But it was better to avoid such showdowns if one possibly could. There was always more than one way of bringing in a harvest." What do you think about this approach? Does it work?

11. The *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* takes a case for Mr. Baboloki Mophephu, who can seem charming enough, but gives Mma Ramotswe pause. After the ladies speak with Baboloki's sister, Maisie, and Mr. Fidelis Mophephu's nurse,

Bontle Tutume, they realize it is their client they should be suspicious of. But things are not always as they seem. How do the lady detectives wrap up the case?

12. There is also the mystery of Mma Potokwane's newest charge, Keitumetse. The girl's name means, "I am happy," although she is not. She was abused by the rich family who was using her as a domestic servant. How does Precious find out more about the family and the girl's situation, and how does the information she gathers help her decide what to do? Do you think her solution will be effective? Do you approve of what she does?

13. As Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's Joy and Light Bus Company finally begins to grow to fruition, how does he convince Mma Ramotswe how important the new company is to him? Do the comparisons to her old white van and her own business venture help change mind?

14. When Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's investment falls through, how does he feel? How does Precious feel when she thinks it is her doing? Facing her husband's disappointment, Mma Ramotswe's reaction is "there were some victories that, for all they saved the day, were hollow nonetheless. This, she thought, was one of them." How is this a victory? Does she believe she did the right thing for her husband?

15. While thinking of the Mophephu case, Mma Ramotswe muses, "You hoped that what you did was for the overall good, but you could never be sure. Sometimes there were doubts, and those doubts could persist, but often you really had no choice. You had to feel your way through the complexities of this life and hope, just hope, that you got it right more often than you got it wrong. And sometimes, of course, you did not have to do anything at all." How does this idea of doubt and doing the right thing reflected in both the situation with Mrs. Pula-Pula and with Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni? How would Precious reconcile those endings with her reflection on doing good?

16. At the end, Mr. T. K. Molefi brings his old friend business for his motor company, as well as putting him on the board of the bus company. How does this justify the trust Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni has for his former classmate. What does it teach Precious Ramotswe? Although Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is delighted with this new position, would he have been better off as a full partner?

17. "Always be ready to admit that you have been wrong," Clovis Andersen wrote. In what ways was Precious wrong, or mistaken, in the story? Despite her sometimes misguided attempts to parse right from wrong, she always acts for the good of others. How has Mma Ramotswe improved the lives of others in this novel.

18. What types of mysteries would you like to see the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency tackle in the future? Which characters would you like to see more of? What moral issues could they address?

Author Bio

Alexander McCall Smith is the author of the *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* novels and a number of other series and stand-alone books. His works have been translated into more than 40 languages and have been bestsellers throughout the world. He lives in Scotland.

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