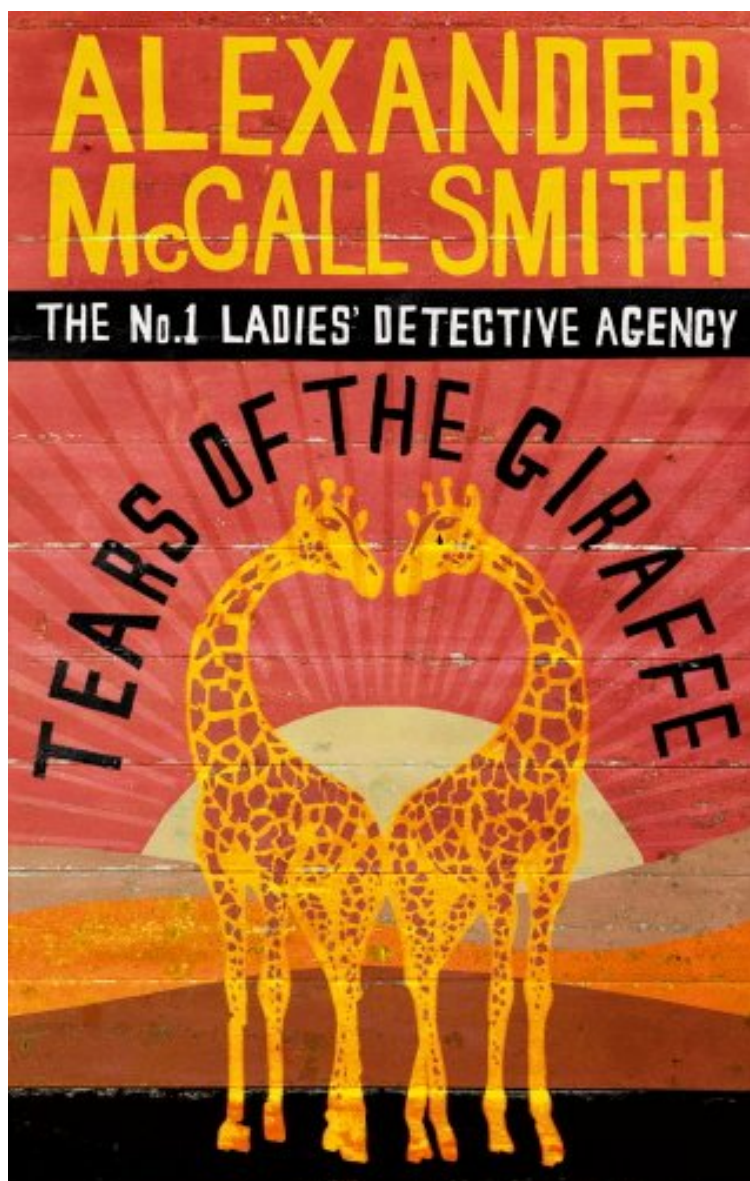


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Tears of the Giraffe



*Par Alexander McCall Smith
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Par Alexander McCall Smith : Tears of the Giraffe before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tears of the Giraffe:

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Description : Description du produitThe No.1 Ladies Detective Agency introduced the world to the one and only Precious Ramotswe -the engaging and sassy owner of Botswanas only detective agency. In Tears of the Giraffe Mma Ramotswe faces a new challenge: resolving a mothers pain for her son who is long lost on the African plains. Mma Ramotswes own impending marriage to the most gentlemanly of men, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, the promotion of Mmas secretary to the dizzy heights of Assistant Detective, and the arrival of new members to the Matekoni family, all brew up the most humorous and charmingly entertaining of tales. Acclaim for The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency: "The authors prose has the merits of simplicity, euphony and precision. His descriptions leave one as if standing in the Botswanan landscape. This is art that conceals art. I havent read anything with such unalloyed pleasure for a long time." - Anthony Daniels, Sunday Telegraph "The most entertaining read of the year." -The Guardian "An African Miss Marple . . . superb." -

