



## The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party

*Alexander McCall Smith*

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## **The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party** Alexander McCall Smith

As the countdown to Mma Makutsi's wedding begins, all is not as it should be at the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. In anticipation of so long-awaited a celebration, upsets and obstacles are to be expected. But not, perhaps, in such numbers.

## **The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party Details**

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Author : Alexander McCall Smith

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# From Reader Review The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party for online ebook

## Petra X says

This is more like it! After the disappointing The Limpopo Academy of Private Detection with its collection of lame stories with no overarching plot and rather limply written characters, this is back to a good story and realistic people.

The main story is about a couple of dead cows and who killed them. There are lots of suspects, a confession or two which aren't necessarily the truth, and instead of a denouement a face-saving solution to the problem that has caused the torture of these two innocent and trusting bovines.

The second story was of course the wedding (at last!) of Madame Makutsi to Phuti Radiphuti involving little side stories of jealous aunts, the manipulative Mma Potokwani from the orphan farm, a pair of really rather crappy shoes but so attractive (all us girls have bought totally unsuitable shoes we couldn't resist, so I laughed at this incident). There was a story of where one of Mr. J.L.B. Makatoni's apprentices had had his dipstick in the oil pipe and illegitimate twins had resulted, or had they?

Highly recommended for a warm and comfortable read, no sex or violence (apart from to a couple of cows), an enjoyable book.

The rest of this review as written before I started to read it and all I can say is I was wrong, wrong, wrong and I'm glad.

(view spoiler)

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## Mal Warwick says

Join Precious Ramotswe, proprietor of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, for the weeks that elapse in this charming tale of life in Botswana, and you may emerge with fresh perspective on life. Mma Ramotswe — the prefix is a title akin to “Ms.” — and those who surround her live their lives in a slow and steady way that would be familiar to village-based people everywhere but alien to those of us who populate the world's fast-paced urban centers.

Mma Ramotswe's Botswana is a nation displaced from the passage of time as we experience it. Botswana today is one of the world's fastest-growing nations, an efficiently governed country that has raised its GDP per capital from \$70 in 1966, when it gained independence from Britain, to \$14,800 in 2010. There is no hint of this dynamism in The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party, which harkens back to an age before the Internet, before mobile phones, before American, European, and Indian films — in short, before all the trappings of today's reality that are inescapable in all but the most resolutely isolated countries in the world

today. This is a celebration of the Africa that never was.

In this novel, as in its predecessors in the celebrated No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, Mma Ramotswe's world is circumscribed by a stable cast of characters who play roles in all her various cases: her husband, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, "the best mechanic in all Botswana," and his two young apprentices, Charlie and Fanwell; her socially inept sidekick, Grace Makutsi, who never lets anyone forget she achieved "97 per cent" on her final exam at the Botswana Secretarial College; Grace's nemesis, Violet Sephotho, a glamorous, man-hungry ne'er-do-well; Grace's fiancé, Phuti Radiphuti, the well-to-do owner of a furniture store; and Mma Potokwane, who manages the orphan farm and the lives of anyone else who comes into her orbit.

All these characters play their assigned roles as Mma Ramotswe sets out to solve the latest mystery — the murder of two cows under the dead of night at a remote rural cattle post — all the while she pursues the ghost of a beloved tiny white van, confronts the accusation that Charlie has fathered twins but refuses to acknowledge them, and helps Grace prepare for her wedding. Each of these plotlines is fraught with anxiety and yields up a surprise, but it all comes out just fine in the end, as always.

The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party is the 12th in Smith's series of novels about The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, his best-known work in fiction. However, this is just one among four other series of novels plus a much longer list of children's books. And his work in fiction pales against his professional career as an expert in forensic law and bioethics and a respected university lecturer in both Scotland and Botswana. In addition to his numerous works of fiction, he has authored or coauthored a dozen nonfiction books on medicine, the law, and other topics.

(From [www.malwarwickonbooks.com](http://www.malwarwickonbooks.com))

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## Sue says

I am such a fan of the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency books and I love the wisdom of Precious Ramotswe. The books are such a peaceful read. My favorite passages:

"So might we fail to see the real sadness that lies behind the acts of others; so might we look at one of our fellow men going about his business and not know of the sorrow that he is feeling, the effort that he is making, the things that he has lost."

