

Mary Soderstrom

THE VIOLETS OF
USAMBARA

a novel



Mary Soderstrom

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USAMBARA



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*For the good people at the Amani Nature Reserve in the
East Usambara Mountains of Tanzania*

PREVIEW NOT FOR RESALE

Friday, March 14, 1997
Outside Bujumbura, Burundi
Thomas

They both agreed that in an ideal world, Louise would have gone to Burundi, not Thomas. Africa was her continent. For years she'd kept tabs on it, raised money for it, grown its flowers. But Louise did not travel well, and it was Thomas who was needed. Or so Louise said.

The trip from Bujumbura to the camp took about four hours, and Thomas held on to the panic bar in the Jeep the whole way. He did not realize how tightly he was gripping it until the Jeep finished threading its way through the lanes that ran between the shelters and came to a stop where the roadway ended. He expected his knees to be stiff, to creak a bit as he stepped out of the vehicle — that had been happening lately, a sign of aging that he didn't like to think about — but the frozen muscles in his hand were something new. In the end, he had to take his other hand and pry his fingers loose. He said nothing about this. The other observers couldn't be more than forty, while the drivers of the two Jeeps and the four young men riding shotgun with AK-47s looked barely out of their teens — AK-47s are the boy soldier's weapon, and Thomas wondered briefly, and not for the first time, if they were

any worse than the guns Oerlikon made. None of the others seemed to mind the drive up the relatively well-paved road north of Bujumbura and along the muddy track that led to the refugee camp.

21 | The drivers parked the Jeeps just inside the barbed-wire fence that enclosed the camp's headquarters. The camp itself, Thomas knew, was no longer supposed to be very dangerous. It was full of people who, in recent months, had poured across the border from Zaire to the west. The other four camps they were scheduled to visit were farther away, up in the hills, and sheltered people who were not refugees as such, but exiles in their own country. Bailey, the man from Witness International, said the outside world had heard little news from any of the camps in the last seven months because of the embargo. Whatever information Thomas and his group reported would be very important because current conditions in those camps were completely unknown. "But this camp is run by the UN High Commission for Refugees, supported by three non-government organizations," he said. "Consider this a practice run."

Practice run, Thomas thought, as he stood next to the Jeep, stretching his arms and working his fingers. The others in his group also stayed close to the vehicles as they took stock of the camp, which housed, Bailey said, about 10,000 people.

Most of the shelters reminded Thomas of the longhouses North American Indians used to build, with silhouettes like a loaf of bread. These structures appeared to be constructed of branches woven together to form an arching roof high enough for a person to stand up in the middle. They had no windows and no chimneys, and, since it was the rainy season, all were covered with bright blue, orange or dirty white plastic tarps. Inside, they would be dark and airless and hot.

The tarps must have come from the NGOs and the UNHCR, Thomas guessed. Same thing for a few small tents he saw here and there, and for the big tent inside the compound. Where did the material to make the shelters come from? The land was bare of vegetation — Thomas could see no trees, no bushes, only shelters scattered in a

haphazard pattern that went on and on, seemingly without end. It wasn't until his eyes lifted toward the hills on the other side of the river that he saw, kilometres away in Zaire, mountains that looked green and, perhaps, tree-covered. Here, there was only mud. Mud and people and smoke rising from their cooking, he thought. But then, he realized, not long ago there would have been jungle here too, or forest or brush. Everything must have been cut down to make shelters or to burn for cooking fires. The landscape had been transformed as much as these people's lives had been by the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis.

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The temptation to think about lives transformed flooded over him, but, as he had reminded himself before, he was not here because of what might have happened in his past. That was nothing — nothing at all — compared to the tragedies that had played out here.

He squinted against the sun. The equator ran a couple of hundred kilometres to the north, through Kenya, Rwanda, Zaire. The seasons changed here — rainy and not rainy — but the times of sunrise and sunset varied no more than thirty-five minutes over the year. At home in Montreal, with the equinox approaching, the sun at noon would only be halfway up the sky, but here, the midday sunlight fell straight down. It circumvented his sunglasses — he needed a hat. He should have bought one of those floatable cotton ones made in Canada, but he hadn't thought to. Nor had Louise.

Louise. The competence of Louise — his Loulou. Another train of thought that would lead nowhere. Better to try to get the measure of this place.