Presentation de l'diteur THE NO.1 LADIES' DETECTIVE AGENCY introduced the world to the one and only Precious Ramotswe - the engaging and sassy owner of Botswana's only detective agency. TEARS OF THE GIRAFFE, McCall Smith's second book, takes us further into this world as we follow Mama Ramotswe into more daring situations ... Among her cases this time are wayward wives, unscrupulous maids, and the challenge to resolve a mother's pain for her son who is long lost on the African plains. Indeed, Mma Ramotswe's own impending marriage to the most gentlemanly of men, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, the promotion of Mma's secretary to the dizzy heights of Assistant Detective, and the arrival of new members to the Matekoni family, all brew up the most humorous and charmingly entertaining of tales.* TEARS OF THE GIRAFFE was selected as one of the GUARDIAN's top ten 'Fiction Paperbacks of the Year, 2000

Extrait CHAPTER ONE Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's House Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, proprietor of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors, found it difficult to believe that Mma Ramotswe, the accomplished founder of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, had agreed to marry him. It was at the second time of asking; the first posing of the question, which had required immense courage on his part, had brought forth a refusal--gentle, and regretful--but a refusal nonetheless. After that, he had assumed that Mma Ramotswe would never remarry; that her brief and disastrous marriage to Note Mokoti, trumpeter and jazz aficionado, had persuaded her that marriage was nothing but a recipe for sorrow and suffering. After all, she was an independent-minded woman, with a business to run, and a comfortable house of her own in Zebra Drive. Why, he wondered, should a woman like that take on a man, when a man could prove to be difficult to manage once vows were exchanged and he had settled himself in her house? No, if he were in Mma Ramotswe's shoes, then he might well decline an offer of marriage, even from somebody as eminently reasonable and respectable as himself. But then, on that noumenal evening, sitting with him on her verandah after he had spent the afternoon fixing her tiny white van, she had said yes. And she had given this answer in such a simple, unambiguously kind way, that he had been confirmed in his belief that she was one of the very best women in Botswana. That evening, when he returned home to his house near the old Defence Force Club, he had reflected on the enormity of his good fortune. Here he was, in his mid-forties, a man who had until that point been unable to find a suitable wife, now blessed with the hand of the one woman whom he admired more than any other. Such remarkable good fortune was almost inconceivable, and he wondered whether he would suddenly wake up from the delicious dream into which he seemed to have wandered. Yet it was true. The next morning, when he turned on his bedside radio to hear the familiar sound of cattle bells with which Radio Botswana prefaced its morning broadcast, he realised that it had indeed happened and that unless she had changed her mind overnight, he was a man engaged to be married. He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock, and the first light of the day was on the thorn tree outside his bedroom window. Smoke from morning fires, the fine wood smoke that sharpened the appetite, would soon be in the air, and he would hear the sound of people on the paths that criss-crossed the bush near his house; shouts of children on their way to school; men going sleepy-eyed to their work in the town; women calling out to one another; Africa waking up and starting the day. People arose early, but it would be best to wait an hour or so before he telephoned Mma Ramotswe, which would give her time to get up and make her morning cup of bush tea. Once she had done that, he knew that she liked to sit outside for half an hour or so and watch the birds on her patch of grass. There were hoopoes, with their black and white stripes, pecking at insects like little mechanical toys, and the strutting ring-neck doves, engaged in their constant wooing. Mma Ramotswe liked birds, and perhaps, if she were interested, he could build her an aviary. They could breed doves, maybe, or even, as some people did, something bigger, such as buzzards, though what they would do with buzzards once they had bred them was not clear. They ate snakes, of course, and that would be useful, but a dog was just as good a means of keeping snakes out of the yard. When he was a boy out at Molepolole, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni had owned a dog which had established itself as a legendary snake-catcher. It was a thin brown animal, with one or two white patches, and a broken tail. He had found it, abandoned and half-starved, at the edge of the village, and had taken it home to live with him at his grandmother's house. She had been unwilling to waste food on an animal that had no apparent function, but he had won her round and the dog had stayed. Within a few weeks it had proved its usefulness, killing three snakes in the yard and one in a neighbour's melon patch. From then on, its reputation was assured, and if anybody was having trouble with snakes they would ask Mr J.L.B. Matekoni to bring his dog round to deal with the problem. The dog was preternaturally quick. Snakes, when they saw it coming, seemed to know that they were in mortal danger. The dog, hair bristling and eyes

