

The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden Study Guide

**The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden by Jonas
Jonasson**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	13
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	18
Chapter 7.....	21
Chapter 8.....	24
Chapter 9.....	27
Chapter 10.....	29
Chapter 11.....	31
Chapter 12.....	33
Chapter 13.....	35
Chapter 14.....	37
Chapter 15.....	40
Chapter 16.....	43
Chapter 17.....	46
Chapter 18.....	48
Chapter 19.....	50
Chapter 20.....	53
Chapter 21.....	56
Chapter 22.....	59



[Chapter 23..... 61](#)

[Chapter 24 and Epilogue..... 64](#)

[Characters..... 66](#)

[Symbols and Symbolism..... 69](#)

[Settings..... 72](#)

[Themes and Motifs..... 74](#)

[Styles..... 78](#)

[Quotes..... 79](#)



Plot Summary

The Girl Who Saved the King of Sweden is a zany, caper-type of novel with some serious undertones and a very admirable heroine.

Nombeko is a poor young black girl from the slums of South Africa who ends up involved in a convoluted plot involving an atomic bomb and a plot to overthrow the Swedish monarchy. Born in the 1960s in South Africa, during apartheid, she is set up to fail. However, she is gifted with a rare intelligence, a quick wit and an uncanny capacity to easily manage situations and charm those she meets.

Her journey takes her from the slums of Soweto to a top secret government facility, where she unintentionally helps build seven secret atomic bombs. There she gets entangled with two Israeli Mossad agents and a low-level Chinese government official before fleeing to Sweden, where she immediately meets two twin brothers. One twin yearns for a normal life, while the other seeks to depose the Swedish king. Unfortunately, one of the bombs follows her to Sweden, and there the adventure picks up.

In Sweden, Nombeko's gang expands to three Chinese art forgers, a PTSD-ridden American veteran, the two twins, and a young revolutionary woman. Together they live in an old pillow factory, hiding their bomb and hoping for a way to get rid of it. For years they coexist as family, each person following their own pursuit, until the Mossad shows up to reclaim their bomb. At this early climax, the building they live in is destroyed by the Swedish National Task Force, their American veteran is killed, and the crew must flee with the bomb in tow.

By means almost unexplainable and filled with wild coincidences, the group is able to hide the bomb on an old potato farm for years, undetected. During these years Nombeko and her group manage to settle into something like normal life. One twin gets a doctorate degree, Nombeko makes millions farming potatoes, eventually they make a magazine together that the Prime Minister loves to read. But the bomb will not wait forever, and events conspire to finally bring Nombeko a way to get the bomb out of the barn so she can live without worry.

The relief comes when an old friend of hers, the Chinese government man, shows up in Sweden to visit the King. However, now he's the President of China. Nombeko, the twins, and Celestine drive to the palace in hopes of the President remembering Nombeko. Of course he does, and gets her an audience with the king and the Prime Minister. However, trouble ensues when she gets them all in the back of the truck to see the bomb and the monarchy-obsessed twin slams the back of the truck and kidnaps them all.

For a long twelve hours trapped on the potato farm, Nombeko and her gang get to know the king and the Prime Minister in ways that didn't expect. Each person in the crowd learns something new about judging people without knowing them. By the end of the



night, they are all friends, and Nombeko and the Prime Minister have a way to get rid of the bomb.

The next day, the Chinese President is preparing to leave, but first he has a meeting with the Prime Minister. He asks his old friend Nombeko to join them. Meanwhile, the President's wife is at the airport, having a difficult time getting her new Arabian horse on the plane back to China. Nombeko rushes to the airport to help, and finds that the President has bought a new car to ship back to China. The crate for the Volvo is the perfect size for the bomb and Mrs. President's horse, and Nombeko makes the switch.

The bomb goes to China, where the kind President can have it dismantled and study its technology, and the rest of Nombeko's crew finds their place in a bomb-free world.



Chapter 1

Summary

The main character, 14-year-old Nombeko -- lives in Soweto, an impoverished area fifty miles from Johannesburg, South Africa. She is an orphan and lives in a shack in the shanties, where most of her neighbors earn a small living emptying the city latrines and hauling the waste to the river. The girl is self-taught and highly intelligent; in an area where many of the poor spend their few dollars on drugs and alcohol, she has kept a clear head and has elevated herself through discipline and hard work. In the beginning of the story she is promoted to a section manager in the latrine-emptying company, because she can add numbers quickly and is a hard worker. However, her boss, a white man named Piet du Toit, dislikes her because her math is always better than his and she is constantly improving the workforce. However, she can't read yet.

She finds a reading teacher in a slick con man named Thabo. They meet when he tries to harass her in the public shower, and she stabs his thigh with her scissors. After she follows him home to claim her scissors back, she finds he lives in a green shack filled with books. Thabo gained his books by reading to an old man who had lost his eyesight. The old man loved poetry, and Thabo learned lots of poetry as a teenager, which he then used to seduce countless women. Thabo was well-read, and a liar. He would use his knowledge gained from books to enhance his storytelling. When he was a young man he made his way to Lesotho, lying his way into countless jobs and several women's beds. He made friends with the tribal leaders and won their influence. He helped a chief broker a deal with the colonial British, and for his trouble he received a bag of rough cut diamonds from the new chief-turned-President.

For a few short months, Thabo and Nombeko enter a partnership, in which he promises to teach her to read and she promises not to stab him when he gets fresh. She learns a lot and becomes very literate when Thabo is knifed in the back in his shack. When he doesn't show up for work, Nombeko finds his dead body. While she is cleaning him for burial she finds fourteen diamonds in the holes where his teeth should be, and after a search under his linoleum, finds the bag given to Thabo by the chief.

That day, Nombeko is fired from her job. Piet du Toit is tired of being upstaged by her. Nombeko packs all of her belongings, a few of Thabo's books, and walks fifteen miles into Johannesburg, where she is promptly hit by a car.

Analysis

This chapter covers a lot of ground. For one, the reader is introduced into the poverty-stricken world into which Nombeko is born. The contrast between the hopeless, often sad area of her origin and the brightness of her intellect is striking. The author almost literally paints Nombeko as a diamond in a rough, dark place. Her cleverness is



matched only by the con man Thabo, who by his looks and his poetry had his way with dozens of women and a few chiefs. However, with all of Thabo's cleverness he is content to sit in his dirty shack in the slums. Nombeko, on the other hand, has an eye towards working hard and creating space for her to move upward. The reader sees her saving her money, improving the workforce at her job in the latrines, and exercising her mind by doing math problems in her head and having Thabo teach her to read.

In later chapters, Nombeko has gained some savvy in the world and moves more easily through men that wish to keep her down and oppose her brightness. However, in this chapter she falls short against Piet du Toit, her dimwitted employer. She is unable to outwit him, and loses her job. It is to be noted that she is fired only because she outshines her boss by finding errors in his math and correcting his financial records. This is the first unfair treatment readers see of Nombeko, but readers will grow in wisdom and cleverness as the story progresses.

With her newfound freedom, Nombeko clears out her shack and decides to walk to the library in Praetoria. This, the ultimate goal in her 14-year-old mind, is the reader's introduction to Nombeko's lifelong love affair with reading. She learned how from Thabo, but for the remainder of the novel Nombeko will read absolutely everything she can get her hands on. Fifteen miles into her walk, she reaches Johannesburg, and here the reader sees the author's first of many examples of wicked ironies as Nombeko is hit by a car. One of the author's consistent themes is how people are all connected, and how one's actions give rise to further actions and have wide-ranging effects. This car accident is the point on which the entire plot begins to fall, like dominoes.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Nombeko and Thabo are unusual for their time and place of birth?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is a way out of the cycle of drugs and poverty in which Nombeko's mother found herself?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think it was ethical for Nombeko to take Thabo's diamonds?

Vocabulary

linoleum, disadvantaged, shantytown, incarnate, deposed, imperial



Chapter 2

Summary

Ingmar Qvist is a man from Sweden who holds an unusual obsession with shaking the King of Sweden's hand. When he was a young teen, the monarch stopped his motorcade, tousled Ingmar's hair, and called him a beautiful boy. Now a married man in his thirties, Ingmar has spent considerable money and time trying to put himself in the King's way again, just for a handshake. His wife Henrietta is patient and relatively long-suffering, his colleagues at the Royal Mail Service think he's an idiot, but Ingmar is determined to meet this goal. The beginning of chapter 2 indicates that things are "about to turn topsy-turvy", but three considerable undertakings had to happen first. First, Ingmar goes directly to the palace and is chased off the grounds. Second, he accidentally forces the King's car off the road, causing an accident. Luckily, the King is unharmed. Third, he follows the monarch to Nice and sees him on the promenade. Plucking up his courage, he speaks to the King, but he rebuffs Ingmar and calls him a scoundrel.

After these events, Ingmar is finished with his obsession with the king. He goes home to his wife.

Analysis

The sections in the novel featuring Ingmar are a display of the author's skilled use of irony, hyperbole, and the absurd. Ingmar is a ridiculous person, and Henrietta is ridiculous for being married to him for decades and allowing his silly quest to continue. Spurred on by a random compliment given in his youth, Ingmar devotes his life to the king. His and Henrietta's story is significant because two of the novel's main characters will come from their marriage, and their personalities are molded in Ingmar's ridiculousness.

The author takes the time to explain Ingmar's three failures in detail, with time in between to note that he barely has a paying job and the brunt of the family work must fall on his wife. Ingmar is also a picture of an extreme fanaticism that will be present in the next generation of characters.

Discussion Question 1

Is Ingmar's goal reasonable?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the King calls him names, when Ingmar finally meets him?



Discussion Question 3

Is it appropriate for Henrietta to be so patient with her husband's foibles?

Vocabulary

industrious, seamstress, commemorative, subsequent, clientele, squandering, extraneous, cortege, fortified, undertaking, chronic



Chapter 3

Summary

In chapter 3 the action returns to Nombeko, who was last seen on a sidewalk in Johannesburg, run down by a car that was driving on the sidewalk. She is injured - a broken arm, wrist, and jaw - but survives. When she is well enough she is taken to court, because the driver of the car, a German named Englbrecht Van Der Westhuizen, or The Engineer, is suing her for walking in front of his car. The Engineer was drinking; his blood alcohol level was five times the legal limit. He accused Nombeko of walking in the street in front of his car. The story takes place in 1976, when racism and apartheid were still woven into South African society, and so the judge finds in favor of the drunk-driving engineer. He orders Nombeko to pay a fine for causing The Engineer's car to be dented. Nombeko has a little bit of money; in fact she has a handful of diamonds sewed into her jacket. However, she can't produce a diamond to pay the fees, or she would surely lose her diamonds and be arrested for stealing. She appeals to the judge, pointing out that The Engineer was indeed drunk and she didn't do anything wrong. The judge feels kindly to her and so reduces her fine, and commands her to work off her fine in The Engineer's house. Nombeko will need to work for seven years to pay back the fine. Nombeko doesn't argue with this pronouncement, feeling that it would be useless to do so; she also figures she can work long enough to heal from her injuries, then run away.

The Engineer is a German who is not really very competent at anything relating to engineering. He is commissioned by the Prime Minister, who is an old Nazi, to build six atomic bombs for him to use against the neighboring countries. The Engineer lives on a large compound that hides all of their secret research. It is surrounded by an electric fence, guard stations, and dogs, and is staffed by two hundred technicians and scientists that are doing all the work. He feels a keen pressure to perform but doesn't know exactly what to do.

Nombeko finds the compound a welcome change from living in the slums of Soweto. She has a bed, an actual bathroom, and three meals a day. There is also a library in the compound; it is mostly math and science materials, but she sneaks books from there all the same and reads them voraciously. The Engineer notices that she's reading and is incredulous, and she seems to understand every single thing she reads. As a white man living in the 1970s, he feels she has very little value and he treats her as such, but he's also baffled by her intelligence. He makes a point to not use her name, but at the same time he lets her read all she wants and gives her his keys and lets her take on responsibilities.

Soon she is solving math equations he doesn't understand. She is helping him with the technical side of his work, which presents a moral dilemma for her. Nombeko soon realizes that she's in a dangerous position. Being a black woman, she is expendable in her society, and after living for several years in the midst of a top secret government



project, she feels like she will be shot the second the bombs are built. On the other hand, if The Engineer does a poor job because he doesn't actually know what he's doing, he will be replaced and then she will be replaced, and shot. She feels she has to find balance between helping him succeed, but not too quickly.

She decides she must escape, and finds help in three Chinese girls that are also indentured to The Engineer because of legal troubles. Years before they sold him a fake artifact out of their home. When he learned it was fake he had them arrested, and they are five years into a ten year service in his home. They tell Nombeko they can help by poisoning the dogs, so they will get sleepy, allowing Nombeko to hide in the one dumpster that an older black woman wheels outside the compound once per day. However, their plan backfires when the girls overdose the dogs, killing them all.

Analysis

Chapter 3 is quite a long chapter that establishes the second of Nombeko's residences in the story - Pelindaba, a top-secret government compound where she is indentured as a cleaning woman to a German engineer - an alcoholic engineer that barely knows what he's doing. How she ended up there is a demonstration of the racism that defined South Africa during this period - this is another of the author's running themes. Although The Engineer was drunk and the accident was clearly his fault, she is found guilty because she is a black teenager, a lesser being than a wealthy, educated white man. Her work in his home is to pay the debt for causing damage to his car.

In the courtroom Nombeko shows her quick wit and well-spoken intelligence by asking the judge to reconsider. She also figures, she is injured, and staying in a rich fellow's home is better than having no place to stay. Escaping is always at the back of her mind.

Pelindaba is not a bad place to be. The reader sees Nombeko's amazing capacity for hard work and resourcefulness in this chapter. She educates herself, reads all she can get her hands on, and makes herself indispensable to The Engineer. By the end of the chapter she knows more about building atomic bombs than he does. The bomb - that which will dominate the remainder of the story - is introduced in this chapter. The Engineer is tasked with building atomic bombs at a secret research facility, except that he knows very little about atomic bombs. In The Engineer the reader sees racism at work - he is white, with a degree, and is given a job he is unqualified for. He also has no qualms about allowing Nombeko to do his thinking for him, because as a black woman, she should be doing anything he wants her to.

She finds herself in a precarious position, knowing she is expendable to The Engineer's employers, and feels she should try to escape. The author's love of the absurd shows itself again in three Chinese girls that are also indentured to The Engineer. Their story is also silly and seemingly insignificant - they made some fake Chinese pottery, sold it to The Engineer as real, and got caught - but their 'talent' will come back again and again in the novel. Their actions will also have an effect on the overarching plot of the novel.



Discussion Question 1

What are the ways that South Africa's society devalues people like Nombeko?

Discussion Question 2

How is it possible that someone that understands so little about engineering as The Engineer would be given such an important task?

Discussion Question 3

How are the Chinese girls important to the story?

Vocabulary

frustration, permanently, stationed, collaboration, obsequious, commenced, anticipated, apartheid, predecessor, essentially, impudent, toil



Chapter 4

Summary

The narration returns to the story of Ingmar in Sweden. After his humiliation at the hands of the king, Ingmar leaves Nice by hitchhiking, because he is out of money. During his travels he meets a Salvationist, who offers Ingmar a meal and a place to sleep. He tells Ingmar he is motivated by the story of the Good Samaritan in the Bible. When Ingmar awakens, he steals the man's bicycle and rides as far as he can before getting a flat tire. Then he sells the bike and uses the money to buy a train ticket home.

