

A GULLIVER DOWD MYSTERY

# LOVE AND FEAR

REED FARREL COLEMAN

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**Summary:** PI Gulliver Dowd is pulled into a search for the missing daughter of the most powerful Mafia don in New York in this work of crime fiction. (RL 2.7)

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*For Jim Bogart and Carrie Robb*

# ONE

**G**ulliver Dowd had been this close to finding out why his sister was murdered. This close to finding out who had done it. He had held the envelope with the answers in his misshapen hands. He had also been the one to set the envelope on fire. For most of the last eight years, the answers to these two questions had been his reason for living. Keisha's murder had haunted him. Driven him. Helped turn him into the man he was. Now he had to forget. He had to leave Keisha's murder behind him. Why?

Why does any man turn his back on the past? Love and fear.

He had been forced to choose between the two women who had meant the most to him. The two women who had lifted him out of his bitter life. His life of pain and self-hatred. His sad and lonely life. One of those women—his sister Keisha—was already gone. And gone was gone forever. He could get the answers about her murder, or he could keep Mia safe. That was his choice. Those were his only options. There was no middle ground. And the man who had given Gulliver the choice was a serious man. A dangerous man with even more dangerous friends. The math was cruel but easy to do.

Gulliver's parents had adopted Keisha, just as they had adopted him. Like Gulliver, Keisha was a runt of the litter. But in many ways she was his opposite. Gulliver was pale. A dwarf. A little person. A freak.

It never mattered to him what label you used. He was never going to grow taller. His legs were never going to be the same length. His body was never going to be normal. As much as he hated his smallness, he hated his good looks even more. God's little joke was how Gulliver thought of his handsome face.

Keisha was black, her skin very dark. Always a little heavy. Plain to look at. An abused foster child. But she had overcome all the things the world had put in her way. She had taken all the pain in her life and turned it into love. She had gotten herself into shape. Gone to college. Made it through the police academy at the top of her class. All that only to be murdered, her body left behind a vacant building in East New York.

In a very real way, it was Keisha's death that had given Gulliver life. Until his sister's murder, he hadn't really lived. A day was



something to suffer through, not something to enjoy. He had only one friend—Rabbi. He'd had only one girlfriend—Nina—and then only for a few months in high school. But the need to solve Keisha's murder had changed him. It had given him a reason to live. Her death had led him to study martial arts. To learn how to shoot. To earn his private investigator's license. As true as all that was, as much as he loved his sister and wanted justice for her, what did it matter? Keisha was like Humpty Dumpty. The answers were like all the king's horses and all the king's men. All the answers in the world wouldn't bring Keisha back again.

Gulliver had to choose Mia. Mia was alive. Mia was his present and his future. And Gulliver knew it would only take a single whisper from one powerful man to another to end Mia's life. Gulliver's was the choice everyone in his shoes would have made. Rabbi had told him as much.

Rabbi who had grown up with Gulliver and Keisha. Rabbi who loved Keisha like a second big sister. So too had Ahmed. Ahmed who had gone to school with Keisha. Ahmed who had dated Keisha before he went into the Navy. But the choice ate at Gulliver. It tore at him.

He felt tortured every time he looked at Mia. Every time he kissed her or held her in his arms. He felt tortured because he had turned his back on Keisha. He felt tortured because he could not stand the thought of losing Mia. But that was just what had happened.

His guilt and fear had made him push Mia away. They were no longer living together. She had stayed in their condo in Brighton Beach. He had moved back into his office in Red Hook. Mia didn't understand why Gulliver had changed. Why he seemed so far away. Why he seemed so cold to her. And he could not explain it.

How could he tell her she was in danger again? How could he make sense of it to her? No, Mia was better off without him. She was safer without him.

Gulliver opened his eyes. Yawned. Smiled. Reached over to the other side of the bed for Mia. But this wasn't their bed. It wasn't a bed at all. And Mia wasn't there. Old habits die hard. The smile ran away from Gulliver's face as he swung his legs off the couch. Not even the bright sunlight pouring into the office could bring his smile back. He laughed a sad laugh at himself, for he had ended up where he began. His office was once Keisha's loft. He had moved into the loft after she was killed, in order to feel closer to her.

