

Tears of the Giraffe Study Guide

Tears of the Giraffe by Alexander McCall Smith

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Plot Summary

The Tears of the Giraffe is an amusing book by Alexander McCall Smith about the lives of two people who become engaged in Gaborone, Botswana. Mma Ramotswe, the founder of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, agrees to marry Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, the proprietor of the Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. This is the second time he had proposed marriage to her and he does not believe his good fortune. He worries that she changed her mind during the night. When he calls her in the morning, they agree to meet for lunch at the President Hotel to celebrate their engagement.

Both Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe are ethical people with deep roots in the traditional old fashioned Botswanan values and customs. For example, Mma Ramotswe becomes upset by people who shake hands without putting the free hand on the forearm or accept a gift with one hand instead of two. Both are kind and considerate people who appreciate each other and they both have a problem of being persuaded by people who they cannot say no to.

Mma Ramotswe is the only lady detective in Botswana. Her inability to say no to Mrs. Andrea Curtin results in her attempt to find out about the disappearance of Andrea's son, Michael, ten years ago. She also becomes involved in uncovering the activities of her fiancée's unscrupulous maid. Mma Ramotswe ends up promoting her secretary to the position of assistant private detective and investigating the philandering wife of the butcher, Mr. Badule, to see how she comes up with money to send their son to a private school.

In the middle of all this, her fiancée appears with two orphan children that he has been talked into accepting by the matron of the orphan farm. He wonders how he was persuaded to do this without consulting his fiancée, Mma Ramotswe. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni feels that he cannot go back on his promise to the children to provide a good home for them. Instead of being angry about his impulsive actions, Mma Ramotswe says that she is lucky to be marrying such a kind man. So a few days after their engagement, they become a family of four.

This delightful book reveals some insights into Botswana's changing society where the youth are losing the traditional values of their culture like youth everywhere in the world. Both Mma Ramotswe and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni adhere to the old fashioned values. The reader will find this easy to read book very refreshing and will enjoy the reading of the book and the situations that the characters seem to find themselves in.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The Tears of the Giraffe is an amusing book by Alexander McCall Smith about the lives of two people who become engaged in Gaborone, Botswana. Mma Ramotswe, the founder of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, agrees to marry Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, the proprietor of the Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. This is the second time that he had proposed marriage to her. He does not believe his good fortune and worries that she changed her mind during the night. When he calls her in the morning, they agree to meet for lunch at the President Hotel to celebrate their engagement.

After hanging up, Mma Ramotswe wonders if he will take her to see his house. They will have to decide which house to live in. They have their celebration lunch and then go to see his house. Along the way, they decide to retain Mma Ramotswe's maid. His yard and house are untidy and full of car parts.

Mma Ramotswe looks through the house, with Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni apologizing for its untidiness. She decides that she wants to talk to his maid so they wait for her to arrive. When they hear the maid arrive, Mma Ramotswe talks to her about the dirty house. Florence, the maid, is upset when she learns that Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is engaged to Mma Ramotswe. He tells her that he will help her secure a job at his cousin's motel.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Mma Ramotswe agrees to marry Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. He is a mechanic and she is a detective. Since they both have houses, they have to decide which house to live in and what household goods to combine.

Mma Ramotswe is appalled at the condition of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's house. His maid does not do a good job of cleaning and she does not like the way that Florence, the maid, takes advantage of him. She confronts Florence, who becomes very defensive.

Mma Ramotswe will at last be happy when Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is her husband and living in her house where he will be properly cared for.



Chapter 2-3

Chapter 2-3 Summary

Mma Ramotswe decides that they will live in her Zebra Drive house after they marry. She wants to diplomatically tell Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni without offending him.

On Monday morning, Mma Ramotswe appears for work at her detective agency. She learns the latest news and gossip from her secretary Mma Makutsi. Sometimes Mma Makutsi provides information that is useful in her work.

At lunch time, Mrs. Andrea Curtin arrives without an appointment. She had learned of Mma Ramotswe's detective agency from the American Embassy and is looking for her son who has been missing for ten years.

In Chapter Three, Mrs. Curtin explains how she, her husband Jack, and their eighteen-year-old son Michael, first came to Botswana. She was happy in Botswana and likes the people, as did her son. Michael preferred the local people as friends and spent his time with them instead of with people in the diplomatic community. He worked with a German named Burkhardt to establish an agricultural cooperative. Michael decided to move into the commune at the cooperative.

Michael was supposed to attend Dartmouth but decided to extend his stay in Africa for another year. At the end of the year when Jack's assignment ended, Michael refused to leave with them. He felt that his work at the farm was too important. He was also involved with a South African woman. They left him with money and stayed in touch by writing letters. The Curtins were notified by the Embassy that Michael was missing.

Mrs. Curtin traveled to Botswana then to look for Michael and stayed for four weeks. She made several trips to Botswana over the years but there was no clue of Michael. Now that Jack is dead, she wants to know what happened to her son.

Chapter 2-3 Analysis

Mma Ramotswe thinks of her deceased father a lot. She is grateful for the upbringing that she had and the kind of man that he was. She knows she made a mistake with her first marriage when she ignored her father's warning. She is determined that her marriage to Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni will be better.