When he arrives at home he tells his wife, Henrietta, that he is finished chasing the king and that it's time to make a baby. Ingmar says it is now his life's work to depose not only the current king, Gustav V, but also to eradicate the entire monarchy. The next fourteen years pass without any pregnancies. Ingmar spends his time working at the Royal Mail and reading all he can about fertility and republicanism. At one point he hangs an inflammatory banner reading, "Die, you goat" on the highway so the king's motorcade will see it. Henrietta becomes addicted to cigarettes.

Finally, at the suggestion of a new sexual position, Henrietta gets pregnant. Ingmar spends the months reading to her uterus all about constitutions and republicanism and systems of government. When the time comes to have the baby, Henrietta has a boy, and then has another. Because of Ingmar's natural goofiness and the fact they were delivered at home, the couple can't tell which one is which, thus they are both named Holger, which was the name of the Salvationist that fed Ingmar fourteen years before, the one whose bicycle Ingmar stole.

Analysis

In this chapter the action returns to the lives of Ingmar and Henrietta, far away in Sweden, and a few decades back from Nombeko's predicament in Pelindaba. Ingmar was snubbed by the king and so rushes back to his home and his wife. On the way, he steals a bicycle from a religious man named Holger, a man who took him in, fed him a meal, and provided him a place to sleep. This action on Ingmar's part is interesting, because the reader gets a glimpse of how single minded he is, to the point of being mentally unstable. The event is a foreshadowing of the next three decades of Ingmar's life, how his single-minded focus on eradicating the monarchy will take over any amount of good sense in his life.

Ingmar is finally ready to start a family, but it's not as easy as he'd hoped. Henrietta, the most patient woman, continues to work while Ingmar researches fertility and how to get pregnant. Meanwhile he continues his anti-monarchy shenanigans. In Henrietta the reader sees how potently one's actions affect those close to them: his wife has waited patiently for their life to begin, only to have it stall another fourteen years.



A new sexual position yields a pregnancy, and when the baby is ready, the author wields absurdity once again- there are twins, and they arrive so quickly there isn't a doctor on hand. They name the first baby Holger, and Ingmar gets so confused he can't tell the boys apart, and so the second is named Holger as well. The reader should surmise that with such a ridiculous beginning, the twins' lives will be characterized by farce.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Ingmar's focus is admirable or silly?

Discussion Question 2

Is Henrietta's long-suffering helpful to Ingmar?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it ironic that Ingmar named his sons Holger?

Vocabulary

eradicated, salient, vocation, precisely, monarchist, defamation, comprehensive, unconventional, phenomenon, neglect, dysfunctional, scapegoat



Chapter 5

Summary

Nombeko's chances inside the compound don't get much better, because no thanks to The Engineer, the technicians solve a few glitches and start asking for a test detonation. Again, she needed to slow the project down in a way that didn't draw attention to The Engineer's shortcomings. His team had begun drilling in the Kalahari Desert in preparation for the test. Because the Chinese girls were so resourceful with the antifreeze poisoning, she turned to them again for help. It turned out that through some sneaking around on their part, the Chinese girls's mother was on the approved list of mail to go in and out of the compound. Her name, with the word "Professor" tagged onto it, was above security clearance. Using this address, Nombeko writes a letter to the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, to tell him about South Africa's plan to detonate the bomb. She give them details, including the coordinates of the test site.

A few weeks later, at the White House, the letter circulates through to the CIA director, Stansfield M. Turner. He would have ordinarily dismissed it, had they not already heard similar information from a Soviet source. The CIA director shows the letter to President Carter. President Carter promptly calls the Prime Minister to ask him about the bomb and is treated to a tirade and a strong denial. The PM immediately calls The Engineer and says he must move his test detonation site elsewhere. The Engineer is happy to because it means he can stall for another year.

Two years actually go by, giving Nombeko and The Engineer some time to figure out a new test site. During that time, the Prime Minister is replaced, by a man named P.W. Botha, who then needed to visit the project first hand to see how it was progressing. Nombeko suggests to The Engineer that he should try to detonate the bomb in the ocean, and he passes this suggestion on to the PM. After the test successfully occurred, PM Botha paid a celebratory visit to the compound. The dinner was going well until the PM asked The Engineer a highly technical question, of which he didn't know the answer. The Engineer falters and Nombeko cleverly supplies the answer; this does not escape the Prime Minister's notice, but he forgot after a few glasses of champagne. Production for the actual bombs continues.

Another two years pass; President Carter is replaced by President Reagan. The Engineer installs a TV in the compound and Nombeko watches it constantly to get her news. At this time the Chinese hears of the South African nuclear program via the Soviets and their new Premier, Gorbachev. The Chinese, who have control of Taiwan, are afraid that the South Africans will try to sell a nuclear device to the Taiwanese, to use against the Chinese, so they decide to send a Chinese emissary to the compound to see what the South Africans have going. This task must be done in relative secret; the Chinese can't be seen cavorting with the South Africans in case the Soviets see. Prime Minister Botha has no interest in seeing the Chinese emissary either; he decides



to plan to have the visitor go on a safari with The Engineer, and he would stumble upon the dinner, making it look like a chance meeting.

When Nombeko hears of this plan, she decides that she will try to escape at this time. Her seven years with The Engineer are now past nine. The Engineer makes sure she will be on the safari so she can help him answer any technical questions. She plans to escape as they are moving from the safari to the restaurant. The first minute of the safari, they lose their interpreter to a scorpion sting; and since Nombeko had taught herself the Wu dialect of Chinese, she is able to step in as interpreter. She immediately tells the Chinese man what The Engineer's plans are, and that the PM would be stopping by soon. They arrive at the restaurant, and Nombeko is readying herself for her escape when The Engineer demands she remove her jacket and leave it in the car. The jacket, her only jacket, the one with diamonds sewn into the lining, looked ridiculous, and he couldn't let the PM see her wearing that. And since Nombeko can't escape without her jacket, she resigns herself that her escape opportunity has passed.

Nombeko joins the men for dinner. Eventually she tells the Chinese man The Engineer's team has completed a few nuclear weapons, but that he can rest assured she hasn't heard of any plans that involve the Taiwanese. The Chinese man thanks her for her honesty and demands to Prime Minister Botha that she be given something to eat. They had averted another crisis, but Nombeko was still stuck with the Engineer.

Analysis

The plot moves along in a very amusing way in this chapter. The author's fondness for the politics of the time period show, as he uses the real world leaders of the day in hilariously fabricated conversations. Also very evident is the amazing resourcefulness that Nombeko can summon for one "uneducated" according to the world's standards. She writes a letter to the then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter to ask for his help with South Africa's expanding nuclear program. This gutsy move does manage to temporarily stall the project, as South Africa's Prime Minister gets a phone call from President Carter.

A few years pass, as The Engineer loses his hold on the project but gains a more potent addiction to alcohol. Nombeko is the opposite; she knows more about the bomb program than he does. World leaders rise and fall - the author discusses them all, focusing the reader on what is happening in the world, seeing how these changes will affect his small characters. The role of Prime Minister changes during this period, and the new PM is more aware of The Engineer's shortcomings than his predecessor. Botha's knowledge causes a growing sense of urgency on Nombeko's part.

At this point in the story, the author introduces a connection to China. Again, he demonstrates the affect of small decisions and how they cause ripples throughout time and place. South Africa must invite a Chinese emissary to their country to ensure that the atomic program isn't being shared with Taiwan. China sends a low-level government employee that will show up later in the story. Nombeko, for her part, treats the Chinese



representative well and charms him with her wit and intelligence; this too, will become important in later chapters of the story. A ridiculous chance meeting on safari is planned. Prime Minister is "far above" meeting with a simple man from China; in contrast, Nombeko treats the man with great respect and provides a pleasant evening for him. He and Nombeko talk as equals, their stations below the Prime Minister, yet their conversation over his head. The author uses irony here to show that people are not precisely their title, or their outward appearance.

When the "dinner" ends, Nombeko has made a friend, the Chinese government is satisfied, and Nombeko gets to eat a fine meal.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't the Prime Minister want to simply meet with the Chinese official?

Discussion Question 2

Why can't Nombeko escape from the dinner?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author's consistent discussion of world politics enhance the plot of the story?

Vocabulary

authentic, anonymous, detonate, formulated, magnitude, respite, coffers, pompous, predecessor, internment, presumptuous, dullard, escalation, etiquette



Chapter 6

Summary

Ingmar begins raising his two young sons to be staunch republicans, believing in elected officials, so that they could one day depose the king. He is reluctant to send them to the local school, because they would waste time learning state-mandated subjects that Ingmar thought would detract from learning what he wanted them to. He then decides that since nobody actually knew they had twins, they could send one boy to school at a time. Ingmar quits his job at the Royal Mail to stay home and teach his sons.

In the meantime Ingmar joins the Republican Club, but this is short lived, as its members find his methods too strong. After that, he tries the Social Democrats, but his attendance in that club is likewise short in its duration. Ingmar wants to be a part of these political parties as a means to work his way to Parliament to depose the king, but Ingmar's temperament isn't right for politics.

The boys grow, educated haphazardly in their every-other-day school plan. One boy is more studious than the other, so the plan only half works. Ingmar spends their off days drilling them on republican topics, and often disappears to Stockholm to plan secret missions against the king. Ingmar watches the political rumblings around him and concludes that violence is an acceptable means for change.

Holger One responds well to his political education, but does not have a head for school. Holger Two is the opposite. However, Holger One is the child that's actually registered with a passport, while Holger Two essentially doesn't exist. Ingmar begins to speak of taking over the country bit by bit; at this, Henrietta demanded he stay home and stop disappearing on missions. He agrees, and so passes the next twelve years. On the eve of the boys' graduation from school, Ingmar disappears to Stockholm and is gone for days. Henrietta takes the opportunity to sit the boys down and tell them about their family, their father, and their secret. She confesses that she doesn't actually know which of the twins was born first.

The boys listen to the story; one of them is inspired and one of them dismayed. The next morning she asks her 18-year-old sons what they thought of her confession. Holger Two feels his mother's burden. Holger One assures his mother that he would never fail in the cause of republicanism, that he would continue Ingmar's fight for as long as it took. Henrietta, heartbroken over the course her life had taken, immediately suffers a heart attack and dies.

Analysis

This chapter is significant because it sets up the huge personality difference in the twins. For the duration of the novel they are referred to as Holger One and Holger Two.



Ingmar doesn't want them to spend their lives receiving government-mandated education, and when they are six he realizes that they really only have to send one of them to school, since nobody knows they had twins. This plot development continues the string of absurdity in the plot; this is quite a fantastical notion, as is the idea of a father being so devoted to a political cause as to brainwash his children. However, the twins's unusual upbringing sets up their quest for meaning as adults, although their quest will take on very different forms.

Educating the twins is tricky. The boys take turns going to school, but one is smarter than the other, so the teacher is generally confused. On the other hand, as the boys grow one takes more to the republican zeal than the other does. It is during this period that Ingmar also lays the foundation in his sons that violence is an acceptable means for change. After trying several respectable, political routes to Parliament, and failing, Ingmar determines that violence can grab people's attention rather well. Being raised with this in mind will affect how the Holgers - as men - will react to the presence of the atomic bomb in their lives.

The reader also learns in this chapter that although Ingmar and Henrietta have no idea which son was born first, they just picked One, and he is the boy that is actually "registered" and has a paper existence in their society. Holger Two essentially doesn't exist, and this fact will affect how he sees the world as an adult.

Ingmar spends the 18 years of the boys's youth going on a few "secret" missions to Stockholm now and again. During one of these missions, Henrietta sits the boys down and give them a confession/apology about their birth and their father's relative craziness. The plot takes a wild turn here; Holger Two feels the weight of his mother's burden and wants to comfort her. Holger One wants her to know that he will fight the king to his own death. Henrietta, overwhelmed that these conversations are the sum of her life and her role as a mother, essentially dies of a broken heart. Their "cause" in her death will affect both of the young men.

Discussion Question 1

Why can't Ingmar join a political party?

Discussion Question 2

What is one way that swapping the boys' school days doesn't work?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Henrietta die?

Vocabulary

quibble, poach, logistics

Chapter 7

Summary

Before The Engineer realizes what's happening, his technicians have built an extra bomb. He is usually drunk by ten o'clock in the morning, so it shouldn't have been a surprise, but having a bomb built outside of their instructions was dangerous. Nombeko tells The Engineer that they should just hide it in hopes that the Prime Minister will commission a new bomb before too long.

South Africa as a country isn't doing too well. Because of its apartheid policy, the biggest players in world politics all have trade embargoes against South Africa, and the economy is suffering. The world leaders are afraid that if they force South Africa to give up apartheid, something worse, like Communism, will take its place. Although other countries have their own issues, it becomes clear that President Reagan of the United States and Prime Minister Thatcher of the United Kingdom will be calling the shots in this issue. Other countries such as Libya and Sweden start to line up behind the big players, while South Africa is on the other side.

At the compound, with only The Engineer and the three Chinese girls to keep her company, Nombeko notices a shift in the air. They no longer have visitors, technicians no longer rush about in their halls. In fact, the place seems eerily still. Prime Minister Botha is also feeling things tighten around him. He has no idea how to spin South Africa's racism problem to turn out well. He's very unpopular with his people, and his economy has practically stopped. There is unrest in all of the poor areas of the cities, and with the whole world watching he can hardly turn the army against the poor. The radical Communist group, the ANC, is knocking at Botha's door to simply take over the country, but Botha can't have six (actually seven) nuclear weapons in their hands. He thinks he could possibly just dismantle them to show the public that he is responsible, so he puts The Engineer on standby in case that becomes necessary.

The Engineer sees that things are about to go bad. He summons two Jewish Mossad agents and offers to sell them the extra bomb. The Israelis are interested in the bomb, but they are afraid to have The Engineer telling all of their secrets after the transaction occurs. On the other hand, they don't want him to sell the bomb to just anybody. So, that night, one of the agents steals a car and runs over The Engineer as he is walking home from the bar, and kills him.

Afterwards, the Israeli agents seek out Nombeko, who has the only key to the corridor where the extra bomb is held. They are planning to use her to get the bomb to them, and to kill her afterwards. They have a meeting in which they discuss how to get the bomb out of the compound. The Israelis suggest using the diplomatic mail service, since the bomb is housed in a crate. These transactions require haste, because once the authorities determine that The Engineer's death wasn't an accident, security in the compound would be increased. They offer to take her out in the trunk of their car, but



she refuses and demands a plane ticket instead. Because Libya was run by a madman, Sweden seemed to be her best choice for a South-African-supporting destination.

The agents are ready to proceed with the transaction, when Nombeko reveals that she has recorded their entire conversation and sent the tape via messenger to a remote location. If she doesn't land safely in Stockholm, the tape will be made public. They agree to her terms. The tape is mailed via the Chinese girls to Stockholm; the bomb is sent to Jerusalem. The Mossad agents allow Nombeko to win, but vow to get her back another time. All manage to leave the compound just before The Engineer's death is ruled a murder.

Analysis

The action moves back to South Africa - the situation there must change, and the author uses the 1980s-era political climate to demonstrate this. There is an extra bomb that was somehow built without The Engineer's knowledge. South Africa, with its apartheid policy, is a very unpopular country, and Western nations such as the U.S. and the U.K. are lining up against it. The Prime Minister doesn't know how to end apartheid without something like Communism taking its place. The author explains all of these issues, particularly the political climate, in detail to show the reader how and why decisions are being made.

