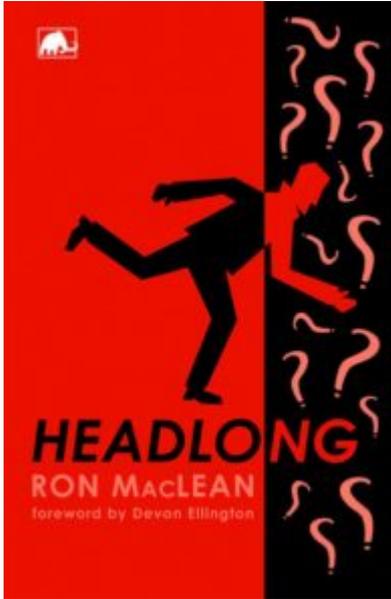


# Small Press Release: Headlong (an excerpt)

written by Jacob Singer | January 7, 2019



*Headlong* by Ron MacLean  
257 pages – [Mastodon Publishing](#)/ [Amazon](#)

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I woke up thinking about Evan Tillman. Fifteen-year-old kid comatose in a hospital room for weeks, his body fighting to stay alive. Fluids dripping from an IV bag suspended on a pole at his side. Monitors tracking heartbeat, pulse. One night, the wee hours, no one there to comfort him, the electronic beep of alarms. Then flatline, the ultimate silence. All because the kid happened to be home when some numbnuts decided to rob the house. Some of us pissed away potential and didn't deserve an advocate. Others had it taken from them. I was supposed to go visit my failing father. Instead I found myself pulling into the parking lot of the Newton Police Department. I needed to tweak someone.

A young female officer sat at a high desk centered on a wide hallway, sandy hair pulled back in a ponytail.

"I'm Nick Young, reporter for *The View*. Who's the investigating officer for the Tillman case?" All chipper, as if what's the forecast.

She eyeballed me. T-shirt. Flip-flops. Whatever. It was four million degrees. "Reporter? For who?"

"*The View*." I said it the way you might say *Time* magazine. She suppressed a smirk.

"That would be Detective Hill."

Two men walked the hall behind her, one older, one younger. The older one looked harried.

"Would he be in?"

She turned her head. "Dennis, are you in?"

The older cop looked at some papers in his hand. "Who wants to know?"

"Reporter." She paused for emphasis. "*The View.*"

"No," he said on his way past, right arm extended, like a football halfback straight-arming would-be tacklers. "I'm not in."

Two minutes later I sat in a cramped office across a cheap desk from press information Officer Scott Halverson. Dark hair parted on the side. Thick-frame glasses. He looked like he'd been president of the math club in high school. He was not the guy I wanted to talk to. Maybe I could annoy my way past him.

"Newton Police made eighteen arrests in seventy-two cases of robbery, rape and aggravated assault last year." I smiled as I read my notes. "Eleven arrests in 225 cases of burglary." A mug on his desk proclaimed World's Greatest Dad. "Are those numbers right?"

"They are." Halverson adjusted his nerd glasses. He was a uniform cop. A perpetual boy scout.

"No offense," I said, "but it seems like you could get that kind of arrest rate from people turning themselves in."

He made a show of looking amused. "Do you have an interest in a particular case, Mr. Young?"

Fuck him. "Heard of Evan Tillman?"

"Of course." His face got a little red, his tone defensive. "You a friend of the family?"

"Concerned citizen. Humble reporter." I pocketed my notes. "Blows my mind. All you've got is a car seen in the neighborhood. A black Lexus. For real?"

"The department is fully engaged on the case, Mr. Young."

"Yeah, it shows."

"Why are you here, Mr. Young?" He moved a folder from one side of the desk to the other. I watched him do it. "We are not in the habit of disclosing the details of ongoing investigations."

His phone rang and he grabbed it. A couple of quick "yesses" into the receiver and done. "Excuse me," he said. "I'll be right back."

I wasted not a second, scooting down the hallway in the direction I'd seen Detective Hill disappear. I found a small kitchen – refrigerator, coffee pot. At the coffee pot I found Detective Hill. He glanced at me. Poured coffee into a mug. Then pulled a second mug from a shelf, poured coffee into that, slid it toward me.

"You're a tricky one." He had a high forehead and tired gray eyes. A gum chewer.

I hoisted the mug. "I've had practice."

"What," he said, "you think I'm going to tell you more than Halverson?"

"Maybe not. I'm naturally prickly. When I'm told I can't be somewhere that's where I want to be." I sipped the coffee. Black. I didn't want to lose my opportunity by asking for milk. "Know what I'm curious about?"

"Nope."

"I'm curious about how a crime committed in broad daylight can remain such a puzzle. I just don't understand. I mean it's now a robbery and a homicide."

He let me stew a minute while he chewed his gum. "I know how you got so far," he said. "Your people skills." Hill crossed his arms. "What is it you think you know?"

"The Lexus seen near the Tillman house the day of the robbery. It's registered to Larry Sparks, former police chief."

Hill worked his gum. "Very good, Sherlock."

"The fact that the department stays silent on that doesn't look good."

Hill laughed out loud. Sipped his coffee. People who wear ties almost invariably wear them too short or too long. Hill wore his too short. "The intrepid reporter. His question hangs in the air, pregnant with implications." Someone paged Officer Halverson. "Interesting take. Here's another. Retired police chief driving around town. His travels take him within a few blocks of where a robbery takes place. The Lexus traces to Sparks, and we lose our best – only – early lead."

"I don't buy it. Let's try a different version, where Sparks wasn't driving the car."

Hill folded his arms across his too-short tie. "You mean stolen?"

"I mean someone else driving."

No reaction. "Like who?"

"Like his granddaughter, Marcela. Who of course knew the Tillman kid."

We both sat with that. An alarm went off in me to shut up, but I ignored it. I needed information. Hill was inscrutable as Buddha. I kept talking.

"Say she was there that afternoon. Found the kid. Got scared and left."

Hill didn't blink. His coffee cooled beside him.

"Say she gets more scared after the Lexus is in the news." Words came out as the thoughts formed. "She talks to her grandfather. He knows what to do. He brings her here and she tells you what she knows – how she found the body – and you grill her and that's all there is. Bad timing by the ex-chief's granddaughter. So you bury it. There's nothing to be gained by making that public. Cops stick together."

Detective Hill picked up his cup. He thought about saying something. Didn't. Set the cup down again. His face showed me nothing. "That's a good story."

I tried to affect a whimsical grin, but my patience was thin. "How much of it is true?"

He laughed. "That's good. Assume your premise. Push for confirmation." He unfolded his arms, put his hands in his pockets. "I told you, it's a good story. I appreciate a good story."

My patience ran out. "No. We're not doing it that way. I have a column due tomorrow. How about you confirm or deny. Or I go with the info about that Lexus belonging to Sparks."

It was an asshole move, but it was all I had.

Hill smiled again. Less friendly. "Do what you gotta do."

I waited for him to crack. It didn't happen. He'd called my bluff. I had nothing I could run with. I was no closer to proving a connection between Marcela and the Tillman kid.

Yet.