



RAPID READS

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COLEMAN

# DIRTY WORK

Advance praise for

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“A little man with a huge heart and a huge chip on his shoulder, Gulliver Dowd swaggers into the crime fiction world and takes his place with the great investigators. Smart, vulnerable, wounded, heartbreakingly hopeful, I just adore his company. This is a staggering achievement. Bravo!”

—Louise Penny

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**Summary:** PI Gulliver Dowd searches for the daughter he didn't know he had, who has gone missing under mysterious circumstances.

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ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
PO Box 5626, Stn. B  
Victoria, BC Canada  
V8R 6S4

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
PO Box 468  
Custer, WA USA  
98240-0468

[www.orcabook.com](http://www.orcabook.com)

*For Ellen W. Schare,  
my favorite school librarian*

## CHAPTER ONE

The phone rang. Gulliver Dowd hurried to his desk as fast as his stubby, uneven legs would carry him. As he hobbled along, he shook his head. What good were cell phones if you didn't keep them in your pocket? He hated cell phones. In fact, he hated nearly everything these days. It seemed he had been angry ever since his sister Keisha had been murdered. Gulliver still recalled the old message on her phone.

*Hi. I'm not home right now, but if you leave your name, number and a short message,*

*I'll get back to you. That is, if I survive my shift. Peace and love.*

The first thing Gulliver had done after the funeral was erase that damn message. He had begged his sister to change it. He didn't approve of her tempting fate. He told her life was hard enough already. But that was her way. Keisha was tough, a fighter. Tell her she couldn't do something, and she would show you she could. That was half the reason she'd become a cop. People had said she would never make it. But her early life in foster care had taught her not to worry about fate. Problem is, things go wrong. It doesn't matter why, they just do. They go wrong for everybody sooner or later. Things had gone very wrong for Keisha. Deadly wrong.

One day she didn't make it back to the station house at the end of her shift. They found her empty patrol car on Pennsylvania Avenue in Brooklyn.

Its engine was still running. Her partner turned up at the Brookdale Hospital emergency room. He was barely conscious, his head bruised and bloodied. He couldn't remember what day it was or how he'd gotten to the hospital. He couldn't recall what had happened to him or where Keisha was. Two days later, they found her body behind an abandoned building on Livonia Avenue. Her hands were tied behind her. She had a bullet in the back of her head. The forensics report said she was on her knees when she died. Gulliver couldn't get that image out of his head. He hated thinking that she had died alone and afraid.

It had been six frustrating years. The NYPD had come up empty on Keisha's murder. He knew the cops had worked the case hard. When another cop is killed, they go all out. It didn't matter that Keisha was an African-American woman.



Or that she had only a few years on the job. Every cop knows the next person to get killed in the line of duty could be him. There were hundreds of clues to begin with. There are always lots when a reward is offered. But none of them worked out. The case went cold very quickly.

In a weird way Gulliver owed a debt to his sister's killer. He didn't like thinking that, but it was the truth. And Gulliver Dowd always faced the truth. No matter how ugly. No matter how hurtful. No matter what. When you looked like he did, you had to be honest with yourself.

Gulliver was so short that his reflection filled up only the bottom half of a mirror. That half showed him how cruel God was. Gulliver looked as if he had been built from mismatched body parts. His arms and legs were too small, even for his squat body. His hands were too big for his arms. His fingers, too small

for his hands. His head, too big for his height. But the cruelest thing God had done was to give Gulliver a handsome face.

“What a waste,” he’d heard a girl say during his first year in college. “What a waste.”

Her friend agreed. “A pity.”

Pity. The thing he hated most. If his face had been as ugly as the rest of him, people would have just turned away. People do that. They turn away from people in wheelchairs and autistic kids at the mall. They don’t like being reminded of how much harder life could be. They don’t want to know that in the next moment everything could be taken away from them. But people didn’t turn away from Gulliver Dowd. Not at first. First they stared. Then they turned away. The looks on their faces said the same things those two girls had said back in college. *What a waste. What a pity.*

So Gulliver never turned away from the truth.

And if his sister hadn't been murdered, he wouldn't have become a private investigator. He wouldn't have gone from being someone who was always bullied to someone with a black belt in karate. For the first two years of karate his body ached. But he loved the training. His teachers didn't care about his looks. They cared only about results. If Keisha hadn't been murdered, he wouldn't have learned knife fighting from a retired Navy Seal. He wouldn't have learned to shoot or gotten a handgun carry permit. It was easier to become an astronaut than get a gun permit in New York. Gulliver did it by getting a job as a gem courier. It was dangerous work to carry jewels on the streets of New York City.

"Who is going to think anyone would trust me with diamonds and rubies?"

Gulliver asked when he applied for the job. “No thief is ever going to think, ‘Hey, that little guy’s carrying a few million worth of gems.’”

And Gulliver got the job. It paid well and suited his schedule. He still did some work for his old company when things were slow and he needed extra money.

Keisha’s killer had taught Gulliver a lesson. If a brave, well-trained cop with a gun could be taken from her patrol car in daylight and shot dead, no one was safe. Gulliver meant to find the person who’d killed his sister. That’s why he had gone through all the training. If the cops couldn’t find the animal who had murdered his little sister, he would. He had pictured the murder in his head thousands of times. He started to picture it now, but the phone rang again.