Nombeko, the Prime Minister, and The Engineer can all see how things are going. The Engineer decides to fix matters himself, and calls his two Israeli engineers (actually Mossad agents) and offers to sell them the bomb. The Mossad agents are interesting characters because they are sinister. To this point in the story the reader has seen some bumbling and mis-handling on the part of the PM and The Engineer. However, the Mossad agents are trained to kill and not afraid to do so. After making their arrangements with The Engineer, they run over him with a car, and then it is only Nombeko that can finish the transaction.

In this transaction the reader sees how Nombeko has developed in dealing with dangerous people. She has seemed to be able to have her way with the PM and The Engineer, but she recognizes that the Mossad agents are dangerous. She senses that they will kill her. The author uses suspense well in this part, as the reader isn't sure what Nombeko is going to do until it's done, and he reveals that she has outsmarted them by taping their conversation and mailing the tape far away. The reader can also see where the story is headed, because Nombeko is going to Sweden. Earlier in the chapter the author does lay the groundwork for this; out of the western nations lining up against South Africa, only Sweden with its peaceful nature would still count itself as South Africa's friend.

Nombeko escapes to Sweden, the bomb is sent to Jerusalem in the diplomatic mail, but the reader knows this isn't the end of the story. Because of excellent foreshadowing and the author's attention to detail - every little event will come back around in this story - the reader can count on seeing the Mossad agents again.



Discussion Question 1

Why is The Engineer killed?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nombeko choose to go to Sweden?

Discussion Question 3

How did Nombeko trick the Mossad agents in the end?

Vocabulary

simultaneously, protocol, observant, capsized, atrocious, kowtow, erratic, initiative, precarious, treacherous



Chapter 8

Summary

Back in Sweden, Ingmar and his sons begin their lives without Henrietta. Holger One wishes to fight the monarchy in his mother's honor, while Holger Two is mainly interested in how they were going to earn money. Luckily, Henrietta's father dies, and Holger One (he didn't know there was a Holger Two) inherits his estate. This estate included a vehicle and a warehouse full of imported goods from the Soviet Union - caviar, linen, boots, Inuit sealskins, etc. The most interesting find was an eight-foot statue of Lenin, except the artistic rendering was more of a kinder, gentler Lenin, so the father-in-law was able to buy him for a good price. Holger Two is disappointed at their windfall; like his mother, he wishes for a normal life. The goods in the garage are enough to support them all for eight years.

Ingmar decides to alter the statue of Lenin to make it look like the Swedish king in hopes of selling it to a wealthy royalist. He finishes and it looks grand; they decide to heft it onto the back of the truck. During this process, the cables snap and the statue falls on top of Ingmar, crushing him and killing him.

The twins are alone. Holger One had always followed his father blindly, while Two always doubted. And yet, Two felt a responsibility to his family. The now 26-year-old men have no way to earn money, and because Two technically doesn't exist, only one of them can apply for higher schooling or look for a job. They start with selling their house and moving into the back of the truck.

The twins find an old pillow factory that needed delivery service, so they offer their truck. Then they find that the owner is about to retire with a pension, so they offer to buy him out and take over his entire business, while paying him a monthly stipend on top of his pension. The pillow manufacturer agrees with one condition: it turns out that he has an American soldier living in his pottery barn. The man had escaped from a Japanese prison during World War II and found his way to Sweden, where he still thinks he sees the CIA lurking behind every corner. He is harmless; he lived in the pottery barn and made pottery that he sold at the market. But the old man wouldn't have him thrown out of the building. The transaction is made, the old man is a pensioner at last, and is immediately hit by a bus.

The relationship with the American starts off well, and the twins begin to live their new life. One immediately finds a girlfriend in a crazy protester he meets downtown. Two is ousted from his room in the pillow factory and must move across the hall. And then, one day Two makes a pillow delivery to the refugee camp outside of Stockholm. Sitting outside the storeroom, he sees a lone black woman, who speaks to him. It is Nombeko.



Analysis

In this chapter, the two narratives finally join together. The reader has seen the Holgers grow to the age of 26. Likewise Nombeko, who was supposed to spend seven years with The Engineer, spent 12, and is also now 26. The reader has patiently waited to see what the author was planning with these two different storylines, and in this chapter they unite.

Without Henrietta, Ingmar and his sons try to find their way in the world. Holger One and his father still talk of republican causes, while Holger Two is more focused on finding a job. He is disillusioned with his father and his teachings. The men find luck (and awesome irony), in the death of Henrietta's Communist father, who leaves his possessions to Holger One. His possessions turn out to be a warehouse filled with smuggled Russian goods, and the men have an income that lasts for eight years.

Ingmar's death is a hilarious use of irony. Included in their inheritance is an 8-ft tall statute of Lenin, which is of no use to them. However, Ingmar spends months altering it to look like the King of Sweden so he can sell it. He succeeds at this, only to have it fall on him and crush him. Ingmar's death is a catalyst. Holger Two no longer has to feel bound to taking care of his father; he can look for a job and a way to live "a normal life." Their new life begins at a pillow factory in a condemned building, which will be there home for more than a decade. Holger Two's kind, forthright manner gains them access to this job and this home.

In this move the author introduces two new characters. Holger One meets an "angry young woman" at a demonstration; before the end of the novel she will have a name and will contribute to the plot in absurd ways. Also, living in the pillow factory is an American veteran with PTSD who suffers from paranoia. He has enjoyed living in a pottery barn in the basement of the pillow factory. This man will impact the plot very little, until it's absolutely vital. His presence provides another example of the author planting small, seemingly insignificant characters/events that become vital later in the story.

In the last paragraph of the chapter, Holger drives to the refugee camp to deliver some pillows, and meets Nombeko.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Ingmar's father-in-law have a warehouse filled with Russian goods?

Discussion Question 2

How are the twins fulfilling their roles in this chapter?



Discussion Question 3

How did the author manage to place Nomebko in the right place to meet Holger?

Vocabulary

abashed, tomfoolery, irresolute, winching, spontaneously, marvel



Chapter 9

Summary

Nombeko is sitting outside the refugee camp when Holger Two appears to unload a truck full of pillows into the storeroom. As he walks by she asks him a question in English, and they strike up a conversation. Nombeko is shocked to find a white man that is so polite and respectful. Holger offers her a ride downtown to the Israeli embassy, where her antelope meat should be waiting. Once at the embassy, she signs some papers and rejoins Holger in the truck, only to find that the packages had been accidentally switched, evidently by the Chinese girls back in South Africa: Nombeko was in possession not of the antelope meat, but the atomic bomb.

Meanwhile, the Mossad agent gets a phone call from the Israeli Prime Minister, who is upset to learn that he has been shipped twenty pounds of dried antelope meat in lieu of an atomic bomb. The agent immediately understands what occurred and vows to find Nombeko and kill her in the most excruciating way possible.

Holger and Nombeko make their way out of Stockholm to the suburbs where he lives and she tells him the whole story. He refuses to take the bomb back to the embassy and furthermore wants Nombeko to live in his building so they can stay clear of the Mossad. She admits that leaving the scheme in the hands of the three Chinese girls was a bad idea. On the drive, they discuss how much the bomb would destroy if it was detonated, and Nombeko estimates a 38-mile radius.

Once they arrive at Holger's building, they wrestle the crate into a deserted corner and cover it with pillows. They get settled to talk and Nombeko demands he explain the story of "why he doesn't exist." Once Holger tells the story, Nombeko tells him that lots of people in South Africa don't have paperwork, and he shouldn't feel so down about not existing. They have just settled into a comfortable sort of friendly silence when the crate pops open beneath them and the three Chinese girls tumble out.

Analysis

The author uses this chapter to set the stage for what the remainder of the book will focus on. Holger and Nombeko become fast friends outside of the refugee camp. For Nombeko, she has never met a white man that treated her with such respect and kindness. This is key to the author's focus on racism and humanity. Holger is immediately impressed with Nombeko, and his manner reflects this, and this is new to her.

They join forces to collect her "package" from the embassy, only to find that it's the atomic bomb and not the antelope meat Nombeko was expecting. The package, which Nombeko told the Mossad agents contained the non-existent damning tape, was actually supposed to contain some dried antelope meat. In this way, Nombeko tricked



the Mossad agents. She did not mean to trick them in the second way, in which the bomb was sent to the wrong city. Nombeko recalls that she left the silly Chinese girls in charge of sending the packages, and they sent the bomb to Sweden instead of Israel.

The action jumps to Jerusalem, where the reader sees that the Israelis have received not a bomb, but twenty pounds of antelope meat. The Mossad agents vow to have their revenge on Nombeko, and the reader can guess that they will show up again.

Because of the bomb, Holger and Nombeko are now bound together in this dangerous secret. The author has made sure that Holger has a place to store a bomb - an abandoned pillow factory that's condemned and beneath the local police's notice, to be exact. However, they also have two anti-monarchy fanatics living there as well. They decide Nombeko will stay there with the bomb.

Once they arrive at the factory and get the bomb settled, the crate pops open and the three Chinese girls tumble out, and the plot gets a little bit more twisted. However, at this point the author can build on one of the themes in the novel - family. Although the people living in the family are a motley group of people, all "off the grid" and not contributing to society in the normal way, over the next several chapters they will gel into a family unit, demonstrating the author's point that "family" can be found in unlikely ways.

Discussion Question 1

Did the Chinese girls send themselves to Sweden on purpose, or did they mean to go to Jerusalem?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nombeko think that Holger is remarkable?

Discussion Question 3

How does Nombeko's opinion of Holger affect him?

Vocabulary

melancholy, nuisance, demise, paralysis, assertion, radioactivity



Chapter 10

Summary

Holger and Nombeko feed the Chinese girls and put them to bed. They'd been in the crate for four days, along with the bomb, a sack of rice, and a few liters of water. After this is finished, they return to the crate, climb on top, and consider what to do with the bomb. Holger is very afraid that Holger One will see the bomb and, with his angry girlfriend, propose to use it to overthrow the government. They decide to call the heads of state to see if they can help. Phone calls to the Prime Minister and the office of the King yield similar results - nobody will take Holger seriously when he tells them that he has a bomb to get rid of.

Holger One and his girlfriend enter the scene. They are suspicious of the new developments in the building. Holger Two easily explains the presence of Nombeko and the Chinese girls - they are refugees that he is allowing to stay. But what of the crate? Nombeko says with heat that the crate holds her personal belongings and she would protect them however she needed to. Holger One and the girl leave. Holger Two and Nombeko go to bed, both weighed down with responsibility. Nombeko is dismayed at how many people around her are just plain foolish. With the exception of Holger Two, her entire fate had been driven by fools her entire life.

The next morning, Holger One and his girlfriend go out to deliver some pillows, Holger Two is working near the crate, so Nombeko seeks out the American potter to speak to him. He isn't quite as suspicious of her because she is a woman, and black, but even then, Nombeko only stays for a few minutes, deciding to see him in small doses. The Chinese girls proclaim they have an uncle somewhere in Europe. If they had a car and some money they would find him and live with him. Even though she doubts the simplicity of finding their uncle in Europe, Nombeko tries to sell one of her diamonds to get some money for the girls. However, the jewelry store owner is leery of foreigners and sends Nombeko away.

Back at the apartment, Holger One is resigned to go to the grocery store, so Nombeko pays a visit to the angry girlfriend. They have a cup of tea and the girlfriend goes on a tirade about all the things she's angry about, which is basically everything. After their conversation, Nombeko manages to borrow the girl's library card, and uses it to check out a Swedish language course. She listens to a few tapes, and later that day she visits Holger One. Holger One tells Nombeko that he was a good republican, but that he was short on ideas. His only current idea involved a helicopter and a kidnapping. Nombeko points out the flaws in this plan, and then promises to help. She figures if she can distract Holger One with some fake plans for revolution, she will keep him away from the bomb in his apartment.



Analysis

In this chapter the reader sees Nombeko's quick intelligence come into play. She very quickly assesses the situation with all of the people living there and determines how to proceed with what she's got. In a day, she visits the American Potter, Holger One's girlfriend, and Holger One himself. She uses the girlfriend's library card to check out a Swedish language course so she's able to converse better with Holger One. Of course, Nombeko picks up Swedish very quickly.

Nombeko has some interesting thoughts in this chapter; she is dismayed at how foolish people are - Holger One, the Chinese girls, The Engineer - with dismay she realizes that her life has been orchestrated by fools her entire life. (Holger Two is exempt from his categorization.) These thoughts demonstrate more that Nombeko is exceptional in her intelligence and good sense, but also highlights the absurd characters with which the author has chosen to populate her life.

Nombeko's best work comes in her talk with Holger One late in the chapter (after she has picked up some conversational Swedish). She finds the young man frustrated that his anti-monarchy fervor hasn't found an outlet. He is desperate for a plan; he has ridiculous thoughts about kidnapping the king with a helicopter. Nombeko handles him brilliantly - rather than trying to talk him out of his thoughts, she appeals to him as a sympathetic friend and promises to help him find a good plan. However, what Nombeko is really thinking is that she can send him away from the building on such a task, and distract him away from the truth of the bomb that's sitting in his apartment.

Discussion Question 1

What are the Chinese girls' plans for the future?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nombeko seek out the American in the basement?

Discussion Question 3

Why don't the phone calls to the Prime Minister and the Palace work out?

Vocabulary

habitable, condemned, exceptional, deftly, maneuver, frequently, obstinate, laborious, threshold, impediments, neurosis, archetype



Chapter 11

Summary

This is the chapter where, despite all the things that could go wrong, things go really well for a short time.

The Chinese girls, bored, start cooking meals for the inhabitants of the pillow factory. Nombeko convinces Holger One's angry girlfriend, Celestine, to do some pillow deliveries as long as she doesn't get stopped by the police, because she is only 17 and the truck's plates are stolen. (The truck plates are stolen because when Holger and Holger first moved into the building, the American veteran changed the truck plates to keep the ever-present CIA off their trail.)

Holger One, who is too listless to actually get a helicopter pilot's license, could get a job that will distract him from wondering what is in Nombeko's crate. With some creative forging, she and Holger Two manage to get Holger One a job at a helicopter taxi service, where he is at least around the machines and making a reasonable amount of money.

Nombeko has taught herself a good deal of Swedish and has managed to get the American to speak to her a little bit at a time. She sits down one day with Holger Two's books and draws up a mathematical formula to determine how many pillows he has backlogged in his factory. The math is complex and he doesn't understand, but in the end he trusts Nombeko and is very impressed with her help.

Analysis

In this short interlude of a chapter, Nombeko "manages" her small crew, occupying each of them with something useful while they try to make peace with the bomb in their midst. The Chinese girls cook, Celestine does pillow deliveries, Holger One gets a job working for a helicopter taxi; he won't actually fly for them, but he will at least feel like he doing something, while making some money. Nombeko herself learns Swedish and helps Holger Two figure out the books for his pillow business.

The events in this chapter yield little action, but the novel is really made up of period of relative peace and quiet, interspersed with something to disrupt the quiet Nombeko has built. This chapter is a "building" chapter, where she spends time setting everyone to work. An interesting note on the character of Holger One's "angry young girlfriend"- who is revealed to be named Celestine - the only reason they can convince her to drive the pillow truck is that the job allows her to be slightly illegal, driving around underaged, in a truck with stolen plates. This just demonstrates Celestine's contrary personality.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Nombeko's method of distraction work so well on Holger and Celestine?

Discussion Question 2

How does this period of peace foreshadow something coming?

Discussion Question 3

How are Holger Two and Nombeko actually living "real life", even though they may not think so?

