

This second novel in a trilogy follows three Americans wrestling with the horror of the Vietnam War. Norman Coddington, an ace fighter pilot in Vietnam, falls deeply in love with a Filipina nurse, Barbara Mander. He struggles to fully give his heart to her, filled with fear of both commitment and rejection. He also knows his cold mother will never accept a daughter-in-law who isn't white, and marrying Barbara might jeopardize his considerable inheritance.

Barbara has anxieties of her own: born into an impoverished family, she was a prostitute and a sex slave before fleeing a sadistic American husband to attend nursing school. She changed her name, and told Norman she comes from a respectable middle-class family, but her murderous ex-husband is intent on tracking her down. Cathy Addison, Barbara's best friend and fellow nurse, is also endangered by this relentless predator. Cathy's grim experiences as a combat nurse provide some of the more realistic glimpses into the gritty ravages of war, and the heavy emotional toll such a relentless spectacle exacts. Cathy is engaged to Dion Murphy, a lieutenant in the Marines, who has disappeared and is hunted by a prolific enemy sniper, Ngu Gin. Meanwhile, one of Dion's best soldiers, Pvt. First Class Randy Peterson, inadvertently reveals sensitive data to an enemy agent disguised as a prostitute.

While some information from the first volume is revisited here, this novel is best read as a sequel to its predecessor, rather than a stand-alone story. Hardy (*Whisper In My Ear*, 2015, etc.) deftly plumbs the darker aspects of war, shorn of romanticizing sentimentality. And this second volume allows him ample opportunity to layer the three main characters—Dion, Cathy, and Norm—with even greater depth. The writing can be haltingly earnest, especially when juxtaposed with such unflinchingly realistic depictions of violence. In anger, Norm thinks to himself: "Those bastards are trying to kill the only woman I ever loved and the dozens of other caregivers who work there, not to mention the sick and wounded, and they may have already murdered Dan too!" Additionally, like the first volume, this book is needlessly long, and the multiple subplots, developed too slowly, will likely weary the reader. But for those who enjoyed the first installment, there's still plenty of riveting action here, and an artful reprisal of the principals