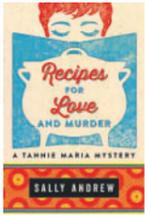


### Recipes for Love and Murder: A Tannie Maria Mystery ★★★★★

Sally Andrew (Umuzi, R220)

**T**HE timing of this charming novel couldn't be more propitious. At the end of a dismal year in South Africa, *Recipes for Love and Murder* slipped onto the shelves, leavening the beaten, bruised mood; a story redolent of community, of landscape, of friendship, of food. It is comfort reading.

Sally Andrew is in Muizenberg when we speak, frantically trying to finish the edit on the second book in what is likely to become a series. "It's interesting you say that," she says, "because when I started writing it I was quite burned out working as an environmental activist. I wanted to do something just for pleasure, to make me feel good."



Andrew and her artist partner split their time between Muizenberg and the Klein Karoo, the setting for *Recipes for Love and Murder*. Here we find Tannie Maria, homely and velskoenshod, watching over her chickens and vegetable patch from her farmhouse stoep. When she's asked to change her cookery column in the Klein Karoo Gazette into an agony aunt page instead, she finds prescribing recipes alongside homespun wisdom works a treat: "Dear Lucy, in the end what matters most is love and food. Without them you go hungry."

When she receives a letter from a woman whose husband is abusing her, it plunges her back into the horror of her own marriage which she escaped only when her brutal husband died. She writes back to the woman, advising her to leave him, "You can do better than I did. You can save your heart." But when the woman is murdered, Tannie Maria sets about her own investigation.

It's no wonder that *Recipes* has been likened to Alexander McCall Smith's Precious Ramotswa series: in fact he provides a fulsome "shout" for it on the cover. But this book is darker. Andrew cuts the cosiness with the acid sapor of spousal abuse, homophobia, the post-traumatic stress disorder of ex-servicemen, the threat of fracking.

And then there's the food. Mma Ramotswa seems to exist on pumpkin stew and bush tea, whereas Tannie Maria bakes



**SOUL SOUP:** Sally Andrew's book is like literary comfort food

Picture: ANDREA NIXON

## CAMDEBOOM!

Sally Andrew's sleuth, a rusk-baking Karoo tannie, promises to be a global hit. By Michele Magwood

trays and trays of *beskuit*, munches marmalade and bacon sandwiches, stuffs bulging *vetkoek* with curried mince and envies the chicken pies of her friend Tannie Kuruman. She chats away to her rusks, informs her morning tea about her plans for the day, and questions a potato salad about the nature of love.

"Food is good company," she reflects, "but it doesn't answer back, not in words anyway. Maybe that is one of the reasons why it is good company."

You'd assume that Andrew is an accomplished cook herself. "I'm not," she laughs. "I've never read a recipe book before now, I just throw things together. So I had to do a lot of research."

She found the people in her

community who make the best *bobotie*, the best *koeksisters*, the best *tamatiebredie*, and what readers are loving is that she has included the recipes at the end of the book.

It is astonishing that a low-

**'Recipes' has been likened to Alexander McCall Smith's Mma Ramotswa series**

key, idiom-heavy, obscurely located story could have global appeal, but it does. The buzz around the book started when a bidding war broke out for it at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Ace agent Isobel Dixon, herself a Ka-

roo native, whipped up so much interest in the manuscript that she was fielding six-figure pre-emptive bids from international publishers before it even went to auction. As well as South Africa it is also being published in the US, UK, Australia and Canada, with 11 other editions in foreign languages, and counting.

A Chinese reader might puzzle over a roast leg of lamb with *pampoep*, or a Swedish reader over the strange landscape of *gwarrie* trees, but there is no doubt the book has universal appeal. The secret, perhaps, is the nostalgia for connectedness, for community, for low-tech, simple living. And for home-cooked food. Things that transcend borders. Comfort. @michelemagwood



### Jacket Notes

MISHA GLENNY

**W**AS wandering just five minutes from the house where I was living in Rio de Janeiro when I stumbled across 12 young men armed with semi-automatic weapons and pistols. They were relaxed and their leader, maybe 10 years older than the rest, shook my hand warmly. Phew!

Writing a book about the drug lord who for five years ran the cocaine trade in Latin America's largest slum posed a peculiar set

of challenges. If I was going to write this book, I had to go and live in one of the *favelas*.

I first had to secure the co-operation of the man in question, known to all Brazil as Nem of Rocinha. He agreed to be interviewed. But that meant trekking 10 times deep into the Brazilian interior near the Bolivian border to visit him in one of Brazil's four maximum security penitentiaries.