Mma Ramotswe is concerned with the traditions of her society and its culture. She doesn't like the disrespectfulness of youth nor does she understand it. She is proper in her behavior and follows the traditions and culture of her society.

After hearing Mrs. Curtin's story, Mma Ramotswe feels sorry for the position Mrs. Curtin is in. She is seeking closure over the disappearance of her son, Michael. Mma

Ramotswe is not sure what she can find out after ten years but feels sorry for Mrs. Curtin and feels she must find some way to help her.



Chapter 4-5

Chapter 4-5 Summary

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is at his garage. He thinks about the behavior of his two young apprentices and how unacceptable it would have been in his day. He has to explain to them that his garage is called Speedy because they perform the work quickly and not because they are increasing the speed of the cars.

He drives to the orphan farm whose matron had been a friend of his mother. He repairs whatever equipment they have free of charge. They talk of his impending marriage to Mma Ramotswe. He is surprised to learn from Mma Potokwane that he is expected to buy a diamond ring for Mma Ramotswe. He is upset at the expense and says he will discuss it with Mma Ramotswe.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni works on an engine pump while at the orphan farm. He does what he can to fix the engine pump and also fixes the wheelchair of one of the orphans.

In Chapter Five, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni finds that Mma Ramotswe does want a diamond engagement ring. They talk about how there are no secrets in Gaborone and how everyone's secrets are known. They both appreciate the value of confidentiality. She mentions that people have been asking to see her engagement ring. Mma Ramotswe explains that the diamond ring is a symbol of appreciation and that there are inexpensive diamonds.

They go to Judgment-day Jewellers the next day. Mma Ramotswe says she wants a small ring. They find a ring that they both like and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, pleased with the price, pays for it. He is pleased that it is from a Botswana mine. They decide to be married at the cathedral.

Chapter 4-5 Analysis

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is a generous person who performs work for no charge for the orphan farm but he is disturbed at the expense of a diamond engagement ring. He can see no useful purpose for diamonds but finds that his fiancée expects one. She convinces him that diamonds do not have to be expensive and selects a small diamond.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is glad that he spent the money on the diamond. He is able to give Mma Ramotswe a beautiful ring. She never had one from her first marriage and the ring means a great deal to her. They both have the same set of Botswanan values and he wants to make her happy.



Chapter 6-7

Chapter 6-7 Summary

Mma Ramotswe did not really want the Curtin case but found that she could not say no. Now she is committed to the case which is stale. Sometimes the past should be left alone. She decides to start at the beginning, at the farm, and drives there on Saturday morning.

On the way, she picks up a woman who was standing on the side of the road. The woman works at a shop in Gaborone and is going to visit her children and family. She is a widow names Mma Tsbago. When they arrive at her village, she introduces her mother and children and then takes Mma Ramotswe to meet Mma Potsane who had worked at the farm with her husband. She had known Burkhardt and Michael. She agrees to go to the farm known as Silolewolela with Mma Ramotswe.

In Chapter Seven, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is looking for something to do on Saturday since Mma Ramotswe is out at the farm. He decides to visit the orphan farm and kill time until his fiancée returns. He finds that they are having problems with the pump again and he repairs it.

Mma Potokwane tells him that she drove by the house on Zebra Street to see where he would be living. She says the house is large enough for children but he says that they will be very happy without children. Mma Potokwane tells him that they could always adopt some of the orphans. The orphans could live with them without the formality of adoption. She suggests two orphans as a wedding gift to Mma Ramotswe.

Chapter 6-7 Analysis

Ma Ramotswe decides to visit Silokwolela, the agricultural cooperative from which Michael disappeared. She feels that she shouldn't have accepted the stale case but found she couldn't say no to Mrs. Andrea Curtin. Now she is in the position of having to follow through on the case.

She is lucky that she stopped to pick up Mma Tsbago who was hitchhiking to her home village. Mma Tsbago introduces her to Mma Potsane who worked at the commune when Burkhardt and Michael were there. She is able to tell Mma Ramotswe about Michael's disappearance and the events that followed.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni decides to spend the day at the orphan farm, since Mma Ramotswe is out of town. Mma Potokwane suggests a couple of orphans as a wedding gift to Mma Ramotswe. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni has the same problem as Mma Ramotswe when it comes to saying no. Remembering his own childhood and the kindness of a man that

gave him his vocation, he begins to explore the possibility of the orphans without discussing it with Mma Ramotswe



Chapter 8-9

Chapter 8-9 Summary

Mma Potokwane tells Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni the story of the two orphans, one of whom is the girl who's wheelchair he fixed. A tribe was in a camp. Among them was a woman who had just given birth to a son, and her daughter. The mother died of a snake bit. The tribe buried her along with the infant son as was the custom, while the girl hid in the bushes. When the tribe left, she rescued her brother and a government truck driver took them to Nyanyabwe Hospital. When they were released from the hospital, they lived in the yard of one of the nurses.

The girl's tuberculosis had damaged her bones and eventually she was unable to walk. When the nurse's husband was transferred, the children were sent to the orphan farm.

