The Kalahari Typing School for Men

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Summary

The story is about a detective agency run by a woman in the small African country of Botswana. Mma Ramotswe has two problems to solve. One is with a man who left his pregnant girlfriend many years ago and wants to put things right with her, and the other regards her employee who is unknowingly seeing a married man.

Chapter 1: Mma Precious Ramotswe runs the No 1 Ladies Detective Agency in Gaberone, Botswana, with the help of her assistant, Mma Makutsi. The agency shares a building with Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors, a garage run by Mr JLB Matekoni, a man Mma Ramotswe is going to marry. Mma Ramotswe is worried about Mma Makutsi's social life and the fact that she doesn't have a husband. Mma Makutsi does not see this as a problem as she is sure the right man will come along. The two businesses don't make much money and Mma Makutsi plans to open a driving school.

Chapter 2: Mr Matekoni has two adopted children, a boy called Puso and his sister, a disabled girl called Motholeli. One day, Mma Ramotswe notices that the girl is unhappy and discovers that she is missing her dead mother, and is being teased at school by a rich girl who said that her mother didn't want her. Mr Matekoni is in the garden when he sees a dead bird that has been killed by a stone. Puso caused the bird's death with a catapult. When asked about this, the boy starts crying, tells both of them he hates them, and runs off.

Chapter 3: Puso sulks. The next day, Mma Makutsi tells her that a new detective agency, run by men, has opened in town. The Satisfaction Guaranteed Detective Agency is owned by Mr Cephas Buthelezi, a retired CID officer from Johannesburg. He is a rude and pretentious man who believes men are better detectives than women. Mma Ramotswe meets Mr Molefelo. They go for a walk together and he tells her of the night he was attacked by thieves and nearly killed. This incident has prompted him to confess to something awful he has done in the past.

Chapter 4: Mma Makutsi is contemplating her jobs of assistant detective and garage secretary and is not optimistic about her future. She decides to open a typing school for men, she phones a friend who works at the secretarial college and secures the use of twelve old, broken typewriters. Mr Molefelo tells Mma Ramotswe his story. When he was eighteen, he lived with Mma Tsolamosese while studying in Gaborone. He met a girl and she became pregnant. To get the money for an abortion, he stole Mma Tsolamosese's radio and sold it. Now, he wants to put right the wrong he has done and give the two people some money. He needs Mma Ramotswe's help to find them.

Chapter 5: Mma Ramotswe begins her search for Mma Tsolamosese and Mr Molefelo's former girlfriend, Tebogo. She manages to get Mma Tsolamosese's address from an official at the pensions office. Meanwhile, Mma Makutsi has found a room in a church to set up her new business, and enough students respond to her newspaper advertisement to begin classes. Despite the fact that some of the typewriters don't work well, the first class is a success and she is very happy.

Chapter 6: Mma Ramotswe arrives at Mma Tsolamosese's house. She tells her that Mr Molefelo stole the radio all those years ago and now wants to make amends. Mma Tsolamosese agrees to see him. A two-year-old girl is brought into the room. She is the daughter of Mma Tsolamosese's deceased daughter. The child has an incurable illness and will almost certainly die before adulthood. Meanwhile, Mma Makutsi tells her students to write an anonymous essay about the important things in their lives. One of them is a sort of love letter by one of the men to her. She knows who has written it because of a repeated error in the text caused by a faulty typewriter key, and writes a note of encouragement on the essay.

Chapter 7: Mma Ramotswe and Mr Matekoni drive to the orphan farm so that he can fix a broken water pump and she can talk to the owner, Mma Potokwani about their adopted son, Puso. Mr Matekoni decides that the pump is beyond repair, but Mma Potokwani at first refuses to spend money on a new one. He convinces her that she must. She tells Mma Ramotswe that Mr Matekoni should be more of a father figure to Puso, and he agrees to try.

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Back at the office Mma Ramotswe guesses correctly that Mma Makutsi has met a man. She admits it and describes him as very handsome with a moustache. Mr Bernard Selelipeng who wrote the amorous essay, has asked her out. He tells her he is divorced. They spend a pleasant evening together and he suggests they go to the cinema the following night.

Chapter 8: Mma Ramotswe reads a newspaper article to Mma Makutsi. It is an interview with Mr Buthelezi, of the other detective agency, criticising her business and her ability to be a good detective because she is a woman, and boasting about his own achievements. She realises that his comments could badly affect her business. That afternoon a rich doctor visits the agency and tells Mma Ramotswe that she has employed the services of Mr Buthelezi's agency and is very dissatisfied. She paid him to follow her husband, who she suspects of having an affair, and all he told her is that her husband goes to church frequently, which she thinks is untrue. Mma Ramotswe agrees to take up the case and the woman shows her a picture of her husband, a man with a moustache. Later that night Mma Ramotswe is introduced to Mma Makutsi's new boyfriend and recognizes him as the man in the photo.

Chapter 9: Mma Ramotswe begins her search for Tebogo, Mr Molefelo's ex-girlfriend and drives to her hometown, Molepolole. She arrives and goes immediately to see an old friend, Mma Boko, who knows everyone in town. Mma Boko tells her that the girl is now called Mma Tshenyogo and lives next door to her. Mma Ramotswe goes to talk to her. Back in the agency she tells Mr Molefelo that Tebogo had been very upset about the baby and his attitude to her, but that she had married well and was happy. She suggests that he makes amends by giving Tebogo's daughter money to go to a private school. Later, Mr Molefelo talks to Mma Tsolamosese and learns about her sick grandchild. It is decided that he should give some money to make the child's short life a happy one.

