



Alexander McCall Smith has created an internationally beloved franchise with his No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency series. While the books always contain a mystery or two for Precious Ramotswe to solve, the main themes of McCall Smith's work are relationships, kindness and honoring the long-held traditions of Botswana.

In the 14th book, "The Minor Adjustment Beauty Salon," Precious Ramotswe, the traditionally built private investigator at the center of the action, is working on two cases while dealing with her secretary, Grace Makutsi's, impending motherhood.

Mma. Ramotswe is hired by Mma. Sheba, a less-than-ethical attorney, who believes a long-lost heir to an estate she's probating may not be who he says he is. In this case, Mma. Ramotswe is suspicious of everyone – the lawyer, the dead man's housekeeper, the "nephew" – and digs deep to find the truth.

Mma. Ramotswe travels to the farm as she tries to put the pieces of a puzzling family together. Scandals, secrets and family shame bubble to the top, leaving Mma. Ramotswe to decide what needs to be told and what needs to stay buried.

While she ponders the thorny situation on the farm, she is approached by Mma. Soleti, the owner of Gaborone's latest beauty shop, who has received the feather of a ground hornbill bird, the traditional symbol of hate. In addition to the omen, vicious rumors are swirling about damaging skin treatments received at the establishment.

Needless to say, Mma. Soleti's business is suffering, and she fears she might not be able to keep the doors open.

Mma. Ramotswe has a more difficult time pinning down the culprit behind Mma. Soleti's problems. McCall Smith, who usually handles the novels' mysteries with deftness, flounders a bit here, tossing too many red herrings into the mix. We know who-done-it long before Mma. Ramotswe, which feels just a little bit awkward. She is usually one step ahead of us.

In the meantime, Mma. Makutsi's growing girth presents its own set of problems. Grace, who never fails to remind all in earshot that she scored an unprecedented 97% on her final exam at Botswana's secretarial college, is torn between two worlds.

In the old Botswana, she would remain in seclusion during her pregnancy, cared for by relatives – in this case, her husband's cranky aunt – who move in and stay forever.

But Grace is a modern girl who left her small village, went to college, looked after her dying brother and worked her way from Mma. Ramotswe's secretary to being her assistant. She also married for love. Her husband, Phuti Radiphuti, is the proud and successful owner of the Double Comfort Furniture Store.

Grace also has a serious affection for shoes. Some of them communicate with her, calling her "Boss," which doesn't sound nearly as unusual in the books as it does in this review.

The Minor Adjustment Beauty Salon - No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency characters learn more about the imp

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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Perhaps what sets this book apart from the previous 13 is the evolution of the characters' relationships.

Mma. Ramotswe's devoted husband, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, decides he's not modern enough and enrolls in a class led by one of McCall Smith's most disagreeable characters.

Embarrassed by the teacher, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, proud owner of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors, decides to demonstrate his affection for Mma. Ramotswe in another way – by cooking dinner.

The fact that he doesn't know a pot from a piston only makes the scene more endearing.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's apprentice, Charlie, a confirmed bachelor who clashes with Grace about almost everything, does an about-face when Itumelang Clovis Radiphuti is born. The tenderness between him and the infant is palatable.

The most interesting development, however, comes between Mma. Ramotswe and Mma. Makutsi. The two women have always been respectful of each other, but after Grace gives birth, they spend quality time together away from the office, each learning to appreciate the other's gifts.

"This is the best woman in Botswana," Grace says about Precious while they sit on the front porch, watching the sunset "as night embraced" the land they both hold so dear.

This may be my favorite book of the series because, at its heart, it's about friends – best friends.

To watch the pilot of HBO's brilliant series starring Jill Scott and Anika Noni Rose, click [here](#) .