As soon as the children arrive at Mma Potokwane's office, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni agrees to take them to his home, without consulting Mma Ramotswe.

In Chapter Nine Mma Ramotswe drives to the farm with Mma Potsane. The farm is basically a collection of ruins now. They go into the deserted buildings. Mma Potsane identifies some people in a picture, which Mma Ramotswe puts in her pocket. That was all she found that was useful.

Chapter 8-9 Analysis

Mma Potokwane tells the sad story of the orphans to Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. The girl rescued her brother from their mother's grave. It was the tribe custom to bury an infant with the dead mother since there was no way to feed the child. Brother and sister had cared for each other all of their lives. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is touched by the story and unable to say no to Mma Potokwane's requests and takes the children with him. He knows he should discuss it with his fiancée, but he doesn't. He can't say no to Mma Potokwane.

Mma Potsane escorted Mma Ramotswe to the farm for a fee. She was very uneasy there but showed Mma Ramotswe around and answers what questions that she can. The place obviously has bad memories for her but Mma Ramotswe does not ask why.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Florence is still upset about her employment situation. She had an easy job since she felt Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni didn't care if the house was clean and tidy and she felt she fed him well enough in spite of what Mma Ramotswe said. She would not be able to entertain her men friends at the house as she used to when her employer was at work. She tried to think of a way to prevent the marriage and decides to enlist the aid of one of her men friends.

As Florence is making lunch, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni arrives home with the two children. The maid is amazed that the children from the orphan farm will be living in the house. She recognizes them as Masarwa children.

As the children eat, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni brings their suitcase in. He begins to realize that he has changed the life of the two children, and also that he has not discussed the situation with Mma Ramotswe and they would be her responsibility. He had promised the children that he would take care of them.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Florence is plotting against Mma Ramotswe. She wants to prevent the marriage in order to protect her own position. She doesn't really care about Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni just the fact that she doesn't want to lose the arrangement she has. The maid entertains men at the house when Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is out and this is a source of extra income for her. Florence decides to enlist the help of one of her men friends in her plot against Mma Ramotswe.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni begins to realize the enormity of what he has done after he has the children in his house. He was easily swayed by the persuasiveness of Mma Potokwane and acted on impulse without consulting his bride-to-be. He now feels that he has an obligation to the children no matter what happens. He made them a promise that he would take care of them and he has to live up to that promise.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Mma Makutsi is at the detective agency. She likes to leave the door open but there is a group of chickens that walk in. She has to chase them out and she resents have to do so. She feels that she should have had a job in a high-rise office building with air conditioning with the grades that she received in secretarial school. One of her classmates explained that the men who did the hiring were not interested in their scores. So she went to work for a woman, Mma Ramotswe, and was happy that she did.

Mma Ramotswe is discussing her visit to the farm with Mma Makutsi. Her intuition tells her Michael is there at the farm even though he is dead. His spirit is there. She also shows her secretary the picture. They agree that a man in the photograph, Oswald Ranta, is evil. The detective decides to try to find the man in the picture.

Mma Ramotswe dictated letters to Mma Makutsi as she typed. The secretary obtains Ranta's number from the phone book and calls. She learns he is at the University where he is a lecturer in the Department of Rural Economics. She gives the information to Mma Ramotswe.

When Mma Makutsi says she wants to be a detective, Mma Ramotswe decides to give her a chance and promotes her to assistant detective.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Mma Makutsi was rather naive when she came out of secretarial school. She thought that the men hired on the basis of grades and performance but found they hired on the basis of looks. She went to work for Mma Ramotswe and it paid off for her. She was not working in a fancy building with an air conditioned office but she proved herself qualified enough to Mma Ramotswe to earn a promotion to assistant detective.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Mma Ramotswe awoke in the middle of the night as she usually did. She read an article about sleep problems one day when she was at the beauty shop. She was upset that the article advised fat people to lose weight in order to sleep better.

At Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's house, the girl is also up and looking out the window. She is watching a plane flying over. Her brother and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni are asleep. She feels safe at his house and trusts him to take care of her and her brother. The girl felt that it was her duty to help him in any way she could.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Mma Ramotswe has one of her nights of disturbed sleep. She often wakes up for an hour or two in the middle of the night. She read an article at the beauty shop that she took exception with because it said fat people had sleep problems that could be solved if they lost weight. She feels that some people have nothing better to do than to give advice. She often thinks of her father at this time of the night.

The girl is awake at Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's house. She isn't afraid at his house. She trusts him and will do whatever she can to help him. She feels it is her duty.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Mma Makutsi is upset to learn that she still has to do the typing even though she is now an assistant detective. Mma Ramotswe can't afford to pay for an assistant detective and a secretary. She agrees to let Mma Makutsi have her own clients subject to her agreement. She explains how one has to start small and work their way up.

That afternoon she gives Mma Makutsi her first case, that of Mr. Letsenyane Badule. He explains how he found people stealing meat at his place of employment and received promotions until he saved enough to open his own butcher shop. His wife tells him that a private charity is paying for their son's education. When he tried to contact them, there is no response. Everyday when he arrives home, his wife is gone and he thinks she is seeing another man. The thought is keeping him up at night.

