



# READING GUIDE

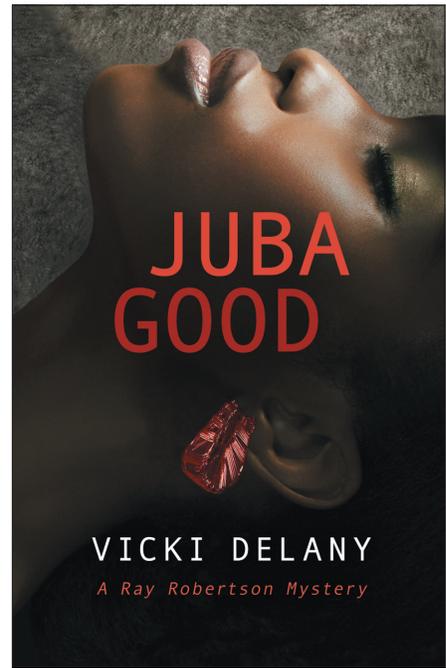
## JUBA GOOD VICKI DELANY

Reading level: 3.0

Interest level: Adult

Themes: crime, mystery, Africa, murder, serial killer,  
RCMP, United Nations, foreign aid

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### Summary

RCMP officer Ray Robertson is nearing the end of his year-long term in South Sudan, where he has been working with the UN to train and advise the new country's police force. He is looking forward to finishing his term and connecting back up with his wife, Jenny, to enjoy a vacation together in Kenya before heading back to his home in Vancouver.

Two weeks before his departure, Robertson stumbles into a string of murders that he ultimately insists on solving before he leaves the country. The victims are all female prostitutes, strangled to death with the killer's trademark white ribbon and dumped on a residential street. As the book gets underway, Robertson is investigating the fourth such murder, accompanied by his trusted partner, John Deng, a native of the Dinka tribe in Africa. Deng is tight-lipped about his own family; Robertson assumes they were killed during Sudan's long civil war.

Deng and Robertson set out to get to the bottom of the murders in a place where the citizens have seen so much darkness and hatred that it's difficult to establish a trusting relationship—especially with the police. A moral man by nature, Robertson nevertheless has to bend rules to get his questions answered. He encounters a number of dead ends along the way, but his determination to see at least a little bit of justice done before he leaves for Canada fuels his refusal to give up.

As Robertson makes the rounds of area restaurants and watering holes in an attempt to piece the mystery together, numerous characters are introduced who could possibly be the murderer, including some of Robertson's policing colleagues at the UN compound: Peter, a soccer-loving cop from Namibia; Nigel, a Brit; Sven, a surly Swede. Through their interactions, as well as those of embassy employees and government officials, readers witness a country in total disarray, where people disappear without a trace, where western proponents of democracy conduct themselves in direct contradiction to their ideological leanings, and where women and girls are raped, fondled and otherwise violated as a matter of course.

Robertson finds himself at times utterly disheartened: if nobody else cares about these women being killed and dumped on the sidewalk, why should he?

But he does. Working in conditions and with tools that are considerably less refined than he



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is accustomed to using in his investigations back home, Robertson nonetheless manages to gather evidence and make connections. After a fifth and then a sixth woman are found dead, Robertson figures out that the owner of the Blue Nile restaurant is running a prostitution racket, “renting” out his waitresses to foreign men. The killer is murdering these women and then dumping them using a stolen car.

When Robertson identifies the killer as Nigel, one of his colleagues, he stakes the man out and follows him. Nigel steals a car and heads to the Blue Nile, where he later leaves with a woman. Robertson elects to confront Nigel in the parking lot, before the hapless victim gets into the man’s stolen truck. A scuffle ensues; the frightened woman slips into the bush and Nigel is arrested. Robertson and Deng lack incontrovertible evidence linking Nigel to the crime. Although Robertson knows it, he can’t prove the man committed the murders—and he isn’t willing to put this newest victim in danger to prove Nigel’s guilt. Ultimately, Nigel is arrested on charges for stealing a car; he is deported back to England and the women of South Sudan are safe from at least this killer.