"She looked at him fondly; that he had been sent to her, when there were so many other lesser men who might have been sent, was a source of constant gratitude. That we have the people we have in this life, rather than others, is miraculous, she thought; a miraculous gift."

"Don't change too much," she said gently. "We like you the way you are, Charlie."

He stared at her incredulously, and she realised that he might not have heard many people say that. So she repeated herself: "We like you, Charlie; you just remember that."

She looked down. He had clasped his hands together, his fingers interlaced. It was a gesture, she thought, of unequivocal pleasure--pleasure at hearing what all of us wanted to hear at least occasionally: that there was somebody who liked us, whatever our faults, and liked us sufficiently to say so."

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## Barbara says

In this addition to the "No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency" series - set in Botswana - Mma Makutsi plans her long-awaited wedding to Phuti Radiphuti while Mma Ramotswe handles a difficult case.

Mma Ramotswe, the detective agency owner, is approached by Mr. Botsalo Moeti, a cattle farmer who reports that two of his cows were purposely maimed. Mr. Moeti doesn't want to contact the police and asks Mma Ramotswe to investigate. The detective drives to the client's farm and finds a fairly common situation: Mr. Moeti bullies his servants and pays them poorly. Further inquiries reveal that the client is a difficult man who quarrels with his neighbor about fences and wandering cattle. So there are plenty of suspects for the cow injuries.

As the case proceeds Mma Ramotswe acquires troubling information and, not sure what to do, consults "The Principles of Private Detection" by Clovis Anderson. This is the book that launched Mma Ramotswe on her detective career and serves as her investigative 'bible.' As always Mma Ramotswe exhibits common sense, sagacity, and thoughtfulness as she solves the case of the injured cattle.

While Mma Ramotswe is detecting Mma Makutsi is making wedding arrangements. She has to get wedding shoes (a happy chore that doesn't go quite right), make a guest list, arrange accommodations for relatives, organize two wedding feasts, etc. To add to her worries Mma Makutsi has to deal with a greedy uncle who demands too many cattle for the bride price. It's interesting to read about wedding customs in other cultures and I enjoyed these parts of the book. Also the beef stew, mashed pumpkin, fruit cake and other wedding foods sound very tasty. (Yum!)

As all this is going on both ladies have something else on their minds. Through the grapevine they've heard that Charlie - apprentice to Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni (Mma Ramotswe's husband) at Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors - abandoned the girl who gave birth to his twin babies. Mma Makutsi, in her usual combative fashion, gives Charlie 'what for.' And Charlie calls her a warthog and runs off. So Mma Ramotswe - wanting Charlie to do the right thing - has to deal with this issue as well.

I enjoyed this cozy mystery but the case and side issues are less engaging than other books in the series. Moreover the resolution of the problems has a 'fairy tale' whiff...too convenient to be believed. Still, it's nice to visit with the familiar likable characters as they go about their everyday lives. I can just picture Mma Ramotswe sitting on the porch after dinner, sipping bush tea, and thinking deep thoughts.

You can follow my reviews at <http://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot.com/>

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## Rebecca says

Wonderful. Like a warm tasty comforting free meal on a cold night. Some surprising developments in the case of Charlie the apprentice who finds out that he has twins to support, until Precious Ramotswe discovers that perhaps he is not the father after all. Precious finally gets her tiny white van back and Grace Makutsi marries Phuti Radiphuti in style after Mma Potokwani invites herself to the wedding and takes over preparations. Much simple wisdom and funny situations and talk, but the book is so *relaxing* despite everything. Therin lies the true genius of Alexander McCall Smith. He can write well, he can create beauty,

but he is perhaps the only author I have read who can give his reader a sense of peace, comfort and relaxation book after book after book. His characters are realistic and subtle neither overdone nor underdone. His plots have the same mix of simple and complex parts as real life does, and he brings to the fore the beautiful simple things, friendship, rain, good fortune with understated skill. A marvelous book in a marvelous series from a marvelous writer.