They discuss the case after Mr. Badule leaves. Mma Ramotswe tells Mma Makutsi to talk to their maid and to follow the wife for one day. Then report the results to Mr. Badule.

Since Mma Makutsi doesn't have a driver's license, her uncle drives her to the Badule house. They wait and watch and follow Mma Badule when she leaves the house to a house on Nyerere Drive. They wait for the maid's lunch break so Mma Makutsi could talk to them. She learns of Mrs. Badule's affair and that she is referred to as the town wife. The man has a well-to-do wife who lives in the village of Mahalaype. The man told the maids they would lose their jobs if they told his wife about Mrs. Badule. The maids say that the boy is the son of the man and not Mr. Badule.

Back at the office, Mma Makutsi types her report of what she has learned. She leaves the decision to Mma Ramotswe as to how much they should tell Mr. Badule.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Mma Makutsi receives her first case from Mma Ramotswe the following day. At first her idea was to just have Mma Makutsi perform supervised tasks, but she saw the enthusiasm of the woman, she decided to allow her to have her own clients. The first client is Mr. Badule who thinks his wife is having an affair. Mma Ramotswe gives her assistant directions on how to obtain the information. Mma Makutsi follows the directions, spends a day on the case, and types a report to Mma Ramotswe. Since she is not sure of how much to report to Mr. Badule, she leaves that decision to Mma Ramotswe. This is understandable since it is her first case.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni takes his foster children shopping. He is still wondering how Mma Potokwane persuaded him to take the children. Sitting in his office, he decides to hire a secretary and to stop worrying about how he ended up with the children and to do his best for them. He is not wealthy but he can provide for them and wants to send them to a good private school.

While driving the children to shop, he finds they girl knows something about engines. After shopping, they have their pictures taken by a photographer. As they are leaving, they meet Mma Ramotswe who is on her way to the post office. She wonders who the children are and why they are with Mr. J. L. B. Matekoni.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni decides to stop wondering how he was persuaded to accept the two orphans. He has accepted the responsibility for them and is now committed to giving them the best life he can make for them. He dreams of the boy, his son, working at his side and taking over the mechanic's business someday. He decides to send them to the best private schools. Since they have few clothes, he begins by taking them shopping and having their pictures taken. He is in to playing the role of father, even though he has not discussed the situation with Mma Ramotswe, whom they meet while they are out.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Florence had been suffering from headaches since she learned of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's plans to marry Mma Ramotswe. She had these headaches when her brother was in prison.

Florence had met Mr. Philemon Leannyne at a take out restaurant at the African Mall. He was one of her men friends even though he lived with a woman with whom he had three children. She had once lied to the police saying he was with her when he really was not and now she felt that he owed her a favor.

She asks him to obtain a gun for her to put in Mma Ramotswe's house. Then she will call the police and report the gun. He agrees to find a gun for her and delivers one that evening. After he leaves, she calls another man, Paul Monsopati, who owes her money. She wants him to plant the gun in the house on Zebra Drive. He says he will pick up the package the next day when Florence is working at Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's house. Instead, he reports her to the police saying that she is selling illegal weapons.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Florence is determined to carry out her plan to prevent the marriage of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe. She has one of her men friends, Mr. Philemon Leannyne, secure a gun for her. Then she asks another man friend, Paul Monsopati, who owes her money, to plant the gun in the house of Zebra Drive. He doesn't take the gun with him because he does not want to be caught with it and tells Florence he will pick it up the next day when she is working. Paul Monsopati has a responsible position at a hotel where he is scheduled for promotion. He does not want any part of Florence's scheme and reports her to the police saying that she sells illegal weapons. He gave Florence the set up she planned to give Mma Ramotswe.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is standing and staring at Mma Ramotswe. She finally asks him what he is doing. He explains that the children are from the orphan farm. The girl says her name is Motholeli and her brother is Puso. They show their photographs to Mma Ramotswe. Motholeli says that they are living at Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's house.

Mma Raotswe tells the children to remain where they are while she and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni go to the post office. She wants to talk to him. He follows her, fearing that Mma Ramotswe will break their engagement and he blames Mma Potokwane for the situation.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni explains what happened at the orphans farm and how he had no alternative but to take the children.

Mma Ramotswe laughs and says that he is a kind man and that she is lucky to be marrying such a kind man. She will be a mother to the children. They will move the children into her Zebra Drive house that afternoon. They go out and tell the children that they will marry soon and Mma Ramotswe will be their mother.

All four of them go to the house on Zebra Drive to show the children their new home and to have lunch. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni calls his office and learns that Florence has been arrested for having a gun. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe spend the rest of the day with the children.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni has to explain to Mma Ramotswe how he came to have two children. It is an awkward situation and he fears that Mma Ramotswe will break off their engagement, but she doesn't. When she hears the story, she says she is lucky to be marrying the kindest man in Botswana. She will be a mother to Motholeli and Puso, when she wants to move into her Zebra Drive house that day. They spend the rest of the day as a family with the children. They are both good people.