The final curveball in *Juba Good* comes when, after having solved the murders and thus made his small mark of goodness in such a messed-up country, Robertson decides to reapply for another year in South Sudan.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What do you know about the civil uprising of Sudan’s southernmost states and their ultimate secession from the country to form South Sudan? As you see it, what lies ahead for South Sudan, which holds  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the former country’s oil reserves and yet is one of Africa’s most underdeveloped countries?
2. People working on UN training missions—like Ray Robertson—are unarmed. But even after a year without his Glock, Robertson still feels like he has a giant hole in his side. What do you feel naked without? Address this question from the standpoint of both your personal and your professional life.
3. As Deng and Robertson ask questions of people who might have heard something on the night of the fourth murder, Robertson reflects that even in Canada, many people would have turned a deaf ear to the woman’s screaming. Consider this aspect of human nature. Does it originate in complacency? Fear? Judgment? Or something else entirely? Discuss.
4. When Robertson describes the murder to his UN colleagues, one man expresses his lack of sympathy for prostitutes. “Hooking’s easier than working in a shop or washing dishes,” he says. “Pay’s better too. I’ve got no tears for them” (ch. 3). On what core beliefs is he forming his opinion? Do you agree or disagree?
5. Few people take umbrage with the function of most jobs: doctors, plumbers, convenience store clerks, sanitation workers, car mechanics. What makes prostitution an issue of such virulent debate? What are the grey areas that make it so difficult for us to achieve consensus?
6. At the end of chapter 3, after hitting a number of dead ends in his investigation into the fourth victim’s death, Robertson throws his hands up in frustration. *I decided I couldn’t face it*, he thinks. *Let her be. If no one else cared, why should I?* Comment on his question. How is it a broader metaphor for the state of the world now?





7. The setting in *Juba Good* is brought to life with vivid description throughout the book. How does the author's description of South Sudan challenge or change your preconceived notions of Africa? Use examples from the story to support your answer.
8. Ray Robertson takes his job and his role in South Sudan very seriously, which is in contrast to a number of other UN workers. Can you think of another character from a book or movie who is similarly possessed by his or her job? Describe this character and their relationship to their job.
9. Ray Robertson is surrounded by supposedly upstanding professionals such as other police officers, embassy employees and government workers. Yet everywhere he turns, he sees men taking advantage of the turn-the-other-cheek attitude toward sexual assault in South Sudan. These same men steal and cheat and engage in other acts of deliberate disregard of decent moral conduct. What challenges would a well-meaning, morally upstanding person struggle with in the face of this kind of deportment? Do you think everyone would wear down over time, until no one had a clean record anymore?
10. In chapter 7, Robertson refers to the Vancouver police ignoring the disappearances of dozens of First Nations women over a number of years. What do you know of the Highway of Tears in Canada? What do you know of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez in northern Mexico? For what reasons do the authorities turn a blind eye to these killings?
11. When Robertson returns to his container on the UN compound one night, he discovers a young girl in his bed (ch. 12). Someone is trying to intimidate or perhaps even frame him in order to discourage him from pursuing the murder cases. Only through quick thinking and by bringing in a third party is he able to circumvent the trap. It's a stark reminder of how, for better or worse, life can change in an instant—and it's not always fair. Think about where you have seen this truism play out in the real world, either in a news story or in your own sphere.
12. Even though Deng has neither entered Robertson's home nor shared any personal information with him, Robertson feels he can trust Deng entirely—as a good man and as a good cop. What creates the conditions for trust? Does it depend on the nature of the relationship?
13. Instead of catching Nigel Farnsworth red-handed and about to murder yet another young woman, Robertson wades in early and has the man arrested for stealing a car. Nigel is subsequently sent back to the UK with a reprimand. Deng is disappointed and feels this isn't an adequate resolution for Nigel, given his likely guilt in committing the murders. What do you think Ray Robertson should have done? Are you satisfied with his actions? How do you feel about Nigel not doing any jail time for the murders he most likely committed?
14. Comment on the significance of the book's title.
15. At the end of *Juba Good*, Robertson decides he wants to take another year-long posting in South Sudan so he can make a difference: *Somehow, here, in this troubled land, I felt that I might be able to accomplish something*, he thinks. *I wasn't just going through the motions anymore* (ch. 15). What compels us to make a positive difference in the world? How do time, age and experience shape this urge?

