In the Company of Cheerful Ladies

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Chapter 1

Honesty, Tea, and Things in the Kitchen

K Mma Ramotswe was sitting alone in her favourite café, on the edge of the shopping centre at the Gaborone end of the Tlokweng Road. It was a Saturday, the day that she preferred above all others, a day on which one might do as much or as little as one liked, a day to have lunch with a friend at the President Hotel, or, as on that day, to sit by oneself and think about the events of the week and the state of the world. This café was a good place to be, for several reasons. Firstly, there was the view, that of a stand of eucalyptus trees with foliage of a comforting dark green which made a sound like the sea when the wind blew through the leaves. Or that, at least, was the sound which Mma Ramotswe imagined the sea to make. She had never seen the ocean, which was far away from land-locked Botswana; far away across the deserts of Namibia, across the red sands and the dry mountains. But she could imagine it when she listened to the eucalyptus trees in the wind and closed her eyes. Perhaps one day she would see it, and would stand on the shore and let the waves wash over her feet. Perhaps.

The other advantage which this café had was the fact that the tables were out on an open verandah, and there was always something to watch. That morning, for instance, she had seen a minor dispute between a teenage girl and her boyfriend – an exchange of words which she did not catch but which was clear enough in its meaning – and she had witnessed a woman scrape the side of a neighbouring car while she tried to park. The woman had stopped, quickly inspected the damage, and had then driven off. Mma Ramotswe had watched this incredulously, and had half-risen to her feet to protest, but was too late: the woman's car had by then turned the corner and disappeared and she did not even have time to see its number-plate.

She had sat down again and poured herself another cup of tea. It was not true that such a thing could not have happened in the old Botswana – it could – but it was undoubtedly true that this was much more likely to happen today. There were many selfish people about these days, people who seemed not to care if they scraped the cars of others or bumped into people while walking on the street. Mma Ramotswe knew that this was what happened when towns became bigger and people became strangers to one another; she knew, too, that this was a consequence of increasing prosperity, which, curiously enough, just seemed to bring out greed and selfishness. But even if she knew why all this happened, it did not make it any easier to bear. The rest of the world might become as rude as it wished, but this was not the way of things in Botswana and she would always defend the old Botswana way of doing things.

Life was far better, thought Mma Ramotswe, if we knew who we were. In the days when she was a schoolgirl in Mochudi, the village in which she had been born, everybody had known exactly who you were, and they often knew exactly who your parents, and your parents' parents, had been. Today when she went back to Mochudi, people would greet her as if she had barely been away; her presence needed no explanation. And even here in Gaborone, where things had grown so much, people still knew precisely who she was. They would know that she was Precious Ramotswe, founder of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, daughter of the late Obed Ramotswe, and now the wife (after a rather protracted engagement) of that most gracious of mechanics, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, proprietor of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. And some of them at least would also know that she lived in Zebra Drive, that she had a tiny white van, and that she employed one Grace Makutsi as her assistant. And so the ramifications of relationships and ties would spread further outwards, and the number of things that might be known would grow. Some might know that Mma Makutsi had a brother, Richard, who was now late; that she had achieved the previously unheard-of result of ninety-seven per cent in the final examinations of the Botswana Secretarial College; and that following upon the success of the Kalahari Typing School for Men, she had recently moved to a rather better house in Extension Two. Knowledge of this sort – everyday, human knowledge – helped to keep society together and made it difficult to scrape the car of another without feeling guilty about it and without doing something to let the owner know. Not that this appeared to make any difference to that selfish woman in the car, who had left the scrape unreported; who clearly did not care.

But there was no point in throwing up one's hands in despair. People had always done that – the throwing up of hands, the shrug – but one got nowhere in doing so. The world might have changed for the worse in some respects, but in others it was a much better place, and it was important to remember this. Lights went off in some places, but went on in others. Look at Africa – there had been so much to shake one's head over – corruption, civil wars, and the rest – but there was also so much which was now much better. There had been slavery in the past, and all the suffering which that had brought, and there had been all the cruelties of apartheid just those few miles away over the border, but all that was now over. There had been ignorance, but now more and more people were learning to write, and were graduating from universities. Women had been held in such servitude, and now they could vote and express themselves and claim lives for themselves, even if there were still many men who did not want such things to be. These were the good things that happened and one had to remember them.

