



READING GUIDE

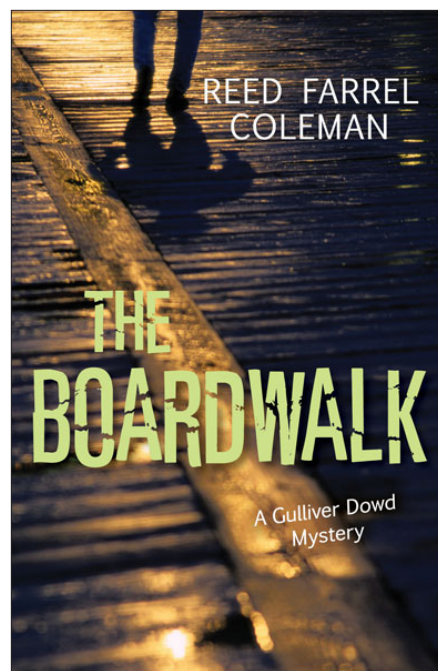
THE BOARDWALK REED FARREL COLEMAN

Reading level: 3.0

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, private investigator, male sleuth, little people, New York City, NYPD, Coney Island, the mob, corruption

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Summary

Gulliver Dowd won't rest until he finds out who killed his sister Keisha, and why. *The Boardwalk* opens with Dowd, a private investigator, preparing to meet with his friend Sam Patrick, an NYPD detective. Sam has something important to share with Gulliver about his sister. Gulliver's interest is piqued; for years, Sam has steered their conversations away from Keisha's murder. Gulliver has always had the impression that Sam knew more than he was saying.

When Sam doesn't show at the appointed time, Gulliver is concerned. As he leaves the area, his van is aggressively run off the road. When he comes to in hospital, Gulliver learns from the investigating officer that Sam Patrick was shot on the boardwalk hours earlier. He suspects his being run off the road and Sam getting shot might be connected.

Once Gulliver has recovered from his accident, he goes to the site of the shooting. It's only a short distance from the home he shares with his girlfriend, Mia. On the boardwalk, he tries to piece together what happened from what he knows: a woman screamed for help; Sam ran to her aid, gun drawn; an on-duty police officer shot him, apparently not understanding that Sam wasn't her assailant. Gulliver doesn't think it was an accident, however: Sam didn't live near the boardwalk, and he was supposed to have been meeting Gulliver miles from that spot.

Gulliver decides to track down Officer Stevens, the cop who shot Sam. He calls on his hired henchman, Ahmed Foster, for backup. At Sam's wake, Gulliver speaks with Sam's ex-wife, Mary, who confirms for Gulliver that Sam had been acting strangely in recent weeks. As Gulliver leaves, he is stopped by Detective Ralph Rigo, Sam's longtime partner. Like Gulliver, Rigo is skeptical about the shooting having been an accident. The two decide to team up to get to the bottom of it, with the first task being Rigo finding out as much as he can about Officer Stevens. All Gulliver knows for sure is that this is somehow connected to Keisha's death.

Rigo finds out that Stevens has had a history of trouble with the force, but that someone higher up must be looking out for him. Gulliver calls in a favor, asking mob boss Joey Vespucci for more information about Stevens. Shortly thereafter, Vespucci sends his thug, Tony, to give Gulliver



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information about Stevens's whereabouts, with a warning for Gulliver to be careful. Gulliver and Rigo drive to the backwoods spot where Stevens is being hidden until the investigation is complete. But when Rigo races ahead to the cabin and shoots Stevens to try and make it look like a suicide, Gulliver realizes Rigo means to kill him too. Gulliver flees into the woods. His confusion only escalates when Rigo is taken out by sniper fire. Stevens and Rigo: dead. Sam: dead. Who is behind their deaths? Why had someone killed Rigo but not him?

