



# The Comforts of a Muddy Saturday

*Alexander McCall Smith*

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## **The Comforts of a Muddy Saturday** Alexander McCall Smith

In this fabulous fifth installment in the bestselling series, Isabel Dalhousie is asked to help a doctor who has been disgraced by allegations of scientific fraud. Whatever the outcome, Isabel's combination of spirit, smarts, and unabashed nosiness guarantees a delightful adventure.

## **The Comforts of a Muddy Saturday Details**

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Author : Alexander McCall Smith

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## From Reader Review The Comforts of a Muddy Saturday for online ebook

### Dawn says

Isabel is a well-heeled, genteel Scots woman living in Edinburgh, enjoying the upper levels of society and editing a scholarly journal on matters to do with ethics. She's a philosopher by training and so much of the story line deals with philosophical questions concerning such issues as the role guilt plays in behavior, or whether or not thoughts can be considered equal to actions (since they may not be acted upon) in terms of moral behavior and culpability. I enjoy her ruminations and find myself spinning off from her train of thought in to my own line of reasoning.

When I think about Isabel, she is the "anti cliché" if there is such a thing. If there is a any danger of thinking this 40-something woman as only a well-heeled, genteel blue stocking, then it's immediately put to bed knowing that she has a lover, Jamie, who is at least a decade younger, and has a child by Jamie - Charlie. The label "Cougar" comes to mind, yet she's anything but comfortable with the age gap and the "illegitimacy" of her son (even though in a previous book she flatly turns down Jamie's offer of marriage).

Isabel is often accused of meddling in other people's affairs, and this meddling usually comes about as a result of something being "not quite right." In this instance, a doctor is accused of falsifying the results of a trial of a new medicine that shows promise to cure a fatal illness. His wife asks Isabel to get involved, which she does with some misgivings, however she soon comes to some conclusions that result in an interesting twist of plot - not to be revealed here! The issue of "meddling in others affairs" becomes an internal debate which is put to the test through several other secondary story lines.

McCall Smith is a writer who is attentive to detail and nuance. Some books encourage the reader to zip through them, arriving breathless with excitement at the conclusion. This book invites the reader to brew a pot of tea, find a comfortable nook and savor each page and each line of thinking as if he is inviting you into the story by saying, "So what do you think about this?" It's a leisurely stroll in the park, a day's picnic by the lake, or a hike into Isabel's beloved hills that surround the city of Edinburgh. I am looking forward to the next conversation with Isabel Dalhousie!

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### Cathleen says

Finishing these books are as easy as sipping a cup of tea.

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### Sun says

Seriously? Alexander McCall Smith writes books like this and they sell? I say this as a sucker who bought a copy, albeit second-hand. I enjoyed the subtle and humorous prose of a couple books in the The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series which were striking in its setting and its main character.

In "Saturdays", Isabel Dalhousie is a philosopher who (for unexplained reasons) is wealthy and independent editor of an ethics journals. Dalhousie is asked to look into the affair of a well-known doctor whose reputation has been ruined as a result of a pharmaceutical scandal.

To an academic reader, all of the above sounds thoroughly interesting. You'd think I'd like the character at least. But no, Dalhousie is not marked by any particular wit or charm, and the characters around her are equally bland. There is a sense of friction with a peripheral character named Nick Smart but what is at first intriguing dissolves into nothing. There is no real discussion of the ethics of impartiality nor does the story devolve into a clash of personalities and tensions between truth and lies. It's slow and it's plodding and we meet each character once or twice once so there's little room for character development.

This novel is not a novel at all but a very mundane journal of someone whose life consists entirely of the uneventful. I can handle very well books in which nothing happen (cf. *How Late It Was How Late*) but not ones where nothing happens and where there is no compelling voice or character.

No more for me thanks, Mr Smith.

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### **Sarah says**

I've finally figured out why I keep reading this series, even though 1) the protagonist isn't a terribly good mystery-solver, and 2) nothing ever happens.

