

The Saturday big tent wedding party

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Wedding planning, ghost vans that mysteriously disappear into the veldt, a perfect pair of heels for a wedding, what's not to like about Alexander McCall Smith's latest in the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series? If life has you feeling blue, this is the perfect book to lighten your mood and take you away from your problems. Botswana, is that far enough? A country where they measure wealth in cattle rather than dollars, and people still have the time to chat in a tree's shade.

All the usual cast is here: the thoughtful, "traditionally built" Precious Ramotswe, and her assistant detective, Mma Makutsi, who is in the last days of planning her big wedding. Also appearing: the kind mechanic, and Precious's nearly perfect husband, J.L.B. Matekoni, who repairs cars at his garage, along with his interns, the somewhat wild Charlie--accused in chapter one of fathering twins out of wedlock, and Fanwell, his more responsible friend.

McCall Smith, who was born in Africa, knows the culture from the inside out. He writes with a warmth and gentleness that draws you in. If you were lucky enough to catch his lecture at IU about a year and a half ago, you can see that his personal kindness extends to his writing. His mysteries are gentle, perhaps too gentle for some--the crime here is the killing and mutilating of cattle, and the suspects include: a young poor herdsboy, a neighbor who manufactures cow-lick, the rancher's maid who has obviously been mistreated, and the rancher himself. But braided with the crime and the investigation are the character's personal problems and small epiphanies of daily living. Precious terribly misses her small white van which had grown too old to repair. However, somehow while driving on cases, Precious catches site of a very familiar phantom van. Mma Makutsi, who scored 97% on the final Botswana Secretarial college exam--the highest score in its history--gives a stern lecture to Charlie for running away from his parenting obligations. What I like best about these books are Precious's rambling philosophical musings that teach us much about humanity and life.

If you like McCall Smith's books, you might also enjoy other "warm milk" cozies written by M.C. Beaton and Elizabeth Peters.

Posted by Dory L. on May 11, 2011

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