HOLLOWPOINT

ADVANCE READER'S EDITION

A NOVEL

ROB EULAND

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ROB REULAND



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Dear Reader,

HOLLOWPOINT is a ballistics term for a kind of bullet that flattens on impact and chews its way through its victim. Andy Giobberti, the anti-hero of this deft and compelling new novel, is the human equivalent. You'll see some extraordinarily bad behavior from this assistant district attorney. He works out of one of the worst precincts in Brooklyn, but even they have their codes of behavior that they don't like to see broken. ...

The shocker is that Gio is one of the more sympathetic characters I've read in recent memory. That's because Rob Reuland (himself a Brooklyn DA, but there the comparisons end) is a preternaturally talented writer, and he brings lust, anger, sorrow, love, and longing to brilliant, throbbing life on the page. There is nobody who gets across the behind-the-scenes workings of the justice system with such effortless precision. This is sexy; it's gritty; it's compulsively readable. Some who've already read this have compared him to Grisham and Turow, but he's definitely got a voice all his own. HOLLOWPOINT has already been sold in a host of foreign countries. I hope you'll agree that Rob Reuland is a major new talent and help us tell the world.

Regards

This book is for my wife, Christine

What divides us from the universe Of blood and seed, conceives the soul in us, Brings us to God, but guilt?

—Archibald MacLeish, J.B.

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Hollowpoint

CHAPTER

1

Another dead body in East New York, and nobody could give a shit. Not even her family, if you can call it a family—a single half sister with a different last name and a stringy, sloe-eyed, coke-worn woman of thirty-eight but looking sixty, the selfsame crackhead mother who lay spent on the couch in the sultry midnight of her roach-spotted living room, who lay in a chemical miasma while Lamar Lamb killed the girl in her own bedroom, hardly bigger than the stained mattress on which she died.

Another dead little girl, if you can call her a little girl—with a little girl of her own.

The mother and the sister are sitting in this place, doing nothing except that. Neither seem to care about this dead girl who was not even close to the fifteenth birthday she will never see, and the funeral is no big deal for anyone at all except for me in the back, looking at them.

But in truth even I am not thinking about that girl in the box but my own dead girl and the green Oldsmobile on an ordinary Thursday afternoon, on an ordinary street one year ago. Mine is the only white face in here—I am the only white man in these several blocks of east Brooklyn except for the detective who brought me here. He is not wearing sunglasses, but he has the look of a man who is. No one else is here.

The mother and the sister sit in the middle of the room, not too near the box with the dead girl, and the dead girl's little girl (about three months old) is crying unobtrusively. Someone's prettied her up. Her ears are pierced.

The mother now looks me over with hostility, a glint in her rheumy eyes. I walk over and seat myself in the row of folding chairs behind her, but she has already turned away and is hefting the baby around to quiet her. She tells the baby to shut up and clicks the twiggy yellow fingers of her free hand at the sister to fetch a bottle or something from a tired diaper bag on the floor. I lean over to get her attention. She tosses the baby around in her sinewy arms. I wait, looking at the back of her head, sparse hair with individual curls like a patch of dying garden. There is the smell of her and the smell of the baby.

When I say the mother's name, she swivels suddenly, swinging the baby around with her. The baby looks at me, too, with a damp, open mouth.

I tell her my name and give her the usual about being sorry and doing everything we can—a tired, threadbare line of horseshit under the circumstances but all I have. Sometimes it makes a difference. Not now. There is something drab and perfunctory about this whole sorry scene. Even the picture of the dead girl is nothing more than a photocopy from her yearbook, enlarged. I have seen this same face in Polaroids of her lying wide-eyed in death. The dead girl, unlike her child, is dark. In the photocopy, her features are obliterated by her blackness.

The mother tells me it was LL who did Kayla and everyone

knows it was LL. "Miss Iris saw him runnin outa my house," she says. "You talk to Miss Iris, Mr. D.A.?"

I tell her I haven't spoken to Miss Iris, but at this moment Lamar Lamb is in a holding cell on the second-floor squad room of the Seven-Five Precinct station house and has been there since last night, when they brought him in.

"Where you find him at?" she asks, turning back to me and genuinely surprised.