It's because Isabel Dalhousie is the anti-Sherlock.

She's an imperfect--indeed, often befuddled and just plain wrong--reader of people, clues, and situations. And she cares about people, not puzzles.

She "solves" little, mundane mysteries (see #2 above) quite in spite of herself--not because she notices all the right details, nor because she comes to the right conclusions. Indeed, in most cases, she doesn't solve anything. She just . . . meddles, ever-so-gently, until other people more or less sort themselves out.

And she does it not because of the thrill of the chase or the pleasure of solving the riddle (the hook for most readers of mystery stories) but because she takes seriously her role as moral neighbor. If someone asks for her help, she gives it.

And her help almost always consists of going to see someone, talking to him, listening to him, and entering sympathetically into his story (whether or not she can figure out how true a story it is). She just acts like a neighbor, and sometimes her neighbors are better off for it.

On the other hand, it's \*really\* weird to encounter real people, philosopher-theologians I've actually met, as characters in fictional stories. "Isabel opened a letter from--" Whoa, wait! That's a \*real\* person! What's \*he\* doing there??

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### **Bruce says**

From the pen of the prolific Alexander McCall Smith, this novel in his Isabel Dalhousie series is told from the perspective of his protagonist, the editor of the *The Review of Applied Philosophy*, herself the mother of sixteen-month-old Charlie and lover of Charlie's father, Jamie. The novel is not really a mystery, although Isabel does become involved in sorting out the truth about a medical researcher accused of negligence.

Rather it is more a long and gentle story that highlights Isabel's incessant ruminations about the countless small ethical decisions that line the path of one's day-to-day existence. If she seems at times to be excessively, even neurotically, self-conscious and self-questioning, she does raise issues for the thoughtful reader, and she raises the reader's awareness of the small ethical ambiguities that lie like sand traps along the fairways of life. Isabel is impressively rich, enabling her to be gratuitously generous, and she is superbly educated, her frequent literary allusions adding spice to what might otherwise be a rather mundane narrative. In her, Smith has created a character whom the reader comes genuinely to care about, a character whose life matters. The book is lightweight, but it is a pleasant *divertissement*.

I "read" this novel in audio book format, the reader being Davina Porter who brought a breadth of tone and accent that was perfect for the setting and the characters.

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### **Barbara says**

Picked up my copy and planned to dive right in. Well, I got sidetracked by another book (imagine!) but once I did get back to Isabel and Co., I was in for good.

Definitely a great addition to the series, and it's always wonderful to drop in on Isabel Dalhousie, Grace, Brother Fox and the rest the Edinburgh world they live in. Jamie continues to grow as a character; Cat makes her usual confused appearance (but is she learning something?); Eddie's coming along nicely too. But it's always about Isabel and her well-meaning, thoughtful need to interfere in the nicest possible way.

In this tale, she's actually asked to "help" a disgraced and depressed medical researcher. However, that little puzzle isn't the only story here and at times this "mystery" disappears while Isabel turns her attentions elsewhere. There's a bit of unrest in her relationship with Jamie too...and at one point, I had a terrible feeling that this would be one Isabel book with a sad ending. Sigh.

I survived--so does Isabel--but not without shedding a few tears (don't ask me why; I get too involved). And now it's just sad that I'm back to a long wait for the next one!

Three cheers for Alexander McCall Smith and his amazing ability to create such a full and internal life for a unique character. Isabel is a wonderful person to spend time with!

