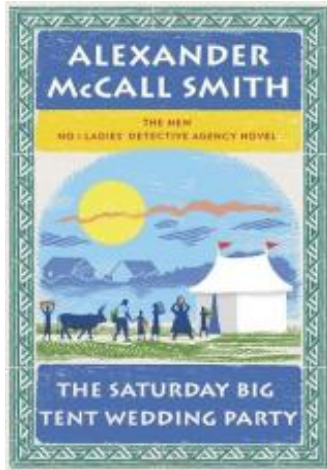

The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party: The New No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Novel

by Alexander McCall Smith



About the Book

The latest installment in the beloved, bestselling series is once again a beautiful blend of wit and wisdom, and a profoundly touching tale of the human heart.

At a remote cattle post south of Gaborone two cows have been killed, and Precious Ramotswe, Botswana's No. 1 Lady Detective, is asked to investigate by a rather frightened and furtive gentleman. It is an intriguing problem with plenty of suspects --- including, surprisingly, her own client.

To complicate matters, Mma Ramotswe is haunted by a vision of her dear old white van, and Grace Makutsi witnesses it as well. Is it the ghost of her old friend, or has it risen from the junkyard? In the meantime, one of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's apprentices may have gotten a girl pregnant and, under pressure to marry her, has run away. Naturally, it is up to Precious to help sort things out. Add to the mix Violet Sephotho's newly launched run for the Botswana Parliament and a pair of perfect wedding shoes --- will wedding bells finally ring for Phuti Radiphoti and Grace Makutsi? --- and we have a charming and delightful tale in the inimitable style of Alexander McCall Smith.

Discussion Guide

1. *The New York Times* Book Review has noted, "As always in Alexander McCall Smith's gentle celebrations of life in this arid patch of southern Africa, the best moments are the smallest." Discuss how this is true. Does your reading of these novels inspire you to appreciate the small, precious moments and things in your own life?

2. Why is Precious Ramotswe so attached to her little white van, even after it is long gone? What is it about certain physical objects for us? Do you have one particular object, large or small, that you are especially attached to? Why? Is it the object itself that you cling to or is it to the memories that you have associated with it?
3. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is always referred to as 'that fine man' or 'that excellent man, proprietor of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors.' What makes him fine and excellent? And why is his job always attached to his name, even by his wife?
4. How much importance do you put on efficiency? Why does Mma Ramotswe think that, 'if efficiency were the only value in this life, then we would be content to eat bland, but nutritious food everyday.' (p. 5) What other values are equally, if not more important in this life --- in work and in play?
5. It is very clear, over the course of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, that 'Charlie (Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's apprentice) did not follow the old Botswana ways.' (p. 19) What does this mean? What are the 'old Botswana ways'? Who does follow them?
6. In **The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party**, Mma Ramotswe says, 'Each of us had something that made it easier to continue in a world that sometimes, just sometimes, was not as we might wish it to be.' (p. 54) What is that you need to get your mind off anxieties or problems in your own life --- 'a drive in the country? a quiet cup of tea'? Why do we all need these small pleasures to release us from looming problems and issues?
7. Mma Ramotswe remembers witnessing with her father a group of birds being attacked by a snake, and he encouraged her not to do anything. Why? What lesson was he teaching young Precious?
8. Mma Ramotswe periodically quotes from Clovis Anderson's **The Principles of Private Detection**. One she particularly believes in and repeats is 'the more you listen, the more you learn' (p. 110). What is it about this book and the pithy sayings it offers that appeals to Mma Ramotswe in moments of indecision? Do you have a book you turn to when you need reassurance or pleasure?
9. There is much talk of beef stews and pumpkins and cake in these novels, and in one instance in **The Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party**, Mma Ramotswe thinks about dinner and says, 'Life was very full.' Describe some of the dishes you remember in the novel.
10. Do you think Mma Ramotswe makes the right decision to turn to Mpho's mother when the little boy shares the secret of the crime he committed? What would you have done in this predicament?
11. Discussions about the differences between men and women come up quite a bit in the novels, and in this novel in particular. What are some of the stereotypes that various characters discuss? Do you agree with them?
12. Mma Ramotswe appreciates the people in her life: her husband, her assistant detective/friend, her father. 'That we have the people we have in this life, rather than others, is miraculous, she thought, a miraculous gift.' Discuss the people in your life that you are most thankful for and why.

13. Discuss how Grace Makutsi and Mma Ramotswe react differently to Charlie and his problem. Why is Grace more judgmental than her boss? Why do you think Mma Ramotswe is more successful in dealing with Charlie?

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15. *The Christian Science Monitor* has written that in the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency novels, "Kindness is paramount." Do you agree with this? And what do you think Alexander McCall Smith is trying to promote by writing these "kind" novels?

16. Discuss the titles of each of the chapters and the title of the book. What do these offer to the experience of reading the novel? Do you think Alexander McCall Smith has fun coming up with these titles?

17. Mma Ramotswe walks around her garden every morning and evening, noticing the flowers, trees, and birds. She also revels in the beauty of the Botswana countryside. Discuss the importance of nature in this novel.

18. Alexander McCall Smith is clearly a master wordsmith. Why do you think he chooses to use relatively simple language and plot lines in his novels? How does the language and rhythm correspond to the message of the novels? Connect this to one of the final sentences of the novel, "simple questions --- and simple answers --- were what we needed in life." What is Alexander McCall Smith saying about life?

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.

Critical Praise

"Utterly charming and compulsively readable."

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