



RAPID READS

ADVANCE READING COPY



# JUBA GOOD

VICKI DELANY

*A Ray Robertson Mystery*

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To Come

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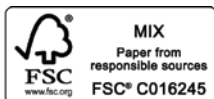
To Come

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**Summary:** RCMP Sergeant Ray Robertson, nearing the end of his year-long UN mission in Juba, South Sudan, struggles to find a serial killer. (RL 3.0)



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*For Caroline*

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## CHAPTER ONE

I jumped out of the way of a speeding boda boda and tripped over a pregnant goat. The driver of the scooter yelled at me. I gave him a hand gesture in return. Not a good idea, in this town, at this time of night. But I'd had a rotten day and was in a matching mood.

The goat I ignored. It was not a good idea to interfere with her. She was worth money.

Juba, South Sudan. April. The dry season. The air red with dust blowing down from the desert to the north. Choking dust.



Getting into everything. Me, coughing up my lungs half the night.

At six foot three, I'm considered a big guy back home in Canada. Here, in a group of locals, I'm about average. Some of these guys—heck, some of the women—must be close to seven feet. Damn good-looking women though.

My name's Ray Robertson. In Canada, I'm an RCMP officer. In South Sudan, I'm with the UN. Our role is to be trainers, mentors and advisers. Help the new country of South Sudan build a modern police force.

Yeah, right.

I've been in the country eleven and a half months. Just over two weeks to go. First thing I'm going to do when I check into my hotel in Nairobi is have a bath. A long hot bath. Get all that red dirt out of my lily-white skin. Jenny gets in the next morning. We're going to Mombasa.

A fancy hotel. A week on the beach. Sex and warm water and clean sand. More sex. Heaven.

I climbed into the police truck. I'd recently begun working with John Deng. He was a good guy, Deng. From the Dinka tribe, so about as tall and thin as a lamp-post. He didn't say much, but what he did say was worth listening to.

His phone rang. Deng spoke into it, a couple of short words I didn't catch. He hung up and turned to me. His eyes and teeth were very white in the dark.

"Another dead woman," he said.

"Damn."

Deng put the truck into gear and we pulled into the traffic. Think you've seen traffic chaos? Come to Juba. The city's mostly dirt roads. Uncovered manholes, open drainage ditches and piles of rubble. Potholes you could lose a family in. Trucks, 4x4s, cars, boda bodas, pedestrians, goats,

chickens and the occasional small child. Every one of them fighting for space, jostling to push another inch through the crowds. The roads have no street signs and few traffic signs. Which no one pays attention to anyway.

We drove toward the river. The White Nile. The goal of Burton, Speke, Baker, the great Victorian explorers. The river's wide here, moving fast. It's not white for sure. More the color of warm American beer. Full of twigs and branches and whole trees trapped in the current. Plus a lot of other things that I don't want to think much about.

The old settlement's called Juba Town. Disintegrating white buildings, cracked and broken sidewalks, mountains of rubbish. A crumbling blue mosque in a dusty square. Small shops selling anything and everything alongside outdoor markets hawking goods.

In daytime, the streets are crowded. Soldiers in green camouflage uniforms.

Police in blue camo. Adults going about their business. Bare-bottomed babies. Schoolchildren with scrubbed faces, clean uniforms and wide, friendly smiles. Honking horns, shouting men, chatting women, music and laughter.

Now, at night, all was quiet. A handful of fires burned in trash piles that had spilled into the streets. Men sat in circles drinking beer. Women watched from open doorways. Above, thick clouds blocked moon and stars.

A water station has been built close to the river. Blue water trucks line up there during the day to get safe water. The street was a mess of deep puddles, red mud, rocks, ruts and trash. Not as good as some, better than most.

Deng stopped our truck at the bend. Where the road turned sharply to run parallel to the river. He left the vehicle lights on and we got out. I pulled my flashlight out of my belt. Flashlight and a night stick.

That's all I carried. No weapon. This was a training mission, remember. I was here to observe. To offer comments and helpful ideas when needed.

A year without the Glock, and I still felt like I had a giant hole in my side.

Deng carried an AK-47. He was former army, SPLA—Sudan People's Liberation Army. At first a band of guerillas, fighting for independence from Sudan. Now the army of South Sudan. He'd spent his time in the bush during the war, doing things I couldn't imagine. Things I didn't want to imagine. The long and brutal civil war had made these people hard. Some of them didn't handle it too well. Deng did. He had a quick smile and a hearty laugh. He wanted to be a good police officer. I'd asked him once if he had a wife and children. A mask settled over his face. He yelled at the driver of a scooter who hadn't come at all close to us. I never asked again.

The woman was lying at the side of the road, up against a concrete wall. Her skin was as black as midnight. Blacker. An earring made of red glass hung from her right ear. A short tight black dress and red stilettos were clues to her occupation. Another dead hooker in the dusty red streets of Juba.

This was the fourth. If she was a hooker. If the same person had been responsible. The fourth in three weeks.

Deng snarled at the security guard who'd found her. The man quickly stepped back. He knew his place.

I used my Maglite to illuminate the scene. A white ribbon was wrapped around her neck. Wrapped very tightly around her neck. As white and pure as the snow on Kokanee Glacier in midwinter. Same as the others.

"What do you see?" I asked Deng. That's the training part of my job.

“A white ribbon.”

“Yup.”

“Do we have a serial killer here, Ray?”

“I’m beginning to think we do.”

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