Mma Ramotswe raised her tea cup to her lips and looked out over the brim. At the edge of the car park, immediately in front of the café, a small market had been set up, with traders' stalls and trays of colourful goods. She watched as a man attempted to persuade a customer to buy a pair of sunglasses. The woman tried on several pairs, but was not satisfied, and moved on to the next stall. There she pointed to a small piece of silver jewellery, a bangle, and the trader, a short man wearing a wide-brimmed felt hat, passed it across to her to try on. Mma Ramotswe watched as the woman held out her wrist to be admired by the trader, who nodded encouragement. But the woman seemed not to agree with his verdict, and handed the bangle back, pointing to another item at the back of the stall. And at that moment, while the trader

turned round to stretch for whatever it was that she had singled out, the woman quickly slipped another bangle into the pocket of the jacket she was wearing.

Mma Ramotswe gasped. This time, she could not sit back and allow a crime to be committed before her very eyes. If people did nothing, then no wonder that things were getting worse. So she stood up, and began to walk firmly towards the stall where the woman had now engaged the trader in earnest discussion about the merits of the merchandise which he was showing her.

'Excuse me, Mma.'

The voice came from behind her, and Mma Ramotswe turned round to see who had addressed her. It was the waitress, a young woman whom Mma Ramotswe had not seen at the café before.

'Yes, Mma, what is it?'

The waitress pointed an accusing finger at her. 'You cannot run away like that,' she said. 'I saw you. You're trying to go away without paying the bill. I saw you.'

For a moment Mma Ramotswe was unable to speak. The accusation was a terrible one, and so unwarranted. Of course she had not been trying to get away without paying the bill – she would never do such a thing; all she was doing was trying to stop a crime being committed before her eyes.

She recovered herself sufficiently to reply. 'I am not trying to go away, Mma,' she said. 'I am just trying to stop that person over there from stealing from that man. Then I would have come back to pay.'

The waitress smiled knowingly. 'They all find some excuse,' she said. 'Every day there are people like you. They come and eat our food and then they run away and hide. You people are all the same.'

Mma Ramotswe looked over towards the stall. The woman had begun to walk away, presumably with the bangle still firmly in her pocket. It would now be too late to do anything about it, and all because of this silly young woman who had misunderstood what she was doing.

She went back to her table and sat down. 'Bring me the bill,' she said. 'I will pay it straightaway.'

The waitress stared at her. 'I will bring you the bill,' she said. 'But I shall have to add something for myself. I will have to add this if you do not want me to call the police and tell them about how you tried to run away.'

As the waitress went off to fetch the bill, Mma Ramotswe glanced around her to see if people at the neighbouring tables had witnessed the scene. At the table next to hers, a woman sat with her two young children, who were sipping with evident pleasure at large milkshakes. The woman smiled at Mma Ramotswe, and then

turned her attention back to the children. She had not seen anything, thought Mma Ramotswe, but then the woman leaned across the table and addressed a remark to her.

'Bad luck, Mma,' she said. 'They are too quick in this place. It is easier to run away at the hotels.'

For a few minutes Mma Ramotswe sat in complete silence, reflecting on what she had seen. It was remarkable. Within a very short space of time she had seen an instance of bare-faced theft, had encountered a waitress who thought nothing of extorting money, and then, to bring the whole matter to a shameful conclusion, the woman at the next table had disclosed a thoroughly dishonest view of the world. Mma Ramotswe was frankly astonished. She thought of what her father, the late Obed Ramotswe, a fine judge of cattle but also a man of the utmost propriety, would have thought of this. He had brought her up to be scrupulously honest, and he would have been mortified to see this sort of behaviour. Mma Ramotswe remembered how she had been walking with him in Mochudi when she was a young girl and they had come across a coin on the edge of the road. She had fallen upon it with delight and was polishing it with her handkerchief before he noticed what had happened and had intervened.

'That is not ours,' he said. 'That money belongs to somebody else.'

She had yielded the coin reluctantly, and it had been handed in to a surprised police sergeant at the Mochudi Police Post, but the lesson had been a vivid one. It was difficult for Mma Ramotswe to imagine how anybody could steal from another, or do any of the things which one read about in the Botswana Daily News court reports. The only explanation was that people who did that sort of thing had no understanding of what others felt; they simply did not understand. If you knew what it was like to be another person, then how could you possibly do something which would cause pain?