Florence got what she deserved. She is arrested for having a weapon and her selfish plot is brought to an end.



Chapter 17-18

Chapter 17-18 Summary

Mma Ramotswe reads the report written by Mma Makutsi and complements her on doing a good job. They discuss the moral issues involved and what to tell Mr. Badule. Mma Ramotswe says that a detective has an ethical duty to tell the truth to a client. Then she thinks about it and how the welfare of the boy is at stake. They decide to tell Mr. Badule about the affair but will try to make him happy somehow.

Mma Ramotswe drives to the University looking for Mr. Oswald Ranta. It is her first time there and she is impressed. She talks to a secretary about Dr. Ranta and learns that he is a ladies man. She finds Dr. Ranta in his office and talks with him and decides that he is a man who needs constant reassurance.

Dr. Ranta says he knows nothing about the disappearance of Michael Curtin and that he told the police everything that he knew. Mma Ramotswe feels that he is lying and tells him that. When he tells her to leave or he will call Security and say she was trying to steal something, she tells him that she knows about a girl named Angel and what he did to her examination. He tells her to come to his house that evening and he will tell her the story.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni has the children visiting the garage with him. Motholeli wanted to watch him work. He has one of his apprentices watch the children while he works. Motholeli is more interested in his work than Puso is.

Chapter 17-18 Analysis

Mma Ramotswe is good at obtaining information from people and at using it. She learns about Dr. Ranta's treatment of a girl named Angel from a disgruntled secretary at the University. When she talks to Ranta about Michael Curtin, she senses that he is lying and knows more than he revealed to the police. When he threatens her with telling the Security Staff that he caught her trying to steal something, she tells him that she will reveal what she knows about Angel. He says that he won't talk to her at his office and that she should come to his home that evening. Will she be walking into a dangerous situation?

As much as Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni wants his son, Puso, to become a mechanic, it is the girl, Motholeli who shows an interest and love for engines. He begins to hope that she will become a mechanic.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Mma Ramotswe is fearful of going to Dr. Ranta's house alone. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni sensed that she was troubled when he came to dinner. He had been to the prison to visit Florence and told Mma Ramotswe about it. When she tells him about visiting Dr. Ranta, she refers to him as a psychopath. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni says he will accompany her to Dr. Ranta's house. He does not want her to go alone.

Mma Ramotswe puts the children to bed. She wishes that her father could have met them.

At Dr. Ranta's house, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni waits outside. Dr. Ranta knows that he is outside.

Dr. Ranta tells her that he was working at the farm on a grant from the Ford Foundation. He talks about the people who were there and how the South African woman, Carla, shared a room with Michael. She then had an affair with Ranta. They used to meet at night in one of the huts. Michael found them one night and ran off into the bus. He fell into a ditch and broke his neck. They buried him and said nothing, fearing that no one would believe that he died accidentally.

Carla soon left the farm since she was pregnant with Michael's baby. Ranta thinks that she is now living in Bulawayo.

Mma Ramotswe says that she won't tell the police but will tell Mrs. Curtin the story. She also promises that she will make no trouble for him about Angel.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Mma Ramotswe is happy that she is making a home for Motholeli and Pusa. She is very touched when the girl tells her that her life is happier everyday and she wishes that her father was alive to meet the children. The two children are apparently filling a void in the lives of both Mma Ramotswe and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni.

Mma Ramotswe learns the truth regarding Michael's death from Dr. Ranta. She thinks about the deceit and extortion that she used to obtain the information. She debates about whether it was ethically right or wrong and then decides that she did the right thing. She beat Dr. Ranta at his own game.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Mma Ramotswe is driving on the road toward Francistown on her way to Zimbabwe. She is going to Bulawayo despite the objections of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. She has a cup of tea in Francistown, and then drives on. In Bulawayo, she stays at the house of a friend.

Mma Ramotswe finds the hotel run by Carla Smit and introduces herself. She tells Carla that she knows how Michael died and wants Carla to talk to Mrs. Curtin and introduce her to her grandson, who is also named Michael. Carla agrees.

Back in Gaborone, Mma Ramotswe finds that Mr. Badule appeared at the agency and received a verbal report from Mma Makutsi. She told Mr. Badule that his wife's affair was so her son could have a good education. Mr. Badule was pleased when it was explained in that way.

Several days later, Mrs. Andrea Curtin met Carla and her grandson. The meeting went well and Mma Ramotswe gives Mrs. Curtin the gift of a traditional Botswanan basket, the design of which was said to be the tears of a giraffe.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Mma Ramotswe follows through on the Curtin case and travels to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe to interview Carla Smit. She arranges for a meeting between Carla and Mrs. Curtin so Mrs. Curtin can obtain closure in her son's death and meet her grandson. She did not have to do this. She could just have provided the details given by Dr. Ranta but she truly wanted to help Mrs. Curtin and Carla.



