



I would have stayed in the mines, I suppose, had I not witnessed a terrible thing. It happened after I had been there fifteen years. I had been given a much better job, as an assistant to a blaster. They would not give us blasting jobs, as that was a job the white men kept for themselves, but I was given the job of carrying explosives for a blaster. This was a good job and I liked the man I worked for. He had left something in a tunnel once – his tin can in which he carried his sandwiches – and he had asked me to fetch it. So I set off down this tunnel where he had been working. The tunnel was lit by bulbs, but you still had to be careful because here and there were great galleries which had been blasted out of the rock. These could be two hundred feet deep and men fell into them from time to time. I turned a corner in this tunnel and found myself in a round chamber. There was a gallery at the end of this and a warning sign. Four men were standing at the edge of this gallery and they were holding another man by his arms and legs. As I came around the corner, they threw him over the edge and into the dark. The man screamed something about a child. Then he was gone. I stood where I was. The men had not seen me yet, but one turned around and shouted out in Zulu. Then they began to run towards me. I turned and ran back down the tunnel. I knew that if they caught me I would follow their victim into the gallery. It was not a race I could let myself lose.

From 'The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency' Alexander McCall-Smith