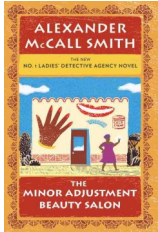


The Minor Adjustment Beauty Salon

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In the bustle and tensions of the holiday season, it was great to take a couple of nights off and travel to Botswana in Alexander McCall Smith's latest book in the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series. As usual the mysteries--there are two of them here--are interwoven with descriptions and a philosophy of living a moral life in Africa. Grace Makutsi, who scored an amazing 97% on her secretarial school final exam, is married now and expecting a baby yet she has not yet talked to Precious Ramotswe about taking any leave. Before she does, her little son arrives along with a pesky aunt, the matriarch of the family who swoops in to take charge of Grace's household.

While Grace is gone, giving birth and settling into motherhood, Mma Ramotswe faces two problems: an acquaintance has opened a new beauty salon, the one of the title, but she is receiving daily threats from an anonymous source. Whoever is doing it is scaring away all her customers and this threatens the business. Also, a female lawyer has contacted the 'traditionally built' detective about an inheritance issue: a nephew is supposed to inherit a farm from a famous politician, but is Liso the actual nephew or someone posing as him? Precious discovers that if Liso is not who he claims to be, the lawyer will inherit the bulk of the estate. Coincidentally--or maybe not--this lawyer was having an affair with the politician Mma Ramotswe discovers.

With Grace on leave, the filing starts piling up. Also, for the first time, Precious finds out how dependent she has grown on Grace, and how solitary work in the office is just no fun anymore. All the usual characters are there: Phuti, Grace's husband, J.L.B. Matekoni who has embarked on a course of learning how to be a modern husband, and Charlie and Fanwell, who assist Matekoni at the mechanic shop. Plus Itumeleng Clovis Radiphuti has arrived, tiny red shoes and all. One of the biggest surprises in this book is how enamored young Charlie becomes of 'Itumeleng What's-his-face' as he calls the new baby.

As always McCall Smith presents some moral quandaries, but ones he deals with delicately, and at book's end you feel blessed with some of the warmth of Africa and of its people.

Another gentle read about Africa is Nicolas Drayson's *A Guide to the Birds of East Africa* which is both a love story and an account of an exciting Kenyan bird watching contest.

Posted by Dory L. on December 9, 2013

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