bright with excitement, would move towards the snake with a curious gait, as if it were standing on the tips of its claws. Then, when it was within a few feet of its quarry, it would utter a low growl, which the snake would sense as a vibration in the ground. Momentarily confused, the snake would usually begin to slide away, and it was at this point that the dog would launch itself forward and nip the snake neatly behind the head. This broke its back, and the struggle was over. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni knew that such dogs never reached old age. If they survived to the age of seven or eight, their reactions began to slow and the odds shifted slowly in favour of the snake. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's dog eventually fell victim to a banded cobra, and died within minutes of the bite. There was no dog who could replace him, but now . . . Well, this was just another possibility that opened up. They could buy a dog and choose its name together. Indeed, he would suggest that she choose both the dog and the name, as he was keen that Mma Ramotswe should not feel that he was trying to take all the decisions. In fact, he would be happy to take as few decisions as possible. She was a very competent woman, and he had complete confidence in her ability to run their life together, as long as she did not try to involve him in her detective business. That was simply not what he had in mind. She was the detective; he was the mechanic. That was how matters should remain. He telephoned shortly before seven. Mma Ramotswe seemed pleased to hear from him and asked him, as was polite in the Setswana language, whether he had slept well. "I slept very well," said Mr J.L.B. Matekoni. "I dreamed all the night about that clever and beautiful woman who has agreed to marry me." He paused. If she was going to announce a change of mind, then this was the time that she might be expected to do it. Mma Ramotswe laughed. "I never remember what I dream," she said. "But if I did, then I am sure that I would remember dreaming about that first-class mechanic who is going to be my husband one day." Mr J.L.B. Matekoni smiled with relief. She had not thought better of it, and they were still engaged. "Today we must go to the President Hotel for lunch," he said. "We shall have to celebrate this important matter." Mma Ramotswe agreed. She would be ready at twelve o'clock and afterwards, if it was convenient, perhaps he would allow her to visit his house to see what it was like. There would be two houses now, and they would have to choose one. Her house on Zebra Drive had many good qualities, but it was rather close to the centre of town and there was a case for being farther away. His house, near the old airfield, had a larger yard and was undoubtedly quieter, but was not far from the prison and was there not an overgrown graveyard nearby? That was a major factor; if she were alone in the house at night for any reason, it would not do to be too close to a graveyard. Not that Mma Ramotswe was superstitious; her theology was conventional and had little room for unquiet spirits and the like, and yet, and yet . . . In Mma Ramotswe's view there was God, Modimo, who lived in the sky, more or less directly above Africa. God was extremely understanding, particularly of people like herself, but to break his rules, as so many people did with complete disregard, was to invite retribution. When they died, good people, such as Mma Ramotswe's father, Obed Ramotswe, were undoubtedly welcomed by God. The fate of the others was unclear, but they were sent to some terrible place--perhaps a bit like Nigeria, she thought--and when they acknowledged their wrongdoing they would be forgiven. God had been kind to her, thought Mma Ramotswe. He had given her a happy childhood, even if her mother had been taken from her when she was a baby. She had been looked after by her father and her kind cousin and they had taught her what it was to give love--love which she had in turn given, over those few precious days, to her tiny baby. When the child's battle for life had ended, she had briefly wondered why God had done this to her, but in time she had understood. Now his kindness to her was manifest again, this time in the appearance of Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, a good kind, man. God had sent her a husband. After their celebration lunch in the President Hotel--a lunch at which Mr J.L.B. Matekoni ate two large steaks and Mma Ramotswe, who had a sweet tooth, dipped into rather more ice cream than she had originally intended--they drove off in Mr J.L.B. Matekoni's pickup truck to inspect his house. "It is not a very tidy house," said Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, anxiously. "I try to keep it tidy, but that is a difficult thing for a man. There is a maid who comes in, but she makes it worse, I think. She is a very untidy woman." "We can keep the woman who works for me," said Mma Ramotswe. "She is very good at everything. Ironing. Cleaning. Polishing. She is one of the best people in Botswana for all these tasks. We can find some other work for your person." "And there are some rooms in this house that have got motor parts in them," added Mr J.L.B. Matekoni hurriedly. "Sometimes I have not had enough room at the garage and have had to store them in the house--interesting engines that I might need some day." Mma Ramotswe said nothing. She now knew why Mr J.L.B. Matekoni had never invited her to the house before. His office at Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors was bad enough, with all that grease and those calendars that the parts suppliers sent him. They were ridiculous calendars, in her view, with all those far-too-thin ladies sitting on tyres and leaning against cars. Those ladies were useless