The problem, though, was that there seemed to be people in whom that imaginative part was just missing. It could be that they were born that way – with something missing from their brains – or it could be that they became like that because they were never taught by their parents to sympathise with others. That was the most likely explanation, thought Mma Ramotswe. A whole generation of people, not only in Africa, but everywhere else, had not been taught to feel for others because the parents simply had not bothered to teach them this.

She continued to think of this as she drove in her tiny white van, back through that part of town known as the Village, back past the University, with its growing sprawl of buildings, and finally along Zebra Drive itself, where she lived. She had been so disturbed by what she had seen that she had quite forgotten to do the shopping that she had intended to do, with the result that it was only when she pulled into her driveway and came to a halt beside the kitchen wall that she remembered that she had none of the items she needed to make that night's dinner. There were no beans,

for example, which meant that their stew would be accompanied by no greens; and there would be no custard for the pudding which she had planned to make for the children. She sat at the wheel of the van and contemplated retracing her tracks to the shops, but she just did not have the energy. It was a hot day, and the house looked cool and inviting. She could go inside, make herself a pot of bush tea, and retire to her bedroom for a sleep. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni and the children had gone out to Mojadite, a small village off the Lobatse Road, to visit his aunt, and would not be back before six or seven. She would have the house to herself for several hours yet, and this would be a good time for a rest. There was plenty of food in the house – even if it was the wrong sort for the dinner that she had planned. They could have pumpkin with the stew, rather than beans, and the children would be perfectly happy with a tin of peaches in syrup rather than the custard and semolina pudding that she had thought of making. So there was no reason to go out again.

Mma Ramotswe stepped out of the tiny white van and walked round to the kitchen door, unlocking it to let herself in. She could remember the days when nobody locked their doors in Botswana, and indeed when there were many doors that had no locks to lock anyway. But they had to lock their doors now and there were even people who locked their gates too. She thought of what she had seen only a short time before. That woman who had stolen from the trader with the wide-brimmed felt hat; she lived in a room somewhere which she no doubt kept locked, and yet she was prepared to steal from that poor man. Mma Ramotswe sighed. There was much in this world over which one might shake one's head. Indeed, it would be possible to go through life today with one's head in constant motion, like a puppet in the hands of a shaky puppeteer.

The kitchen was cool, and Mma Ramotswe slipped out of her shoes, which had been pinching her recently (could one's feet put on weight?). The polished concrete floor was comfortable underfoot as she moved over to the sink to pour herself a glass of water. Rose, her maid, was away for the weekend, but had tidied the kitchen before she left on Friday evening. Rose was conscientious and kept all the surfaces scrupulously clean. She lived in a small house on the far edge of Tlokweng, which she maintained with the same rigour as she devoted to her work for Mma Ramotswe. She was one of those women, thought Mma Ramotswe, in whom there seemed to be an unending capacity for hard work. She had raised a family – and raised them well – with little help from the fathers of the children. She had provided for these children on the small wages that she had earned as a maid and by the payment, scant though it was, that she received for the sewing work that she undertook. Africa was full of such women, it seemed, and if there was to be any hope for Africa it would surely come from women such as these.

Mma Ramotswe filled the kettle from the kitchen tap and put it on the cooker. She did this automatically, as one performs familiar tasks, and it was only after she had done this that she noticed that the kettle had not been in its accustomed place. Rose always left it on the small wooden chopping block beside the sink, and the children, Motholeli and Puso, knew to leave it there too. That was the kettle's place, and it would not have occurred to anybody to leave it on the low wooden dresser on the other side of the kitchen. Certainly Mr J.L.B. Matekoni would not have done that – and indeed she had never seen Mr J.L.B. Matekoni touch the kettle in all the six

months since their marriage and his arrival in the house on Zebra Drive. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni liked tea, of course – it would have been very difficult to marry a man who did not like tea – but he very rarely seemed to make any tea for himself. She had not thought about this before now, but it was rather interesting, was it not, that somebody might believe that tea just happened along? Mr J.L.B. Matekoni was not a lazy man, but it was remarkable to reflect how most men imagined that things like tea and food would simply appear if they waited long enough. There would always be a woman in the background – a mother, a girlfriend, a wife – who would ensure that these needs would be met. This should change, of course, and men should learn how to look after themselves, but very few men seemed to be doing this yet. And there was not much hope for the younger generation, looking at the two apprentices and how they behaved. They still expected women to look after them and, unfortunately, there seemed to be enough young women who were prepared to do this.