Altogether I spent 30 hours interrogating Nem about his life. He told me about the terrible auto-immune disease which his 10-month-old daughter developed. He was forced to borrow money from a drug lord in order to pay for the treatment which would save her life. And to pay it back, he had to leave his respectable



job and work in the coke business.

Living in the slum was perhaps the trickiest aspect. Rocinha, as it is called, has 120 000 people packed into an area the size of a village. Airconditioning is a luxury in the sweltering semi-tropical climate. And when you're not baking, you are battling the biblical downpours that bust open the modest roofs of the slum and come gushing through your bedroom at 3am. Worst of all was the permanent noise: howling dogs, the thud and screams of domestic violence, the loud music and, of course, the occasional burst of gunfire.

If the threat from violence and natural disaster wasn't enough, I knew that if I was to write about

drugs, corruption, poverty and violence in Brazil, I had to make a serious stab at learning Portuguese. At my age (mid-50s), learning a new language poses serious problems even if you can already speak others. But nothing had prepared me for the discrepancy between the written word and how it is pronounced in Brazilian Portuguese.

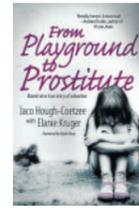
My abiding memory in writing this book, however, is about the destructive power of inequality. So many bright young people who are born into the extreme poverty of the *favelas* never have the chance to secure the education that would enable them to lead fulfilling lives, instead of picking up a gun to sell drugs.

**'Nemesis: One Man and the Battle for Rio' (Penguin Random House, R285)**

## book bites

**From Playground to Prostitute** ★★★★★  
Elanie Kruger with Jaco Hough-Coetzee (Jonathan Ball, R210)

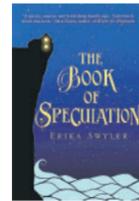
### BOOK buff



Engela is from a broken home. Her parents are alcoholics, and at 10 years old her life is one of poverty and sexual abuse. Isolated and shunned by her peers, Engela gravitates to a satanic group called Group 13. For a while she thinks she has found acceptance, but then she witnesses something horrific at a satanic ritual. Scared, she runs for her life. She is betrayed by the one closest to her and is sold into prostitution to pay a debt. Kruger and Hough-Coetzee shine a light on the dark and insidious world of human trafficking. — *Kholofelo Maenetsha* @KMaenetsha

**The Book of Speculation** ★★★★★  
Erika Swyler (Corvus Books, R275)

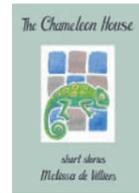
### BOOK fiend



Simon loses his librarian job and is on the verge of losing everything else when an antiquarian bookseller named Mr Churchwary sends him a mysterious old book. The book appears to have belonged to one Hermelius Peabody, proprietor of a travelling carnival circa 1780. Simon soon discovers that it holds his family secrets, including why all the women in his family succumb to death by drowning. Skilfully written, it weaves past and present with intricate strands of fantasy, mythology and Slavic folklore. — *Annetjie van Wynegaard* @Annetjievw

**The Chameleon House** ★★★★★  
Melissa de Villiers (Modjaji, R200)

### BOOK buff



This local short story collection showcases ordinary, imperfect, messy lives, with characters ranging from a desperate pregnant woman to a lonely adolescent grappling with sexual awareness. Several tales occur in the Eastern Cape, with its distinctive flavours, accents and scenery coming alive on the page. De Villiers has a knack for crafting unexpected endings, some of them leaving the reader to decide what ultimately happens. — *Ayeshka Kajee* @ayeshakajee

**Numero Zero** ★★★★★  
Umberto Eco (Harvill Secker, R285)

### BOOK thrill



At first, *Numero Zero* seems to be a deliciously hard-boiled crime thriller. The illusion is short-lived. The story turns out to be a rich businessman's plan to start a fake newspaper to exert influence on his peers, echoing the alleged political origin story of Silvio

Berlusconi. An assortment of hacks are gathered together to produce it: Colonna, who self-identifies as a loser; Maia, young, slim, misunderstood; and Braggadocio, who sees conspiracies at every turn. After some amusing satirical observations about the creation of news, Braggadocio's obsessions dominate the final third, and the book descends into a hyper-complex tale concerning the death of Mussolini. The main disappointment is how old, grumpy Colonna inexplicably ends up with bright-eyed, promising young Maia. — *Jennifer Malec* @projectjennifer

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