Vocabulary

infinitesimal, aviation, aerodynamics, muddled, foreseeable, cumbersome



Chapter 12

Summary

South Africa continues to live in isolation from the rest of the world, who loves and supports Nelson Mandela, but not the country that imprisons him. In Sweden, national elections yield the same Prime Minister, which means that Nombeko and Holger Two can't look to a new person to help them with their bomb. It is 1988 and a year has passed since Nombeko moved into the abandoned building. Celestine and Holger One are both following relatively useful pursuits, and Holger Two's pillow business is thriving.

Holger Two and Nombeko celebrate her one year anniversary with cake, and then an admission of how they feel about each other. After all, neither of them actually exist in their respective countries. If they had children, Nombeko would be pleased that they wouldn't have to clean latrines as children, and Holger would be pleased that they wouldn't be brainwashed. They cement their attraction on top of the crate holding the atomic bomb.

The Chinese girls are bored. Although they started cooking in the complex months before, they just cooked for the building's private residents and not for anyone else. They weren't getting paid, and not getting any closer to having enough money to leave Sweden. So they write an advertisement in English that they would open the "restaurant" up to the public, and put it up around the neighborhood. When they tell Holger Two what they did, he is shocked and a little bit frightened. The building would never pass code, and there were several illegals, not to mention an atomic bomb, under its roof. Luckily, that evening, the only person that shows up was the health inspector. Holger tells her that the flyer was a joke, and nobody was living in or cooking food in the condemned building.

But Nombeko knows they had to find a way to distract and occupy the Chinese girls, just as they had with Celestine and Holger One. So Nombeko takes the girls to see the American potter, and the four of them go into business making "authentic" Han dynasty pieces. They make several thousand Swedish kronor over the next several months.

Analysis

In the beginning of this chapter the author checks in with what's happening in South Africa - Mandela is still in prison. It's 1988 and Sweden's election don't change their PM. This is important because Holger Two and Nombeko are desperate to call somebody in leadership in Sweden, to tell them about the bomb. The author is waiting for world politics to be just right to bring the problem with the bomb to its climax.

Holger Two and Nombeko begin their romantic relationship in this chapter, which is important because of the author's focus on their feelings of insignificance. There is talk following this event of the two of them not being "real" people, and being unable to have



a "real" family, marriage, or children. They both recall their unhappy childhoods and hope that if they do have a child it will fare better than they did. Thus, Nombeko and Holger Two, who are waiting for "real life" to begin, actually begin real life and a real relationship with each other. They sleep on top of the bomb, for good measure.

The Chinese girls have run out of things to occupy their time, so they advertise a restaurant in the building. This is assuredly illegal. It also contributes to the growing sense of "how long this bomb stay a secret?" which is at the heart of this section of the novel. Every connection the characters make in the real world is one more person that could find their way into their haven and find their secret. It is a delicate balance the author strikes, to keep the reader focused on what will happen next.

To further keep the girls busy, Nombeko sends them to the American, recalling that back in South Africa they had made reproductions of Han dynasty ceramics and sold them to gullible collectors. The girls and the potter go into business, a fact which will come around hilariously, by the end of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why can't the girls open a restaurant in the building?

Discussion Question 2

What are the Chinese girls saving up for?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the author focused on the political climate in Sweden?

Vocabulary

credibility, analyzed, environs, germinate, repulsive, expounded



Chapter 13

Summary

Things in the condemned building go along well for another few years. Holger One and Celestine are occupied while the Chinese girls and the American potter do a successful business in their Han pottery. Another round of Swedish elections occur; a new Prime Minister is elected, and once again Holger Two's attempts to give the bomb away are rebuffed. Nombeko begins to think that someone famous must get close to the PM or the King in order to tell them their dilemma with the bomb. It is 1991, and the world seems to have calmed down.

The pottery business takes a dangerous turn when a man buys up all of the "authentic" Han pieces in the area and tries to sell them to a reputable auction house, to which the girls had sold a handful of pieces over the past few years. The man is arrested for fraud, and Han pieces are suddenly dangerous to have in Stockholm. The girls decide to take the pieces they have, along with the money they've saved, pack it into their new van, and drive to find their uncle, who lives in Basil or Bern or Berlin. Nombeko warns the girls not to try to sell a piece of pottery without an inauthentic certificate of authenticity. Nombeko never sees the girls again, but the girls did drive straight through Europe until reaching Switzerland. They were waved through every border check, and the first person they met in Switzerland eventually led them to Basel, and their uncle.

Nombeko and Holger Two's relationship goes well for these years. They really wish to have a child together, but despite trying to make that happen on a regular basis, Nombeko is yet to get pregnant. They began to feel that getting rid of the bomb is their key to moving to a new phase of life, and maybe the child will come then. They begin to plan a way to meet the PM to tell him about the bomb. They need to sell the diamonds, get Holger into University in his brother's name so he could study to become something important, that would then allow him to be near the prime minister. It is a time-consuming and risky plan, but the alternative is to sit about and wait.

On the street in Gnesta, their neighborhood, Nombeko meets a South American jeweler named Antonio. Antonio has a checkered past; he had spent some time in jail for robbery, but after an amazing win at the horse races, became a legitimate businessman. Over the next three months, Nombeko sells her twenty-one diamonds for 19 million Swedish kronor. It is July, 1994.

Analysis

In this chapter a plan begins to take shape for Nombeko and Holger Two. They are still very focused on waiting for "life" to begin, which for them means after they get rid of the bomb. A new Prime Minister of Sweden is elected, and Holger Two and Nombeko try to speak to him about the bomb, but cannot. At this time Nombeko begins to think that one



of them needs to be in some sort of position that is invited to meet the PM. One of them needs to be famous. Nombeko finds a man who will buy her diamonds, and the jeweler's story is an interesting one. The author places several minor characters in this story, many of them for only a couple of pages. However, each of them has a very developed backstory in which he leads the reader exactly to the place where the character makes a huge impact on the plot. The jeweler, for example; the author spends 3-4 pages detailing the jeweler's past, so that the reader understands exactly how his seemingly insignificant choices put him in the perfect place to available to buy Nombeko's diamonds.

The Chinese girls leaves the flock in this chapter, and their departure fits well into the absurd nature of the novel. After several years of lucrative business in the pottery world, the girls find themselves suspect. They had been good about only selling a few pieces at a time, so the market isn't flooded, especially to a reputable antiques dealer. However, one of their other customers decided to try to peddle his pieces to the reputable dealer, and was arrested for fraud. There is a lesson here about being patient and not greedy. Nombeko tells the girls to stop the business for a while, but they are tired of Sweden. They buy an old van, pack it full of contraband Han geese, and drive haphazardly across Europe in search of their uncle. Ironically, they make it safely, with no checkpoints or issues from border patrol, and find their uncle almost immediately. The Chinese girls are the most carefree characters in the novel, not saddled by politics or principles, so it's fitting that they would sail across Europe with no hindrances, and find their kinsman.

By the time the chapter ends, six years have passed since Nombeko moved into the abandoned and condemned building.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Antonio the perfect customer for selling Nombeko's diamonds?

Discussion Question 2

What are the problems with Holger Two attending University?

Discussion Question 3

Why are the Chinese girls getting into trouble for their pottery?

Vocabulary

supplement, lucrative, neuroses, fraud, bungler, slipshod



Chapter 14

Summary

It is spring, 1994. Nombeko and the bomb have been in Stockholm for seven years. South Africa's nuclear program has been discovered by the world, and their PM has, in the same breath, given up all of the known atomic bombs. Likewise, the power in the country has been handed over to its black majority.

Celestine, Holger's angry young girlfriend, is tired of things not happening in their lives. She announces to Holger One that she is ready to stir things up, and sets about her task by picking up the newspaper and seeing the advertisement for a rally run by the Swedish Democrats the next day. After receiving .09% of the vote in the last election, Celestine feels they need a counter-demonstration to keep the party from gaining ground. She and Holger One make several signs and prepare to attend the rally the next day. They attend the rally with their signs hidden, ready to expose them at the right moment. Celestine leaves Holger to use the restroom, and he decides to start his counter-demonstration while she is gone. Upon seeing the signs, the crowd turns on Holger and beats him senseless, but not before the news cameras catch every second of it, and in turn broadcast the film all over the world.

The next day, Holger One goes to work despite his injuries. He is alone in the office when Agent A from the Mossad shows up with a gun. The Mossad agent had been tracking Nombeko and the atomic bomb for the past seven years. The cameras at the embassy had sent him pictures of Holger (two) loading the crate with the bomb onto his truck. A search of the truck's plates (which Holger had switched to appease the potter) came up dead. However, once the video of Holger One was seen all over the world, the Mossad agent knew exactly who he was and went directly to Stockholm. The agent threatened Holger One and asked where the bomb was. When Holger learned what Nombeko had been hiding from them for all of those years he was very angry. He makes a decision. He offers to take the Mossad agent to the bomb in the only remaining helicopter at the facility. The agent, who cannot fly a helicopter, is a little concerned and first forces Holger to send the location of the bomb to his partner agent.

They fly towards Gnesta and the condemned building. Holger One sets the copter on autopilot, points it towards the Baltic Sea, and jumps out of the back.

Meanwhile, the government health agent who had previously shut down the proposed Chinese restaurant in the condemned building is out walking her dog in Gnesta. She chases her dog to the building and notices that there are people actually living in it. The next day she puts a notice of eviction on the building, warning that it will be demolished in three months.

Celestine finds the letter the day that Holger disappears into the helicopter. She is angered that the government plans to evict her from her home, and decides to stage an



occupation rally. Her first step is to dismantle the truck - she removes the license plates and slashes the tires. A few calls to the paper later, she storms into the room where Holger Two, Nombeko, and the bomb live, dragging the potter with her. Celestine is about to announce to them that the government is going to invade them, when Holger One sails through the hole in the ceiling, falling onto the 50,000 pillows stored in the room. He announces that he knows the crate is a bomb, and some minor chaos erupts in the room. Nombeko suggests they keep the information quiet, because a crowd of people could accidentally set the bomb off; at that moment, the police show up, having responded to Celestine's many phone calls about the condemned building. And then, Nombeko glances at the potter, who appears to be dead.

Analysis

This chapter is filled with plot-moving action. After several chapters that were almost pastoral in nature, as the reader watches Nombeko's "crew" become more like a family, events occur in this chapter that change the trajectory of the remainder of the plot. What is interesting about the events that occur in this chapter is that they demonstrate the author's meticulous plotting of cause and effect. One event very directly affects the specific occurrence of the next. It's a very fatalistic viewpoint, that things happen for a reason.

The chapter starts with Celestine planning to attend a rally against the Social Democrats, to protest their minimal success at the previous election. This entire scheme is a study in irony, because Celestine is so interested in protesting against something, she chooses the political party that garnered .09% of the vote in the previous election. That she and Holger write ridiculous signs to take to the counter-demonstration is even more absurd, but the signs result in Holger getting badly beaten, and the event broadcast live around the world. This is key because his face and name is seen on TV by the Jewish Mossad.

And finally, after 7 years, Holger One learns what Nombeko is hiding in their apartment when the Mossad confronts him. This scene is filled with the impending doom and tension that the Mossad agents provide. However, the doom is turned on its end when Holger orchestrates a plan in which the Mossad agent is disposed of in the most awful way, and Holger himself decides that he must die in order to commit this heroic act; when in fact, his life is saved because he happens to fall into his own building, which is stacked high with pillows.

These events are in themselves enough to cause Nombeko to pause and take stock of their next actions, but there will be more. The gang is seen in the building by a health inspector and commanded to evacuate. This gives Celestine something real and tangible to fight against, and she sets her protest in motion with a call to the police and some local vandalism. The appearance of the police at the apartment gives the American potter the fright of his life, and he has a seizure and (apparently) dies.



This entire chapter is a domino train of ridiculous happenings that all build on one another until the cliffhanger ending: the dead American. They set the stage for the plot shifting in a new direction in the following chapter.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Holger One get beaten up?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Celestine call the police?

Discussion Question 3

Is seven years too long for the crew to live as they did without detection? How does this absurd fact contribute to the plot?

Vocabulary

dismantled, impediment, rhetoric, manufacturers, aforementioned



Chapter 15

Summary

The potter is dead in his chair. The police are threatening to break into the building in five minutes. They have a corpse and a bomb that needs to be removed from the room. Holger Two remembers that the potter had built a tunnel out of the building, years before. They scatter to find the tunnel. Celestine has a plan, and Holger One's boss calls to report that one of his helicopters is missing.

Meanwhile, the police decide to cut through the south-facing wall of the warehouse, which is exactly where the bomb is located. Just as they are preparing to do this, Holger Two yells from the top floor that he will jump if they try. The police see a body sail off the top floor and land to its death, and they stop to call the National Task Force.

The body was the potter's, who had suffered a heart attack when he heard the police arrive on the scene. In the few minutes the men took the body to the top floor, Nombeko finds the potter's tunnel, which is supplied with electricity, water, food, and kerosene lamps for light. It is also large enough to fit the crate through, but just barely. The tunnel is a well built marvel of engineering. It leads to an exit across the street, away from the gathering crowd. Nombeko sends the crowd throughout the building to collect anything that might identify where they'd been, directing Celestine to collect her backpack, which is filled with 19 million Swedish kronor.

The crowd wheels the bomb through the tunnel, out of the exit, and into the Swedish countryside. Things move slowly until they come to a slight downhill, where they lose control of the handcart and watch the bomb swiftly slide downhill.

A couple named the Blomgrens were standing in their pasture, burning a pile of wood that had once been a ramshackle shed, when the handcart sails across the field and straight into the fire. Nombeko, Celestine, and the Holgers approach and scream at Mr. Blomgren to turn his hose onto the fire right away. He refuses until Celestine threatens to kill him. They manage to put the fire out without detonating the bomb, but the backpack with its 19 million was gone. The Blomgrens did not want to let the group continue on with their cart until they were promised financial compensation for the fencing and water used in putting out the fire. A compromise is reached; the group will stay the night in the Blomgren guest house. They transfer the bomb to a trailer and store it in the unused garage. Things seem fine until Holger relieves himself in the lilac bushes; although the guest house is equipped with a toilet, it is a coin-operated toilet, and Mrs. Blomgren refused to make change, so Holger had to do his business where he could.

At the same time, the National Task Force uses a large amount of its own resources and injures a few of its own people, but they determine the burned down, condemned building to be free of terrorists.



The next mornings, the Blomgrens tell the group that they are untrustworthy people, so they had to take matters into their own hands. During the night, they took the bomb, which they thought was old and useless, to a scrapyard to collect money for the scrap metal to cover the damage done to their property. Celestine nearly goes crazy with rage, and Nombeko demands the location of the scrapyard. Mr. Blomgren tells her that he took the bomb to the only scrapyard that was close by, the one back in Gnesta, where they had just left. At the time they approached in the middle of the night, the Task Force was messing up the condemned building and all they could do was park the bomb behind the barricade. The group takes the Blomgrens' car and leaves.

Analysis

The plot goes off track here; in this chapter, the author uses large doses of irony and absurd plot machinations to elicit humor and head-shaking. The dead American potter, thanks be to his extreme paranoia, has a pristine tunnel that leads from the factory building under the street to the other side of the neighborhood. The gang can just get the bomb onto a hand cart and through the tunnel, but they need a distraction. In a last bit of devotion to freedom and justice, the potter's body is used to stall the police when Holger Two pushes it off the roof, pretending that it's a man committing suicide. This event is both gruesome and hilarious.