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### **Sally906 says**

When I pick up a book from The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency Series I have certain expectations. I expect a slower pace and to reacquaint myself with familiar friends who have traditional values such respect for people, for property and to have manners. In fact if someone doesn't portray these values then they are usually the 'baddie'.

THE SATURDAY BIG TENT WEDDING PARTY, the twelfth in the series, opens a few weeks before Mma Makutsi's long awaited wedding. The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency takes on a new case with a client who makes a big fuss about not wanting to meet Precious Ramotswe in the office. Someone has killed two of his cattle and he would like Mma Ramotswe to find out who and why. As well as doing her detecting work Precious needs to solve various domestic issues such as sorting out the problem of Charlie the apprentice, stop an old enemy from being voted into parliament and solve the mystery of the ghost van. I love spending time in Botswana with Precious; she makes me smile and her story relaxes and soothes me as I read. In fact I now drink Red Bush tea myself – and it is a wonderful brew to sip while you are reading about detecting. The characters are all charming, they grow in character every book and the stories are a wonderful peek into another culture that in many ways is not dissimilar to our own.

My one tiny niggle with the story was my feeling of being left out of the Botswana wedding celebrations. After all the back story build-up and preparations, when the day arrived it was a bit – well – meh! I wanted drums, I wanted music I wanted colour – but there was none of that. Otherwise I have really enjoyed this series, a blend of wit and wisdom I hear someone very accurately described them, and thankfully I still have a couple to go before I catch up.

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### **Jan Rice says**

I sit here, sipping a steaming mug of African red bush tea, wondering how to convey to you why I feel about Alexander McCall Smith, in general, and this book, in particular, as I do.

Here in Atlanta there was a local right-wing talk-show host, eventually nationally syndicated and now retired (and, I always remember, my exact same age) who used to bluster that he said what everybody else was thinking but was afraid to say--nasty, mean-spirited comments about others, of course. Alexander McCall Smith is his diametric opposite. He also says what others think and are afraid to say, but, in his case, kind things, though no less true and sharp. Just think, which words are most likely to have changed your life, the nastiest insults? Or the kind observations?

For example:

"You can tell her to shut up, Mma?" Charlie said. "That is very good. All the time I thought everyone agreed with her. There were all these woman. You. Her. Mma Potokwane too. All against me."

"Well, I'm not against you, Charlie. I promise you that." She paused. "And you'll come back to work tomorrow? If you do, I'll tell Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. He won't say anything."

"Nothing?"

"I'll talk to him too. He'll understand."

Charlie considered this. "He's a good man."

"Of course he is, Charlie, and so are you, you know."

Had it not been quite so dark, Mma Ramotswe would have seen the effect of her words. Charlie, who had been slouching, as if expecting some sort of physical blow, seemed to grow in stature. The furtiveness with which he had acted disappeared, and he stepped forward, as if putting the shadows, real and otherwise, behind him. "Thank you, Mma. Thank you..." His voice became choked.

On second thought, the above example deserves another comment. The point is not to soothe or appease the behaviorally challenged by "being nice." Timing is everything in such matters, with the operative kind word not necessarily a matter entirely under our control but one that sometimes seems, rather, to smack of the miraculous. And that's how it was in *The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party*.

McCall Smith can observe and he can write:

People noticed things in Botswana; they saw who went into which house and they speculated as to what took them there; they noticed who was driving which car and who was in the passenger seat. People saw these things, in much the same way as an expert tracker in the Kalahari will look at the ground, and see, written in the sand, the history of all the animal comings and goings.

And, again:

She went out into the garden. The sun had set, but there was still a faint glow in the west, above the Kalahari--enough to provide that half-light that makes everything seem so rounded, so perfect. She stood in her garden and looked about her. Against the gradually darkening sky, the branches of the trees traced a pattern of such intricacy and delicacy that those standing below might look up and wonder why the world can be so beautiful and yet break the heart.