"At home," I say in a hush.

"LL ain't got no home." She tells me about LL in her full-throated scratch. "He ain't got no home no more. Last I hear, he be livin on the street. And before that he was in jail." With her free arm she fans herself with a pamphlet. The air is stifling here and moist. There is no air-conditioning. The front door is propped open, but no relief blows in with the street sounds. Atop a pole in the corner, a single fan spins without effect over the dead girl, its head hanging mournfully limp—an overtall sunflower.

"At his grandmother's," I tell her. "In Cypress Hills."

Her face takes on the hostile glint again. "I know where his grandmother live at. She don' want him there no more. She told me she had an order. From the judge. She show me the paper. He can't go there no more."

"From what I hear, it wasn't her idea."

"What you mean?"

"So why you here? If you arrest him already?"

"I wanted to show our—" I start again with the horseshit but then don't bother. "I have to present the case to the grand jury. To indict him for the murder."

"So?"

"I need to speak with you about that night. I don't mean now. Not today. But I'd like you to come down for the grand jury. And your other daughter." I look at the sister, whose green gaze now focuses intently upon me. "You were there?" I ask her.

"Oh, sweet Jesus," the mother interrupts. "I already told the cops what I saw—which was nothin. And she din't see nothin. We was both sleepin."

The baby begins to act up, squirming in the dead girl's mother's arms, and she waves me away. I have no choice. I walk to the back, and the detective gives me a nod. He's right. Let's blow. But there is someone now in my way—a man with a shaved head like an obsidian bulb. He stands close to me. He stands too close to me. He stinks like liquor and there is a carnival atmosphere about him. Who he is I have no idea, but he wants to know what the D.A.'s office is gonna do about it. He, too, knows it was Lamar Lamb who did the girl. He tells me Lamar should die.

"Let me ax you," he says to me. "This nigger should'n get the death penalty for what he done?"

"That's not what I'm-"

"Let me tell you about that young lady, because you didn't know her. She was a fine young lady. She was"—he says, then stops short, thinking—"in school. Beautiful girl. Never bothered no one. And the D.A. is gon—what? Gon give that nigger some kinda, some kinda plea bargain and shit? Let him out—in five years or some shit? That ain't right."

"No one said—"

He gets even closer to me, if that is possible. His right index finger is pointed at my sternum like a gun. "Don' you, don' you think they should give him the death penalty for what he done to Kayla?"

"Absolutely," I say for no other reason than to shut him up. I'm tired. I'm tired of the dead. I'm tired of the living. I'm tired of this

mean-looking motherfucker with the finger like a gun. I'm tired of the dead girl's mother, who won't talk to me about the man who killed her daughter. I'm tired of the sun and the heat and these streets. But mostly I'm tired of Lamar Lamb. I was tired of Lamar Lamb before I heard his name. He's just the latest horror, and even the newspapers wouldn't have touched him except the girl was fourteen and naked and killed in her bed.

ARREST IN TEEN SEX SLAY, read today's *Post* headline over a few lines of copy on page seventeen—beneath a leggy nude virtually guaranteeing safe and effective cellulite removal.

Brooklyn detectives last night announced the arrest of Lamar Lamb, 19, of East New York after a two-week manhunt following the August 4 murder of Kayla Harris. Fourteen-year-old Harris's disrobed body was found in the bedroom of her home in the Cypress Hills public housing project. Harris, an honor student at Franklin K. Lane High School, was remembered by classmate Lashanta Wayne as a "quiet and friendly girl" who liked English and math. Harris was killed by a single bullet to the chest. Captain Art Tobin of the 75th Precinct in East New York stated that the "possibility of a sexual motive for the attack cannot be ruled out at this time." Assistant District Attorney Andrew Giobberti, who in May prosecuted subway stalker Larry "Spiderman" Bartlett, refused comment.

I move to the door with the detective in tow, stopping short to sign the guest book in my moronic handwriting below four or five other names. Then I leave.