His ears were still filled with the sound of the Jeep, of the wind rushing past them. Around him, he was aware of the noises of the camp, the chatter of children, a woman shouting, two hammers pounding out of sync with each other, more wind, but also the absence of other sounds — no machines, no vehicles, no generators. Even the smells that hit him were ancient — woodsmoke, rotting vegetation, a hint of sewage.

From behind him, Thomas heard movement, and he turned to see a slight white woman with short white hair come out of the

headquarters tent. She was smiling as she looked past him toward Bailey, who was taking things out of the back of the Jeep and handing them to the driver.

41 “Well, look who’s here,” she said coming forward, her arms outstretched. “What took you so long?” She only came up to Bailey’s shoulder, her two hands gripping his elbows as she beamed up at him. She was wearing hiking boots and khaki pants like many other people working for NGOs, but the way her white short-sleeved shirt was buttoned all the way to the collar set her apart from the other female aid workers Thomas had met so far.

Bailey looked surprised at the warmth of her welcome. “Well, we got here,” he said. He turned slightly, out of her grasp, and began to introduce the others — the tall, lanky fellow from the Mennonite Missionary Service, the dark-haired woman from the Witness International office in New York, and Thomas Brossard from Canadian Catholic Overseas Charities.

The small woman smiled at the other two, but when Bailey came to Thomas, her expression shifted. “Thomas Brossard,” she said, pronouncing it the French way. “The Honourable Thomas Brossard,” she added in English. “Louise’s husband. I heard she’d been campaigning to get you involved.”

She was one of Louise’s religious friends, a nun, Thomas immediately realized. He might have been the one with the political career, but Louise’s shadow extended all the way here.

“So you came to see what we’re doing?” the nun asked once hands were shaken and smiles exchanged. Her question appeared to be general, but she looked straight at Thomas. “We’ll show you. You’ll have a lot to report. I promise.”

Before, in his other life, he had represented his government on many trade missions and at dozens of conferences. Inspection visits like this would begin with a greeting, followed by a walk-about and a chance to talk to a worker, a school child or a small-businessman.

The real information would come out later. Thomas thought he had learned how to look around edges for the truth, how to tease news about the real situation from a web of official words. He was prepared to do much the same on this trip, even though he was here as a private citizen.

At lunch in the headquarters tent — bottled water and vegetable stew — the nun explained that this was the second wave of refugees to use the camp. It first sheltered Hutus fleeing Rwanda in fear of retribution of the genocide there, but Burundi's Tutsi government had pushed them back home. Now the camp was full of Tutsis from Zaire who wanted to get away from the growing trouble there.

The armed guards who had come with them from Bujumbura walked in front as the nun led Thomas and the other observers down the camp's winding paths. The water tanks and electric lines had been put up during the first period, she said, and luckily no one had removed that infrastructure while the camp was empty. It had been a relatively simple matter to bring back generators and fill the tanks with water when the refugees from Zaire arrived.

"The shelters were still standing for the most part, too," she went on, stopping by the entrance of one where women were sitting, resting from the midday heat. "People had taken what they could with them, but the basic huts were still here. And since we've got fewer refugees than there were then, crowding is not as bad."

The women looked up at the little group of whites, blinking at the light. One of them said something and the others giggled.

The nun ignored them. She pointed to a small boy leaning against his mother, who stared up at Thomas. "He's thin," she said, "but notice that he doesn't have a pot-belly or scabby skin. He's not seriously malnourished." The boy scratched the back of his left calf with his right foot. "And see how tall he is. He's probably three if he's still hanging around the women and not running with the other kids, but he's as tall as a kindergartner."

The man from the Mennonite services nodded. “They’re being well treated, is that what you’re telling us?” he asked. He had pulled a small notebook out of his shirt pocket and was taking notes.

61 Thomas looked around for other children to compare with the boy. He saw women with babies in slings on their backs and a couple of bare-legged seven- or eight-year-old girls in short, tattered dresses. But before he could spy any boys, he was hit by a choking smell. Sewage, the revolting smell of human waste, left to fester in a dark place.

The nun coughed too. “They are cleaning out the latrine pits,” she said. “We’ve had some trouble with them. Usually it’s not this bad.”

“Sanitation is always a problem,” the Mennonite man said, covering his face with a bandana. “You haven’t had any cholera?”

“No,” the nun answered, and began an explanation of the sanitary arrangements as she walked quickly down the lane, away from the smell.

Thomas didn’t follow immediately. He was hunched over, fighting back nausea. He fumbled a Kleenex from his back pocket as he gagged, his mouth filling with bile. He spat, and scrubbed at his mouth with the tissue, trying to clear the taste away. For several seconds he squatted there, willing his heart to stop pounding and the sweat pouring down his face to subside.