Recently I was complaining about a book (God Soul Mind Brain: A Neuroscientist's Reflections on the Spirit World) by a neuropsychologist that purported to shock the reader by his discussion of how people project personalities and souls onto inanimate objects (and, by extension, onto people). Alexander McCall Smith does just as well plus is more fun to read:

Her van had been her companion and friend for many years. Can a vehicle--a collection of mechanical bits and pieces, nuts and bolts and parts the names of which one has not the faintest idea of--can such a thing be a friend? Of course it can: physical objects can have personalities, at least in the eyes of their owners. To others, it may be only a van, but to the owner it may be the friend that has started loyally each morning--except sometimes; that has sat patiently during long hours of waiting outside the houses of suspected adulterers, that has carried one home in the late afternoon, tired after a day's work at the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency.

And, after a discussion of ghosts:

Mma Ramotswe laughed. "There are no ghosts, Mma. No ghost people, no ghost vans. These things are just stories we make up to frighten ourselves."

Mma Makutsi, now standing beside the kettle, looked out the window. Yes, she thought, one can say that sort of thing in the broad daylight, under this wide and sunlit Botswana sky, but would one say the same thing with equal conviction at night, when one was out in the bush, perhaps, away from the streetlights of town, and surrounded by the sounds of the night--sounds that could not be easily explained away and that could be anything, things known or unknown, things friendly or unfriendly, things that it was better not to think about?

Well, that's a little sample.

Also recommended are his 44 Scotland Street and The Sunday Philosophy Club (Isabel Dalhousie) series, both of which are set in Scotland.

Just the dregs of the tea, cold now, are left. Time for a walk before dark.

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## **Marci says**

Alexander McCall Smith's No.1 Ladies Detective Agency series is one of my favorite series. This installment is probably the best of the twelve books so far.

In this book, Precious Ramotswe thinks at one point: "... she would always take the time to drink tea, to look at the sky, and to talk. What else was there to do? Make money? Why? Did money bring any greater happiness than that furnished by a well-made cup of red bush tea and a moment or two with a good friend? She thought not" (p 198). This is one of my favorite themes, that living simply yields riches of truth and beauty and wisdom and value.



I love that she spends time looking at the progress of light and shadow, and the growth of natural things in her garden both mornings and evenings.

I love that in this book the tiny white van enjoys a sort of resurrection.

I love that Charlie has a larger part to play and that Mma Ramotswe finally sees into his heart and helps him grow up.

I love that Grace Makutsi ruins her wedding shoes because she is so caught up in something else so important to Mma Ramotswe.

I love that Mma Ramotswe figures out a way to honor her promise to a small child, when circumstances could easily have justified her breaking the promise.

I love that justice is served even when the truth remains unknowable.

I love that Mma Ramotswe is committed to kindness first, last, and always.

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## **Laura says**

*\*second read\**

I'm running out of things to say about this series. I've read this book now twice in the same calendar year. I could be perfectly happy to be reading one of the books in this series all the time. They are wonderful and they get better with each read and as the series progresses. How many series can you honestly say that about?!

*\*First read\**

Alexander McCall Smith is a treasure. It's as simple as that. I love this series so much. For me, they are the perfect comfort read, because they're not sickeningly sweet or too fluffy; they're just right. At times you will laugh, you may even have a sad or a sweet tear here or there.

If you'd like to learn a bit about the culture of Botswana, spend some time with decent, interesting recurring characters, and immerse yourself in a non-violent mystery that focuses more on the goodness and kindness in the world than all the rest, you couldn't find a more perfect series.

ETA: I wanted to add a quote:

*Against the gradually darkening sky, the branches of the trees traced a pattern of twigs and leaves – a pattern of such intricacy and delicacy that those standing below might look up and wonder why the world can be so beautiful and yet break the heart.*

I'm going to move right on into the 13th book when I can get it from the library, and when I come to the end of this series, I'm starting over at the beginning. I find myself in a place and time where I really need to focus on "what is above", and this is a perfect series for that. The ending to this one left me with sweet tears. What a wonderful series and author. Can't say enough about AMS.

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## **Jennifer says**

Another enjoyable instalment in the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency Series. McCall Smith certainly churns them out along with his other two 'middle class comfort zone' series - but they work for me!

