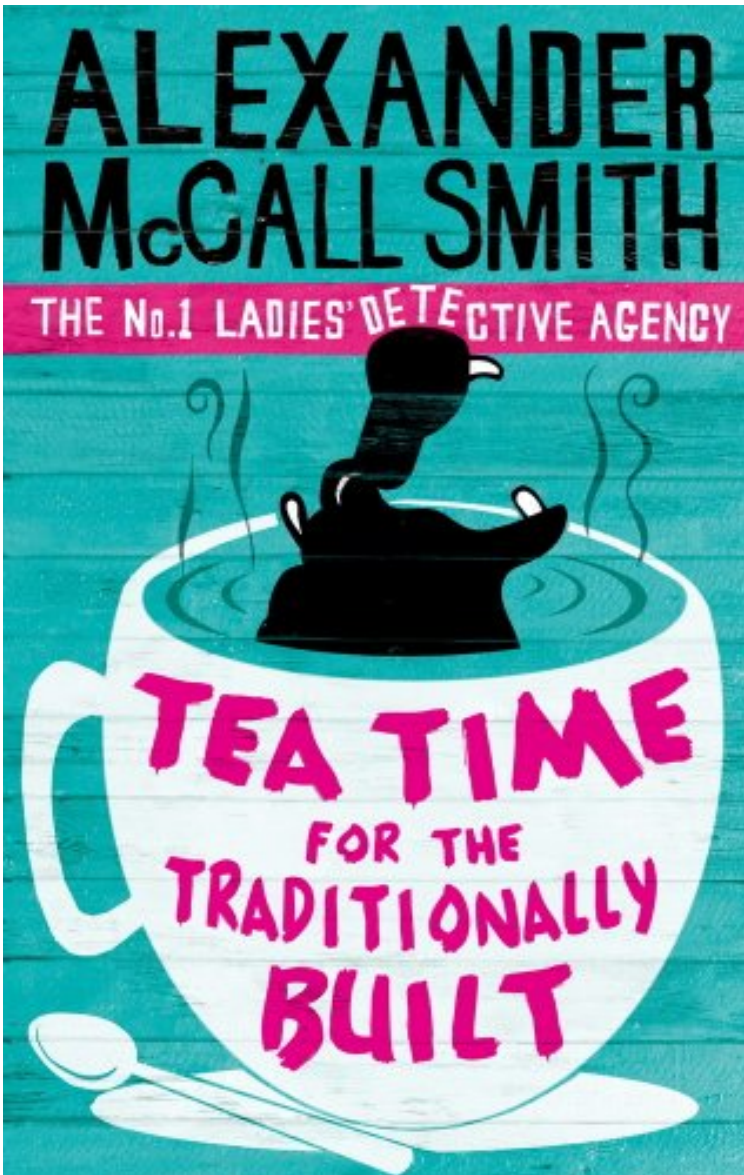


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Tea Time For The Traditionally Built



*Par Alexander McCall Smith
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIt is a troublesome fact on which even Mma Ramotswe and her assistant Mma Makutsi agree: there are things that men know and ladies do not, and vice versa. It is unfortunate, for example, when Mma Ramotswe's newest client is the big-shot owner of the ailing Kalahari Swoopers, that one thing lady detectives know very little about is football. And when the glamorous Violet Septho sets her sights on Mma Makutsi's unsuspecting fianc, it becomes exasperatingly clear that some men do not know how to recognise a ruthless Jezebel even when she is bouncing up and down on the best bed in the Double Comfort Furniture Shop. In her attempt to foster understanding between the sexes and find the traitor on Mr Football's team, Mma Ramotswe ventures into new territory, drinks tea in unfamiliar kitchens and learns to trust in the

observational powers of small boys. And, as wise and warm-hearted as his heroine, Alexander McCall Smith reminds us that we must dig deep to uncover the goodness of the human heart.