By the time the smell had dissipated a bit and he felt he could go on, the others were almost out of sight. He knew he should hurry to catch up, but a flash of red, bright against the browns and tans of the earth, caught his eye. Boys were running and shouting down a path that branched off from the one Thomas’s group was on. Thomas heard a cheer go up and saw another red T-shirt flash by.

Kids having a good time? A soccer game in this heat? Strange in this strange place. No one else seemed to be moving — the women were resting, a couple of old men sat in the shade, heat bounced off the plastic tarps.

The boys disappeared from his line of sight, and before he knew it, Thomas found himself on their trail, wondering at the contrast

between their apparent joy and the lethargy of the rest of the camp. He threaded his way between the huts, carefully stepping around the puddles taking up much of the path, thankful that the smell of stale ashes and mould had replaced the stench of sewage.

As he came closer to the end of the path, an expanse of mud appeared beyond the group of shelters. In the middle, Thomas saw eight or ten gangly, pre-adolescent boys dressed in coloured T-shirts chasing a much smaller boy. Thomas tried to catch sight of the ball the smaller one must be dribbling amid the pumping legs. Strange, Thomas thought, he's not trying to pass or shoot at whatever they're using for goalposts. Indeed, it was only when two boys pounced that Thomas realized what was happening. The smaller boy fell and the others stopped. They shouted as the two front-runners began kicking the smaller boy.

There was no ball. It was no game.

Despite the heat, despite the residual smells, Thomas rushed out onto the expanse of mud, startling the boys who turned and fled. The injured boy lay on the ground, his knees pulled up and his back curved forward, his forearms covering his gut. He was not crying. Thomas heard Bailey yelling, "Brossard, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"You don't understand," the nun said when Thomas, Bailey, the boy and the armed man had rejoined the group. "Here you must not go off by yourself. A well-travelled man like you should know better."

"But the boy ..." Thomas began. The child had blood streaming down his face and held his right arm in front of him at an angle that Thomas was sure was unnatural. He was walking, however, supported on his left side by the guard.

"The boy will be looked after. We can handle cuts and bruises," the nun said. Her voice was curt, authoritative, like that of Sister Benedict, his third-grade teacher in Boston. "Now, do you want to see the rest of the camp or not?"

He followed along after that. No one mentioned what had happened again, not during the meal they shared with the medical staff in the evening, nor the couple of hours they spent sitting inside the compound, listening to a lay missionary play the guitar and sing.

8 | The next morning, they toured the fields outside the camp proper, where people had begun to plant beans. The nun talked about food aid, what could be produced here and the number of malnourished babies who had received supplementary feeding, while the others took notes. Thomas — who'd left his notebook back at the hotel — nodded, telling himself he would remember all this, that he would write it all down when they arrived back in Bujumbura. What he really wanted to know was the boy's story.

On the way back from the fields, Thomas made a point of walking beside the nun so he could ask about him. "Do you have any idea why the bigger boys attacked him?" he asked as they passed the tiny plots.

She didn't look at him, nor did she answer his question. "The boy will be all right," she said evenly, calmly, as if there were much more in this world to worry about than conflicts among boys. "His aunt is looking after him. He's a lucky one, actually. He's lost his parents, but he has several relatives in the camp." Then she turned to say something else to Bailey.

"No, wait," Thomas said. He fished in his pocket for the hidden compartment where he carried extra US money. "Here," he said, pulling out a bill. "Give this to him."

She took the bill and looked at it — twenty US dollars, Thomas saw; he hadn't looked before.

"Give it to him," Thomas repeated.

"I'll see that it is used properly," she said.

For just a second, Thomas wondered if he should press her, make sure that the money wouldn't disappear into the general welfare fund, but Bailey quickly took him by the arm and reminded him that they had to get going if they were to get back to Bujumbura before curfew.

Half-grown boys and refugees; Thomas thought about them as he held tightly to the panic bar of the Jeep that sped back to the city. Memory is much faster, however. All our memories are hiding inside our brains, ready to be tapped at the speed of light if the right signal is given. In a nanosecond the thought of half-grown boys and refugees sent Thomas back to Montreal in 1994, six months after he lost the election. He was still looking for work then, and was not pleased when his newly retired mother announced that she was coming from Boston to visit.

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“I didn’t want to leave town for the first little while,” she said on the phone. “Nobody knows how things work the way a school secretary does. But now the new one is broken in, so I will come to see you.”