I walk from the funeral home, and it is very bright outside after that somber, ill-lit place. I reach for my knockoff Ray-Ban aviators. The gray Chevy Caprice is parked on Linden Boulevard, on the sidewalk. No one pays it any mind. In this neighborhood, Chevy Caprices (gray or black or dark blue, beat to hell and missing hubcaps, laminated police placards tucked under their windshields) park routinely on the sidewalks. The detective is inside the Caprice now, pushing at the passenger door. Stuck. The handle doesn't work from the outside, so there is nothing I can do except stand here squinting and sweating in the afternoon sun, which did not abate while we were inside.

All the little businesses here on Linden are overhung with colored awnings, which line the sides of the street in a cheerfully optimistic progression of yellow, blue, aquamarine, and red. The sidewalks crowd together fire hydrants, fruit stands, stunted little saplings, bus shelters, subway entrances, parking signs. Dumpsters and lampposts are alive with papers that dangle and blow in a breeze sour with the city heat. Good citizens come and go-old women in print dresses and white socks and sneakers, men and boys in immaculate Timberlands and Air Jordans, Koreans in white aprons, girls in sandals with black soles three inches thick. The pace on the street is slow here, slower than the city, for instance, where people walk intently, offensively. Brooklyn walks-if we walk at all, instead of driving or just idling under awnings or on stoops, or playing dominoes before storefronts, or bullshitting on the street corner, arms on hips—as though we're going no place in no hurry. Manhattan walks behind us and wants to kick us in the ass.

But this is not my Brooklyn. These are not my streets. These places—before this job, they were places I did not go, places I did not know. Nor did their people know my places or go there. No one

ever pointed out the line on a map, but we all knew where it was and we all stayed where we were. We only saw one another on the train.

The detective is cussing now at the door, and the sister appears as if from nowhere.

She is a willowy sixteen-year-old in project gold, and tall—so tall she can look me in the eye, which she tries to do. Only her eyes suggest kinship with the mother, although this one's (a violent, chlorophyll green) are merely drawn into subtle almonds without giving her the sinister look of her gargoyle mother. She tries to look at me, but I am standing with the sun at my back. I feel it through the threadbare wool of my jacket. Her gossamer dress is cut low and high, and the blue-black of her skin is stark against the white of it.

"Mister," she says. "Anthony said you got LL in jail or whatever?"

"I'm sorry about your sister—it's Utopia, isn't it?"

"Yes. What gon happen to him now?" she asks.

"Lamb? I'm gonna try him," I tell her. "For the murder."

"All right," she says. "He's in jail?"

"Yes."

"What gon happen now?" she repeats. "To LL?"

"First I have to indict him in the grand jury," I say. "And then in about a year, we'll have a trial. Unless he pleads guilty."

"All right. He'll, um, be like in jail the whole time?"

"You don't need to worry about him anymore," I say. "If that's what you're thinking."

"Yes," she answers.

"You don't need to worry about him, Utopia."

"All right."

"He's taken care of," I say, but I am thinking, Nothing scary is

going to get you, Opal. Go to sleep.

"Mister," she says. "Can I like call you on the telephone—if I have a question to ax you or whatever?"

I give her a business card; Utopia is not looking at me but past me down Linden, toward the sun. She squints at it, and then at her mother who stands now in the funeral doorway, watching us, with the baby. For a moment, Utopia looks back to me with her eyes bright behind the green contacts. She walks away with her spectral, long-limbed walk.

The detective starts in—an unrelenting stream of gloomy banter that doesn't let up until we are back at Joralemon Street. He is unloading what he silently ate back there. He has an Irish tan and about twenty years on the job. He drives the Caprice in the south Brooklyn style. One arm drapes limply over the wheel, steering more with wrist than hand.

"Look at this fuckin shit hole," he says. "Summertime. When it's the worst. People get all jacked up when it's warm." As he speaks, his small gray eyes dart like fish. "You'd think they'd, you know, take it easy there. Relax. Have a lemonade or some shit. Cool off. Instead, it's the opposite. Vicy versy. They get all jacked up and the guy there will, you know, say something to the other guy, and then the other guy there will be like, *Yeah*, *what'd you say, ass wipe?* or whatever and that's how it starts. They pop each other for that."

I nod my head.

"Not for nothin," he says, "but I ever tell youse my fuckin plan?"

"No," I say. "What fucking plan's that, Detective?"

"All right. Now hear me out. I tell youse how to cut the num-