This is possibly one of the slighter books and with some disappointments but some welcome familiar themes - Charlie the apprentice's waywardness, Mma Makutsi's passion for shoes. In this book there is a lot reflecting on the differences between men and women. Occasionally McCall Smith can jar when he 'goes off on one' but he seems to have struck the right note this time.

The main case to solve here, the horrible attacks on cattle, is an interesting one and ties the series firmly to its African setting.

I was disappointed not to get more of a feel for the atmosphere of a Botswana wedding - especially after years of waiting for Grace's big day. And surely those poor foster children deserve more attention (especially if you are going to spend time talking about gender differences - wouldn't Mma Ramotswe's thoughts light on them)

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## **Deanna says**

After an unsatisfied, uncomfortable read of the latest book in this series, I found myself going back to number 1 to see if I still love wd the first one. I have just kept going, almost automatically, with the re-read to this point.

I'm losing steam, though. Not sure I'll continue this re-read-athon.

In the more recent novels, an authorial grumpy old guy voice near overshadows the natural voices of the characters.

Since the mystery arcs in each book are secondary to the series character arcs and the opportunity to just visit with the characters and their beloved Botswana, it's a problem when I can't hear the characters for the underlying railing against the deterioration of society and the disappearing wonderfully good old days.

At some point, every character who appears is almost there to represent the good guys who uphold the good old ways, or the bad guys who represent the destructive forces against the past. And so often, the angst about change isn't really about deadly serious issues or social depravity. They're often small things that get a lot of worried attention because, well, We Seem To Be Losing Them!

Sigh. I try to tune out the didactic voice till the actual characters and story get to come back on stage, because I really do like them and find them charmingly real and modestly exotic.

When I went back to the first book in the series, I found the sentimental conservatism and mild-mannered moralism was not particularly offensive or obtrusive, just part of the fabric and old-fashioned, decency-celebrating mood of the series.

But as I continued to book 2, 3, 4, and beyond, I found a big, unrelated surprise. This series badly needed a continuity editor.

The whys, how, and even whats of significant parts of the character arcs get changed, story to story. It's like McCall Smith forgets the histories of these characters and their evolving relationships, and either he doesn't realize it or can't be bothered to go back and check the details. Ditto for his editors.

It's really disconcerting, because this keeps happening, inconsistency after inconsistency, book after book.

Again, I've tried to talk myself into incorporating these quirks, let's call them, into the charm of the book. But I find myself again silently yelling at this guy: No No No! This can't be happening, because in past books this other thing happened, and the two things are incompatible.

These contradictions are fairly important in the developing history of this little community of characters. I'm not a reader who is likely to notice or care if in book 1 her eyes were green and book 3 they are brown, or we used to turn left out of the office to go home and now suddenly we're turning right. I'm talking about meaningful story contradictions, and they kind of drive me crazy.

Reading the books over time as they're published, I don't notice the problems. But one after the other, I want to call up an editor and say, Go back and fix these and give me the polished version, not the rough cut. Don't take me out of the story to be your continuity watcher. Do that before it ever gets to me.

And, yeah, that authorial voice that seems to worry about most values and social mores that have developed since 1950 gets louder and longer as the series progresses, when you read them one after the other. I've started to wonder if he comes back to keyboard to visit his lovely characters and nation, or just to fuss that all that was ever good about their world is going away because modern people Just Don't Care Any More.

Actually, I wouldn't necessarily disagree with many of his points, if we had to sit down and talk about them. But I don't come to these books to do that, and neither, really, do his characters, even though he uses any or all of their voices at times to make his points. They wait patiently until it's time for them to get on with things.

I kind of want to slip off to Botswana and meet a couple of them on the veranda of the President Hotel and catch up with their lives, and shhh, don't tell the author we're there.

This background hand wringing that keeps getting bigger in the foreground doesn't really sound like these characters themselves.

I would like to read this otherwise charming, gentle series to \*escape\* the ain't it awful of the world, not engage in a mental debate with a fiction writer about how awful it is or isn't.

Instead, at various points in each book, I feel like I'm stuck at a holiday dinner table with a crotchety male relative who is even a generation older than I am, and I wish he would just get up and go watch football and let the rest of us talk and eat in peace.