Characters

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is the proprietor of the Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. He had grown up in Molepolole. He is a mechanic by trade. Matekoni lives in a house near the airfield and prison. He is forty-five years old at the time of his engagement to Mma Ramotswe and is a believer in traditional Botswan values. He is worried about the expense of a diamond engagement ring but is willing to spend whatever he has to to make Mma Ramotswe happy. He is relieved when she selects a small ring that is very affordable. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is easily swayed by people and has a difficult time saying no. When he is fixing an engine pump at the orphan farm, he allows the matron to persuade him to accept two orphans to live with him. She says they will be a fine wedding gift for Mma Ramotswe who does not know anything about it. He does not even consult her about the arrangement. Luckily for him, she thinks that he is the kindest man in Botswana when she hears how he came to have the orphan children, allaying his fears of a broken engagement. Like him, she wants to do what is best for the children. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni hopes that Puso will follow in his footsteps and become a mechanic, but it is the girl, Motholeli who is interested in engines and mechanics. He is just as happy to have her follow in his footsteps.

Mma Precious Ramotswe

Mma Precious Ramotswe is the founder of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. She had been married to Note Mokoti and lives in a house on Zebra Drive. Mma Ramotswe had been raised by her father, Obed Ramotswe, and cousin since her mother died when she was a baby. She had had a child by her first husband but the baby died soon after it was born. Since she knows what it is like to lose a child. She feels that she has to help Mrs. Andrea Curtin in her search for information about her missing son, Michael. Mma Ramotswe has old-fashioned Botswanan values, just as Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, her fiancé, does. She could have asked for a big diamond engagement ring and he would have bought it for her, but she did not. She wanted a small ring, which was more than affordable for him. Mma Ramotswe believes in being fair with people and promotes her secretary to assistant private detective when she asks to become a detective. Like Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, she has a problem saying no to people at times. When she learns how Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni ended up with Motholeli and Puso, she says that he is a kind man and she is lucky to be marrying him. She wants to be a mother to the children and moves them to her Zebra Drive house. Mma Ramotswe is forty-years old when all this happens. She solves the mystery of Michael Curtin's death and arranges for Mrs. Curtin to meet her grandson.



Mrs. Andrea Curtin

Mrs. Andrea Curtin is an American who becomes a client of Mma Ramotswe. Her husband had been an economist with the World Bank and had accepted an assignment in Botswana ten years earlier. Mrs. Curtin and her son Michael, then eighteen, had come to Botswana with him. Michael became involved with a German named Burkhardt who formed an agricultural commune in Molepolole. When the Curtins returned to America, Michael refused to go with them, saying that his work at the commune was too important. One day, the Curtins are notified by the Embassy that Michael is missing. Mrs. Curtin returns to Botswana to try to find him but there is no trace of him. He had just disappeared. When Jack dies of pancreatic cancer, Mrs. Curtin returns to Botswana six months later and hires Mma Ramotswe to find whatever she can about Michael. Mma Ramotswe was recommended by the American Embassy. As a result of Mma Ramotswe's efforts, she learns the true facts of her son's death and meets her nine-year-old grandson.

Mma Florence Peko

Mma Florence Peko is the maid of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. She entertains her male friends at her employer's house when he is out. She will lose her job when Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni marries Mma Ramotswe and plots to prevent the marriage. She plots to have a gun planted in Mma Ramotswe's house but is herself turned in to the police for having a gun and is arrested.

Mma Makutsi

Mma Makutsi is the secretary of Mma Ramotswe. She is a cum laude graduate of the Botswana Secretarial College and is promoted to assistant private detective at the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency.

Mr. Letsenyane Badule

Mr. Letsenyane Badule is a client of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. He wants to know if his wife is cheating on him. This is the first case that Mma Makutsi handles.

Mma Silvia Potokwane

Mma Silvia Potokwane is the matron of the orphan's farm. She had been a good friend of the mother of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and persuades him to accept two orphans to give as a wedding gift to Mma Ramotswe.



Carla Smit

Carla Smit is a South African woman who lived with Michael at the farm and bore his son, also named Michael. She and her son meet Mrs. Curtin as a result of the efforts of Mma Ramotswe.

Motholeli

Motholeli is a teenage orphan who is confined to a wheelchair. She and her brother Puso go to live with Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe.

Puso

Puso is an orphan and the younger brother of Motholeli. He and his sister go to live with Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe.

Dr. Oswald Ranta

Dr. Oswald Ranta teaches at the University. He worked at the farm when Michael was there and provides the facts about Michael's death.



Objects/Places

Botswana

Botswana is a nation in Africa that is the scene for the novel. Gaborone is the capital city.

Zebra Drive

Zebra Drive is where the house of Mma Ramotswe is located.

Molepolole

Molepolole is located near Gaborone and is the site of the agricultural commune where Michael Curtin disappeared from.

No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency

No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency is the work place of Mma Ramotswe and is located in Gaborone near Kgale Hill.

Tlokweng

Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors is the workplace of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and is located in Gaborone.

Silokwolela

Silokwolela is the name of the agricultural cooperative located near Molepolole.

The House on Nyerere Drive

The House on Nyerere Drive is where Mma Badule is having an affair and where Mma Makutsi interviews the maids.

The House of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni

The House of Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is located near the old airfield.