As the gang gets the bomb out of Gnesta and into the Swedish countryside, the author introduces two of his most ridiculous characters yet. Again, he uses several pages to tell the story of Harry and Margareta Blomgren, the frugal and hypocritical landowners whose barn happens to be in the path of the bomb, which careens out of the gang's control when they reach a downhill slope. The couple demand financial recompense and threaten to call the police on Nombeko and her crew. Nombeko, who has kept a cool head in every confrontation to date, almost loses her composure in the face of the highly unlikable couple.

The Blomgrens are the catalyst for an interesting character development - in this chapter, when dealing with the ridiculous people, the gang behaves like a family unit. For many years Nombeko and Holger Two have felt like they need to control and manage Holger One and Celestine, and they will feel that way again, but in this scene the gang comes together as one against a common enemy. Nombeko and Holger Two find themselves defending and protecting the other couple.

After an evening at the Blomgren home, the condemned building in Gnesta is burned down, Nombeko's 19 million kronor is burned away, the potter is dead. and they find they have to drive back to the scene to retrieve the bomb. It's another dash of irony, but the author has his reasons for sending Nombeko and her crew back to the scene of the crime.

Discussion Question 1

What did the National Task Force do to the pillow factory?



Discussion Question 2

Why did the Blomgrens take the bomb back to Gnesta?

Discussion Question 3

Why are the Blomgrens so relentlessly frugal?

Vocabulary

capability, provocative, paranoid, adrenaline, peculiar



Chapter 16

Summary

The Mossad agents, A and B, are still charged with finding the bomb. Agent A disappeared somewhere over the Baltic Sea in a helicopter, but Agent B had been alerted to the presence of the bomb and arrives in Gnesta to a great surprise - the bomb, on its trailer, sitting behind the barricade around the ruined condemned building. A moment later, Nombeko shows up. Agent B asks where his colleague is and Nombeko tells him that A is on his way to Tallinn, Estonia, across the Baltic Sea. Knowing that the Mossad agent can't do anything to harm her in the midst of hundreds of people, the group attaches the trailer with the bomb to the back of their car and drives away.

They drive north, towing the bomb. Celestine offers to drive them to her grandmother's house on a potato farm. Celestine had a checkered past as a Marxist-Leninist, until that party fell out of fashion. She wished above all to defy her father, a banker and a fascist. When she finished school she had moved in with her grandmother. After a few months, Celestine's grandmother revealed that she was a countess. Celestine had left immediately, and that was seven years before.

They arrive at the grandmother's house and are met with threat of gunfire. Celestine ran to her grandmother and hugged her, and the group asks if they can stay, if Nombeko cooks a meal. Over dinner, Nombeko cleverly tells the entire story to her (Gertrud), banking on the woman's intelligence and sympathy. She invites them to stay a while, particularly since they hadn't actually committed any crimes.

Holger Two asks Gertrud her story: her grandfather was a scam artist, a counterfeiter, who didn't know his son existed. His son eventually settled down on the potato farm and had a daughter, who had Gertrud. The crew is happy that Gertrud is accepting of their predicament and allows them to stay.

The next day Celestine and Holger Two visit the police to discuss the burned-down building. Holger Two asks about insurance recovery for his destroyed property, and the policemen mentions that it was reported that people were living there. On cue, Celestine bursts into tears and says she had squatted there for just a short while to escape her abusive parents. The policeman is fooled and promises not to tell.

Meanwhile, Mossad Agent B is furious with Nombeko for the turn of events. During the brief moment they saw each other, he managed to get the license plate number of the car they were driving - the Blomgrens' car. He pays them a visit and manages to find out about Celestine. He finds all of Celestine's most recent addresses; for a time he ignores Gertrud's house and just focuses on the other two. And then one day, just before he decides to visit Gertrud, his boss tells him to give up and come back to Jerusalem.



Analysis

In this chapter the gang lands at a new home, one at which they will stay for another set of "building" years. But first, they must retrieve the bomb from the scene of the wrecked pillow factory, and there Nombeko runs into the second Mossad agent. However, this time she handles him with calmness and assurance. The speed at which Nombeko's mind works is an important part of her character. She knows he can't and won't hurt her in the midst of the police, news crews, and firemen there at the wreckage, so she politely says hello to him, and drives away with the bomb (in the Blomgren car).

The crew drives the bomb far to the north of Stockholm, to the home of Celestine's grandmother Gertrud. Gertrud is another very interesting character. Although she has spent her life on the potato farm outside the city, she believes herself to be a countess, directly related to the King himself. The author takes several pages to disclose Gertrud's family history, beginning with her rake of a grandfather and ending with Celestine. However, the reader should pay attention, because the author will use this information again in later chapters. There is no information dispensed in this novel that is not somehow used later on.

In Gertrud, the author revives his focus on family connections, as the reader sees true affection between the usually-angry girl and her grandmother. It is ironic that Celestine has been mostly useless up to this point in the plot, but it's only due to the affection the older lady holds for her that the gang is given a place to stay for what turns out to be several years.

In another twist of irony, Holger Two is able to collect insurance money on the destruction of his building.

The author spends a few pages on the second Mossad agent, showing the reader that chasing Nombeko and the bomb have become something of an obsession to him. With his partner assumed dead over the Baltic sea, he must resume his quest alone. He resumes his search in Stockholm, starting with the license plate number he jotted down on the Blomgren car. An interview with the obnoxious Blomgrens nearly gets them killed, but in the end they manage to tell him about Celestine. The agent checks all of Celestine's known addresses except for the one her grandmother holds on the potato farm; he is about to check that one when his boss calls him back to Jerusalem. However, the reader should know that this agent will appear again.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Celestine leave her grandmother's house in the first place?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it ironic that Holger Two recovers insurance money on the condemned building?



Discussion Question 3

Why did the Mossad agent's boss call him back to Israel?

Vocabulary

inveterate, surveillance, euphonious



Chapter 17

Summary

Back home in South Africa, Nelson Mandela has been released from prison and elected President. The rest of the crew relaxes at Gertrud's house for months, which stretch into a year. When spring arrives, Nombeko and Holger revive the potato farm and discuss, again, how to get rid of the bomb so they can have a normal life together. It's necessary to take the bomb to the highest level of government. They return to the idea of Holger going to University, and the following spring he enters school for a degree in Economics and Political Science. Meanwhile, Holger One and Celestine attend weekly meetings of the Anarchical Union, but anonymously and without heavy involvement.

Nombeko expands the plans for the potato farm, with Gertrud's blessing. She buys the surrounding fields and draws up plans to get the most for their money and labor. After two years, Gertrud's farm was the largest producer by acreage. Gertrud and Nombeko borrow 10 million kronor and purchase machinery for the harvest.

Holger and Celestine keep their promise to stay anonymous, but they still do lots of things with the Anarchist club in secret. Gertrud blossoms with the young people living there. Nombeko continues to supervise what everyone is doing, the year 2000 arrives.

And then it is 2004. Holger is nearly finished with his political science degree and is finished with a doctorate in economics. His dissertation concerns how a nuclear disaster would allow certain countries to excel in the cleanup and aftermath. The potato industry explodes, and their potato company is debt free and in excellent shape. In May of 2004, it is Holger's day to defend his dissertation. It is also the day the printers finish with a round of flyers that Holger One and Celestine create to stir up the masses against the king. Holger and Celestine take the car to pass out their flyers, despite the fact that Holger Two had told everyone he needed it. So Holger Two had no way into Stockholm and had to rush and eventually catch the bus, making him late.

Celestine and Holger paper their flyers all over the museum, and head to Stockholm University next. While in the men's room with his flyers, Holger One is approached by Holger Two's professor, who is surprised and pleased to see him, and asks if he's ready to defend his dissertation. Holger One isn't completely clear on what's happening, but he begins talking anyway, mostly about his wish to transport all the government leaders into the country and detonate the bomb there. His plans shock the audience and the professor asks him to leave. One leaves, and minutes later Two arrives. The professor immediately has Two thrown out and won't speak to him.

Analysis

Chapter 17 is another "building" chapter for the most part, establishing what each person in the gang is doing, how they are using their time; the author allows time to



pass for everyone to get comfortable and to arrive at the chronological location at which he will start the climax of the story. The author begins, as usual, with a check on world politics - he notes that Mandela has been released from prison and elected President of South Africa. This fact is important, to note the progress in the area of racism. After Holger One's and Celestine's brief burst of usefulness in the previous couple of chapters, Holger Two and Nombeko put them on a short leash to keep them from accidentally doing anything that could involve the bomb.

Meanwhile, Nombeko and Holger Two are very industrious, continuing their quest for "real" life to begin while living it without realizing it. Holger Two goes to University so he can become a famous political scientist and get an audience with the PM. Nombeko uses her incredible math skills to make Gertrud's potato farm financially successful. They buy the surrounding fields, plant, and borrow money for harvesting equipment. In this manner, five years pass without incident. Yet the residents of the farm can't feel settled in what is otherwise a good life, because the bomb is still parked in the barn.

Holger Two is nearly finished with his doctorate when Holger One and Celestine decide they can't "do nothing" anymore. These two characters are an endless fount of incredibly short-sighted ideas that really drive the conflict in the story. In this case, Holger One ruins Holger Two's dissertation defense. This is actually the first piece of action the reader sees in which the twin brothers are confused for the same person.

The mistake causes some building tension between the Holgers, and this event is really a foreshadowing for the rest of the story, as Holger and Celestine become less and less trustworthy.

Discussion Question 1

How did Holger One and Two end up in the same place at the same time?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Holger and Celestine decide to make the flyers?

Discussion Question 3

What is the topic of Holger's PhD dissertation?

Vocabulary

warranted, anarchist, assessment, competence, industrious, radiant, blotto, inconstant



Chapter 18

Summary

Holger Two is depressed due to the graduate school failure. Holger One is getting antsy about the monarchy still holding strong. Nombeko is trying to hold everything together. She suggests to Gertrud that they sell the potato farm, sensing that the potato boom is on its way out. They have a buyer for the farm that offers them 60 million kronor.

Nombeko suggests they publish a magazine together.

In the fall of 2007 the first issue of Swedish Politics is distributed for free to many of the country's most influential thinkers and government positions. It receives much praise and interest for its wide-ranging thoughts on political topics and world issues. Everyone thinks the publisher is an 80-year-old potato farmer. The Swedish prime minister is heard saying that he really liked the magazine, so Holger calls his office the next day and is granted an interview for just after the next issue will be released. Holger and Nombeko work on the next issue, and just before sending it to print, Holger One and Celestine break into their offices and add some anti-monarchy jargon on the second page. The magazine goes to print, and the PM cancels their interview.

The Prime Minister is a reasonable man with balanced views and no wild ambitions, but he is glad that he is not getting tangled up with the new magazine. Back at the potato farm, Holger Two can't stand to be around his brother or Celestine. The tension fuels the fact that One and Celestine are already fairly unstable. They both begin to feel like they have been treated poorly all along. And Holger Two feels as low as he's ever felt in his life.

Analysis

The happy 5-6 years at the potato farm starts unravel in this chapter, as the action draws near to the climax. Holger Two's nerves are frayed from the dissertation disaster, and Holger One begins to resemble his father with his single-minded obsession with the monarchy.

Nombeko is still trying to hold her little "family" together and keep all of the balls in the air. She sells the potato crop for a huge profit and suggests putting the money into a magazine, which will gain the attention of the Swedish government. It is fascinating for the reader to note all of the fantastical things these characters have been involved in. Nombeko has personally grown two businesses, helped build a bomb, learned three languages... Holger One has run a helicopter taxi service... Holger Two has two unawarded PhDs... the author takes these people that are nothing much on paper and gives them an incredible existence.



The next big enterprise is the magazine Swedish Politics. Nombeko and Holger work on it together and distribute it for free so it gets in front of the Prime Minister. Nombeko is especially talented in this area, so the magazine is very well-received, and the PM grants an interview.

However, as in the previous chapter, Holger One and Celestine enter the scene, fed up with sitting still so far from the government action. They add an inflammatory ad into the magazine, and the entire enterprise is for naught.

This event, like in the previous chapter, adds to the growing tension between the two couples. Holger One and Celestine begin to vent their frustrations and feel some bitterness towards Holger Two and Nombeko, and Holger Two feels depressed, with all of the negativity focused on his brother.

Discussion Question 1

Have Holger One and Celestine been ill-treated?

Discussion Question 2

Why did the potato boom fail?

Discussion Question 3

Why do Holger Two and Nombeko choose to name Gertrud as the magazine's publisher?

Vocabulary

efficacy, abysmal, unanimous, alliance



Chapter 19

Summary

Nombeko is reading the newspaper in the library near the potato farm. Much of the coverage concerns the fact that the President of China is planning to visit Stockholm. He was coming to see the Volvo plant and afterwards was planning to attend a gala banquet at the palace of the Swedish king. Nombeko sees the pictures of the Chinese President and recognizes him as the low-level Chinese official that was sent to South Africa, more than 20 years before, with whom she had shared a delightful dinner chatting in Chinese with The Engineer and the Prime Minister of South Africa.

She realizes this is her chance. If she could somehow catch his attention, and if he remembered her, she could speak to him about the problem and maybe get in touch with the King or PM once and for all. In a rush, she rode her bike back to the farm and found Holger Two. They sneak into the barn to avoid being noticed by One and Celestine, but One is in the hayloft and hears them. He demands to know what they were doing. Holger Two snaps and says there is no way he is taking One and his girlfriend with him. But Celestine handcuffs her hands to the inside of the truck, so they all go together. They take the potato truck, which still, after all the time, had the bomb in the cargo area.

So it is all four of them that drive to the castle together, but only Nombeko pushes her way to the front of the onlookers. The Chinese president walks by, and she yells at him in Wu Chinese. This gets everybody's attention. When the President looks back at her, he recognizes her, and smiles. They shake hands and she quickly tells him her story. He promises to tell the Prime Minister and get him involved. The procession into the castle continues. Nombeko stays outside, and a while later the PM's assistant comes to get her. Nombeko leads the assistant to the truck, which they drive around to the back of the palace, where the king, the PM, and the President of China await. Nombeko and Holger Two get out of the truck, leaving One and Celestine inside, and open the back of the truck so the powers can see the bomb. The king, the Prime Minister, and Chinese President's interpreter step inside for a closer look, but they have to quickly shut the door to the onlookers. Two asks One to turn on the cargo lights in the back of the truck so everyone can see. One sees the king in the back of his truck. Dumbstruck and hearing the voice of his father Ingmar, he drives away.

Analysis

The climax of the novel begins in this chapter. With the brothers at odds and Nombeko's best idea to get in front of the PM ruined by Holger and Celestine, something new has to happen to move the action along.



At this point in the story, the President of China, (Hu Jintao - the actual president of China) is visiting Sweden because he wants a special edition Volvo - a fact that will, like others, come back around at a crucial time. He is, of course, the Chinese man Nombeko met in South Africa so many years before. Nombeko's kind and respectful treatment of him will come around in her favor at this point; she plans to find him at a gala at the King's palace.

The tension with Holger One comes to its breaking point here, as he refuses to let Holger and Nombeko take the bomb into Sweden to find the President. He and Celestine handcuff her hands to the inside of the truck, so they end up all going together. The reader can surmise that this does not bode well - Holger One and Celestine driving the potato truck, which holds the bomb in its cargo hold, and Celestine is handcuffed to the interior.

At the gala, President Hu Jintao does indeed recognize Nombeko and listen to her story about the bomb - this is where Nombeko's notable and amazing character traits are a benefit to the story, as she is a most memorable person. The group convenes at the back of the castle - the King and the PM of Sweden (both called by name in the novel by their real names), Holger Two and Nombeko, President Hu Jintao and his interpreter. They all climb in the truck to see the bomb; Holger asks his brother to turn on the cargo lights so they can see better. Holger does so and sees the King of Sweden in his truck, and chaos happens next.

