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# **Precious and the Monkeys**

Written by Alexander McCall Smith

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Alexander McCall Smith

Precious and  
the Monkeys



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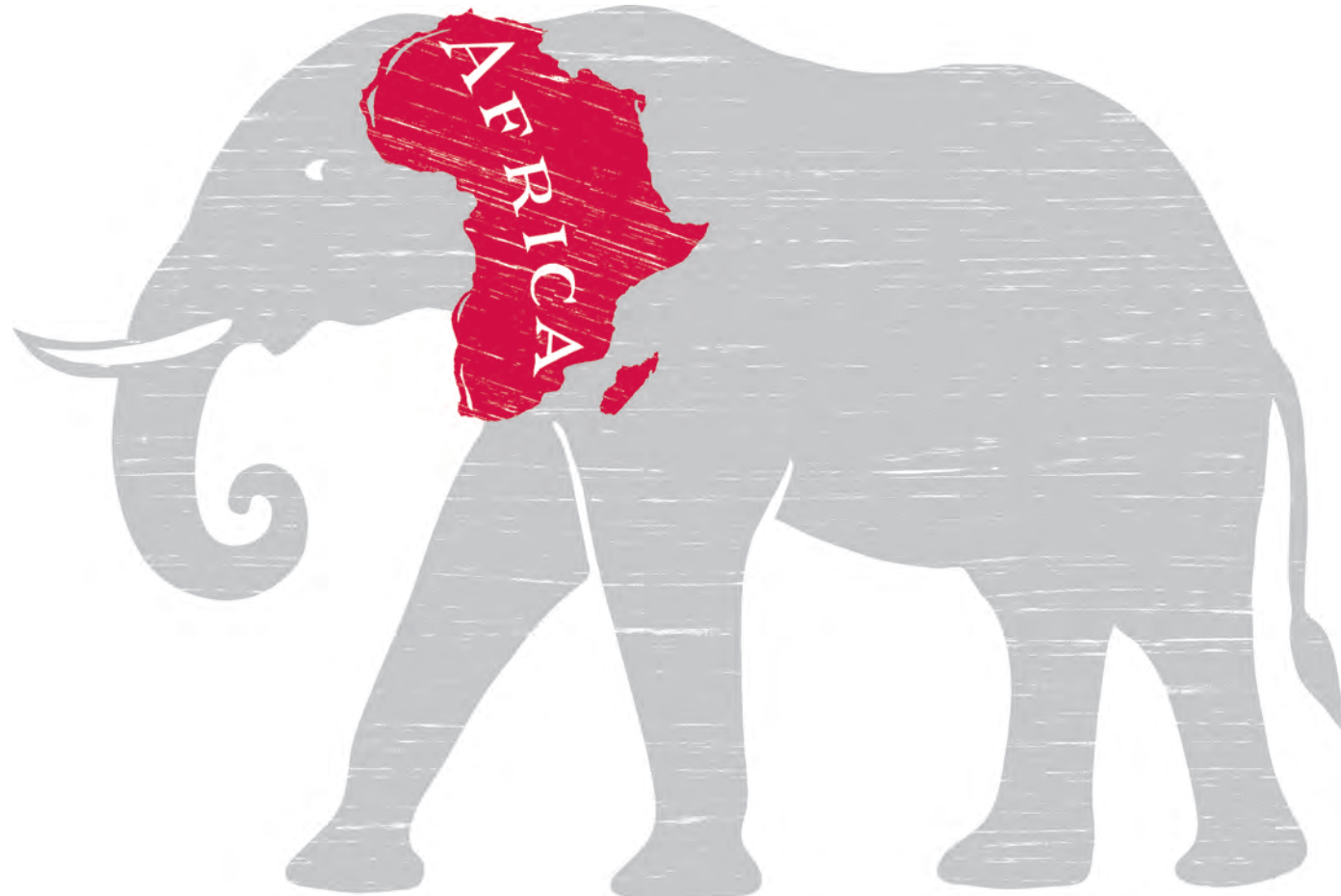
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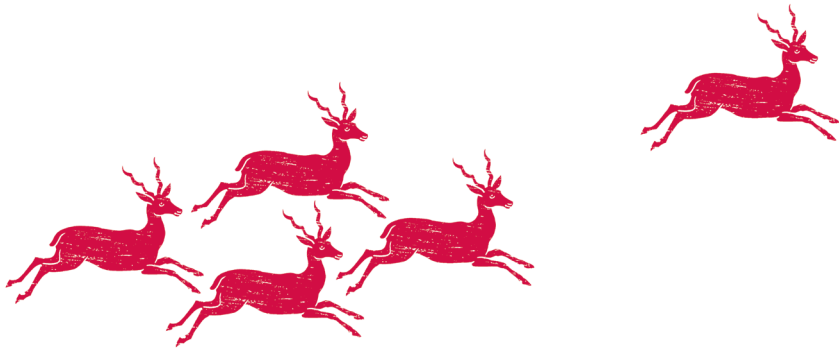
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**H**AVE YOU EVER SAID TO YOURSELF – not out loud, of course, but silently, just in your head: *Wouldn't it be nice to be a detective?* I have, and so have a lot of other people, although most of us will never have the chance to make our dream come true. Detectives, you see, are born that way. Right from the beginning, they just *know* that this is what they want to be. And right from the beginning, even when they are very young – a lot younger than you – they show that solving mysteries is something they can do rather well.