for everything. They would not be good for having children, and not one of them looked as if she had her school certificate, or even her standard six. They were useless, good-time girls, who only made men all hot and bothered, and that was no good to anybody. If only men knew what fools of them these bad girls made; but they did not know it and it was hopeless trying to point it out to them. They arrived at the entrance to his driveway and Mma Ramotswe sat in the car while Mr J.L.B. Matekoni pushed open the silver-painted gate.

She noted that the dustbin had been pushed open by dogs and that scraps of paper and other rubbish were lying about. If she were to move here--if--that would soon he stopped. In traditional Botswana society, keeping the yard in good order was a woman's responsibility, and she would certainly not wish to be associated with a yard like this. They parked in front of the stoop, under a rough car shelter that Mr J.L.B. Matekoni had fashioned out of shade-netting. It was a large house by modern standards, built in a day when builders had no reason to worry about space. There was the whole of Africa in those days, most of it unused, and nobody bothered to save space. Now it was different, and people had begun to worry about cities and how they gobbled up the bush surrounding them. This house, a low, rather gloomy bungalow under a corrugated-tin roof, had been built for a colonial official in Protectorate days. The outer walls were plastered and whitewashed, and the floors were polished red cement, laid out in large squares. Such floors always seemed cool on the feet in the hot months, although for real comfort it was hard to better the beaten mud or cattle dung of traditional floors. Mma Ramotswe looked about her. They were in the living room, into which the front door gave immediate entrance. There was a heavy suite of furniture--expensive in its day--but now looking distinctly down-at-heel. The chairs, which had wide wooden arms, were upholstered in red, and there was a table of black hardwood on which an empty glass and an ashtray stood. On the walls there was picture of a mountain, painted on dark velvet, a wooden kudu-head, and a small picture of Nelson Mandela. The whole effect was perfectly pleasing, thought Mma Ramotswe, although it certainly had that forlorn look so characteristic of an unmarried man's room. "This is a very fine room," observed Mma Ramotswe. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni beamed with pleasure. "I try to keep this room tidy," he said. "It is important to have a special room for important visitors." "Do you have any important visitors?" asked Mma Ramotswe. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni frowned. "There have been none so far," he said. "But it is always possible." "Yes," agreed Mma Ramotswe. "One never knows." She looked over her shoulder, towards a door that led into the rest of the house. "The other rooms are that way?" she asked politely. Mr J.L.B. Matekoni nodded. "That is the not-so-tidy part of the house," he said. "Perhaps we should look at it some other time." Mma Ramotswe shook her head and Mr J.L.B. Matekoni realised that there was no escape. This was part and parcel of marriage, he assumed; there could be no secrets--everything had to be laid bare. From Publishers Weekly Alexander McCall Smith (The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency) offers the second and third installments of his dignified, humorous Botswanan series. In *Tears of the Giraffe*, PI Precious Ramotswe tracks a missing American man whose widowed mother appeals to Ramotswe; meanwhile, the imperturbable detective is endangered at home by her fianc's resentful maid. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.