



MaP's OVC programme celebrated in Alexander McCall Smith's latest novel, 'The Handsome Man's De Luxe Café'



Alexander McCall Smith with MaP students



Chapter Seven Pilates with Cake

Mma Potokwani, matron of the Orphan Farm, and substitute mother, over the years, to almost eight hundred children, each of whose young life had had such a bad beginning, took most things in her stride. Mr J. L. B. Matekoni had once remarked that she was the only woman in Botswana who could be struck by lightning and make the lightning blow a fuse. 'And I wouldn't want to be the lion who tried to eat her,' he had added. 'That lion would learn a lesson, I think.' An exaggeration, of course, but Mma Potokwani had certainly never let the world put obstacles in her path. She had survived the intrusions of bureaucrats, and the indifference and selfishness of those who, having made their money, refused to share it. She had begged and borrowed and scraped in order to provide for the orphans in her care, and prided herself on the fact that none of them, none at all, had gone out into the world without knowing that they were loved and that there was at least one person who wanted them to make something of their lives - one person who believed in them.

'Maybe I can't give them everything they need,' she once said to Mma Ramotswe, 'but at least they know that I have tried.'

And Mma Ramotswe, who was well aware of the heroic efforts that Mma Potokwani had made, had replied, 'They know that, Mma. They definitely know that.'

As did many others. Everybody was now aware of the scheme that Mma Potokwani had cooked up with Mr Taylor at Maru-a-Pula School to give orphans what amounted to the best education available in Botswana.

The children chosen for that scheme had done every bit as well as the pupils who came from backgrounds of comfort and privilege, and had gone on to train for jobs that would otherwise have been way beyond their wildest dreams. A child who had nothing, who had been passed from pillar to post among struggling relatives, or who had not even had such relatives and had been completely abandoned because there was no grandmother to shoulder the burden - something that went against every fibre of Botswana traditions - such a child might find himself or herself training as a scientist, a doctor, an agronomist. And in the audience at such a graduation would be sitting Mma Potokwani in pride of place, in a sense - even if she were not physically there.