Thomas was not pleased, but he had trouble telling Louise why. It boiled down to the fact that he did not want to hear his mother sigh over the way his career had crumbled. He did not want to hear her say that it had been a mistake for his father to send him to board at Collège Brébeuf the year of their divorce. He did not want to hear her complain that he would have done better if he had stayed in the US. He did not want her to speculate aloud on what he might have become if he’d stayed in a first-rate country instead of allowing himself to be ensnared by a second-rate one.

In the past, she had never listened when he’d protested that, by many people’s standards, he’d done very well. The last time they talked, he added that he was tired of hearing Americans claim the moral high road as their own. That was shortly after Bill Clinton was elected and he and Hillary were trying to set up universal Medicare in the States, but the plan was going nowhere. “For Christ’s sake,” Thomas said, “we’ve had it here for thirty years. Just what the heck are you doing down there? People are dying because they haven’t got insurance.”

She could not answer that, but now with Thomas’s own electoral defeat behind him and the future unclear, he didn’t want to have to defend himself.

Louise insisted they be hospitable to her anyway. “She’s an old woman,” she said. “Just because she’s wrong is no reason for us to be mean.” He suspected she was right, as she so often was, so he agreed that they take his mother out to dinner and that they tell the kids be polite.

10 | To complicate things, the evening before Mrs. Brossard arrived, their younger son, Sylvain, asked if he could invite his friend Benjamin over for the weekend.

Thomas was in the other room, ready to call out a summary “no.” But Louise didn’t answer immediately, and the weight of her silence made him hesitate. Finally, she asked, “He’s the one whose father was killed last week?”

“Yes,” Thomas heard Sylvain say, and listened to more silence. Of course, Thomas thought, *Le Devoir* had a story about the family on Wednesday when the news of the bloodbath in Rwanda began to come out. Benjamin’s father was a Tutsi from a *colline* north of Kigali, who’d met Benjamin’s mother — a woman from a small town in farming country, south of Montreal — when he’d been training as an agronomist at Université Laval in Quebec City. He had gone back to Rwanda in January, and his wife and their four children had been scheduled to move there as soon as the school year ended.

When Sylvain finally spoke, his voice broke the way it had the year before, when it began to change. “His mother wants to take the little kids down to their grandparents’ in the country,” he said. “But Benjamin’s got tests next week, he won’t be able to study down there.” There was a pause. “And besides, Maman, he’s so sad ...”

“In that case, of course Benjamin can stay with us,” Thomas heard Louise say, all hesitation pushed aside. Later, Louise asked that Thomas prepare his mother — she would not allow there to be a scene in front of the boy.

Officially, Mrs. Brossard was in favour of equality for everybody. “We’re all God’s children,” she’d told Thomas when he was a boy. After his parents’ divorce, she had chosen to remain in a neighbourhood

that teetered on the brink of complete racial change. She had worked long and dedicated years in a parochial school that had originally taught the children of Irish- and Franco-Americans, and then found a second life as the school of choice for the children of hard-working African-American families. She wasn't unsophisticated, she wasn't mean. She considered herself tolerant.

More than once, though, she had said she really didn't think that the coloured wanted to mix with the whites anymore than the other way around. Never to Thomas's knowledge had she sat down for a meal with a person of colour in a social setting. The cafeteria at her school and the restaurants where she sometimes treated herself had been integrated for decades but she had never been a guest at a table where a person of colour was welcomed as an equal or friend.

Thomas told his mother about Benjamin over breakfast on Saturday morning before the boy arrived. She listened politely to his explanation of the friendship between the two boys and the tragedy that had befallen Benjamin's father. She didn't respond right away, but seemed to consider various reactions as Thomas watched with apprehension. "Well of course, I'll be glad to meet any friend of Sylvain's," she said finally. She shook her shoulders in a tiny shiver. "The poor thing."

Thomas smiled when he heard that. Perhaps it would be all right. Benjamin was a handsome boy and, possibly just as important where Mrs. Brossard was concerned, not very dark. When he arrived at the house in the middle of the afternoon, Thomas made a point of introducing him to Mrs. Brossard before he and Sylvain disappeared to listen to music in Sylvain's room. Benjamin politely shook Mrs. Brossard's hand, told her he was *enchanté*, and Thomas saw her smile at him.