Chapter 10: Mma Ramotswe turns her attention to the dilemma she faces regarding Mma Makutsi. She has a duty to her client, but then the private life of an employee should not be her business. She visits Bernard Selelipeng and tells him she knows about the affair and that his wife has hired her to report on him. She knows that he has no intention of leaving his wife and suggests that he move away from town under the pretence of having got a new job. Later, Mma Makutsi reveals that she didn't really love Bernard and is not displeased that he has moved away. Mr Buthelezi declares he is giving up his agency and Mma Makutsi suggests that he opens a driving school. At the end there is a big party and everyone feels content with the way their lives have turned out.

Background and themes

Africa: The book is written about people living in a small African country. Several aspects of life there come up in the story. There is reference to the prevalence of Aids, which is Mma Tsolamosese's granddaughter's illness, to typical food and drink such as rice and chicken and bush tea, to the arid climate, to the use of water pumps instead of piped water, and to the traditional chauvinistic attitudes held by Mr Buthelezi.

Feminism: The central character is portrayed as a strong yet caring woman. She has her own business, is astute, very diplomatic and fully in charge of her life. She is unusual in a predominantly male-dominated society. Mma Makutsi is a determined woman, who starts her own business and is not devastated because a handsome man leaves her life. As for the men, one is an adulterer, one a big-headed chauvinist, and one is a man who abandoned a girl in a time of crisis to protect his own career prospects.

Repentance and forgiveness: Mr Molefelo is forced to come to terms with an event in his past. He deeply regrets how he treated his girlfriend and the family he lived with and he does everything he can to undo the wrong. He eventually finds out that these people have forgiven him.

Discussion activities

Introduction

After reading

1 **Discuss and write:** Ask the students to talk about and then write the answers to the following questions: *Where did the author study at university? What did he teach in Botswana? How many non-fiction books has he written? When did this book come out? How many books about Mma Ramotswe's agency are there? What does his wife do? When did the British stop governing Botswana?*

Chapter 1

While reading (p. 3, after 'Surely Mma Ramotswe could tell her how to find a husband?')

2 **Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and tell them they are going to think about a husband for Mma Makutsi. Ask them to consider the following questions: *Should he be the same age as her? Should he have the same interests as her? Should he be rich? Should he be good-looking? Should he have the same level of intelligence as her? What can she do to find this man?*

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After reading

3 **Write, ask and answer:** *Write How old was Mma Ramotswe?* on the board and elicit the answer (In her late thirties.). Now tell students to write similar questions about Chapter 1. Students then mingle as a group, asking and answering each other's questions.

Chapter 2

Before reading

4 **Predict and discuss:** Tell the students that Puso, the adopted son of Mma Ramotswe, is going to do two bad things. In pairs ask the students to try to predict what he is going to do. Then ask the students to discuss what kind of bad things they, their brothers and sisters and their friends did when they were children.

Chapter 3

While reading (p. 18, after 'Trust your inquiries to a MAN!')

5 **Discuss:** Mr Buthelezi is a private detective. Put the students in small groups and ask them to think of all the jobs they know in English. Put them on the board and add some of your own. Then, tell the students to discuss whether some jobs are done better by men or by women.

After reading

6 **Write and guess:** Write *The business was making money.* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (losing not making). Now students choose a sentence from Chapter 3 and rewrite it changing one word. Students mingle, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

Chapter 4

While reading (p. 25, after 'My girlfriend was now becoming angry with me.')

7 **Role play:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to act out a conversation between Mr Molefelo and his girlfriend. Mr Molefelo wants to get rid of the baby and his girlfriend doesn't. See Discussion activities key for a possible beginning to the conversation.

After reading

8 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *parents, ten, prison, nurse, radio, president, cupboard.* Ask the students to talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5

After reading

9 **Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapter 5. Tell then to write it again, making five spelling changes to words in the text. Students then show their paragraphs to another pair, who have to identify the mistakes.

Chapter 6

After reading

10 **Research:** Mma Tsolamosese's daughter undoubtedly died of the disease Aids. Ask the students to look for information on the Internet about this disease, how it is affecting people in Africa and what is being done to combat it. Students then give an oral presentation of what they have found out.

Chapter 7

While reading (p. 46, after 'Will you be free?')

11 **Pair work:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to talk about the times they have asked a boy or a girl out on a date. Tell them to talk about where they went, what they did and whether it was a success or a disaster.

Chapter 8

While reading (p. 50, after '… and she should reply.')

12 **Write:** Ask the students to write to the newspaper complaining about the views expressed by Mr Buthelezi.

Chapter 9

Before reading

13 **Guess:** Ask the students to predict the answers to these questions: *Will Tebogo still be alive? Will Mma Ramotswe find Tebogo? Will she be married? Will she have any children and if so how many? Will she be a nurse?*

Chapter 10

14 **Game:** Put the students into small groups and ask them to write ten questions about any part of the book. When they've finished, each group reads out their questions and the other groups have to write their answers on a piece of paper. The group with the most correct answers wins.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.

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