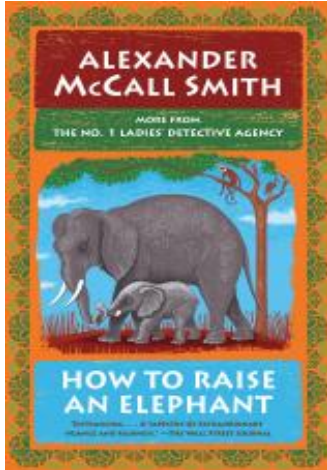


# How to Raise an Elephant: No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (21)

by Alexander McCall Smith

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## About the Book

**Mma Ramotswe must balance family obligations with the growing needs of one of Charlie's pet projects in this latest installment in the cherished *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series.**

Precious Ramotswe loves her dependable old van. Yes, sometimes it takes a bit longer to get going now, and it has developed some quirks over the years, but it has always gotten the job done. This time, though, the world --- and Charlie --- may be asking too much of it, for when he borrows the beloved vehicle he returns it damaged. And, to make matters worse, the interior seems to have acquired an earthy smell that even Precious can't identify.

But the olfactory issue is not the only mystery that needs solving. Mma Ramotswe is confronted by a distant relative, Blessing, who asks for help with an ailing cousin. The help requested is of a distinctly pecuniary nature, which makes both Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Makutsi suspicious. And there is no peace at home, either, as the new neighbors are airing their marital grievances rather loudly. Still, Mma Ramotswe is confident that there are solutions to all of these difficulties, there to be discovered as long as she is led by kindness, grace and logic, and can rely on the counsel of her friends and loved ones.

## Discussion Guide

1. How has the setting changed? Is Gaborone different now from how it was presented in the first book in the series?
2. "When the rains come," said Mma Makutsi, longingly. "But will they ever come, Mma? Each year they seem to be later and later, and when they do break, they are sometimes no more than a wind with a few drops of water in its eyes." How does the setting of Botswana shape the characters in the book? How would they be different in another setting?

3. Mma Ramotswe refers to her bickering neighbors as 'not being under the same blanket.' What do you think of this phrase? Can you think of instances this saying might be useful in your own life?
4. Describe Mma Makutsi's and Charlie's relationship. Is there real animosity? What traits are in their personalities that clash with each other? In what ways are they alike?
5. How does Mma Ramotswe handle being asked money from her distant relative? Have you ever had a relative ask for money or another favor that makes you uncomfortable? How did you deal with the situation?
6. Mma Ramotswe and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni have a slight disagreement when it comes to giving the money. 'If you want to be charitable,' he says, 'then I think you should start at home.' Do you agree with this sentiment? What about Mma Ramotswe's obligation to her family, however distant? Should Precious use her money regardless of his input?
7. What does Precious find when she and Mma Makutsi drive out to meet Tefo?
8. What was the source of the smell in Mma Ramotswe's little white van? What was Charlie borrowing it for? How did Mma Ramotswe find out?
9. What was to happen to the little elephant before Mma Ramotswe intervened? Did Charlie know its intended fate? Why would he allow this?
10. Compare Charlie and Fanwell. How are they different? Do you like one character better than another?
11. Describe Mma Potokwane. What is her role in life? How does that help Charlie's little elephant?
12. Why does Mma Ramotswe ask Mma Makutsi to investigate Tefo's claim of a disability? What does she find?
13. Mma Makutsi contemplates her relationship to a woman she sees only momentarily. What do her musings make her realize? With what does she offer to help the woman? What does she get, unexpectedly, in return?
14. What values does Precious hold dear when speaking of her late father, Obed, and even the entire country of Botswana?
15. What happens to Charlie's elephant in the end? Were they able to resolve the situation in a way that made everyone happy?

## 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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