It is interesting that the author chooses this moment to have Holger One hear the voice of his father in his head. As this event is the beginning of a fast climax and resolution, the voice of Ingmar adds an element of drama. Moreover, Holger One hasn't had an independent idea the entire story, and he chooses this moment to do something very decisive and dramatic.

Discussion Question 1

What is notable about President Hu Jintao's interpreter?

Discussion Question 2

How does the tension between the twins contribute to the moment in the barn?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Holger One was thinking when he saw the king in his truck?

Vocabulary

persist, exasperation, discreet, modicum, parasite, hubbub, reminisce, aforementioned, guarantee, whereupon, unassuming, fidgety



Chapter 20

Summary

Holger One is driving the potato truck away. Celestine is in the front seat with him, and the King, the Prime Minister, Nombeko, Two, and the bomb are in the back. The king is mostly bewildered, while the PM is indignant. Nombeko assures them that they are not kidnapping them, and that she and Two have no control over One. A discussion begins on how dangerous the bomb is; Nombeko is reluctant to be completely honest about this. Finally, she tells him the bomb would level everything in a 38-mile radius. Again, the PM is indignant while the king muses aloud on what they should do next.

The King himself never really wanted to be king, but he lost his father young and his grandfather would live to see 99. Everyone thought it important to keep the young prince safe and secure to keep the government away from the republicans, but the prince's mother wanted him to have friends so he could live a somewhat normal life. He didn't do well in school because he had dyslexia.

Two begins to explain to the heads of state what exactly is going on. He explains all about his father and his brother; Nombeko chimes in with the history of the bomb itself and how it came to exist unknown to the world. The king and the PM feared that the National Task Force would chase them and make a mistake that would detonate the bomb, so they call the castle and tell them to stay put. The truck eventually stops at the potato farm. One runs into the hayloft and grabs the pistol that he had taken from Mossad Agent A 13 years before; he opens the truck and tells everyone to get out nice and slow. Gertrud hears the commotion and shows up with her moose-hunting rifle.

Seated inside Gertrud's kitchen, One falters in the next step of his plans, and the king mentions that he's hungry. He goes out to kill a few chickens, while the PM goes out to dig potatoes so that Gertrud can cook them a meal. This is not according to One's plans, and he's annoyed that nobody seems bothered by his gun. Nombeko suggests he put the gun away and simply hide the truck key, as they are miles from anywhere. One puts the gun in his pocket, failing to put the safety on first.

They sit down to dinner. Gertrud is increasingly friendly with the king, which angers One and Celestine. Gertrud makes everyone a cocktail, which the king recognizes as the one named after Gertrud's errant grandfather, Marshal Mannerheim. The king is curious as to how Gertrud knows of Mannerheim, and asks, which is exactly what the group needs to keep One and Celestine from doing something stupid. One is confused about how "normal" the king actually is.

And then the Mossad agent busts into the room with a pistol, commanding everyone to stay where they are.



Analysis

The following chapters with the two Swedish heads of state are quite enjoyable and humorous to read. The truck barrels back to the potato farm with the bomb and its four attendants in the cargo hold of the truck. The author takes this opportunity to display the personalities of the two Swedish leaders - the PM is indignant and angry at the amount of laws broken, because he is a rule-follower. The King is bewildered and hungry. What follows is 2-3 pages on the King's background, his struggle as a student, his love of the outdoors, and his casual attitude towards his own importance.

The PM toys with the idea of calling the National Task Force to intervene, but he recalls how that group destroyed the entire pillow factory and didn't find any terrorists, so he decides against it. This conversational thread is an amusing nod to the events of an earlier chapter.

When they arrive in the barn, Holger One retrieves a gun he'd taken from the Mossad agent a decade before and directs the group to the house. Gertrud joins the standoff with her moose rifle. The entire scene is absurd; at this point the author is taking the reader on a very circuitous route to the end of the action. Once in the kitchen, the others can sense Holger's natural state of indecisiveness - the kidnapping must be postponed so people can eat.

With Gertrud's suggestion of chicken casserole, the king and PM both show themselves useful in killing chickens and pulling potatoes - it is this event, seeing both men engaged in such normal pursuits, that will start unraveling the single-minded quest in Holger's mind that was planted by his father when he was a boy. The king takes off his lavish coat, covered with medals and sashes, and tosses it over a nail; his dress shirt is splattered with chicken blood. The PM's clothes are dusty with potato dirt. The group enjoys dinner together; the PM meticulously cleaning her kitchen, sweeping and mopping the floor, scrubbing the dishes. These scenes cause war in Holger's head with his principles.

The general mood begins to relax in this way until the old Mossad agent shows up with a gun.

Discussion Question 1

What endears the King to Gertrud?

Discussion Question 2

How can the group tell that Holger One isn't sure what he's doing?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Mossad agent show up after all of these years?

Vocabulary

defuse, ornithology, evasive, dramatic, succession, hereditary, dyslexia, catastrophe, elucidate



Chapter 21

Summary

Agent B had officially retired from the Mossad one week earlier, at his 65th birthday. Instead of enjoying retirement, however, he traveled to Sweden, unable for the last decade to shake the story of the bomb and the African woman. He still had one more address to check out, that of Celestine's grandmother. As he approaches the house he sees the potato truck parked in the driveway, with the back cargo open and the bomb sitting inside.

Inside the house, when Nombeko explains to everyone who Agent B is, the Prime Minister takes charge and commands him to lower his weapon or he will call Israel's Prime Minister immediately. Agent B complies and Gertrud fixes him a drink. Nombeko and Agent B tell the king and the PM the story of the bomb in greater detail. Back at the palace, the king's security force is growing antsy.

During these long hours, Holger One is losing his grip on why he hates the king. His mental image of the monarchy is not this king that laughs and smiles and cooks chicken, but his great-grandfather, who snubbed their father many years ago. And even worse, the prime minister was just as "normal", on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor and laughing with everyone. He decides that if he can remind himself of the evil of the monarchy he can get the kidnapping back in hand. He recalls Gustav V, the old king, whom he was always taught was the worst of kings, and asks the king next to him what HE thought of King Gustav V.

The king considers the question about his great-grandfather. The wars, the growing independence of the people, the nuclear threats: the older king had in truth handled these challenges well. He realizes the weight of Holger's question. Had the old king abused the twins's father? He finally answers to Holger One, that his great-grandfather Gustav V was a real bastard.

One takes Celestine outside to discuss the situation. They are both confused; Celestine for being related to a countess and One for actually thinking the king is a nice guy. Holger One summons the king to speak to them. He tells him that he probably won't set off the bomb and kill everyone, but he would like the king to resign. The king reminds One that just taking a king off the throne isn't always enough. He tells the story of a Swedish king who was defeated by Napoleon and left the throne in disgrace, but he was replaced by a son, an uncle, a brother, and finally a Frenchman. His point is that if the people want a king, they will find one.

The king goes inside and Two and Nombeko join One and Celestine outside. One admits that the caper is over, and hands Nombeko the truck key; however, when he pulls the gun from his pocket, he drops it on the ground and it goes off, shooting Holger Two.



Analysis

With the Mossad agent on deck with a pistol in hand, the mood in the room changes, but only momentarily. The author spends a page showing that the Mossad agent has been pretty obsessed with the bomb for the past decade. This is an appropriate response - for a young black woman to take a bomb from straight under his nose and disappear with it is shocking to the top intelligence agency in the middle east. However, the Prime Minister immediately diffuses the situation with a stern directive at the agent to lower his weapon or he will call Jerusalem directly. This measure was certainly the best to keep the house safe, but it also shows that the Prime Minister is beginning to feel protective for this motley group, rules or not.

Holger's confusion has reached its boiling point. He needs to decide how he feels about the king. What is interesting here is that the king can sense how important Holger's question is - how he gives his opinion about his great grandfather Gustav V can change the course of their evening, and restore Holger One to a contributing member of society. What the king eventually says about the old King is also very humorous, and lightens the mood of the scene. The reader almost feels sympathy for Holger, that his kidnapping has gone so horribly off track.

The next conversation is also key, where Holger tells the king that he likes him just fine, but the monarchy must go. The king responds with a nod to fatalism, which is one of the author's ways of arranging events and people to tell his story. The king tells Holger that as long as the people want a king, they will have one. Getting rid of him and his family will not get rid of the monarchy.

Holger is, finally, released of Ingmar's burden. Nombeko and Holger Two join Holger outside and declare the kidnapping over. And then the author adds one more weight to Holger Two's tension towards his brother, as Holger One drops the gun. The safety was off, and the gun shoots Holger Two.

Discussion Question 1

What does the king think is a possible reason for Ingmar's hatred of Gustav V?

Discussion Question 2

How does the crew make the Mossad agent feel welcome?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the Mossad agent wait so long to check out Gertrud's house?

Vocabulary

obliterate, monocle, waver, dynasty, incompetent, dandy



Chapter 22

Summary

Around 3 am, the Prime Minister calls his office to tell them that he and the king were safe, and that they would be returning to the palace that morning. Holger Two was shot in the arm, but it would be fine. One and Celestine and the Mossad agent are sleeping, so Nombeko and the PM sit in the cab of the potato truck for a talk. The PM confesses to Nombeko that he really wished to arrest them all, but considering each party one by one, he couldn't find much fault with the countess, Nombeko, or Holger Two.

Even prosecuting One and Celestine would be difficult, because the process would alert the public that a bomb had been loose in Sweden for 20 years. He and the king would also be culpable for not raising an alarm as soon as possible. He asks Nombeko her opinion on how to clean up the whole mess, and she suggests locking the bomb deep in a bunker where it was safe from everyone. The list of people that know about the bomb already is worrisome, but Nombeko promises that most of them would keep quiet about it forever.

They look up and see the king and the countess strolling towards the dock. The PM rushes inside the house and commands the Mossad agent to leave and pretend that he was never there. Nombeko stops the king and the countess from rowing into the lake to poach fish, and then tells the PM that sometimes the "right" thing isn't really an option. They pay a visit to One and Celestine; the PM tells them he won't arrest them if they promise to cooperate.

Around 6 am, they leave the farm in the potato truck: the PM driving, Nombeko in the middle, and Holger Two in the passenger seat. In the cargo hold was the bomb, the king, and the countess, who has decided to leave the farm for good and really live as a countess should. First they leave the king in his palace; then they check into a few suites at the Grand Hotel Stockholm. Two is given pain medication and put to bed; One falls asleep on the sofa, while the Countess Gertrud checks out the minibar. The PM would need to be left at Parliament to meet with the President of China, while Nombeko and Celestine would need to simply drive the bomb around until he was finished.

However, the Chinese President's interpreter had been injured the night before in the kidnapping, and was unable to attend the meeting; the President requests Nombeko attend in his place. This is a grand idea except for leaving Celestine behind with the bomb. As an insurance policy, Nombeko handcuffs Holger One to the sofa and promises to throw the keys into the river if Celestine doesn't obey.

Analysis

Holger Two is only slightly injured, but he may never speak to his brother again.



Although the gang has made it through the quasi-kidnapping unscathed, they still have to decide how to move forward. This chapter is a bridge between the close of the scenes at the potato farm, and what will happen to close out the story. The heads of state are ready to return to Stockholm, but the PM is wrestling with how to deal with the situation. There is an interesting discussion between him and Nombeko about right and wrong; she tells him sometimes there isn't a "right" option as much as there is a "best" option. She also tells him that "cleaning things up" is what he's great at, and in this case he might just need to clean up the bomb. He and Nombeko decide together to lock the bomb deep in an unused bunker, and put their plan into action.

The group leaves the potato farm together in the truck. The King and PM are returned safely. Gertrud (The Countess) and the twins are checked into the Grand Hotel Stockholm. Because of their need to live under the radar, the reader forgets that this crew is actually quite wealthy. The author discloses that they made 60 million kronor on the potato farm, which is approximately 7 million USD.

Nombeko and PM had a plan, but it needed to wait until the PM finished with Hu Jintao. However, the author further complicates the caper by placing Nombeko in the meeting with Hu Jintao and the PM, because of course Nombeko can speak Swedish and Chinese, and just like two decades ago in South Africa, Hu's interpreter (the same interpreter from the first story, the author reports) is hurt again and cannot serve. The reader is pleased to see Nombeko recognized for her intelligence and talent in this area.

Discussion Question 1

Why is the Prime Minister afraid to arrest Celestine and Holger One?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Gertrud leave her house with the group?

Discussion Question 3

How does Nombeko insure Celestine's cooperation?

Vocabulary

pragmatic, prosecute, dispensed, vendetta, trauma, devastation, salvage



Chapter 23

Summary

The Prime Minister prepares Nombeko for their meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao. He wanted to talk to the president about an upcoming climate summit, plus economics, business, human rights, and democracy. He would need for Nombeko to translate word for word and not add anything in. President Hu shows up in the office and is happy to see Nombeko; she warns him of what's coming and the meeting begins. Nombeko oversteps her bounds a few times, but they are able to get through the human rights portion and into climate. President Hu asks about the bomb, and Nombeko embellishes the truth by telling him that it is locked away forever. President Hu considers how much he'd like to take apart the bomb to see how the Israelis handle their technology. They have lunch, finish their meeting, and Nombeko is sent to be with Celestine.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister summons the head of the Swedish military in order to find an empty bunker for the bomb, but he is in Italy and can't possibly make it back to Sweden before 4:30pm. The PM takes a well-deserved nap in his office, while Nombeko and Celestine do the same in the cab of the truck.

President Hu's wife has a lovely time while he is meeting with the PM. She goes shopping and buys what looks like an authentic Han dynasty pottery goose. She also buys a horse, and thus causes a delay at the airport. And with the interpreter still in the hospital, President Hu's staff calls Nombeko again to help straighten out the issues with Customs. The needs for transporting the horse are so great, Nombeko needs to rush back to the government offices to fix the situation. She takes a taxi back, urging Celestine to try to stay unnoticed in the potato truck. Celestine is stopped in traffic after an accident, but with Billy Idol playing on her radio she can't keep still, and so she plows forward in the bus lane and is pulled over.

Celestine is driving a truck with stolen plates and no license, and has been waiting for years to tell off the local police. She is arrested, and when the police see what's in the truck, they drive it to the local station as well.

Back at the government offices, Nombeko arrives to see the PM just before the head of the military does. She reports how she helped President Hu and the horse situation: the horse couldn't leave the country undeclared, but as the Chinese plane WAS taking the President's new Volvo back, which had already been declared, Nombeko thought they should put the horse in the crate with the Volvo. But the Volvo and the horse wouldn't fit; however, she had the Volvo taken out of the crate and put the bomb into it. Bomb and horse are happily on their way to China, while President Hu's Volvo is in the back of the potato truck.



The Prime Minister dismisses the head of the military, telling him he can go back to Italy. Then he calls President Hu to tell him of the development; the President is delighted and requests the car be given to Nombeko. He also promises to use the bomb for research only.

Back at the Hotel Grande, Nombeko finally gets some needed sleep. She awakens the next day to One, Two, and the Countess. The Countess has discovered Room Service and they all have new clothes, tons of liquor, and a three-course meal. Nombeko steps downstairs to the lobby and sees Celestine's face on the paper. She was recognized by her parents, who bailed her out of jail and paid her traffic fines. The Volvo in the back of the truck was tracked down to President Hu, who said it was to be given to an unnamed woman; the police assume this is Celestine, so Celestine and her parents drive off in the Volvo.

