

D'après France métropolitaine • Juin 2011  
Série L • LV2

Like so many of her peers, she had gone travelling for a year after completing her course in physical education at the University of Western Australia. She had gone to Thailand, where she had spent four months working her way up from Krabi to Chiang Mai, staying in hostels and cheap guest houses. But the life of a lotus-eater, to which the existence of staying in Thai resorts proved to be so similar, became boring and eventually palled. Travel was all very well, but it needed a sense of purpose – something which a journey without a terminus always lacked. After Thailand there were Vietnam and Cambodia, but she was impatient and beginning to run out of money. It was time to go to London.

The flat in Corduroy Mansions was the first one she looked at, seeing Jenny's advertisement by chance a few minutes after it had gone live on Gumtree. She had arrived two hours later, been interviewed by Jenny and agreed to move in the next day.

Dee had been interviewed the day after that, with Jo being co-opted onto the vetting committee. She and Jo had taken to one another immediately, although both of them had been less sure about Caroline when it was her turn to be assessed as the final member of the flat. "I'm not too sure," Dee whispered to Jo as Jenny took Caroline out of the room to show her the bedroom she would have.

"No? What's the problem?"

"She's a bit... you know."

Jo had her doubts too, but was it because Caroline was a bit... you know? And what was "you know" anyway?

"I don't know actually," she said. Was "you know" the same as being a *whinger*? English people were said to whinge a bit but perhaps in England itself they could be allowed to do so. After all, it was their country, even if it was run by Scots.

"Posh," said Dee simply.

"Oh." That was different from being a whinger, although one might have, of course, a posh whinger.

But Jo's fundamental sense of fairness, her Australian heritage, came to the fore. She remembered her father once remarking, "You can't help the bed you're born in, you know." She had been a teenager when he said that, and the observation had stuck in her memory. Of course you can't help who you are. That is something that people forget, she felt. They

...they uselessly.  
...will not be

...the one who  
...with his

...sense" (l. 42);

...their words  
...sure that the

...there. The  
...be the reason

...David's family  
...down on as

...one of his TV  
...You can't

...Caitlin's tui-  
...really worried.

...the situation  
...the producers

...the first thing he  
...He is really

...I'll be able to

forgot it when they were unkind to people because of where they came from, or because they were different, or because they had greasy skin. Her father was right. "She can't help that, you know," she pointed out. "She can't help the way she talks, can she? None of us can."

Dee had found herself unable to argue with that, although she mumbled something about Sloane Rangers<sup>1</sup>. But they both decided that they would not object to Caroline's admission to the flat, which was just as well because Jenny announced when she came back into the room that Caroline would be moving in.

"Why did she ask us to interview her if she was going to make up her mind by herself?" Jo later complained to Dee.

Dee thought for a moment. "Because that's what we call consultation in this country," she said. "It's the same with government. Look so at how they have all these consultation exercises. But they decide policy in advance, before they have the consultation exercise, and then they announce what they're going to do – which is exactly what they were always going to do anyway. That's the way it works."

"But that's very hypocritical," said Jo.

Dee laughed. "Oh yes, it's hypocritical all right. But there's an awful lot of hypocrisy in this country. Isn't it the same in Australia?"

That question required more than a few moments of thought. Then Jo replied, "I think we're more direct speakers," she said. "We say things to people's faces."

Alexander McCall Smith, *Corduroy Mansions*, 2009.

1. Sloane Rangers: young conventional upper-class people from London's West End.

### COMPRÉHENSION

- 1 What do we learn about Jo (nationality, education, travel experience)?  
Answer in your own words. (15-20 words)
- 2 Where do Jo, Jenny, Caroline and Dee meet? (City? Precise location.)
- 3 What brings them all together? Write one sentence.
- 4 Who was in the place first? Justify with one quotation.
- 5 In what order do the other characters arrive? Justify with a quotation for each character.

- 6 1. "After all, it was their country" (l. 27).  
Who is speaking?
2. "Because that's what we call consultation in this country" (l. 48-49).  
Who is speaking?
3. What can one conclude about Dee and Caroline's nationality?
- 7 Why do Jo and Dee have doubts about Caroline?  
Explain in your own words. (10-20 words)
- 8 Explain: "You can't help the bed you're born in" (l. 33-34). (15-20 words)
- 9 How does it influence Jo's final opinion about Caroline? (25-30 words)
- 10 What political behaviour does Dee refer to when she mentions the British government?  
Explain the parallel with the situation in the text. (30-40 words)
- 11 Contrast Jo's and Dee's visions of their respective countries. (30-40 words)

### EXPRESSION

- Les candidats traiteront les deux sujets (300 mots au total, soit environ 150 mots pour chaque sujet).
- 1 Imagine Jenny's interview of Jo. Write the dialogue.
  - 2 Are parental values the only values that can influence people's lives? Justify your answer.

### LES CLÉS DU SUJET

#### ■ Le texte

#### L'auteur

Alexander McCall Smith, né en 1948, est écossais. Né au Zimbabwe, il est professeur de droit médical à Édimbourg où il vit actuellement après être retourné au Botswana pour participer à la fondation d'une école de droit. Il a écrit plus de cinquante livres de renommée internationale.

Pour en savoir plus : [www.alexandermccallsmith.co.uk](http://www.alexandermccallsmith.co.uk)

#### Le contexte

Jo est australienne et a décidé de faire le tour du monde à la fin de ses études, en travaillant sur place pour financer son voyage. Elle vient de s'installer à Londres, où elle cherche des colocataires pour partager