It was while she was thinking this that Mma Ramotswe noticed that one of the drawers in the kitchen dresser was not as she had left it. It was not fully open, but had definitely been pulled out and then not closed properly. She frowned. This was very strange. Again, Rose always shut everything after she used it and the only other person who had been in the kitchen since Rose left had been Mma Ramotswe herself. She had been in there early that morning, when she had got out of bed to make breakfast for Mr J.L.B. Matekoni and the children before they went off to Mojadite. Then she had seen them off on their early start and had gone back into the kitchen to tidy up. She had not needed anything from that drawer, which contained string, scissors, and other items that she would only use from time to time. Somebody else must have opened it.

She moved over to that side of the kitchen and opened the drawer further to inspect it. Everything seemed to be there, except ... and now she noticed the ball of string which was sitting on the top of the dresser. She picked this up and examined it. This was her ball of string, indeed, and it had been taken out of the drawer and left out by the person who had opened the drawer and, she imagined, who had also moved the kettle from its accustomed place.

Mma Ramotswe stood quite still. It now occurred to her that there had been an intruder, and that whoever it was who had come into the house had been disturbed by her return. That person might have run out of the front of the house when she came into the kitchen, but then the front door, which provided the only means of leaving on that side of the house, would have been left firmly locked. This meant that the intruder might still be inside.

For a few moments she wondered what to do. She could telephone the police and tell them that she suspected that somebody was in the house, but what if they came out to investigate and there was nobody? They would hardly be pleased to be called out for no reason at all and they would probably mutter comments about nervous women who should know better than to waste police time while there were real crimes to be looked into. So perhaps it was premature to call the police and she should, instead, go through the house herself, moving from room to room to see if there was anybody there. Of course that was risky. Even in peaceful Botswana there

were cases of people being attacked by intruders when they came upon them in the course of a robbery. Some of these people were dangerous. And yet this was Gaborone, on a Saturday afternoon, with the sun riding high in the sky, and people walking along Zebra Drive. This was not a time of shadows and inexplicable noises, a time of darkness. This was not a time to be afraid.

Chapter Two

Trousers and Pumpkins

kMma Ramotswe did not consider herself to be a particularly courageous woman. There were some things of which she was frightened: curtainless windows at night, for example, because one could not see what was outside, in the darkness; and snakes, because there were snakes about which were truly dangerous – puff adders, for example, the lebolobolo, which was fat and lazy and had great curved fangs, or the mokopa, which was long and black and very poisonous and which was well known to hate humans because of some distant wrong in snake memory. These were things about which one should be frightened; other things could be frightening if one allowed them to be so, but could be faced up to if one were only prepared to look them in the eye.

Yet there was something very strange about thinking that you were alone in the house and then discovering that you were not. Mma Ramotswe found this very frightening, and had to struggle with herself before she began her inspection, walking first through the door which led from the kitchen into the sitting room next door. She glanced about her, and quickly noticed that everything was in its normal place and that nothing seemed to have been disturbed. There was her ornamental plate with its picture of Sir Seretse Khama – a prize possession which she would have been mortified to have lost to a burglar. And there was her Queen Elizabeth II tea cup, with its picture of the Queen looking out in such a dignified way. That was another thing that she would have been very upset to have lost, because it reminded her of duty and of the traditional values in a world that seemed to have less and less time for such things. Not once had Seretse Khama faltered in his duty, nor had the Queen, who admired the Khama family and had always had a feeling for Africa. Mma Ramotswe had read that at the funeral of Sir Garfield Todd, that good man who had stood up for decency and justice in Zimbabwe, a message had been read out from the Queen. And the Queen had insisted that her High Commissioner should go to the graveside in person, to the very graveside, to read out what she had to say about that brave man. And when Lady Khama had died, the Queen had sent a message too, because she understood, and that had made Mma Ramotswe feel proud of being a Motswana, and of all that Seretse and his wife had done.