Chapter One Mr. Molofololo Traditionally built people may not look as if they are great walkers, but there was a time when Precious Ramotswe walked four miles a day. As a girl in Mochudi, all those years ago, a pupil at the school that looked down over the sprawling village below, she went to her lessons every morning on foot, joining the trickle of children that made its way up the hill, the girls in blue tunics, the boys in khaki shirts and shorts, like little soldiers. The journey from the house where she lived with her father and the older cousin who looked after her took all of an hour, except, of course, when she was lucky and managed to ride on the mule-drawn water cart that occasionally passed that way. The driver of this cart, with whom her father had worked in the gold mines as a young man, knew who she was and always slowed down to allow her to clamber up on the drivers seat beside him. Other children would watch enviously and try to wave down the water cart. I cannot carry all Botswana, said the driver. If I gave all you children a ride on my cart, then my poor mules would die. Their hearts would burst. I cannot allow that. But you have Precious up there! called out the boys. Why is she so special? The driver looked at Precious and winked. Tell them why you are special, Precious. Explain it to them. The young Mma Ramotswe, barely eight, was overwhelmed by embarrassment. But I am not special. I am just a girl. You are the daughter of Obed Ramotswe, said the driver. He is a great man. That is why you are riding up here. He was right, of course at least in what he said about Obed Ramotswe, who was, by any standards, a fine man. At that age, Precious had only a faint inkling of what her father stood for; later on, as a young woman, she would come to understand what it was to be the daughter of Obed Ramotswe. But in those days, on the way to school, whether riding in state on the water cart or walking along the side of that dusty road with her friends, she had school to think about, with its lessons on so many subjects the history of Botswana, from the beginning, when it was known as Khamas country, across the plains of which great lions walked, to the emergence of the new Botswana, then still a chrysalis in a dangerous world; writing lessons, with the letters of the alphabet being described in white chalk on an ancient blackboard, all whirls and loops; arithmetic, with its puzzling multiplication tables that needed to be learned by heart when there was so much else that the heart had to learn. The water cart, of course, did not pass very often, and so on most days there was a long trudge to school and a long walk back. Some children had an even greater journey; in one class there was a boy who walked seven miles there and seven miles back, even in the hottest of months, when the sun came down upon Botswana like a pounding fist, when the cattle huddled together under the umbrella shade of the acacia trees, not daring to wander off in search of what scraps of grass remained. This boy thought nothing of his daily journey; this is what you did if you wanted to go to school to learn the things that your parents had never had the chance to learn. And you did not complain, even if during the rainy season you might narrowly escape being struck by lightning or being washed away by the torrents that rose in the previously dry watercourses. You did not complain in that Botswana. Now, of course, it was different, and it was the contemplation of these differences that made Mma Ramotswe think about walking again. We are becoming lazy, Mma Ramotswe, said Mma Makutsi one afternoon, as they sipped their afternoon cup of red bush tea in the offices of the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency. Have you noticed? We are becoming lazy. Mma Ramotswe frowned. There were times when Mma Makutsi made statements that suffered from that classic flaw of all generalisations they were just too general. This observation, it seemed to her, could be such a remark. Do you mean that you and I are becoming lazy? she asked her assistant. If you do, then I do not think thats right, Mma Makutsi. Take this morning, for instance. We finished that report on security at the loan office. And we wrote a lot of letters. Six, seven, I think. That is not being lazy. Mma Makutsi raised a hand in protest. No, Mma, I did not mean that. I did not mean to say that you and I are becoming lazy. Or not specially lazy. I am talking about everybody. Mma Ramotswe raised an eyebrow. The whole of Botswana? Mma Makutsi nodded. Yes, the whole country. And its not just Botswana, Mma. We are no worse than anybody else. In fact, I am sure that there are many much lazier countries elsewhere. What I really meant was that people in general are becoming lazy. Mma Ramotswe, who had been prepared to defend Botswana against Mma Makutsis accusations, relaxed. If the remark was about people in general, and not just about the residents of Gaborone, then Mma Makutsis theory could at least be heard out. Why do you say that people are becoming lazy, Mma? she asked. Mma Makutsi glanced through the half-open door that led from the agency into the garage. On the other side of the workshop, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni was showing his two apprentices an engine part. You see those two boys out there? she said. Charlie and . . . Fanwell, supplied Mma Ramotswe. We must start using his name. It is not kind to be forgetting it all the time. Yes, Charlie and . . . Fanwell, said Mma

