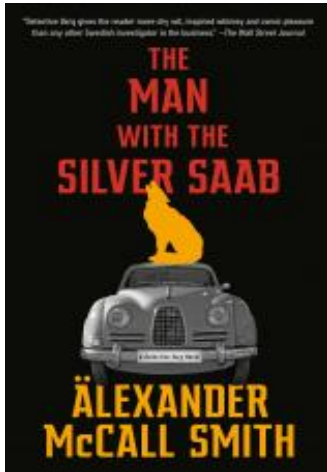


The Man with the Silver Saab: A Detective Varg Novel

by Alexander McCall Smith



About the Book

In the hilarious new novel in the bestselling Detective Varg series, an eminent art historian is framed and the ace investigators of the Department of Sensitive Crimes are on the case.

Detective Ulf Varg is a man of refined tastes and quite familiar with the art scene in Malmö. So when art historian Anders Kindgren visits the Department of Sensitive Crimes to report a series of bizarre acts that have been committed against him, Ulf and his team swing into action. Fish stuffed into the vents of Kindgren's car and a manipulated footnote in a recent publication would be cause enough for an investigation. But when a painting Kindgren had confidently appraised as genuine is later declared to be a fake, it's clear that someone is out to tarnish his reputation.

Meanwhile, Ulf is also weathering personal issues, which quickly spiral out of control. When his lip-reading dog, Martin, engages in a contretemps with a squirrel that results in a grievous wound, Ulf must rush Martin to the veterinarian and weigh the merits of cosmetic surgery for animals. And later, when Martin's blood is found in the back of Ulf's classic Saab, Ulf finds himself the subject of a departmental investigation.

In the end, Ulf will have to muster all his detective skills and bureaucratic cunning to restore Kindgren's reputation --- as well as his own.

Discussion Guide

1. Detective Varg is often lost in his own reflections. Are you a philosopher at heart? Do you often contemplate the nature of man, beast and the world? What types of things do you consider in your reveries?
2. "Human perversity [is] endlessly inventive." What does Varg mean by that? How does his job as an inspector in the

Department of Sensitive Crimes unit help him form that opinion? Do you agree?

3. What do you think of Varg's neighbor, Mrs. Högfors? Does she remind you of any of Alexander McCall Smith's other characters?

4. Varg admits to himself that he is in love with his colleague Anna but would do nothing to interfere with her life with her family. "How sad," he thinks. "We had such a short time in this world, this little speck in infinite space, our wobbly little platform, and how wretched were we if we would so love to spend it with one who was unprepared to spend it with us; who would not, or could not --- it amounted to the same thing, to the same existential bad luck." Do you agree with this sentiment? How does it change your perception of Varg, if at all?

5. Varg reflects: "One could not be held accountable for one's dreams, but they revealed one's inmost wishes; they laid out exactly what one really wanted to do. And what one really wanted to do constituted, in a sense, one's deepest self, for which, surely, we were all responsible --- at least to some degree. Or were we? Could we make our character better than it was?" How well does this thought echo Varg's character? Do you think we can change our inner nature?

6. Detective Varg's neighbor, Mrs. Högfors, cares deeply for Martin (the dog) and, by proxy, his owner. Why is she anxious when he finds her nephew's air rifle? What is she hiding?

7. Why do the police come and take Varg's Saab away, and why was he suspended? What did you think of his conversation with Inspector Lund and the resolution of the suspension?

8. Anders Kindren comes to Varg with a list of suspicious incidences that seem to be escalating. It appears someone is trying to hurt Kindren, not physically, but damaging his reputation in various ways. Why is this a good case for the Department of Sensitive Crimes, and Varg in particular?

9. When Varg goes to the auction house to investigate the mistaken painting, he meets Christina Berk and her intern, Ivar. How do those two characters relate to each other outside of work? Why does Ivar tell Varg as much as he does about his personal life?

10. Varg gets indirectly (and unofficially) involved in a case with a man threatening people with cucumbers. Besides the incident with Mrs. Högfors, how does this connect to Varg's politician brother, Björn?

11. Varg has an interesting time at Kindren's party. Who do you think he has the most impactful conversation with? Is Varg suspicious of any of the guests? Would you be?

12. How would you describe Blomquist? Is he useful to Varg? Why does Varg let him stay in the department? Do you think it's the right thing for Blomquist? What about the department as a whole?

13. In the end, three people were responsible for Anders Kindren's troubles. Who are they, and why did they participate in such an endeavor? How does love for another person play into their actions?

14. Varg meets a new romantic interest, his veterinarian's assistant, Juni. What about her does he like? What does Varg confess to Mrs. Högfors about his feelings? How are his feelings about Anna resolved? Have you been in a situation

where you liked a colleague as more than a friend? What did you do about it?

15. Consider the closing line of the book: "[T]here is a certain nobility in statements that are both kind and true." How does this fit into Varg's character? Is he king? True? How is he noble?

16. THE MAN WITH THE SILVER SAAB (referenced on page 170): Why is this title appropriate for the book? What does the car say about its owner?

17. This is the third book in the Detective Varg series. What do you enjoy about this series? How is it different from Alexander McCall Smith's other series?

18. Given that Alexander McCall Smith is learned in bioethics, we can infer that he, as the characters he writes, searches for truth in an otherwise unethical situation. If you were to meet the author, what would you like to discuss with him?

Author Bio

Alexander McCall Smith is the author of the *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* novels and a number of other series and stand-alone books. His works have been translated into more than 40 languages and have been bestsellers throughout the world. He lives in Scotland.

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