Dragons’ Eggs  J. M. Newsome

Summary

The story is set in Zimbabwe during the time of the land reform laws when white landowners were being asked to leave their farms in the name of land redistribution. As a result of this, 18-year-old Tendai is forced to leave his private school in Harare, which his father’s escaping boss had paid for, and go to live in his stepmother Abigail’s village, Mangwe Ford, with his father, who is unwell and in a state of shock following recent events, his brother Amos and sisters Memory and Gugu. On arriving, he meets and is immediately attracted to a young woman called Sibongile, but his excitement turns to horror shortly afterwards, when his brother Amos loses a leg and a hand in a landmine explosion.

Tendai vows to do something about this terrible danger in the village. At the town hospital in Sikumi, Zola, a journalist and part-time volunteer, gives him some information about landmines and a list of companies which clear them, while the village chief, Uncle Winston, enlists the help of Tendai and Sibongile, which helps along these teenagers’ strong mutual attraction. She has also recently come from Harare and encourages him to tell the villagers the stories which he knows.

And so, at sunset, by the village baobab tree, Tendai tells the story of Dragons’ Eggs (mines) as a way of warning the smaller children in the village to watch carefully where they walk. However, Sibongile is tragically killed by a landmine and the traumatised Tendai runs away. Lost in a safari park full of dangerous predators, he meets an old woman, Gogo, who helps him live a little easier with Sibongile’s death and the sounds of her voice in his head.

He subsequently meets Mrs Ndlovu who runs the safari park and is also deputy mayor. During Tendai’s short period as her driver, she promises to look into the landmine situation. However, finding himself in Sikumi, where Amos is recovering in hospital from his trauma, Tendai runs away, from Mrs Ndlovu, embarrassed by her sexual advances. At the hospital, he meets his father, with whom he goes to see Mayor Kapuya, soon realising that the latter’s account of the missing money from the original Mangwe Ford landmine project is different from Mrs Ndlovu’s.

Having learnt from the mayor’s secretary that Bart Gresham of Victoria Falls was the intended landmine expert for the survey, Tendai sets off on the thousand-kilometre journey to see him. He is lucky when a truck driver, Don McInley, gives him a lift as far as Victoria Falls and even arranges an appointment for him to see Gresham the next morning. While Gresham’s wife takes Tendai to see Victoria Falls, Gresham finds the documents and confirms that the Zimbabwean government money must have disappeared in Sikumi. Bart and Tendai then go back there to confront Kapuya who, it turns out, has already fled towards the Mozambique border following the discovery that Mrs Ndlovu is also investigating the disappearance of the money. This road passes through Mangwe Ford, and Bart, his dog Kit, Tendai, his father and Inspector Ncube chase down the mayor’s crashed car, and then Kit tracks down Kapuya himself.

The story makes front page news, Mrs Ndlovu becomes the new mayor, striking a deal with Bart on the landmine survey project. At Mangwe Ford, the villagers prepare to leave for their temporary lodgings so that Kit can sniff out the killer landmines, while Tendai decides to work as a sports instructor in the care home where his brother Amos will be sent. The story ends with Tendai at Sibongile’s grave, finally accepting that her tragic death has not been in vain as the people of Mangwe Ford will be able to live safely in the future.

Before reading

1. 1) The landmine suggests war/conflict in the country.
2) The dry conditions suggest a hot continent – Africa, Australia, Asia, the Middle East.
3) Student’s own answers.
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2. 1) Student’s own answer.
2) Student’s own answer.
3) Student’s own answer.
4) In south central Africa.

3. Harare is the capital. It is surrounded by Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, South Africa.

4. 1) Abigail
2) Shamba
3) Amos
4) Tendai
5) Gareth’s

Check your reading

Chapter 1

1. 1) for standing on Beatrice’s dress
2) His father, who has lost his job, is sick and the family have nowhere to go.
3) Student’s own answer.

2. a) What’s your name?
b) How old are you?
c) Which school did you go to?
d) Who paid for your private school?
e) What job does your dad do?
f) Do you play any sport?

Chapter 2

1. 1) Memory
2) Gugu
3) Abigail
4) Tendai’s dad
5) Amos
6) a monkey

Chapter 3

1. volunteer, organisation, landmines, nails, landmines, minefields, marked, landmines, revolutionaries
2. Student’s own answer.

