



## Busara Road

**David Hallock Sanders**

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In *Busara Road*, eleven-year-old Mark Morgan follows his widowed father, a Quaker missionary, to newly independent Kenya. David Hallock Sanders's atmospheric debut sets a mid-1960s coming-of-age tale against a community marred by British colonialism and the Mau Mau Uprising.

At first cautious, and still mourning his life in Philadelphia, Mark arrives at the Kwetu Mission with a youthful sincerity that eases his way among the local people, including his cook and caretaker, Chege; a neighbor, Layla, whose affecting story is an undefined, haunting reminder of human cruelties; and Radio, the son of the local doctor. Without being overly conscious of his whiteness, Mark adapts to his new life.

The book pins everyday incidents—from explorations in the jungle to sermons to celebratory gatherings—on a dark collage made of war crimes that Mark's friends and their families experienced a few years before. When the man who orchestrated the crimes resurfaces, Mark witnesses the fallout.

The result is a novel of shifting moods and shimmering impressions, with unsettling histories that are both elegiac and matter-of-fact. This painful retrospective captures a limited view of Kenya's past. Mark absorbs knowledge without fathoming the loss that the African members of the mission have borne, underscoring the extent to which he'll never belong.

Mark's character is drawn with sensitivity. He's a naive observer but also an unwitting interloper. He's sometimes kind, sometimes thoughtless of his burden on others. An impulsive decision further alienates him from his adoptive home, and the abrupt conclusion is a truthful acknowledgment that life doesn't offer easy answers.

Mark's passage out of childhood is unusual in its brushes with violence, familiar in its early longings, and evocative of an era. *Busara Road* is a beautifully written, slow-burning drama that touches on devastation and collective memory, culminating in the piercing discovery that knowing the truth comes at a personal cost.

KAREN RIGBY (May/June 2019)

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