They neglected, however, to prepare her for their eldest son's girlfriend — Anh-Louise was standing next to Richard outside the restaurant when they drove up. When Richard introduced her to his grandmother, Thomas saw a quick look of panic pass over the old

woman's face as she took in the tiny girl — her slanted eyes, her sleek black hair, her pale skin — before she regained her calm and accepted the girl's handshake and greeting kisses with a careful smile.

12 | The dinner itself was deceptively pleasant. Sylvain and Benjamin talked mostly to Richard and Anh-Louise about subjects that Thomas didn't catch, while their daughter, Marielle, told her grandmother stories about medical school. Thomas watched the pleasure with which Louise ate, he noticed that Sylvain was trying to make Benjamin laugh, he saw Richard take Anh-Louise's hand and hold it on top of the table where everyone could see. Then he heard his mother talking to him.

"The girl, where is she from?" she asked in English, the language she had always used with him for official business when he was growing up.

"Anh-Louise you mean?" he answered, stalling a little, wondering just what his mother was getting at. "She was born here. Louise met her mother in a prenatal class, as a matter of fact. But if you're asking about her ancestry, it's Vietnamese."

His mother nodded. "I should have known," she said. "She is very pretty. Richard seems to be very fond of her." She paused for a second. "Her family, are they some of those boat people?"

"Boat people?" Thomas asked, although he suspected where her thinking was headed.

"You know, those refugees from Vietnam that came flooding in," she said, giving her shoulders a little shake, as if willing unpleasantness away. "So poor, so many of them ..."

Thomas forced himself to laugh, cutting her off. "I don't think so," he said. "They seem to be quite well off."

"And the boy. You said his father was killed in some trouble in Africa?"

"Yes," he said. "An inter-ethnic clash."

His mother once again shook her shoulders, this time as if a great cold wave of disgust had flowed over her. "Savages. All of them, all

over the world,” she said. “Just goes to show you how difficult it is to civilize people.”

Thomas looked around quickly to see if anyone else had heard.

Only one had.

Benjamin’s eyes met Thomas’s across the table.

Thomas’s memories fled as the Jeeps paused before turning into the hotel compound. Five or six boys stood outside the closed grillwork gate. The young man riding shotgun jumped out of their Jeep, shouting at the gatekeeper, who seemed reluctant to open up. Then he moved to unsling his weapon. The boys did not notice, they were looking inside the Jeep, pushing their faces next to the window, pointing to their mouths, crying, “*Faim, faim*, hungry, hungry.”

Thomas gripped the panic bar tightly. They were tall, skinny boys, about the same age as the one in the camp, only a few years younger than Benjamin and Sylvain had been.

A uniformed guard with his own AK-47 strode across the hotel’s courtyard, gesturing with his weapon for the boys to move aside. Their guard turned to point his weapon at the boys, who took a few steps back. The gatekeeper opened the gate. The Jeep could enter, and Bailey grunted in satisfaction that they had returned safely.

The boys’ eyes stayed with Thomas when he settled down for the night in his comfortable hotel room, his luxurious room, complete with king-size bed, shiny porcelain toilet and bidet. There were no unsanitary latrines here, no bad smells, he thought as he drifted off to sleep in the protective darkness. He was safe, he must not let the eyes intrude upon his sleep.

In the morning, the eyes still troubled him, but he knew he must banish them to focus on the work at hand. Even though it was Sunday, the group of observers were supposed to set off in late morning for a camp for internally displaced persons, or IDPs. When Thomas came down for breakfast a little before nine, however, Théophile, the hotel manager, had a message from Bailey.

“There has been a small problem concerning transport that Mr. Bailey has gone to rectify. He said to tell you and the others that you have the morning off,” he said, as he led Thomas through the covered area that served as a bar in the afternoon and evenings. At the edge of the pool, six tables had been set with cutlery and white tablecloths under an awning.

141 “You are the first to arrive,” Théophile said, pulling out a chair for Thomas at an otherwise empty table. “Would you like coffee? We also have croissants this morning, which is a treat for us these days.”

Bailey had said to expect only the basics, even in the hotel, because of the embargo. For six months, the surrounding African countries had not allowed shipments into Burundi in an attempt to force the government and rebel forces to the bargaining table.

“Bujumbura used to be famous for its bakers, its butter and its fish,” Théophile continued, standing erect, immaculate in his jacket, tie and crisp light blue shirt, even though the heat was already rising. “But last week we couldn’t find sugar at the market and the fishermen haven’t been allowed on the lake for weeks.” He leaned forward, confidentially, smiling. “However, this Sunday, we have *confiture Bonne Maman* to go with the croissants. Imported from France. The chef’s special stock.”

