

Not a stalker, just a fan

Marian Keyes tells us she has strong feelings for fellow novelist **Alexander McCall Smith**

Alexander McCall Smith. Yes, I love him. I really, really love him. I want to meet him. I want to spend time with him. But I'm not a stalker, you understand, I just want to be his friend.

A few years back I read the first ladies' detective book and it didn't really take. But a month ago, I read the second in the series and I was charmed! Charmed and uplifted. Then I read *44 Scotland Street*, then *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, then *The 21/2 Pillars of Wisdom*. By now, I would read his shopping list.

I'm obsessed with him—he's adorable! His books are a light in a dark world and if I had to choose between him or George Clooney as a dinner companion, I would be on the horns of a very thorny dilemma.

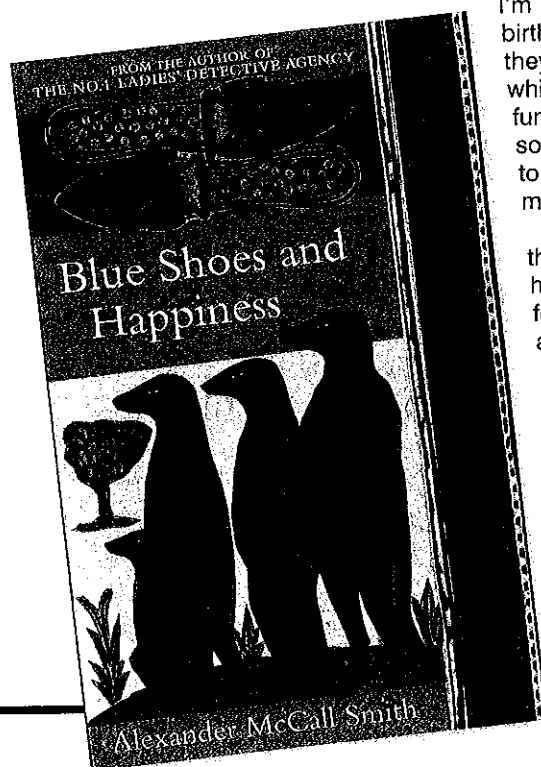
The thing is, I've actually been in a room with Alexander McCall Smith, but this was before my obsession had me in its fiendish grip. For an entire lunch, I sat and ate and barely glanced in his direction. If only I'd known! I could have done the Badgerer's Crouch (it's been done to me)—where a person shoves in between two chairs and crouches down beside the object of their obsession, who is trying to eat their lunch, and tells them how much they love them. Because the badgerer is crouching, they give the impression that they'll only be there as long as their knees hold out. But the thing about a person in the grip of an obsession is that their knees can withstand inhuman amounts of pressure.

But what if I'm wrong?! What if Alexander McCall Smith isn't a lovely man at all? What if he reserves all his charm and warmth and generosity of spirit for his books? What if, in real life, he's the kind of man who turns all the lights out and pretends not to be in when carol singers call?

Unlikely; very, very unlikely; in fact I'm appalled I even suggested it—everyone who's ever met him has fallen in love with him—and the only reason I said it is that sometimes people get the wrong



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idea about me from my books. Because I write comedy, they think I'm great fun. Over the years, lovely readers have invited me to their birthday parties, hen nights, even weddings. 'We need you to come,' they say. 'You're great fun!' And I smile anxiously and quickly decline, while something withers and dies inside of me. Because I'm not great fun. Not at all. I'm in bed every night by 10pm. In real life, I despair so much that I've had to ration myself and now I only permit myself to do it between the hours of 4am and 6am. I'm only great fun in my books.

But that's just me, and sadly, I haven't convinced myself that Mr McCall Smith is anything less than an extraordinary human being. I still want to move into his home and follow him around like a puppy, soaking up his kindness and wisdom.

But there's nothing sinister in my intent. Really. Like I said, I'm not a stalker. I just want to be his friend.

The seventh title in Alexander McCall Smith's 'First Ladies Detective Club' series is Blue Shoes and Happiness, published this month by Little, Brown. Little, Brown is running a fantastic consumer competition to win a safari in Botswana—make sure all your customers enter!