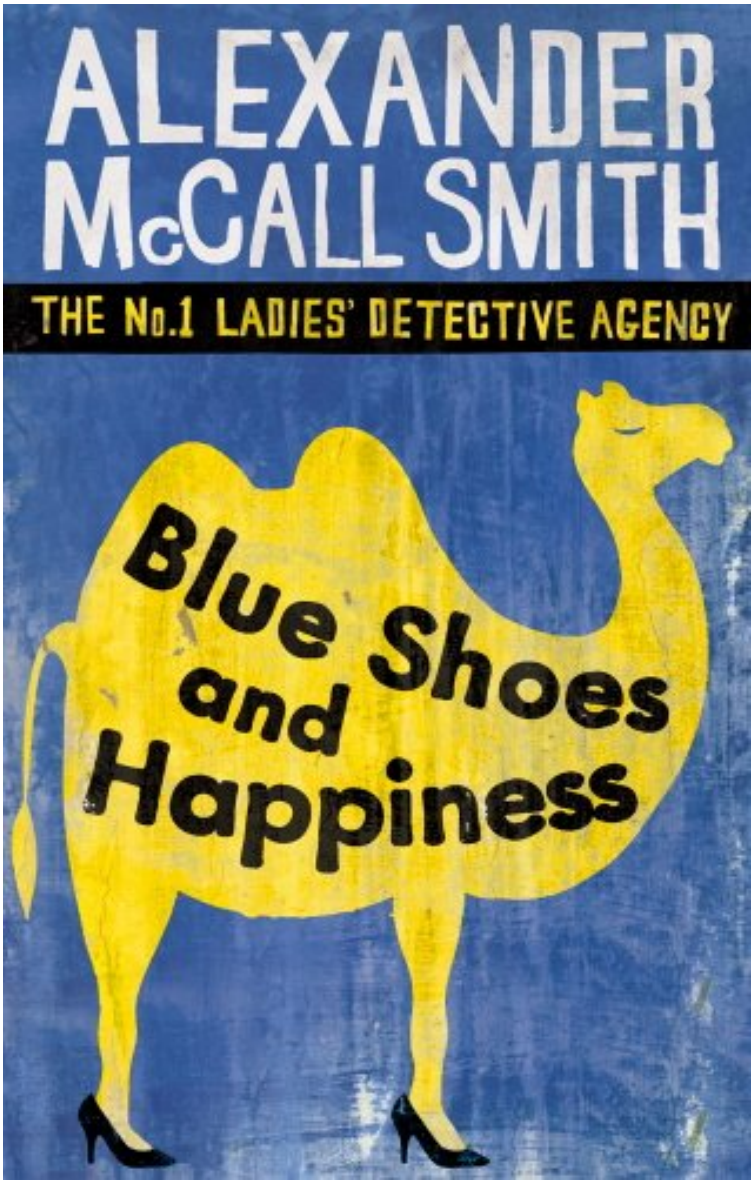
Blue Shoes And Happiness



Par Alexander McCall Smith
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Par Alexander McCall Smith : Blue Shoes And Happiness before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Blue Shoes And Happiness:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNow that she is finally and happily married to her long-term suitor Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, Mma Ramotswe of the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency of Botswana might have expected life to grow more sedate. But the many problems that lead customers to Mma Ramotswe's door seem, if anything, to have multiplied, and no sooner has she settled her traditionally built person into the married state than she finds herself looking into several troublesome matters at once. There is, to begin with, a disturbing case of blackmail and theft from the Government catering college. Then, while on an errand for her husband to the Mokolodi Game Reserve Mma Ramotswe is seconded to investigate an unpleasant atmosphere that may be down to witchcraft, or something worse. There are sinister goings-on at a health clinic to be looked into, not

to mention any number of small wrongs to be righted along the path to detective triumph. And all the time Mma Ramotswe has weighty questions of a philosophical nature to consider, such as whether it is right to find happiness in small things, such as a new pair of blue shoes, a slice of cake, or a red sunset over the Kalahari.Extrait Aunty Emang, Solver of Problems When you are just the right age, as Mma Ramotswe was, and when you have seen a bit of life, as Mma Ramotswe certainly had, then there are some things that you just know. And one of the things that was well known to Mma Ramotswe, only begetter of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (Botswana's only ladies' detective agency), was that there were two sorts of problem in this life. Firstly, there were those problems-and they were major ones-about which one could do very little, other than to hope, of course. These were the problems of the land, of fields that were too rocky, of soil that blew away in the wind, or of places where crops would just not thrive for some sickness that lurked in the very earth. But looming greater than anything else there was the problem of drought. It was a familiar feeling in Botswana, this waiting for rain, which often simply did not come, or came too late to save the crops. And then the land, scarred and exhausted, would dry and crack under the relentless sun, and it would seem that nothing short of a miracle would ever bring it to life. But that miracle would eventually arrive, as it always had, and the landscape would turn from brown to green within hours under the kiss of the rain. And there were other colours that would follow the green; yellows, blues, reds would appear in patches across the veld as if great cakes of dye had been crumbled and scattered by an unseen hand. These were the colours of the wild flowers that had been lurking there, throughout the dry season, waiting for the first drops of moisture to awaken them. So at least that sort of problem had its solution, although one often had to wait long, dry months for that solution to arrive. The other sorts of problems were those which people made for themselves. These were very common, and Mma Ramotswe had seen many of them in the course of her work. Ever since she had set up this agency, armed only with a copy of Clovis Andersen's The Principles of Private Detection-and a great deal of common sense-scarcely a day had gone by without her encountering some problem which people had brought upon themselves. Unlike the first sort of problem-drought and the like-these were difficulties that could have been avoided. If people were only more careful, or behaved themselves as they should, then they would not find themselves faced with problems of this sort. But of course people never behaved themselves as they should. "We are all human beings," Mma Ramotswe had once observed to Mma Makutsi, "and human beings can't