Thomas nodded at the man’s proud smile. “Very good,” he said. “And tea, please. With milk and sugar, if you have it.” Then he looked around at the other tables.

Families sat at two of them already, and as Thomas watched, the other three tables quickly filled with well-dressed people, looking as if they had been to early Mass and were now free to enjoy Sunday brunch. The women, without exception, were lovely — slender, tall, with rich brown skin, wearing dresses of brightly coloured fabric, or wrapped in long skirts worn with jacket-like blouses. The men were also tall, but two of them had round bellies that even their well-cut jackets couldn’t camouflage. Thomas counted twelve children from babyhood to near-adolescence. The boys wore white shirts and ties,

and the girls, bright dresses with fluffy skirts. His own children had never been better dressed, and Thomas's memories of Sundays when they were young rang with their noise — back chat, teasing, minor conflicts that always exasperated Louise. These children appeared much more serious than his had ever been as they ate their croissants and drank their chocolate.

He told himself he should remember this; he should begin writing in the journal Louise had put in his suitcase. She would appreciate a little description of the Sunday morning crowd. He should check out the cathedral too.

15

His thoughts were interrupted by the sudden awareness that someone was standing just to his left. He turned to see a boy of about nine carrying a kind of instrument — a curved piece of wood with strings. No one else appeared to notice him, even when he began to sing a mournful song in a high, loud voice. The strings twanged as he strummed them, not following the rising and falling pitch of his song, but marking time and setting off what seemed to be verses.

The boy carefully avoided looking at Thomas, but when Thomas judged he'd heard enough and began to fish in his pocket for coins, the boy slung the instrument over his shoulder and held out his hand. That was when Thomas noticed the belt that cinched in the boy's khaki shorts. It looked like a broad *ceinture fléchée* — a finger woven belt worn by country folk in French Canada in the nineteenth century, which was used as a symbol of an independent Quebec during several historic moments.

The belt wouldn't have the same meaning here, but Thomas grinned anyway. It and the boy deserved more than the minimum handout, he thought, so he searched further into his pocket. That morning he'd stowed his US dollars under his shirt in his money belt and all he could come up with was a Canadian dollar coin. "Sorry," he said, "it's all I have."

The boy looked skeptically at the coin.

"Canadian," Thomas said.

The boy looked at him, taking his measure. "Canada," he said. Then he pocketed the coin and turned away.

16 | Thomas was surprised at the irritation that bubbled up unbidden at the way the boy dismissed his money. He'd never had a reaction like that when he'd travelled officially. There had always been smiles and remarks like, "Fine country" and "Number one." Of course, he knew that events then were set up to impress him, but he also expected Canadians to be greeted with some warmth.

He'd have to tell Louise, write it in the journal too. What would she be doing now? Given the time difference — Quebec was eight hours earlier than Bujumbura — she would probably still be sleeping in her little room at the retreat on the Île d'Orléans, lying on her side with the covers brought up close around her face, warm and cozy.

The thought went no further. The blast of the first explosion suddenly overwhelmed the pleasant sounds of breakfast on the terrace. The great thudding noise came from the other side of the hotel compound's walls, but it was so loud that Thomas's ears rang. For a moment, he was paralyzed, unable to imagine what was happening, what should be done. Three of the other men jumped to their feet, while, with great presence of mind, the women pushed the children under the tables and knelt beside them. A baby began to cry. Two uniformed guards who had been walking around the perimeter of the hotel garden rushed through the terrace toward the front of the hotel.

A woman screamed on the other side of the wall, her voice rising in an arpeggio of alarm. A tempest of fear engulfed Thomas and suddenly he found himself blown away from the current crisis, toward that time, months ago, when he last heard a woman scream. It was a sound he had tried to cleanse from his mind.

Praise for

THE VIOLETS OF USAMBARA

"Mary Soderstrom's *Violets of Usambara* is a moving novel that explores the possibility of redemption in a morally complex world. Cutting between Canada and tension-filled Burundi, it has echoes of Graham Greene both in setting and tone, but it is above all Soderstrom's intelligent investigation of power and its absence and love over the lifetime of a marriage." — *Antanas Sileika, author of Woman in Bronze and Dinner at the End of the World*

"Mary Soderstrom's thoughtfully written novel illuminates the dilemma of the Western do-gooder in an African culture." — *Susan Swan, author of What Casanova Told Me and The Wives of Bath*

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