The Orphans Farm

The Orphans Farm is located near Gaborone and run by Mma Sylvia Potokwane.

Bulawayo

Bulawayo is a town in the African country of Zimbabwe where Mma Ramotswe goes to see Carla Smit.

Themes

Ethics and Values

One of the dominant themes in the book is ethics and values. As believers in the old traditional Botswanan traditions and culture, both Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe are concerned with ethics and values. They both have businesses which they run. In his mechanics business, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni stands by his word. When he quotes a price, he stands by it even if the job ends up costing more. When he accepts the orphans from the orphan's farm, he promises that he will take care of them and provide for them. Once he has told them that, he knows he cannot retract his promise even if Mma Ramotswe breaks their engagement over the issue. When he gives his word, he doesn't go back on it. He feels morally bound to stand by it. That is the kind of person he is.

Mma Ramotswe is also concerned with ethical issues in her detective business and she and Mma Ramotswe have several discussions about ethics. When Mma Matuski uncovers the details of Mma Bandule's affair, they wonder how much to tell Mr. Bandule. Mma Ramotswe says that a detective has an ethical duty to give the client the true facts. When Mma Ramotswe interviews Dr. Ranta about the details of Michael's death, she resorts to deceitful tactics to obtain that information and later wonders if she did the right thing. These characters try to do what is morally and ethically correct.

Kindness

Kindness is a second theme of the novel. Both Mma Ramotswe and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni describe each other as kind people. He donates time to the orphan's farm performing work on a pro bono basis. Due to his kindness and inability to say no, he is persuaded by the matron, Mma Potokwane to take two orphan children into his home. He impulsively makes a commitment to care for the children that he feels that he cannot morally walk away from. Once he does this, he wonders how Mma Ramotswe will react when she finds out. He hopes that she will not break off their engagement and blames Mma Potokwane for his situation. Mma Ramotswe finds out when she meets Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni shopping with the children. He has bought new clothes for them and had their pictures taken by a photographer. When she hears the story of how he ended up with the two children, she laughs and says he is the kindest man in all of Botswana and she is lucky to be marrying him and to be the mother of the two children. They have enough to make a good home for the children and Mma Ramotswe insists that they come and live with her that very day. She also tries to be kind to her clients. She goes out of her way to make sure that Mrs. Andrea Curtin meets her grandson and that Mr. Bandule and his son are not hurt.



Good Listening Skills

Good listening skills are another theme of the book. This is important for a detective like Mma Ramotswe. She is able to talk to people and correctly deduce a lot about them and also able to learn a lot of small bits of information by making small talk. For example, consider her meeting with Mma Tsbago, the hitchhiker she picked up on her first trip to the farm. She accurately deduced that the woman worked at a shop in Bagorone and traveled to her village on the weekends to visit her children. Mma Tsbago provided her with an introduction to Mma Potsane who was at the farm when Michael Curtin disappeared. Mma Potsane showed her around the ruins of the farm and talked about the people who lived there ten years ago. From a photo, she obtained the name of Oswald Ranta who lived there at the time. When she went to interview him at the University, she made small talk with the secretary and learned he was a womanizer who had been unfair with the secretary's cousin. She was able to use this information to obtain the facts that she needed from Dr. Ranta. She sensed that he had not killed Michael but was lying when he said he did not know anything about his death. She was able to obtain the information she needed from him because she listened to the information the secretary gave her.

Style

Point of View

The Tears of the Giraffe is written in the third-person point of view with the narrator being the author, Alexander McCall Smith. The use of the third-person point of view allows the author to provide background and other information to the reader. This avoids the problems of the first person point of view where the knowledge of the reader is limited to events that occur in the presence of the storyteller. The reader has a better overall picture of the action of the novel of this kind with the third person point of view. This is true in situations like the backgrounds of the two orphan children, Motholeli and Pusa.

There is plenty of dialogue between the different characters in the novel. This allows the reader to become familiar with the personalities of the different characters and to see how they interact with one another. The reader also gains information about characters and events from this dialogue.

The third-person approach works well for a novel of this type and is the correct point of view for this book.

Setting

The setting for the action of the novel takes place in two countries in Africa. Most of the action occurs in Botswana, in and around the city of Gaborone. Mma lives in a house on Zebra Drive and has her No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency office near Kgale Hill. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni has his house near the airfield and his place of employment at his garage called the Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. The agricultural cooperative where Michael Curtin lived is called Silkwolela and it is located near the village of Molepolole which is where Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni was born. There are also scenes at the orphan's farm where Motholeli and Pusa lived until Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni brought them to his house. When Mma Makutsi investigates Mma Badule, she follows her to a house on Nyerere Drive where she interviews the maids and learns the details of the relationship. There are also scenes at the jewelers, the post office, the University and other places in Gaborone as the characters move around the area. The only scenes that are outside of Botswana are when Mma Ramotswe travels to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe to interview Carla Smit.