Makutsi. It is a stupid name, though, don't you think, Mma? Why would anybody be called Fanwell? Mma Ramotswe could not let this pass. Mma Makutsi was too hard on the two apprentices, particularly on the older one, Charlie. Words had passed between them more than once, including on the occasion when Charlie had called Mma Makutsi a warthog and made disparaging references to her large glasses. It had been quite wrong of him, and Mma Ramotswe had made that plain, but she had also acknowledged that he had been provoked. They are young men, she had said to Mma Makutsi. That is what young men are like, Mma. Their heads are full of loud music and thoughts of girls. Imagine walking around with all that nonsense in your head. That had been said in defence of Charlie; now it was necessary to say something for Fanwell. It was wrong of Mma Makutsi, she thought, to poke fun at Fanwell's name. Why is anybody called anything, Mma Makutsi? That boy cannot help it. It is the parents who give children stupid names. It is the fault of the parents. But Fanwell, Mma Ramotswe? What a silly name. Why did they not call him Fanbelt? That would be a good name for an apprentice mechanic, wouldn't it? Hah! Fanbelt. That would be very funny. No, Mma Makutsi, said Mma Ramotswe. We must not make fun of people's names. There are some who think that your own name, Grace, is a strange name. I do not think that, of course. But there are probably people like that. Mma Makutsi was dismissive. Then they are very foolish, she said. They should know better. And that is what Fanwell himself would probably say about anybody who laughed at his name, Mma Ramotswe pointed out. Mma Makutsi had to agree with this, even if reluctantly. She and Mma Ramotswe were fortunate, with their reasonably straightforward names of Grace and Precious, respectively; she had contemporaries who were not so fortunate and had been saddled by their parents with names that were frankly ridiculous. One boy she had known at school had borne a Setswana name which meant Look out, the police have arrived. The poor boy had been the object of derision amongst his classmates and had tried, unsuccessfully, to change the name by which he was known. But names, like false allegations, stick, and he had gone through life with this unfortunate burden, reminded of it every time he had to give details for an official form; looking away so that the person examining the form could be given the opportunity to smile, which they all did. Even if their names are not their fault, said Mma Makutsi, the way those boys behave is their fault, Mma. There can be no doubt about that. And those boys are very lazy, Mma. They are examples of what I am talking about. She looked sternly at Mma Ramotswe, as if challenging her employer to contradict her. Mma Ramotswe did not rise to the bait; Mma Makutsi was rather assertive and she admired the younger woman for that but it did not help, she had decided, to engage with her too much when she was in mid-theory. It was best to let people have their say, she always felt; then, when they had finished, and had possibly run out of breath, one could always lodge a mild objection to what had been said before. Mma Makutsi peered in the direction of the garage and lowered her voice. Have you ever seen those two young men walking? she asked. Mma Ramotswe frowned. Of course she had seen the apprentices walking; they walked about the garage, they came into the office to collect their tea, they walked to the tree under which Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's truck was parked. She pointed this out to Mma Makutsi, gently enough, but not so mildly as to prevent a firm refutation from the other side of the room. Not that sort of walking, Mma, said Mma Makutsi. Anybody can walk across a room or round a garage. Anybody, Mma. Even those two lazy young men. The sort of walking I#8...Revue de presse" The 10th Precious Ramotswe novel is as adorable as the first. Alexander McCall Smith's combination of loveable characters in a delightful setting in rural Botswana, along with some clever plots, is the perfect formula for an afternoon escape." Margaret Cannon, The Globe and Mail "This is feel-good fiction, all right, but it's not trite or trivial. . . . McCall Smith has created a memorable and lovable detective, and he writes with good humour and gentle wit." Sunday Mercury "Mr. McCall Smith has done it again, bestowing on his readers a book imbued with an irresistibly gentle philosophy that presumably reflects his own and more power to him. All we can do is look forward to going back to Botswana. And nobody should give up on that tiny white van yet." The Washington Times From the Hardcover edition.