Analysis

The meeting with at the PM's office provides a way out of the bomb question - President Hu tells Nombeko in Chinese that he would be interested in dismantling the bomb to see how it was built. The Prime Minister doesn't know this, but the reader knows that Nombeko will see a way to make this arrangement.

The author has one more caper to execute before ending the story. While Nombeko, the PM, and President Hu are meeting, there is a complication at the airport with loading all of Madame President's souvenirs, including an Arabian horse, onto the plane. Nombeko is required to translate again, and her quick wit saves the situation again. The reader finds out later, after the plane has taken off, that Nombeko has taken President Hu's Volvo out of its container and had the bomb put in its place, along with Madame's horse. It's a brilliant end to the problem of the bomb.

In a few more humorous ironic twists, Celestine is finally arrested for driving a truck with stolen plates, which she has been waiting for for fifteen years. The reader is afraid the police will see a bomb in the back of the truck, but it is only President Hu's Volvo, which is tells the Prime Minister to give to Nombeko. Finally, Nombeko is treated well for her excellent character. Celestine's parents see her face on television and a tearful reunion takes place in the jail. It turns out that the "angry young woman" really has a soft spot for her family.

In one last ironic switch, the reader finds that Celestine drives the Volvo away from the police station because President Hu wouldn't name Nombeko by name. The police assumed "the girl" the Volvo belongs to is Celestine.

The reader feels like they have been on a merry-go-round, and one's head is still spinning when the action finally slows down.



Discussion Question 1

Why did Nombeko switch the bomb with the car?

Discussion Question 2

What other humorous item does President Hu's wife purchase on her shopping trip?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Celestine get arrested?

Vocabulary

objectionable, censure, lengthy, rhetoric, tumultuous, bureaucracy



Chapter 24 and Epilogue

Summary

The Countess continues to live in the hotel, but Nombeko and Two are ready to move out and buy an apartment, as soon as they find a way to actually exist. For Nombeko, a few phone calls from the Prime Minister fixed her citizenship. Holger Two goes from office to office until he finds a bureaucrat that will listen, as long as Holger has a few character witnesses. Holger calls the king and the PM.

Holger One and Celestine become the Countess's assistants, and they all decide to build a home together. Holger Two convinces Stockholm University to allow him another chance to defend his thesis. Nombeko gets a full time job working in the government as a Chinese expert, and completes a math degree in a few weeks. Gertrud's new manor home is magnificent; it has a lake and a helipad. They established a group called Preserve the Monarchy and donated millions to it. When Holger One tells Two and Nombeko all about his change of heart, Nombeko can't help herself any longer, and twists his nose.

Years later, at a summit conference in Iraq, the Israeli minister of foreign affairs takes the Swedish Prime Minister aside and asks if he knows about some missing antelope meat. She had previously received a message from an aged Mossad agent that urged her to seek out the information. The PM told her that the meat tasted poor and had been disposed of, to someone who would not abuse the meat or use it ill.

Nombeko finds, at 47 years of age, that she is pregnant. Celestine learns the same. Nombeko has a baby girl, and Celestine has twins - named Carl and Gustaf.

One year later, Nombeko is sent to South Africa as the Swedish ambassador. One day President Hu comes to visit, and they have a lovely evening together.

In the Epilogue, the action returns to Piet du Toit, the small man that fired Nombeko when she was 14 for being smarter than him. When his father finally dies at 90, Piet finally sells his father's entire art collection, to the tune of 8 million swiss francs, and transfers the money to one Cheng Tao's account in Shanghai, because he wants to invest in the Chinese economy. Piet had traveled to Cheng's home in Switzerland and found he and his three nieces had a gold mine of Han dynasty pottery, which he buys for 8 million Swiss francs.

Analysis

In this final chapter the reader is satisfied with happy endings for all. For Holger and Nombeko the ending is very fitting, for they are the only normal characters in the story. For all of the other characters, they finish with a taste of the absurd.



The Israeli government places a call to the Swedish Prime Minister to ask after "some missing antelope meat," i.e., the bomb.

It is most pleasing to see Holger Two and Nombeko get actual government identities, such that they can rent their own apartment and receive bills. Both of them are given excellent jobs that utilize their considerable talents. They finally are starting a "real life", including a child, which they name after Holger's mother.

Holger and Celestine move in with Gertrud, who has built herself a fabulous manor home as is fitting for a countess. In the ultimate of ironies, Holger starts a foundation called Preserve the Monarchy, and when he and Celestine have twins they name them Carl and Gustaf - traditional names of Swedish monarchy.

Nombeko is promoted to ambassador to South Africa, and finally gets to hang out with Hu Jintao.

The Epilogue is an excellent demonstration of "what goes around comes around," which the author uses many times in the story. The small mean man that fired Nombeko from the latrine when she was 14 gets his just deserts; Piet pays 8 million Swiss francs for a collection of Han dynasty pottery... which of course was fabricated by 3 Chinese girls and their uncle.

At the same time, the reader is glad Nombeko was fired, otherwise her story would have ended very differently.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Nombeko and Holger will miss their erratic life after the bomb is gone?

Discussion Question 2

Is life as inter-connected as the author wants the reader to believe?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it fitting for Nombeko and her family to return to South Africa?

Vocabulary

formality, integrity, citizenship



Characters

Nombeko

Nombeko is a highly intelligent, resourceful black South African woman. She was born into poverty, into low expectations, and into near orphanhood. However, by the end of the story she has managed to outwit and outclass everybody she meets, not by cruelty or violence, but by being clever and thorough. And although she is the smartest character in the novel, she remembers her origins and is never patronizing or mean to the people she lives with. And although she was raised with no semblance of family, the people in the story become family to her, and she intrinsically understands how to treat them as such.

Holger Two

Holger Two is the second, unnamed, twin to Ingmar and Henrietta Qvist. Raised by his father to become a violent revolutionary and take down the monarchy, he sees the flaws in his father's teaching and instead wishes throughout the novel to have a "normal" life and existence. He is bright, a hard worker, friendly, and steady; he is entirely dependable and not given to fits of greatness like his twin. His relationship with Nombeko spans twenty years by the time the novel is over; and while his life probably can't be classified as "normal", the reader can look back across the story and see that he did live a life with her, that they did live like a family, and that although for much of that life he wasn't a registered citizen, he was a contributing member of society.

Holger One

Holger One is the opposite of his brother. While Holger Two showed intelligence, free thought, and was skeptical about his father's teaching, Holger One bought completely into the republican propaganda. Throughout the novel he is doggedly devoted to this cause, to the extent that he doesn't really show devotion to anything else. He doesn't show any independent thought or idea, unless it's related to taking down the Swedish monarchy. As a plot device, he provides a classic foil to the balanced, thoughtful actions of Nombeko and Holger Two.

Celestine

Celestine is Holger One's "angry young girlfriend." She appears early in the story and stays faithfully by Holger's side throughout the story. They meet at an anarchist club meeting and find that common thread. Together Celestine and Holger are the authors of some of the story's more erratic and hilarious plot turns. As a character, she and Holger together are the opposites of Holger Two and Nombeko. Where the latter are thoughtful and cautious and clever, Holger and Celestine are impulsive, outrageous, and



ridiculous. The author, who uses irony liberally in this story, presents the greatest irony in Celestine, who is descended from royalty and is daughter to extremely bourgeois parents.

President Hu from China

The President of China appears early in the novel as an entry-level civil servant, but in the intervening 20 years he rises to the top political position in the People's Republic. What is key about this character is that he is the first people to see true value in Nombeko from the very beginning, when she was only 25 years old. He sees through gender and race, and sees intelligence and perseverance. For the reader, who wants to root for Nombeko from the beginning, the Chinese man is an ally.

The Engineer

The Engineer is only part of the novel in the early chapters, but he is an important character because he represents one of the novel's major themes - racism. He doesn't recognize Nombeko for her skills or her abilities; he only sees a black person, and a woman at that. Using her for her knowledge and allowing her to do his work doesn't make him feel bad, because to him she is less than an actual person. Although his character is comical with his drinking and his poor knowledge of actual engineering, his racism is a sobering reminder of how many people thought back then, and how many people still think.

The King of Sweden

Although the king only appears as an actual person in a few chapters near the end, he is important because he is the fuel that drives Holger One's and Celestine's obsession with republicanism. He is a symbol of absolutism to them, a tyrant that can't see or feel like a real person. When the reader does meet the king, he is an affable character; likable and relate-able and very un-king-like. His kindness and ability to get along with the crew even causes Holger One and Celestine to revise their opinion about the monarchy. Another of the novel's themes is not judging someone until you know them; the king is a good example of this.

Gertrud Vitranen

Gertrud is Celestine's grandmother, from whom Celestine thought she was estranged, but she really wasn't. Celestine left her parents and lived in several different places for a few months at a time, stopping over at her grandmother's for a short period. Late in the novel, the crew returns to Gertrud's house because it is secluded and far from Stockholm. They hunker down on the family potato farm for years. In Gertrud they find an ally and an amusing conversation partner, and if her story is to be believed, a countess. Her family history is long and checkered, but it delights the king when he



comes to visit. For the story, Gertrud really just provides another absurd link in the chain the author builds throughout the plot, but she's also a reminder of the importance of family.

The Prime Minister of Sweden

Like the King, the PM is only in the story for a short time. He is an interesting character because, for being so successful at politics, he doesn't seem to fit into it very well. He's very much a rule-follower and doesn't mentally have the capacity to see the gray areas, which seems to be a common trait in politicians. But the reader ends up liking him because he's methodical and thoughtful and thorough, like Nombeko, and like the King, he sees the good in her pretty quickly. By the end of the story he is one Nombeko's biggest fans and allies, and the reader likes to see her succeed in this way.

Thabo

Thabo is only in the first chapter of the novel. He is Nombeko's first opponent; she wins him over and through him, learns to read. After one unsuccessful attempt to molest her, Nombeko sits with him daily and reads through all of his books. Thabo is wealthy and has lived and traveled more than anyone else in Soweto. When he is killed, Nombeko unceremoniously takes all of his diamonds and sews him into the lining of her jacket. He is important to the novel because he helps arm Nombeko with her greatest asset, her mind, as well as posthumously providing her with great wealth.



Symbols and Symbolism

The bomb

The atomic bomb in this story is the constant sense of danger, of something that needs to be done, of something preventing the main characters from relaxing and entering into "real life." It is always present, a growing sense of urgency; and all of their actions are filtered through what they can do about the bomb.

Politics

The author is constantly referring to world politics in the story, to remind the reader that world is steadily changing and moving and evolving. In the decades that pass during this story, the world's attitudes towards race and women change drastically, technology improves, and world leaders rise and fall. Nothing stays the same, and the changes in the world affect us all.

Mathematics

Nombeko is a math whiz. From early in the story to its end, she is showing the reader her quick calculations and turning money into money with her smart numbers sense. Nombeko's personality, likewise, is logical and calculating. In each sticky situation she is able to quickly scan her options and present a logical solution that always benefits her gang.

Anarchy

All of the "gang" in this story lives under the radar. Even Celestine and Holger One, who actually have valid identifying papers, have lives outside the fringes of real society, and all of the misfits that collect around Nombeko sport similar stories- the Chinese sisters, the American potter, Gertrud, even the Mossad agents that have fake identities; all of these people have full stores outside the confines of the law.

Nombeko's diamonds

Taken from the dead man Thabo in the first chapter of the novel, Nombeko sews a handful of raw diamonds into the lining of her jacket at the age of 14. They are an insurance policy for her, and yet also a danger, because nobody would believe a black girl would come by such wealth honestly. The diamonds are a comfort for her for two decades, always an option, until she is finally able to sell them in Sweden, years later.



The Chinese reproductions

The story of the three Chinese girls is silly and seemingly insignificant. Somehow the three sisters ended up living in South Africa and with their mother, made fake Han dynasty pottery geese to sell to gullible collectors. However, these fake Han geese show up over and over in a hilarious way. The author uses many things that are nice on the outside but fake, empty, or hollow on the inside to compare to some of the characters- the Engineer and the Blomgrens, for example. This idea also contrasts a person with little value in society- like Nombeko- that is actually a resourceful, intelligent, special person.

Vehicles

There is a lot of vehicle-swapping in this novel. The crew goes from using a delivery truck, to a station wagon, to a potato truck, and all of them seem to be unregistered, with stolen plates. Not vehicle car in this novel is legitimately owned and registered. Just as none of the characters in this novel truly operate "on the grid."

Hope

Nombeko is a woman possessed by a hope that she can be recognized for her merit and live a normal life. Growing up poor in racist South Africa, this seems a tall order. However, with an eye to staying calm, managing chaos, and loving people well, she does what she can to see her dream realized. Likewise, Holger Two wishes for a "normal life," although their two upbringings are so radically different. Together these characters work to keep their zany world together.

Identity

Both Nombeko and Holger Two are paperless people, technically non-existent in Sweden. Both of these characters search for a way to fit into a world that doesn't recognize them, such that their proudest moment in the novel comes when they receive a bill in the mail. Receiving mail, and a request for money, proves to them that they truly exist.

Home

Nombeko's gang moves around a lot in this story, because they are toting an atomic bomb and that requires some flexibility in living accommodations. However, the reader is struck by how this group of misfits always manages to fit together like a family wherever they are. With Nombeko as their stolid matron, they fit into an abandoned factory, a potato farm, a car, a truck, and finally, the Grand Hotel of Stockholm. They

don't always get along well, but these unlikely pairings function together as a family, making their "home" wherever they are all together.



Settings

Soweto, South Africa

This is Nombeko's first home. It is a slum outside of Johannesburg, South Africa. The author paints a vivid picture of what it's like to live there, with orphans running about, parents sending their kids to pick up paint thinner for them to drink, and the 12-year-old Nombeko emptying latrines for a living. It is a hard place for hard living, and early on the reader sees Nombeko rise the unfortunate location of her birth by educating herself and vowing not to use drugs.

Pelindaba, South Africa

Pelindaba is the compound where Nombeko is taken after being run over by The Engineer in Johannesburg. In many ways it is a huge improvement on Soweto. The author improves Nombeko's living situation gradually as the story continues - for instance, in Pelindaba she has her own bedroom, a bathroom with plumbing, and two meals a day. She also has use of a library, and later, television. The Engineer is a rude and incompetent boss, but Nombeko makes her way through and manages to touch the lives of two Mossad agents, a low-level Chinese civil servant, and three Chinese sisters. The setting of Pelindaba is important because it is a fenced-in compound with electric gates and guards with guns and dogs, so Nombeko is essentially trapped there for 11 years.

The condemned building in Gnesta, Sweden

The old pillow factory is the next place Nombeko lives, for over a decade. After a short time there, she and Holger Two share a room together, sleeping on top of the crate which contains the bomb. This building is an interesting setting because it is where Nombeko's new "family" assembles: she and Holger Two in a room, Holger One and Celestine in a room, the three Chinese girls in a room, and the American potter in a room. In this place they all expand and grow and learn to love each other in their own way. Nombeko helps Holger Two expand his pillow delivery business. She keeps Celestine occupied and finds Holger One a job. Even the Chinese girls, she manages to push into business with the American potter.

The potato farm in Norrtälje, Sweden

The next place where Nombeko and her "family" moves is Norrtälje, Sweden, home to Celestine's grandmother, Gertrud. This eccentric lady lives on several acres of potato fields and has a large barn in which they hide the atomic bomb during the years they are living there. Nombeko and Holger Two share one room and Holger One and Celestine share another. The time they spend there is the most productive in the novel,



as Nombeko expands the potato farm to bursting, then sells it all and saves the money from the profits. She and Holger Two start a magazine on Swedish politics, with Gertrud as editor, which even catches the attention of the Prime Minister. And Holger Two goes to University and completes two degree programs. The reader can feel the novel rushing towards its inevitable end, as the two remarkable main characters take what little they have and are so industrious they multiply it.