So that's my own crotchety take on a nearly full re-read of this series.

I admire a great deal about this series and the imagination and writing that created it. Great characters, gorgeous fascinating country, incomparable audio narrator.

I've tried a few of the author's other books out of this series and they didn't stick for me, but I'm grateful to have come to know something of his Botswana.

Still, will I continue the series? I've reached that uncomfortable, hopeful/sad point in a long running series that is starting to lose my love for it as it ages. But I will always be fond of how we got started together.

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### **SoManyBooks SoLittleTime (Aven Shore) says**

Botswana's favorite fictional detective stories from the traditionally built. Now with soccer. The beautiful game crops up in this one. As always, sweet and funny while wise and elegiac - a love song to Africa that goes down as smooth as bush tea.

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### **Lis Carey says**

This is our latest visit with the ladies of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency and their family and friends. After many months, epic bride price negotiations with Grace's greedy uncle, and the trauma of Phuti's loss of a foot in a previous book, Grace Makutsi and Phuti Radiphuti are at last making the final preparations for their wedding day. And Grace is starting to realize how her life will change, when she is married to this man whom she loves and who loves her--and who is wealthy enough that money will never again be a reason not to do something they really want to do.

Meanwhile, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's apprentice, Charlie, has run away, fleeing pressure to marry a girlfriend who has given birth to twins. Mma Ramotswe has a client concerned about two of his cows being killed--a client who is not all that he appears to be, nor is the case of the dead cows. And both Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi keep seeing Mma Ramotswe's old, tiny, white van, sold for scrap and parts months ago. Can cars have ghosts?

These are rich, wonderful, engaging characters, familiar friends that it's fun to spend time with. They continue to grow--but not too fast! They keep coming back to us in gentle, engaging stories, and this one is no exception.

Recommended.

I borrowed this book from my local library.

Read more of my reviews at my blog, Lis Carey's Library.

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### **Ellen says**

I like Laurel's review of this series. The books are comforting, I agree. For me, it is like having a bedtime story read to me. I like them even more because I've watched the HBO series of dramatizations of the books. How did they manage to cast the characters EXACTLY as I had imagined them? This book aided in my recovery from a siege of sickness. I know that it helped me get better!

The main mystery in this book had an intriguing solution.

Here's Laurel's review:

Laurel

Jun 14, 2008

Laurel rated it 4 of 5 stars

There is something so comforting about this series. Even though life in Botswana is most likely very different than life in Canada, there is something about the tone or writing style that reminds me of life at my grandparent's house. I love the traditional values, the respect for people/property/manners. And most of all, I love that it is important to slow down and really be in the moment with those important to you. I know that the future installments become a little formulaic. However, ev...moreThere is something so comforting about this series. Even though life in Botswana is most likely very different than life in Canada, there is something about the tone or writing style that reminds me of life at my grandparent's house. I love the traditional values, the respect for people/property/manners. And most of all, I love that it is important to slow down and really be in the moment with those important to you. I know that the future installments become a little formulaic. However, every so often I am struck by how much I miss my grandparents, and reading one of these books takes the edge off. There is a little magic to these books.

Another apt comment from a reviewer: The twelfth installment in the beloved, best-selling series is once again a beautiful blend of wit and wisdom, and a profoundly touching tale of the human heart.

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### Thomas Strömquist says

This one was way too repetitive if you've read others in the series. Everyone does what you expect them to do - and nothing they haven't done before. One of the side stories fizzles out into absolutely nothing (almost as if the author forgot he had started that particular thread) and the "main mystery" comes to an undramatic but still a bit disturbing closure. Most others in the series (that I have read so far) are better choices.

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### Janet says

"Taking her old shoes out of the box into which Paticia had tucked them, she slipped them back on her feet and continued on her way to the Tlokweg Road. One or two people had witnessed the tragedy, or at least had seen part of it: a young man passing by, a boy on a bicycle, an old man standing in the shade of a tree. But they had only seen a woman racing after a white van and then stumbling; they had seen her bend down and change her footwear before walking off towards the main road. So might we fail to see the real sadness that lies behind the acts of others; so might we look at one of our fellow men going about his business and not know of the sorrow that he is feeling, the effort that he is making, the things he has lost."