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### **Jon says**

Alexander McCall Smith wrote one of the most entertaining short stories I've ever read in "Heavenly Date and other Flirtations." And I love the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency books--they have a charm, innocence, and solid "placiness" that are hard to resist. This series is far less charming, in my view. There is nothing placey about this version of Edinburgh. Locales are named, but no associations are evoked. It could be set anywhere. Isabel Dalhousie admits over and over that she thinks too much, which is true, but less true than that she doesn't think very interestingly. She ponders, literally, everything, but she rarely comes up with anything fresh or surprising, or that the reader hasn't already thought as well. She builds elaborate castles of surmise on observations that turn out to have been wrong. Her possessive worries about the faithfulness of her lover finally become just plain annoying in this latest installment. I'm beginning to think McCall Smith simply writes too much--with Mma Ramotswe, Isabel, and his 44 Scotland Street series each having a new installment at least every year. He needs to consider that every single thing that crosses his mind is not necessarily worth publishing.

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### **Tim says**

Chance and a back-yard denizen, brother fox, are the leitmotifs of a muddy Saturday. McCall's charming nosy parker, sleuth, and all-around moral philosopher Isabel Dalhousie, editor and now owner of the Review

of Applied Ethics, takes us on a charming and thought-provoking turn around the ethical life, set in Edinburgh but lived on any muddy day anywhere. This time Isabel takes up the aid of a depressed doctor who has lost his job and reputation because of the harm he caused in prescribing a new medicine. She offers aid to her niece's troubled employee Eddie, and to her niece as well, unfulfilled in love because always in search of her distant father. And, through additional turns as well, Isabel's engagement with these causes - none of which does she resolve as she expects - brings her balm for her own insecurities as an older woman partnered with a younger man with whom she has a wee child. In the end, the doctor confesses to hubris and wrong-doing to which confession Isabel offers the absolving question, "So what will you do?" Her aid to Eddie is repaid with unexpected honesty. She plants in her niece with a quiet observation the germ of self-understanding. And brother fox offers her allowance for and acceptance of unsought comfort of her own.

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### **Catherine Elliott says**

As with all of the books that I've read which were written by Alexander McCall Smith, I thoroughly enjoyed this wonderfully philosophical and thought-provoking story. The author has a simple and subtle way of weaving deeply philosophical observations about the moral and ethical decisions one makes in every day life into a fun and interesting tale. The character development is generally well done, although in this particular book the reader is left somewhat curious about some figures who are introduced in the story, but then just disappear and are never heard of again, presumably since they have served their purpose of an example of some moral or ethical dilemma. I'm looking forward to reading more books in this Isabel Dalhousie series.

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### **Beth Bonini says**

The Isabel Dalhousie books are not mystery/detective series so much as a puzzling out of moral and ethical problems. In this case, Isabel is asked to help a doctor, Marcus Moncrieff, who has been discredited in his profession -- and sunk into a state of depression and shame. Each time Isabel interviews someone close to the situation, her understanding of it changes -- and her hypothesis about what happened undergoes change as well. We all do this, to some extent; but I think that what makes Isabel interesting as a character is her willingness to be 'plastic' in her mental processes and her determination to be kind and tolerant. In this book, Isabel is suffering from a great emotional vulnerability in regard to her relationships with Jamie (her younger boyfriend, and the father of her son Charlie). On several occasions, Isabel misconstrues a situation - and jumps to the wrong conclusion - at least partially because she is feeling insecure. She doesn't trust Jamie to love her as she loves him, and in her belief that Jamie might go off of her, she keeps finding evidence to support that theory. At the end of the book, Isabel notes that "in sexual matters, we dance to a tune which was composed for us a long time ago, by somebody else, by our parents perhaps, or by biology." She is talking about Cat, her niece - who keeps having unsuccessful relationships with good-looking, remote men who are very like her father -- but the same assessment could apply to Isabel herself. Her first husband, who cheated on her, is barely mentioned in this book, but I suspect that he may show up again before the series reaches its full resolution. This book is a sort of "hump" book for the relationship between Jamie and Isabel; not in the sexual sense, (that is rather unfortunate given the context), but in the sense that I feel like Isabel is finally going to move past her own self-created barrier.