really help themselves. Have you noticed that, Mma? We can't really help ourselves from doing things that land us in all sorts of trouble." Mma Makutsi pondered this for a few moments. In general, she thought that Mma Ramotswe was right about matters of this sort, but she felt that this particular proposition needed a little bit more thought. She knew that there were some people who were unable to make of their lives what they wanted them to be, but then there were many others who were quite capable of keeping themselves under control. In her own case, she thought that she was able to resist temptation quite effectively. She did not consider herself to be particularly strong, but at the same time she did not seem to be markedly weak. She did not drink, nor did she over-indulge in food, or chocolate or anything of that sort. No, Mma Ramotswe's observation was just a little bit too sweeping and she would have to disagree. But then the thought struck her: Could she resist a fine new pair of shoes, even if she knew that she had plenty of shoes already (which was not the case)? "I think you're right, Mma," she said. "Everybody has a weakness, and most of us are not strong enough to resist it." Mma Ramotswe looked at her assistant. She had an idea what Mma Makutsi's weakness might be, and indeed there might even be more than one. "Take Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, for example," said Mma Ramotswe. "All men are weak," said Mma Makutsi. "That is well known." She paused. Now that Mma Ramotswe and Mr J.L.B. Matekoni were married, it was possible that Mma Ramotswe had discovered new weaknesses in him. The mechanic was a quiet man, but it was often the mildest-looking people who did the most colourful things, in secret of course. What could Mr J.L.B. Matekoni get up to? It would be very interesting to hear. "Cake," said Mma Ramotswe quickly. "That is Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's great weakness. He cannot help himself when it comes to cake. He can be manipulated very easily if he has a plate of cake in his hand." Mma Makutsi laughed. "Mma Potokwane knows that, doesn't she?" she said. "I have seen her getting Mr J.L.B. Matekoni to do all sorts of things for her just by offering him pieces of that fruit cake of hers." Mma Ramotswe rolled her eyes up towards the ceiling. Mma Potokwane, the matron of the orphan farm, was her friend, and when all was said and done she was a good woman, but she was quite ruthless when it came to getting things for the children in her care. She it was who had cajoled Mr J.L.B. Matekoni into fostering the two children who now lived in their house; that had been a good thing, of course, and the children were dearly loved, but Mr J.L.B. Matekoni had not thought the thing through and had failed even to consult Mma Ramotswe about the whole

matter. And then there were the numerous occasions on which she had prevailed upon him to spend hours of his time fixing that unreliable old water pump at the orphan farm-a pump which dated back to the days of the Protectorate and which should have been retired and put into a museum long ago. And Mma Potokwane achieved all of this because she had a profound understanding of how men worked and what their weaknesses were; that was the secret of so many successful women-they knew about the weaknesses of men. That conversation with Mma Makutsi had taken place some days before. Now Mma Ramotswe was sitting on the verandah of her house on Zebra Drive, late on a Saturday afternoon, reading the paper. She was the only person in the house at the time, which was unusual for a Saturday. The children were both out: Motholeli had gone to spend the weekend with a friend whose family lived out at Mogiditishane. This friend's mother had picked her up in her small truck and had stored the wheelchair in the back with some large balls of string that had aroused Mma Ramotswe's interest but which she had not felt it her place to ask about. What could anybody want with such a quantity of string? she wondered. Most people needed very little string, if any, in their lives, but this woman, who