Language and Meaning

The language and the meaning of terms in the novel is easy to read without any hidden meaning. The novel is written in a simple to understand language. There may be a few words that the reader is unsure of and wants to look up. There are a few foreign language terms that add to the realism of the novel but don't detract from the



understanding of the material. The meaning of the terms and phrases is clear and easy to understand and contributes to the ease of reading the novel. The language of the novel is very polite with the women always being addressed by the title Mma. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is always referred to as Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. Mma Ramotswe is never referred to by her first name of Precious, even by Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. The language and writing style make the book fast and easy reading as there is little to slow down the reader. This makes the book light and enjoyable reading for the reader who does not get bogged down in unnecessary details.

Structure

The structure of the book is very simple. There are twenty chapters, each with a title indicative of the contents of the chapters. The chapters vary in length from four to twenty-two pages and offer very easy reading. Each chapter covers the actions of one of the main characters, usually either Mma Ramotswe or Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni. Some cover the action of other characters. Even with this patchwork approach, there is still a cohesiveness to the action of the novel. There are no gaps and the reader does not feel that the story is jumping around, even though it may be. When the reader finishes a chapter about Mma Ramotswe's activities, he/she begins to wonder what Mr. J.L.B. Maketoni was doing at the time.

There is no Table of Contents for the book. Although one would have been nice, it isn't really needed. There is also no Index, Preface or Introduction and none of these detracts from the action of the novel.

The Tears of the Giraffe is written for quick and easy reading and is worth the reader's time.

Quotes

"All that Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni needed to bring was a suitcase containing his clothes and his bar of carbolic soap. That was all" (Chapter 1, pg. 16.)

"Such questions were undoubtedly challenging, but they tended to lead to further questions which simply could not be answered. And at that point one ended up, as often as not, having to accept that things are as they are simply because that is the way they are" (Chapter 2, pg. 19.)

"Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni felt a surge of pride as she spoke. This was the woman he admired, the woman who believed in the old Botswana values and who had no time for showiness" (Chapter 5, pg. 58.)

"Sitting in her office at the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, Mma Ramotswe reflected on how easy it was to find oneself committed to a course of action simply because one lacked the courage to say no. She did not really want to take on the search for a solution to what happened to Mrs. Curtin's son; Clovis Andersen, the author of her professional bible, *The Principles of Private Detection*, would have described the enquiry as stale" (Chapter 6, pg. 61.)

"He had not spoken to Mma Ramotswe about it and it seemed quite wrong to land her with something like this without consulting her first. Was this the way to start a marriage? To take a decision of such momentum without consulting one's spouse? Surely not" (Chapter 8, pg. 88.)

"He had allowed himself to be bamboozled into taking them by that persuasive Mma Potokwane, and he had hardly thought out all of the implications" (Chapter 10, pg. 105.)

"Perhaps one day she would find a place where she would stay. That would be good. To know that the place you were in was your own place - where you should be" (Chapter 12, pg. 125.)

"Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni is maybe not the most fashionable man in town, but he is one of the best men there is. You could trust him with anything. He would never let you down. And I know he would never have any secrets from me. That is very important" (Chapter 13, pg. 136.)

"But they did not teach moral philosophy there, and she had no idea how to resolve the dilemma with which her successful investigation had presented her. She would leave that to Mma Ramotswe" (Chapter 13, pg. 147.)

"As he sat in the office of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors and contemplated a mound of paperwork, he made two decisions. one was to employ a secretary - a decision which he knew, even as he took it, that he would never get round to implementing - and the



second was to stop worrying about how the children had arrived and to concentrate on doing the right thing by them" (Chapter 14, pg. 150.)

"Everybody cut some corners, and if she was proposing to deal with Mma Ramotswe in this unconventional way, it was only because it was necessary to use such measures against somebody who was so patently a threat to Mr. J. L.B. Matekoni. How could he defend himself against a woman as determined as that?" (Chapter 15, pg. 163.)

"But then she thought: Do I want to marry the kindest man in the country? I do. Can I be a mother for them? I can" (Chapter 16, pg. 171.)

"This girl was different. She understood the feelings of engines, and would be a great mechanic one day - that was clear" (Chapter 18, pg. 198.)

"Life was messy, and sometimes there was no other way. She had played Dr. Ranta at his own game, and had won, just as she had used deception to defeat that cruel witch doctor in her earlier case. It was regrettable, but necessary in a world that was far from perfect" (Chapter 19, pg. 213.)

"These little marks here are tears," she said. "The giraffe gives its tears to the women and they wave them into the basket" (Chapter 20, pg. 226.)



Topics for Discussion

Why is the issue of confidentiality important to both Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni and Mma Ramotswe? Where are the problems in Gaborone society that make confidentiality difficult? Give examples in your answer.

Why does Mma Ramotswe agree to investigate Michael's disappearance? Why does she feel that she should not have taken the case?

How did Mma Makutsi become an assistant private detective? What was her first case?

How did the orphans end up living with Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni? In what way did he act impulsively?

How does Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni explain the orphans to Mma Ramotswe? How does she react?

What moral dilemmas does Mma Ramotswe face in her work? How does she deal with them?

What were the circumstances surrounding the death of Michael Curtin? How did Mma Ramotswe help Mrs. Curtin?