For years it had been his office and his home. Now there was much less space than there used to be. When he'd moved to Brighton Beach with Mia, he had built walls around his office and rented the rest

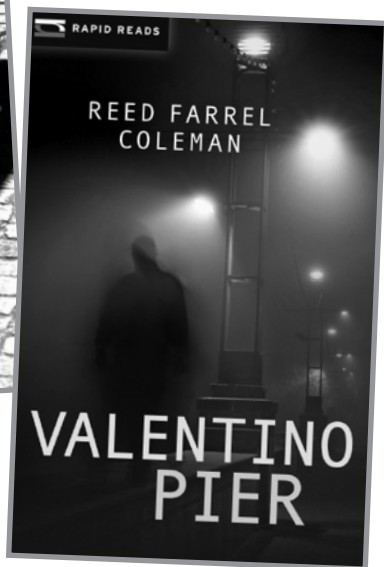
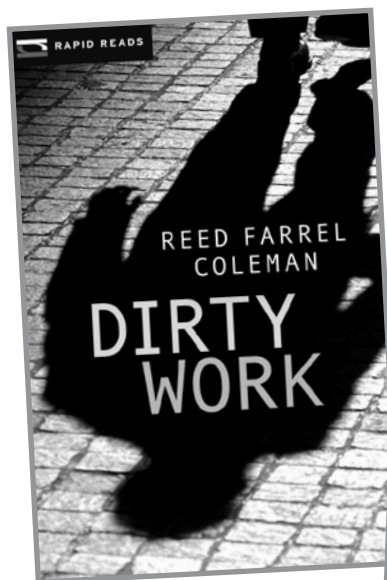
of the loft space to a group of artists. That was okay. Small spaces suited him. And so too did building walls around things. Walls around his office. Walls around his heart.

With the smell of freshly brewed coffee thick in the air, Gulliver sat at his desk. He had showered and dressed. He didn't bother shaving. What for? Who for? As he sat there, he could feel himself slipping back into his old bitter self. When he was working cases, it was easier to forget. It was easier to forget about the choice he had made. Easier to forget about missing Mia. Easier to forget about who he really was and what he really looked like. But he was between cases, and the mirror had stopped lying to him. All he saw when he looked into it was the little, lonely freak he had always been.

He couldn't know that the knock at his door would change everything forever.

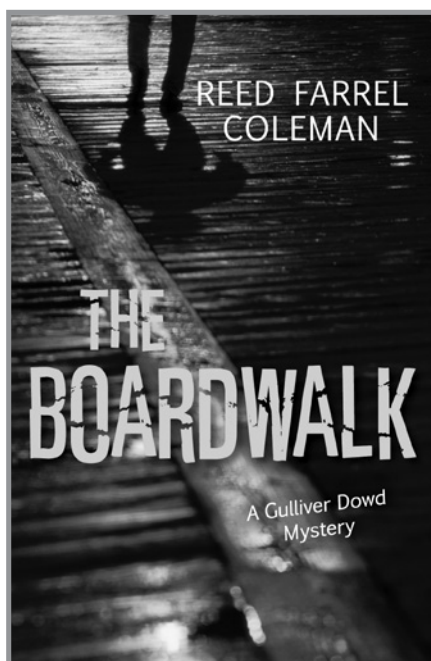
Called a “hard-boiled poet” by National Public Radio’s Maureen Corrigan and the “noir poet laureate” in the *Huffington Post*, **REED FARREL COLEMAN** is the author of twenty-one novels and novellas. He has been signed to do the next four books in Robert B. Parker’s Jesse Stone series and by Putnam to begin a new series of his own. He is a three-time recipient of the Shamus Award and a three-time Edgar Award nominee in three different categories. He has also won the Audie, Macavity, Barry, and Anthony awards. He lives with his family on Long Island. For more information, visit [www.reedcoleman.com](http://www.reedcoleman.com).

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"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."

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