was a beautician, seemed to need a great deal. Did beauticians have a special use for string that the rest of us knew nothing about? Mma Ramotswe asked herself. People spoke about face-lifts; did string come into face-lifts? Puso, the boy, who had caused them such concern over his unpredictable behaviour but who had recently become much more settled, had gone off with Mr J.L.B. Matekoni to see an important football match at the stadium. Mma Ramotswe did not consider it important in the least-she had no interest in football, and she could not see how it could possibly matter in the slightest who succeeded in kicking the ball into the goal the most times-but Mr J.L.B. Matekoni clearly thought differently. He was a close follower and supporter of the Zebras, and tried to get to the stadium whenever they were playing. Fortunately the Zebras were doing well at the moment, and this, thought Mma Ramotswe, was a good thing: it was quite possible, she felt, that Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's depression, from which he had made a good recovery, could recur if he, or the Zebras, were to suffer any serious set-back. So now she was alone in the house, and it seemed very quiet to her. She had made a cup of bush tea and had drunk that thoughtfully, gazing out over the rim of her cup onto the garden to the front of the house. The sausage fruit tree, the moporoto, to which she had never paid much attention, had taken it upon itself to produce abundant fruit this year, and four heavy sausage-shaped pods had appeared at the end of a branch, bending that limb of the tree under their weight. She would have to do something about that, she thought. People knew that it was dangerous to sit under such trees, as the heavy fruit could crack open a skull if it chose to fall when a person was below. That had happened to a friend of her father's many years ago, and the blow that he had received had cracked his skull and damaged his brain, making it difficult for him to speak. She remembered him when she was a child, struggling to make himself understood, and her father had explained that he had sat under a sausage tree and had gone to sleep, and this was the result. She made a mental note to warn the children and to get Mr J.L.B. Matekoni to knock the fruit down with a pole before anybody was hurt. And then she turned back to her cup of tea and to her perusal of the copy of The Daily News, which she had unfolded on her lap. She had read the first four pages of the paper, and had gone through the small advertisements with her usual care. There was much to be learned from the small advertisements, with their offers of irrigation pipes for farmers, used vans, jobs of various sorts, plots of land with house construction permission, and bargain furniture. Not only could one keep up to date with what things cost, but there was also a great deal of social detail to be garnered from this source. That day, for instance, there was a statement by a Mr Herbert Motimedi that he would not be responsible for any debts incurred by Mrs Boipelo Motimedi, which effectively informed the public that Herbert and Boipelo were no longer on close terms-which did not surprise Mma Ramotswe, as it happened, because she had always felt that that particular marriage was not a good idea, in view of the fact that Boipelo Motimedi had gone through three husbands before she found Herbert, and two of these previous husbands had been declared bankrupt. She smiled at that and skimmed over the remaining advertisements before turning the page and getting to the column that interested her more than anything else in the newspaper. Some months earlier, the newspaper had announced to its readers that it would be starting a new feature. "If you have any problems," the paper said, "then you should write to our new exclusive columnist, Aunty Emang, who will give you advice on what to do. Not only is Aunty Emang a BA from the University of Botswana, but she also has the wisdom of one who has lived fifty-eight years and knows all about life." This advance notice brought in a flood of letters, and the paper had expanded the amount of space available for Aunty Emang's sound advice. Soon she had become so popular that she was viewed as something of a national institution and was even named in Parliament when an opposition member brought the house down with the suggestion that the