Gulliver asks Ahmed to take Mia away and keep her safe until he sorts everything out. He now knows that Rigo, Stevens and Sam Patrick were all sharing a secret—and that someone doesn't want that secret to come out. When Mary calls Gulliver to report that she's having trouble getting hold of Sam's lawyer to handle the will, Gulliver is suspicious. He goes to the lawyer's place and discovers the man murdered. He also finds a note about a package that his client, Sam, had intended to deliver to Gulliver Dowd. The package, however, is nowhere to be found. And why did Sam want to talk to Gulliver so desperately, anyway—and why now?

At Sam's funeral, Gulliver overhears that Sam had cancer and had only a few months left to live. He understands now why Sam had wanted to get the information about Keisha off his chest: he was dying. He is shocked to learn that Joey Vespucci's men had been leaning on Sam's doctor for information about his failing health. Gulliver demands a meeting with Vespucci, who complies. He brings the package that Sam was trying to deliver to Gulliver—the package that will answer all of Gulliver's questions about Keisha's death once and for all. But Vespucci tells Gulliver that if he opens the package, he and Mia will die within the week. His other choice is to let Vespucci destroy the package, and to stop snooping into Keisha's death. Vespucci does admit that Sam Patrick was his sister's murderer. But now that he has found true love, Gulliver isn't about to let go of it: now that he knows who killed his sister, Gulliver is able to agree with Vespucci setting fire to the package.

Questions for Discussion

1. Gulliver Dowd rents his sister's loft out to artists. He likes artists because, he says, they can create new worlds, and shape those worlds to match the ideas in their heads (chapter 1). Explain what he means by this.
2. Gulliver seeks vengeance for his sister Keisha's murder. This is his driving motivation. Talk about another character in literature who shares this prime motivation of avenging the death of someone they love. What makes these characters and their motivations so appealing??
3. One of the things that makes Gulliver Dowd an excellent private investigator is his keen intuition. Where does his intuition help him throughout the story? Talk about intuition. What do you know about it and where have you felt it in your own life?
4. When bystanders come to Gulliver's aid after his van overturns, one Good Samaritan |corrects another by stating that Gulliver is a little person, not a dwarf. "They don't call them dwarfs anymore," she says (chapter 2). Similarly, the words *Indian*, *retarded* and *gypsy* have fallen out of common use. Can you think of others? Discuss the importance of using the right language when speaking about other people's lives and realities.





5. From the car accident, Gulliver sustains a concussion. Talk about our growing understanding of concussion and its effects on the brain and on a person's life. Can you think of any people in the public arena, e.g. athletes, who have sustained concussions and are suffering as a consequence?
6. Many people chase happiness, but most would agree that it is difficult to stay happy all the time. Gulliver is afraid of being happy, because he understands that it is impossible to keep. Is this a bad thing? What should we be seeking, if not happiness? What would you say to Gulliver?
7. Talk about Gulliver's observation that once something is digital, it's forever. How has this truth informed your own conduct online?
8. What does mob boss Joey Vespucci mean when he says, in chapter 9, that cops are the flip side of the same coin?
9. In chapter 11, Gulliver calms Mia after Tony follows her out of the elevator. After being kidnapped and beaten by her previous boss, she is afraid of any recurrence of that sort of violence. Gulliver reflects that "Mia was going to a shrink to help her get over things." What do you understand to be the purpose of counselling? Is it that kind of one-shot deal, where you can get over things?
10. Sometimes disability and differences make able-bodied people feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or even afraid. How does Gulliver use this to his advantage?
11. In chapter 13, when Gulliver is being hunted by Rigo in the woods behind the cabin where Stevens was hiding out, he practices breathing techniques he learned in his martial arts practice. This helps to calm his panic. How does deep breathing help you?
12. At Sam Patrick's funeral in chapter 17, Gulliver wonders how getting shot by accident somehow made Sam a hero. Discuss his observation in the context of what you know about funerals and death.
13. How significant is it that this book (and the other Gulliver Dowd mysteries, *Dirty Work* and *Valentino Pier*) center on a character who is very physically different from the norm?
14. What do you think of Gulliver's choice at the end of *The Boardwalk*?
15. If you could choose another name for this book, what would it be?