This paragraph from page 92 of *The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party* perfectly illustrates what I love about this series. On the surface it is a gently comedic mystery series in which blood is rarely spilled and almost no one dies (at least not from murder). I know some readers find it a series in which nothing seems to happen.

But I love it because for me it is really about how we treat each other as human beings and how we struggle to decide what is right from what is wrong. And sometimes whether it might not be better to be kind than right.

Also, I love an author not afraid of the semicolon.

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### **Emily says**

I know that not everyone is a fan of Precious Ramotswe, but she makes me smile. These books are so comfortable and comforting, soothing almost. I love the cadence of the language and diction of the Botswanan characters; it momentarily transmits the slower pace of life to the reader. I can feel myself relaxing as I read.

Quick, light read with enough mystery for a detective agency to earn its keep, but lots of affirmation that most people really are good at heart. These books make me smile. :)

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### **Lori Rader-Day says**

These books are the only nearly-plotless books I can stand and, in fact, I love them beyond reason. They wander, they dilly-dally. Sometimes mysteries get solved. I can't explain why they've grown on me, except to say that they star charming characters who deal with the problems people bring them in charming ways. I am charmed. And now I have to wait months and months for the next one and hope that Alexander McCall Smith lives forever.

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### **Lucy Hannigan says**

I have read every book in "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency" series and have loved them all. As in any series some books are better than others, but all have been a delightful read. When I heard that HBO was doing a TV show based on the books I was a little concerned, but having now watched them all, I think they did a great job in casting and staying true to the books (other than introducing a regular character who is NOT in any of the books). I love Mma Precious Ramotswe (who is a "traditionally built" woman), her secretary, turned assistant, Mma Grace Makutsi and Mma Ramotswe's sweet, kind husband Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. That they call each other Mma and Mr. puts a smile on my face as I read. One day when I took my son to a new doctor, the doctor and I were talking about another doctor my son had seen years before. I said to the doctor, "I heard Dr. -- has passed" and the doctor got a huge smile on his face and said, "You must be a fellow fan of 'The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency'...only you should have said 'Dr. -- is late.'" I told him I had never met a man who had read the books and he said that his wife was such a fan that he decided to read one and then he was hooked himself. I started reading this series when I had a son living in South Africa and maybe that influenced my feelings about these books, but regardless, I will always look forward with happy anticipation to the next book being written and hope that Mr. McCall Smith has a long and healthy life.

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## Will Byrnes says

In the 12th volume of this delightful series, Botswana's most renowned lady detective looks into a mysterious event on a farmer's land. Cattle have been slashed. Who would do such a thing? Of course Precious Ramotswe and her able, if somewhat shoe-addled assistant, Grace Makutsi, are on the case, and you know they will get to the bottom of it, by and by.

In the meantime, Grace is eagerly planning for her upcoming wedding. This entails getting the finest possible shoes. If you have read any of the prior books, you know that Makutsi and shoes have a magical relationship and you absolutely *must* smile when she converses with them.

Girl-crazy Charlie, seemingly permanent apprentice to Precious's mechanic husband, may be the father of twins. He does not respond well to the news.

Like the '56 T-Bird in American Graffiti, Precious Ramotswe's much-loved-but-finally-junked white van keeps showing up, just enough to entice. Is it a ghost? Can inanimate things like cars *have* ghosts? What's up with that?

If you are beginning this series at book twelve, that is not a traditional approach. You might want to consider placing your new volume on a shelf while you head out to the local bookstore and pick up a copy of volume 1, *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*.

As usual, McCall has offered a light, breezy, comfortable experience. One does not read books in this series for the action or the mysteries, though the mystery here is handled cleverly, as usual. One comes to these books to spend a little more time with familiar faces, to enjoy the ambience, maybe to pick up a bit more of a taste of Smith's Botswana. You need not look for hidden meanings, symbolism, references to classical literature. Just check in with some old friends and see how they are doing. By now, with a twelfth volume in hand, it has become a precious tradition.

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