Holger's and Nombeko's apartment

The reader only gets a glimpse of this place, because Holger and Nombeko only live there together for a paragraph or two. However, this place is important because it is the place they finally carve out for their own and make a life together. They finally register their identities with the government and obtain passports. Nombeko finds work in the Prime Minister's office. Holger finishes his doctorate at Stockholm University. They are alone, away from Holger One and Celestine and Gertrud. And finally, when they thought their chances were past, they have a child while living there.



Themes and Motifs

Racism

The author begins this story in the middle-late 20th century, when holding racist attitudes was common in all people, even educated ones. Nombeko has two strikes against her for being both black, and a woman, and in her day and in her country that also meant poor. The reader can see the poverty cycle clearly in Nombeko's origins- born to a poor, young black woman, who not only couldn't find a way to work, but spent any money she had on drugs. Nombeko's mother, who saw no way for her child to climb out of their place on the ladder, chose suicide.

Nombeko is exceptional and finds a way to make money and educate herself, and by the end of the story the reader sees her exalted to a place in which she truly deserves to be. However, in her early years she was ignored, discarded, and thought little of. The white men in authority thought nothing of making decisions that actually devalued her and took away her rights and liberties. For example, when Nombeko is run over by a car driven by a drunk, white man, the judge not only finds in favor of the white man, he actually charges Nombeko an exorbitant fine, one there is no way for her to afford. The judge has no qualms about putting a young black girl in an impossible situation.

This early part of her life is contrasted with how she is treated in Sweden, in fact by the first person she meets, Holger Two. This man says hello and treats her like an equal the second he meets her, and later falls in love with her quick mind and steady presence. In Sweden, nobody thinks twice about her being black, which is amazing because Sweden is a predominantly white country. Nombeko is able to move in and out of society without drawing any negative attention or prejudice, and in this environment she is able to thrive.

Throughout the story, Nombeko shows her value as a person and not as a color or gender. She makes quick and intelligent decisions. She is very attentive to the small "flock" she attracts, looking out for them even when they are an annoyance to her. She works tirelessly towards ridding Sweden of the dangerous bomb. She is industrious and clever. By the novel's end, she has drawn the attention and admiration of countless people in high government situations, which is an amazing climb from her poor and sad origins.

Family

Nombeko has no family in this story. She is orphaned by the time the reader meets her. However, by the end of the story she has assembled a motley crew - Holger and his brother, Celestine, the American Potter (for a while), the Chinese girls (for a while) Gertrud, and even the King and the Prime Minister for a time. These people are not her blood relatives and they are far from perfect, but they are forced together by



circumstances, and after twenty years they are family. Although the group lives together through the entire story, there is no reason for Nombeko to take any real responsibility for them. After all, it is mostly proximity that links them; and possibly, that is one of the author's points. Spending a lot of time with people in community makes them our family, blood relation or not.

There is support and patience, like in any family. Holger One and Celestine, for example, try Nombeko's and Holger Two's patience countless hilarious times in the story. Those two ruin so many of Nombeko's helpful schemes, the plot is expanded exponentially. Nombeko and Holger Two have any number of reasons to leave those two to their own ridiculousness and run off; however, they always forgive and always stay, even finding occupation for the two anarchists and standing up for Holger One when he is threatened. There is never a requirement for Nombeko to take care of any of these people, but she does anyway.

The author further shows the emphasis on family with the introduction of Celestine's grandmother Gertrud. They stay with her for another handful of years, and the older woman is thrilled to have her granddaughter. The reader just assumes that Celestine has bad parents or a bad relationship with her parents, but in the end of the story the reader meets Celestine's parents and sees how thrilled they are to have their child back.

In the end, Holger and Nombeko are able to have a baby together, and Celestine and Holger One do as well, thus cementing the author's claim that a close, supportive community can help us through any number of struggles.

Connectedness

In this novel, the author throws a mighty web over the world, and in a humorous way shows the reader how the world is connected, and how our actions have ripple effects over years and continents. Each character or circumstance introduced in the story will come back around later, usually in a hilarious way.

The most impactful example is President Hu Jintao of China, who makes a short appearance early in the novel as a low-level official sent to South Africa to discuss the nuclear bomb. At the time, the South African Prime Minister sees the Chinese fellow as far beneath him, and his condescending attitude shows. However Nombeko, as translator, is open and honest with the man, telling him exactly what's going on at the table and giving him his due respect.

An offhand story about Celestine's great-grandfather comes back around when Gertrud and the King make friends over the alcoholic beverage that's named after him.

As a plot device this is fun, but it also demonstrates that our actions have repercussions, even if they aren't as far reaching as they are in the story. It is also a reminder that every person's actions are motivated by something that is important to them and not evident to those on the outside. For example, the most ridiculous characters in the story are Holger One and Celestine, who from the outside are always



involving themselves in stupid schemes that will land them in trouble with the law. However, the reader knows that Holger's upbringing was basically brainwashing, and the sudden way in which he lost both of his parents makes it difficult for him to grow up. The reader also learns that Celestine is that way as a means of separating herself from her boring and bourgeois parents.

Politics

There are many sections in the book devoted to keeping the reader up to date on what's happening in the world. The reader can step back and see the progression of ideas and leaders from the 1960s to the 2000s; what's more, the author shows how these decisions made in small rooms at the highest level of government do affect the most insignificant person.

For example, South Africa's policy on apartheid obviously plays a large part in Nombeko's early life. It dictates how she is treated as a child, and also eventually makes South Africa unlikeable to the rest of the world... this in turn motivates them to eventually disarm the nuclear bombs because they have no support in the world. Sweden, who doesn't personally believe in apartheid, does believe enough in the government's right to do as they please that as a country, they support South Africa's choices. It's an odd and twisting truth that links these two countries, but it serves the author and his plot well.

The government leaders discussed in the novel are true to life. Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, and Margaret Thatcher make an appearance, as well as lesser-known (in the west) leaders like Sweden's king and China's President. The author uses these real personalities to remind the reader that our government leaders are actual, fallible humans that are having discussions that will trickle down into our personal lives.

The focus on world politics is in interesting contrast to how absurd the plot often is with its twists and turns. By the end of the story, the reader is well versed on Israel, China, South Africa, and Sweden, and how each of these systems of government operate. Nombeko's interest in politics is something that shows up often, and her intelligence in this area benefits her several times throughout the story. Because she is so well-versed in world events, she is able to make a magazine that gets the Prime Minister's attention, sit in on meetings and serve as his translator, and eventually get a job working for him.

Purpose

Nombeko and Holger Two are both people with virtually no identity. Because Holger Two was never registered at birth, and Nombeko was born in a slum, they have no identifying papers, nor are they registered in their own governments. They are unable to purchase a car, get a bank account, or even apply to school because they have nothing to prove who they are. This is a humorous idea because both of them so thoroughly exist, but they struggle with their "lack of existence" because one's name and their purpose are tightly linked.



Several conversations occur in the novel where these characters express dismay that they don't exist and can't do the things that normal people can do. However, throughout the story they both disprove this assumption, because these two characters create a deep impression on the people in their lives.

Holger gets two advanced degrees and runs a successful business. Nombeko publishes a magazine, and creates a second successful business. They are both remembered because of their intelligence and kindness and attention to their neighbors, and all of these things make them "exist" despite their lack of passports or identifying documents. They also create community and family, which is linked to another of the author's themes. At the end of the story, both of these people, who began life as obscure and unnoticed, hold highly paid and very important positions in government. They have a child and command the attention of several world leaders. They are excited to finally pay bills.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view is third person omniscient, which is a circle past third person limited. Rather than just seeing things around Nombeko, the reader is able to see what is happening not only with the other principle characters, but across the entire world. The author takes several breaks in the action to describe world politics or give the reader the backstory of a character, and these plot devices must work with an omniscient storyteller. It is also beneficial to the reader to simply watch Nombeko make magic from nothing, rather than be inside her head listening to her thoughts and motivations. It creates more awe from the reader to see her work her clever plans and see them come to fruition.

This viewpoint is also helpful in building suspense, because the author is able to leap from one place to another and describe what is happening, so the reader is watching two independent events occur with the knowledge that they will eventually converge. There are several places in the novel where the author does exactly this, to an excellent effect.

Language and Meaning

The author writes in a way that lets the reader in on how absurd the story is. There are many sarcastic comments and asides that help the reader feel like they are in on the whole thing. Because the plot is clever and intricate, the writing is also clever and humorous, providing many laughable moments and some surprises.

Structure

In this novel the chapters tend to run long, because the author is careful to use one chapter to describe one important plot-moving event. The novel is divided into parts as the plot takes large leaps, for instance, from place to place, or if an opponent is vanquished. The reader can feel like they are involved in a long chapter, but the author uses the length to keep the attention focused on the event that will happen; in the next chapter, there will be a new event or a new phase in the lives of the characters.



Quotes

Surrounded by liquor, thinner, and pills, she was expected to live for a while and then die in the mud among the latrines on Soweto's Sector B. Out of all of them, Nombeko was the one to break loose. She left her shack for the first and last time.

-- Narrator (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote, said early in the story, sets up the breadth of her character. That she was born to poverty in a place where everybody was poor and parents had no control over their children's futures. That her mother poisoned her body and left her 12-year-old daughter alone and poor. Despite these disadvantages, this girl taught herself to speak and add, and found a way to learn to read, found a job, and earned money honestly. The writer is telling the reader that this girl will manage to rise above her circumstances and do something more; and that it started with simply leaving the neighborhood.

The logic of racism was no more complicated than that.

-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 2)

Importance: Much of this story's events are driven by racism; most particularly, people's tendency to underestimate Nombeko's intelligence because she was a woman, and black. This quote demonstrates that this attitude isn't complex in nature, isn't complicated; the men in the story believed she was incapable because of her gender and race, even though she proved herself very capable time and again.

How can one accept fools as they are?

-- Nombeko (chapter 10 paragraph 4)

Importance: The contrast between Nombeko's cleverness and the foolishness of the men in the story is a consistent theme. And while many of the characters in the story are foolish, many of them are still likable fools that are simply products of their surroundings. In this chapter, Nombeko feels she is surrounded by fools, but also doesn't wish to abandon them. There is tension between loving the people they are while taking responsibility for their stupidity and mistakes.

Sometimes it's impossible to do the right thing, Prime Minister. Just more or less wrong. The final cleanup of the countess's kitchen was in the best interest of the country. You mustn't have a guilty conscience over that.

-- Nombeko (chapter 21 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote is an interesting take on right and wrong, but really points to the difficulty of being a man or woman in a position of great power. The PM is a very black-and-white individual, and the thought of disposing of the bomb without going through correct channels doesn't sit well with him.



At home in their apartment, they were delighted every time a bill came through the mail slot. For only a person who truly exists can be invoiced.

-- About Holger Two and Nombeko (chapter 24 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote points to Nombeko's and Holger's constant wish throughout the story to exist as real paper, with licenses and passports and in this case, even bills. The reader triumphs with them over this huge victory that shows itself in small ways.

As long as people want a monarchy, you can't get rid of it. But I respect your views; after all, we do live in a democracy.

-- The King of Sweden (chapter 21 paragraph 3)

Importance: These words, spoken cleverly by the king and addressed to Holger One, essentially stop Holger in his quest to eliminate the royal family. The king both knew his audience and proved he was a reasonable person, not a monster; but he also explained to Holger through a slew of historical examples that just because a king is eliminated doesn't mean there won't be others to take his place.

Nombeko and Holger Two were the only ones who knew that the man who wanted to discuss compensation had just burned up 19.6 million kronor because he wanted to save water. From his own well.

-- About Harry and Margareta Blomgren (chapter 15 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote is another demonstration of the author's use of irony. It is in reference to a pair of the novel's most absurd characters, Harry and Margareta Blomgren, who are hopelessly cheap and hypocritical. For them to demand a handful of coins when their stubbornness caused the loss of nearly 20 million is just hilarious irony.

It had clearly been negligent of the intruders to send a cart right through the couple's fence, but they had hardly done that on purpose. To then bully the couple into wasting water so that their belongings wouldn't burn up was remarkable - a criminal act - but if worst came to worst it could be excused by the desperation one could imagine they felt at the time. But to willfully, and contrary to clear instructions, stand by a lilac bush and urinate in the couple's yard - this was so outrageous that Harry and Margareta were beside themselves. It was theft; it was disorderly conduct; it was perhaps the worst thing that had ever happened to them.

-- Harry and Margareta Blomgren (chapter 15 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote is a classic example of hyperbole, and used in connection with some highly absurd and over-dramatic characters. Out of all the things that have happened, for Harry and Margareta to be enraged over public humiliation is hilarious. The author here is poking fun at people who take themselves too seriously.

The angry young woman complained that the stingy goddamn fucking bastard they'd stolen the car from hadn't even gassed it up first.

-- About Celestine (chapter 16 paragraph 4)



Importance: The one chapter in the novel that concerns the Blomgrens moves the plot along very little, but it packs a huge punch for irony and hilarity. This quote also reinforces the character of Celestine, who is constantly at odds with her world and allowing her dissatisfaction with life to come through.

A witness or two?" said Holger Two. "Yes, I think I can find a few. Would the prime minister and the king do?"

-- Holger Two (chapter 24 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote is a great triumph for Holger Two. The reader rejoices with him as he is finally able to get his identity established in his country, if only he can find a few reputable witnesses.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Livni hesitated for a few more seconds, then said, "Is it possible that the prime minister is aware of twenty pounds of antelope meat that is of interest to the nation of Israel?" ... he said that he was well aware of the antelope meat, that it has not tasted good, and that it had been dealt with such that no one else would be able to have a taste of it henceforth. ... Minister of Foreign Affairs Livni didn't need to ask any more questions. She didn't share the prime minister's aversion to antelope meat (vegetarian though she might be), but then, the important thing for Israel was knowing that the meat hadn't ended up with the sort of people who lacked respect for international rules pertaining to the import and export of animal products.

-- Narrator, recounting a conversation between heads of state of Sweden and Israel (chapter 24 paragraph 1)

Importance: This conversation is a clever wrapping up of Israel's interest in the atom bomb. It was prompted by the aging Mossad agent who begs his leader to ask the Swedish PM if he knew what had happened to it. Couched in a benign discussion of antelope meat, the two world powers have mutual assurance that the bomb is safely away from dangerous hands.

You're far too kind, Mr. President. But now the fact is - if I may get straight to the point- I'm sure you remember the crazy engineer from my old homeland, the one who invited you on safari and to dinner? Right. Things didn't go particularly well for him after that, and that's just as well, but he did succeed in scraping up a few atomic bombs, with the help of myself and others." "Yes, right, six of them if I remember correctly," said Hu Jintao. "Seven," said Nombeko. "On top of everything else, he was bad at counting. He locked the seventh up in a secret room, and then you could say it ended up lost. Or...actually, it was in my luggage...when I came to Sweden."

-- Nombeko to President Hu Jintao of China (Chapter 19 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote is important because it highlights the mutual respect between Nombeko and the President of China, whom she met years before in South Africa. In a few clever words she is able to tell him her dilemma. The humorous and ironic wording of the quote is also an example of the author's absurd sort of writing style, underplaying elements that are truly important- such as atomic bombs.