Chapter 4

1. 1 F, 2 F, 3 F, 4 O, 5 O, 6 O, 7 O

Chapter 5

1. (suggested answer). Dear Pete, Well, life is very different here from our school in Harare. I am surrounded by animals and countryside. The earth is rocky and red, there is a thick forest, and a river runs by our village of Mangwe Ford. The hills are full of animals, such as zebras, and there are more of them than us humans! I don’t know what I am going to do here! Hope you are well, Tendai
2. Student’s own answer.

Chapter 6

1. 1 F, 2 F, 3 T, 4 F, 5 T, 6 F, 7 F, 8 F, 9 F, 10 F

Chapter 7

1. 1 S, 2 S, 3 S, 4 S, 5 T, 6 T, 7 T, 8 S

Chapter 8

1. ‘Dragons’ eggs’ are the mines.
2. He wants to warn the village children.
3. Student’s own answer.
4. Student’s own answer.

Chapter 9

1. 1 g, 2 c, 3 b, 4 f, 5 e, 6 a, 7 d

Chapter 10

1. e – a – g – f – c – b – d

Chapter 11

1. 1 Gogo, 2 Gogo and Tendai, 3 Gogo,
4 Sibongile, 5 five children, 6 The King Lion,
7 little boy
Chapter 12
1. 1 F, 2 T, 3 T, 4 F, 5 F, 6 F, 7 F, 8 F

Chapter 13
1. 1) The next morning at seven o’clock
2) A uniform.
3) A large black Peugeot.
4) Sikumi.
5) Sad because of Amos; afraid in case he saw his parents; confused; reminded of the horrors.
6) She was deputy mayor of Sikumi.
7) Outside the bank
8) Mrs Ndlovu.
9) To make Tendai her boyfriend.
10) He heard Sibongile in his head.

Chapter 14
1. 1) Sibonglie, 2) Abigail, 3) Tendai, 4) Tendai’s dad, 5) Mayor Kapuya, 6) the mayor’s secretary, 7) Tendai’s dad, 8) Tendai’s dad

Chapter 15
1. To look out for job adverts for him.
2. Sibongile was uninjured, sitting on a large rock and looking down at Tendai. She asked him never to run away from her and Tendai began to cry. She then said he should get the landmines cleared before starting to work because there were many more and that he should be careful of the mayor. She finally said that she had loved him for eight days.

Chapter 16
1. 1) d, 2) f, 3) a, 4) e, 5) b, 6) g, 7) c
2. Student’s own answer.

Chapter 17
1. 1) the people getting on the train, 2) train, 3) dirt road, 4) group of trees, 5) Bart Gresham, 6) map, 7) Tendai, 8) clearing the landmines

Chapter 18
1. a) Mrs Gresham, b) truck, c) sound (Victoria Falls), d) Gareth, e) Victoria Falls, f) Kit, g) the mayor’s secretary, h) pick up truck, i) Kit, j) Kit

Chapter 19
1. When the Young King asked the Old King of the Land of Falls for one of his rainbows, the Old King gave him a rainbow-coloured bird instead. The Young King thought the present was rather stupid so he gave it to his youngest and prettiest wife. As it wouldn’t eat or drink, they let it go and then watched it fly up and down happily in the free air. Then, while sitting on some rocks, they became surrounded by many rainbow birds, and the Young King realised the Old King wasn’t stupid at all.

2. Student’s own answer.

Chapter 20
1. 1) e, 2) i, 3) a, 4) g, 5) c, 6) h, 7) f, 8) b, 9) d

Chapter 21
1. Mayor Method Kapuya was arrested after an exciting car chase involving a police car and a private vehicle last night. He was on his way to the Mozambique border crossing beyond Mangwe Ford. He had tried to leave the country because a large sum of money is missing from the town council accounts. This money was given by central government to pay for the landmine survey of the area around Mangwe Ford, where one person has been injured and another killed in the last three weeks. Mr Bart Gresham, a landmine expert from Victoria Falls, and his dog, Kit, were involved in the chase. The arresting officer was Inspector Ncube, and Shamba and Tendai Murvuri of Mangwe Ford were also present. The police are now investigating Mayor Kapuya’s personal bank accounts.
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2. Mr. Gresham will do the survey and get paid later. The villagers will temporarily stay at the old safari centre.

Chapter 22

1. 1) Lazarus Lodge care home
    2) Sports organiser for people injured by landmines
    3) Uncle Winston
    4) Kit
    5) explosive experts
    6) two
    7) the rocky hill
    8) life without Sibongile
    9) ‘Sibongile, gone too soon’
    10) ‘What we do with our lives is what we give to ourselves.’