



Reading Guide

***Dark Traces* by Martin Steyn**

1. The yesterday-today-and-tomorrow (*Brunfelsia pauciflora* “Eximia”) is a Brazilian shrub with flowers that start out as violet, fading to white as the days pass. In Afrikaans, it is also called the *verbleikblom*, fading flower. What does the name “yesterday-today-and-tomorrow” convey about where the main character, Inspector Magson, finds himself emotionally at the beginning of the book?
2. In what ways do Mags and Menck complement each other as partners?
3. Dr. Sinette Killian, the forensic pathologist, states that “murder victims who were hanged are extremely rare”. Why do you think the killer chose this method?
4. Why is the Cape robin (“Emma’s little bird”) so important to Mags? Discuss the irony that its fate provides the impetus for Mags to take the first reluctant step towards healing.
5. Who do you think left Rommel on Mags’s porch and why do you suspect that individual (or those individuals)? Why do you think the author chose not to reveal this person’s identity?
6. Rommel’s arrival is a significant factor in Mags’s struggle to heal. In what ways does Rommel’s presence change Mags and why do these changes occur?
7. *Dark Traces* veers into a number of morally gray areas, particularly when it comes to taking a life. While Mags is hunting a sadistic serial killer, who takes pleasure in torture and murder, he also helped his terminally ill wife to die. Discuss the contrasts between the two types of homicide. Do you feel Mags was justified in assisting Emma to die? Why or why not?
8. Do you think Jeanine Rheeder was willfully complicit in her husband’s crimes or was she a victim, too? Why?
9. Why do you think Mags couldn’t carry on as a detective?
10. Modern crime fiction authors frequently tend to employ a multitude of short chapters to maintain urgency and pace. *Dark Traces* only has 19 chapters. What impact, if any, do you feel this has on the reading experience? What are the advantages and drawbacks of each approach?