This is the story of a girl who became a detective. Her first name was Precious, and her second name was Ramotswe.

# RAM • OTS • WE

That is an African name, and it is not as hard to say it as it looks. You just say RAM and then you say OTS (like *lots* without the l) and then you finish it off by saying WE. That's it.

This is a picture of Precious when she was about seven. She is smiling because she was thinking at the time of something funny, although she often smiled even when she was not thinking about anything in particular. Nice people smile a lot, and Precious Ramotswe was one of the nicest girls in Botswana. Everyone said that.

Botswana was the country she lived in. It was down towards the bottom of Africa, right in the middle. This meant that it was very far from the sea. Precious had never seen the sea, although she had heard people talk about it.

“The sound of the waves is like the sound of a high wind in the branches of the trees,” people said. “It’s like that sound, but it never stops.”

She would have loved to stand beside the sea, and to let the waves wash over her toes, but it was too far away for her wish to be granted. So she had to content herself with the wide dry land that she lived in, which had a lot of amazing things to see anyway.

There was the Kalahari Desert, a great stretch of dry grass and thorn trees that went on and on into the distance, further than any eye can see. Then there was the great river in the north, which flowed the



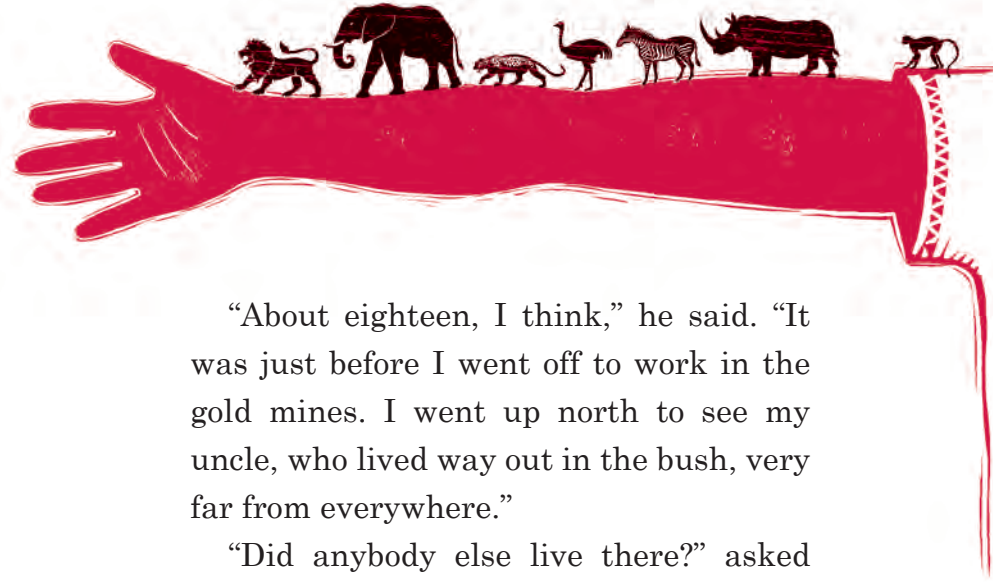
wrong way, not into the ocean, as rivers usually do, but back into the heart of Africa. When it reached the sands of the Kalahari, it drained away, just like water disappears down the plughole of a bath.

But most exciting, of course, were the wild animals. There were many of these in Botswana: lions, elephants, leopards, ostriches, monkeys – the list goes on and on. Precious had not seen all of these animals, but she had heard about most of them. Her father, a kind man whose name was Obed, had often spoken about them, and she loved the tales he told.

“Tell me about the time you were nearly eaten by a lion,” she would ask. And Obed, who had told her that story perhaps a hundred times before, would tell her again. And it was every bit as exciting each time he told it.

“I was quite young then,” he began.

“How young?” asked Precious.



“About eighteen, I think,” he said. “It was just before I went off to work in the gold mines. I went up north to see my uncle, who lived way out in the bush, very far from everywhere.”

“Did anybody else live there?” asked Precious. She was always asking questions, which was a sign that she might become a detective later on. Many people who ask lots of questions become detectives, because that is what detectives have to do.

“It was a very small village,” said Obed. “It was just a few huts, really, and a fenced place where they kept the cattle. They had this fence, you see, which protected the cattle from the lions at night.”

As you can imagine, this fence had to be quite strong. You cannot keep lions out with a fence that is no more than a few strands of wire. That is hopeless when it comes to lions – they would just knock down such a fence with a single blow of their paw. A proper lion fence has to be made of strong poles, from the trunks of trees, just like this:

That is a good, solid lion fence.

“So there I was,” Obed went on. “I had gone to spend a few days with my uncle and his family. They were good to me and I enjoyed being with my cousins, whom I had not seen for a long time. There were six of them – four boys and two girls. We had many adventures together.



“I slept in one of the huts with three of the boys. We did not have proper beds in those days – we had sleeping mats, made out of reeds, which we laid out on the floor of the hut. They were very comfortable, even if it doesn’t sound like it, and they were much cooler than a bed and blankets in the hot weather, and easier to store too.”

Precious was quiet now. This was the part of the story that she was waiting for.

“And then,” her father continued, “and then one night I woke up to hear a strange sound outside. It was a sort of grunting sound, a little bit like the sound a large pig will make when it’s sniffing about for food, only deeper.”