policy proposed by some hapless minister would never have been approved of by Aunty Emang. Mma Ramotswe had chuckled over that, as she now chuckled over the plight of a young student who had written a passionate love letter to a girl and had delivered it, by mistake, to her sister. "I am not sure what to do," he had written to Aunty Emang. "I think that the sister is very pleased with what I wrote to her as she is smiling at me all the time. Her sister, the girl I really like, does not know that I like her and maybe her own sister has told her about the letter which she has received from me. So she thinks now that I am in love with her sister, and does not know that I am in love with her. How can I get out of this difficult situation?" And Aunty Emang, with her typical robustness, had written: "Dear Anxious in Molepolole: The simple answer to your question is that you cannot get out of this. If you tell one of the girls that she has received a letter intended for her sister, then she will become very sad. Her sister (the one you really wanted to write to in the first place) will then think that you have been unkind to her sister and made her upset. She will not like you for this. The answer is that you must give up seeing both of these girls and you should spend your time working harder on your examinations. When you have a good job and are earning some money, then you can find another girl to fall in love with. But make sure that you address any letter to that girl very carefully." There were two other letters. One was from a boy of fourteen who had been moved to write to Aunty Emang about being picked upon by his teacher. "I am a hard-working boy," he wrote. "I do all my schoolwork very carefully and neatly. I never shout in the class or push people about (like most other boys). When my teacher talks, I always pay attention and smile at him. I do not trouble the girls (like most other boys). I am a very good boy in every sense. Yet my teacher always blames me for anything that goes wrong and gives me low marks in my work. I am very unhappy. The more I try to please this teacher, the more he dislikes me. What am I doing wrong?" Everything, thought Mma Ramotswe. That's what you are doing wrong: everything. But how could one explain to a fourteen-year-old boy that one should not try too hard; which was what he was doing and which irritated his teacher. It was better, she thought, to be a little bit bad in this life, and not too perfect. If you were too perfect, then you invited exactly this sort of reaction, even if teachers should be above that sort of thing. But what, she wondered, would Aunty Emang say? "Dear Boy," wrote Aunty Emang. "Teachers do not like boys like you..."From the Hardcover edition.From Publishers WeeklyThe seventh entry in the No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency series (after 2005's In the Company of Cheerful Ladies) reaffirms Smith's considerable gifts as a writer. His familiar characters offer further facets of their personalities, and their gentle, tolerant approach to life remains a refreshing contrast to most fictional figures, let alone those populating most mysteries. The author's love for his creations and for his Botswana setting are evident on every page. While the plot will be of secondary importance to fans of Precious Ramotswe, the "traditionally-built," self-taught private detective, and her assistant, Grace Makutsi, Smith presents them with several mysteries, including the search for the identity of a blackmailer and the source of malaise at a nearby game reserve. Ramotswe's intuition and understanding enable her to find the truth, while dispensing justice according to her own personal dictates. Even newcomers will be charmed by this wonderful novel, with its skillful blend of humor and pathos, and will doubtless rush to catch up with the earlier books.