She looked quickly at the wall to see whether the photograph of her father – her Daddy, as she called him – the late Obed Ramotswe was in place, and it was. And so was the velvet picture of mountains, which they had brought over from Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's house near the old Botswana Defence Force Club. There would have been many people who would have liked to steal that, so that they could run their fingers

over it and feel the texture of the velvet, but it was safe too. Mma Ramotswe was not sure about that picture, and perhaps it would not be an altogether bad thing if somebody did steal it, but she corrected herself and suppressed the thought. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni liked that picture, and she would not have wished him to be upset. So the picture would remain. And indeed, if they ever did have a real burglary, when everything was taken, she was sure that the picture would somehow be left, and she would have to look at it while she sat on cushions on the floor, all the chairs having gone.

She moved over to the door between the sitting room and the verandah and checked it. It was securely locked, just as they had left it. And the windows, too, although open, had their wrought-iron bars intact. Nobody could have entered by any of those without bending or breaking the bars, and this had not been done. So the intruder, if he existed, could neither have come in nor gone out through that room.

She left the sitting room and walked slowly down the corridor to check the other rooms. There was a large, walk-in cupboard a few paces along the corridor, and she stopped before this, peering gingerly past the edge of its door, which was slightly ajar. It was dark in the cupboard, but she could just make out the shapes of the items it contained: the two buckets, the sewing machine, the coats that Mr J.L.B. Matekoni had brought with him and hung on the rail at the back. Nothing seemed out of place, and there was certainly no intruder hiding in the coats. So she closed the door and went on until she came to the first of the three rooms that gave off the corridor. This was Puso's room, which was very much a boy's room, with little in it. She opened the door cautiously, gritting her teeth as the door creaked loudly. She looked at the table, on which a home-made catapult was resting, and the floor, on which a discarded football and a pair of running shoes lay, and she realised that no intruder would come in here anyway. Motholeli's room also was empty, although here Mma Ramotswe thought it necessary to peer into the cupboard. Again there was nothing untoward.

Now she entered the bedroom she shared with Mr J.L.B. Matekoni. This was the largest of the three bedrooms and it contained things that somebody might well wish to steal. There were her clothes, for instance, which were colourful and well-made. There would be a keen demand for these from larger ladies looking for dresses, but there was no sign that the hanging rail on which these garments were suspended had been tampered with. And nor was there any sign of disturbance on the dressing table on which Mma Ramotswe kept the few brooches and bangles that she liked to wear. None of these seemed to have gone.

Mma Ramotswe felt the tension leave her body. The house was obviously empty and the notion that somebody might be hiding in it was manifestly a nonsense. There was probably some perfectly rational explanation for the open drawer and the ball of string on the dresser, and this explanation would no doubt emerge when Mr J.L.B. Matekoni and the children returned that evening. One possibility was that they had set off, forgotten something, and then come back to the house after Mma Ramotswe had herself left it. Perhaps they had bought a present for Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's relative and had come back to wrap it up, a task for which they would have needed the string. That was a perfectly rational explanation.

As Mma Ramotswe made her way back to the kitchen to make her tea, she thought of how things that appeared to be mysteries were usually no such thing. The unexplained was unexplained not because there was anything beyond explanation, but simply because the ordinary, day-to-day explanation had not made itself apparent. Once one began to enquire, so-called mysteries rapidly tended to become something much more prosaic. Not that people liked this, of course. They liked to think that there were things beyond explanation – supernatural things – things like tokoloshes, for example, who roamed at night and caused fear and mischief. Nobody ever saw a tokolosh for the simple reason that there was nothing to see. What one thought was a tokolosh was usually no more than a shadow of a branch in the moonlight, or the sound of the wind in the trees, or a tiny animal scurrying through the undergrowth. But people were not attracted by these perfectly straightforward explanations and spoke instead of all sorts of fanciful spirits. Well, she would not be like that when it came to intruders. There had been no intruder in the house at all, and Mma Ramotswe was quite alone, as she had originally thought herself to be.

She made her tea and poured herself a large cup. Then, cup in hand, she returned to her bedroom. It would be a pleasant way of spending what remained of the afternoon, resting on her bed, and falling asleep if she wished. She had a few magazines on her bedside table, and a copy of the Botswana Daily News. She would read these until her eyes began to shut and the magazine fell out of her hands. It was a very agreeable way of drifting off to sleep.