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### **Jean says**

I discovered that I had missed reading this book which is the fifth book in the Isabel Dalhousie's Philosophy

Club Series. I love the meandering of Isabel Dalhousie's mind. This book has the familiar activities of Isabel. She is helping Cat in the Deli for a week, while Cat is away on holiday. She is sticking her nose in people's business, per usual. The one item that is different is Isabel is jealous.

The book, of course, is well written. It was published in 2008. Because I did not read it until 2018, one of her philosophical ponderings had more meaning to me now than if I had read the book in 2008. The topic is lying and the value of truth. Considering the current problems with lying today, I found this subject most interesting.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is seven hours and 41 minutes. Davina Porter does an excellent job narrating the book. Porter is one of my favorite narrators. She has a beautiful voice. She also has a delightful mild Scottish accent for this book. Porter has been narrating since the early 1980s and has won many awards for her narration. She won the Voice Arts Award for Best Voice-Over in Fiction as well as many Earphone awards.

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## **Bridget says**

The Comforts of a Muddy Saturday  
By Alexander McCall Smith

This is the first book I have read by this author, and I picked it up because I had read a positive review of it recently. In this story, Isabel Dalhousie, the owner and editor of a literary journal, who lives in Edinburgh, is asked to help clear the name of a doctor whose reputation has been ruined due to a scandal involving a drug trial.

We also meet Isabel's lover Jamie, who is also the father of her young son, and who is considerably younger than Isabel. This causes her no end of worry, though he seems devoted to both of them. There is also Isabel's niece, Cat, who owns a local deli, and used to be romantically involved with Jamie.

I wanted to like this book, but as far as I'm concerned, it just never took off. None of the characters were particularly appealing to me, and there didn't seem to be much of a plot. Though I enjoyed the descriptions of Edinburgh, there was nothing else that really grabbed my attention. By the end of the book, I was trying to figure out how this was supposed to be suspenseful, and wondering what the point of the book was in the first place. I guess if it is supposed to be a narrative of a slice of time in the characters' lives, it does the job. But my first thought when I finished reading the last page was, "Why was this book written?" I had kept going, thinking that there would be a point where things all started to fall into place, but if they did, I missed it.

It also really annoyed me that Isabel spent so much time worrying about whether or not Jamie really loved her, was going to stay with her, found her interesting and attractive, etc. Once again, we have a supposedly independent, educated woman, who seems to worry primarily about a man. I got really sick of that whole thing by about the third chapter.

This was a quick read, so at least I didn't spend a whole lot of my time reading it.

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## **Charlene says**

Continuing on listening to this series and enjoying everyone of them. Isabel's mind goes here and there with her philosophical musings. She tries to solve a medical mystery, gets it all wrong but it works out in the end, of course. She has a spasm of jealousy and continuing insecurity over Jamie but that, too, works out, of course. Charlie is a toddler now and a growing delight in the series.

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## **Matthew Gatheringwater says**

I'm afraid I've gone off this series and I feel a little sad about it, as I might feel after discovering my life has diverged from that of a once close friend. Smith's protagonist is a thoughtful, kind, and well-meaning woman and I have nothing bad to say about her, but with her seemingly unlimited wealth, her lovely home in historic Edinburgh, her gorgeous young boyfriend, and now her adorable baby, we really don't have anything in common. If I read another book about her charmed life I fear I shall begin to resent her. In fact, even while reading this book I longed for Smith to strike her with some pestilence--perhaps her boyfriend could turn out to be a bisexual or all her cherished Peploes could succumb to a rare fungus, or anything, really, to add a little flavor to her milquetoast existence.

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## **Laura says**

3.5 stars. This is a series you read if you enjoy the characters, the Scottish setting and the philosophical backdrop. You don't really read this for the storyline as much. The audiobooks are all well done and the series is good, but not great.

I really like this series for when I wake up at 3am and don't fall right back to sleep. They keep you company without keeping you on the edge of your seat. Alexander McCall Smith is always a winner in my book because I know he's not going to be offensive and he'll often have me smiling and that's pretty much what I'm looking for when I pick up a book in this series.

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