She opened wide the window to allow a cooling breeze to circulate. Then, having placed her tea cup on the bedside table, she lowered herself onto the bed, sinking down into the mattress that had served her so well for many years and which was holding up very well with the additional weight of Mr J.L.B. Matekoni. She had bought the bed and its mattress at the same time that she had moved into the house on Zebra Drive, and had resisted the temptation to buy cheaply. In her view a well-made bed was the one thing on which it was worthwhile spending as much money as one could possibly afford. A good bed produced happiness, she was sure of that; a bad, uncomfortable bed produced grumpiness and niggling pains.

She started to read the Botswana Daily News. There was a story of a politician who had made a speech urging people to take more care of their cattle. He said that it was a shocking thing to the conscience of a cattle-owning country that there should be cases of mistreated cattle. People who allowed their cattle to go thirsty while they were driving them to the railway siding should be ashamed of themselves, he said. It was well-known, he went on, that the quality of meat was affected by the experience of the cattle in their last days. An animal that had been stressed would always produce beef that tasted less than perfect, and perfection was what Botswana wanted for its meat. After all, Botswana beef was fine, grass-fed beef, and tasted so much better than the meat of those poor cattle which were kept cooped up or which were fed food that cattle should not eat.

Mma Ramotswe found herself agreeing with all of this. Her father had been a great judge of cattle and had always told her that cattle should be treated as members of the family. He knew the names of all his cattle, which was a considerable feat for one who had built up so large a herd, and he would never have tolerated their suffering

in any way. It was just as well, she thought, that he was no longer able to hear this news of thirsty cattle, nor to see the sort of things that she had seen that very day while having her tea at the shopping centre.

She finished the article on cattle and had embarked on another one when she heard a sound. It was a rather peculiar sound, rather like moaning. She lowered the newspaper and stared up at the ceiling. It was very strange. The sound was apparently coming from fairly nearby – from just outside her window, it seemed. She listened very hard and there it was again, once more emanating from somewhere not far away.

Mma Ramotswe sat up, and as she did so the sound occurred again – a soft, indistinct groaning, like the sound of a dog in pain. She got up off the bed and crossed to her window to look outside. If there was a dog in the garden, then she would have to go and chase it away. She did not like dogs to come into the garden, and in particular she did not like visits from the malodorous yellow dogs which her neighbour kept. These dogs were always moaning and whining, in a way which was very similar to the sound that she had heard while lying down.

She looked out into the garden. The sun was well down in the sky now, and the shadows from the trees were long. She saw the paw-paw trees and their yellowing leaves; she saw the spray of bougainvillaea and the mopipi tree which grew at the edge of Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's vegetable patch. And she saw the rough patch of grass in which a stray dog might like to hide. But there was no dog in sight, not under her window, nor in the grass, nor at the foot of the mopipi tree.

Mma Ramotswe turned round and went back to bed. Lying down again, her traditional frame sank deep into the mattress, which sagged down towards the floor. Immediately the moaning sound returned, louder this time, and it seemed rather closer. Mma Ramotswe frowned, and shifted her weight on the mattress. Immediately the moaning sound made itself heard again, this time even more loudly.

It was then that she realised that the sound was coming from within the room, and her heart skipped a beat. The sound was in the room, and it seemed as if it was directly under her, under the bed. And at that point, as this frightening realisation was reached, her mattress suddenly heaved beneath her, as if a great subterranean event had propelled it upwards. Then, with a scuffling sound, the figure of a man squirmed out from under the bed, seemed to struggle with some impediment as he emerged, and then shook himself free and dashed out of the room. It happened so quickly that Mma Ramotswe barely had time to see him before he disappeared through the bedroom door. She had no time to see his features, and she only barely took in the fact that although he was wearing a smart red shirt, he was not wearing any trousers.

She shouted out, but the man was already out of the room. And by the time that she struggled to her feet, she heard the kitchen door slamming as he made his exit from the house. She moved over to the window in the hope of seeing him as he ran across her yard, but he had taken another route, over to the side, and must have been heading towards the fence that ran along the side of her property.

Then she looked down at the floor and noticed, just at the side of the bed, where they were still snagged on the sharp end of a spring, a pair of khaki trousers. The man who had been hiding under her bed had become trapped and had been obliged to wriggle out of his trousers to make his getaway. Mma Ramotswe now picked up these trousers, releasing them from the spring, and examined them: an ordinary pair of khaki trousers, in quite good condition, and now separated from their owner. She felt gingerly in the pockets – one never knew what one would find in a man's pockets – but there was nothing other than a piece of string. There was certainly nothing that could identify this man.