



# Lightwood

*Steph Post*

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## **Lightwood** Steph Post

Judah Cannon is the middle son of the notorious Cannon clan led by Sherwood, its unflinching and uncompromising patriarch. When Judah returns to his rural hometown of Silas, Florida after a stint in prison, he is determined to move forward and live it clean with his childhood best friend and newly discovered love, Ramey Barrow. Everything soon spirals out of control, though, when a phone call from Sherwood ensnares Judah and Ramey in a complicated web of thievery, brutality and betrayal.

Pressured by the unrelenting bonds of blood ties, Judah takes part in robbing the Scorpions, a group of small-time, meth-cooking bikers who are flying down the highway with the score of their lives. Unbeknownst to the Cannons, however, half of the stolen cash in the Harley saddlebags belongs to Sister Tulah, a megalomaniacal Pentecostal preacher who encourages her followers to drink poison and relinquish their bank accounts. When Sister Tulah learns of the robbery, she swears to make both the Cannons and the Scorpions pay, thus bringing all parties into mortal conflict rife with deception and unpredictable power shifts. When Judah's younger brother Benji becomes the unwitting victim in the melee, Judah takes it upon himself to exact revenge, no matter the damage inflicted upon himself and those around him. Judah becomes a driven man, blinded by his need for vengeance and questioning everything he thought he believed in. With Ramey at his side, Judah is forced to take on both the Scorpions and Sister Tulah as he struggles to do the right thing in a world full of wrongs.

## **Lightwood Details**

Date : Published January 24th 2017 by Polis Books (first published January 10th 2017)

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Author : Steph Post

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# From Reader Review Lightwood for online ebook

## Sharon Mensing says

Post's (A Tree Born Crooked) rural Florida is a place where one would not want to break down when passing through. Silas is a violent town with little apparent law enforcement and plenty of smoky, grimy bars patronized by motorcycle gang members and the criminal clan that controls the community. Money and meth are at stake here, where even the local preacher manages her followers through malevolent manipulation. Despite his determination to go straight, Judah, a son in the brutal Cannon family, falls straight from prison into his family's latest scheme. By the time the conflagration among them is over, the Scorpion motorcycle gang, Sister Tulah, and the Cannons have left death, blood, and misery in their wake. None of the characters is particularly sympathetic, but Post reveals the inner doubts of enough of them to inspire interest in their stories.

**Verdict** A good choice for fans of grit lit that emphasizes blood ties and redneck justice; this will also attract readers who prefer their suspense very dark and filled with violence.

This review first appeared in Library Journal.

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## Bonnie says

**Short Summary:** When Judah Cannon is released from prison and returns to his hometown of Silas, Florida, he finds himself swiftly wrapped up in the troublesome workings of his family once again except this time may not result in prison, but death.

**Thoughts:** Steph Post has written a riveting noir-style story about revenge and betrayal that switches up the typical Appalachian setting of most Southern Gothic novels and gives us a peek at the dynamic and dangerous world of Florida scrub country.

**Verdict:** Daniel Woodrell, Donald Ray Pollock, and Cormac McCarthy are all big names of the often lurid genre but Steph Post proves with Lightwood that her name is just as deserving to be listed amongst them.

*I received this book free from the Author in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.*

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## Sarah says

This is my first intro to Steph Post and her writing and I have to say I'm blown away. I heard great things about her debut novel A TREE BORN CROOKED so had high hopes for LIGHTWOOD. It's a refreshing surprise when a book goes above and beyond my expectations which was exactly the case here. The story takes place in Silas, FL, a small rural town where you can feel the heat practically scorching through the pages. The story alternates POVs but centers mostly around Judah Cannon who just got out of prison. He's immediately brought back into his criminal family despite his misgivings. His father, Sherwood, is a tough son of a bitch who doesn't take no for an answer. The Cannons pull off a robbery which sets off a deadly domino effect involving terrifying Bible-thumper Sister Tulah, a motorcycle gang, and the implosion of the

Cannon family. Post writes with such assuredness and her descriptions are both eloquent and gritty. Her characters are larger than life while also making me feel like I've met them somewhere before. A must-read for any fan of down and dirty Southern noir with an unexpected twist of elegance.

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### **Nicole Ledford says**

Kept me hooked throughout the entire ride! Well done!

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### **Lyn says**

I have to confess right here that I did not finish this book. I could not finish it, but you need to know why. The writing was so good, I felt like I was there, which can be a good thing, but I didn't want to be in this particular place. The people made me uncomfortable. They reminded me of folks I knew a long time ago. It wasn't a good place to be then or now, even in my head through this book.

Kudos to this author for pulling me in and making it so real. So sorry it was too real that I had to leave before the show was over.

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### **Ryan says**

Fast paced southern literary crime fiction at its finest. It is very easy to become completely immersed within the world created by the author. Characters are well developed, believable, and sometimes terrifying, pacing is great, and entire work has a very cinematic feel. It's not difficult to see this novel becoming a new mini-series.

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### **David Nemeth says**

All my reviews can be found at [davidnemeth.net](http://davidnemeth.net).

If you think of Florida as the Holy Trinity of Tourism: Orlando, Miami and Key West, then Steph Post's *Lightwood* (Polis Books), a backwoods crime fiction novel set in northern Florida, will be a bit of a surprise.

*Lightwood* begins with Judah Cannon released from prison and no one is there to pick him up, not his on-again-off-again wife or his cohorts in crime — his father and brother. As Judah begins the long walk to his hometown, it is time for that "first cigarette as a newly released man" that he would hopefully find as "remarkable."

Nothing. It didn't burn. The world didn't appear clearer, didn't make any more sense. A pickup truck with a bed full of teenagers screamed past him. An empty Coors tallboy landed on the pavement five feet ahead of him accompanied by an insult to his mother. Judah exhaled. The cigarette tasted the same as the last one he had just smoked standing out in the prison yard. As the last one he had smoked before walking into the courthouse for sentencing. The last one he

had smoked after his daughter was born. After he had won his first midnight drag race. Lost his virginity. Kissed a girl. Stolen his first pack of cigarettes. It was the same. It was the same. His brother had been right. Getting out of prison was just another day of getting on with life.

Judah is immediately brought back into the family business with a simple job of robbing the motorcycle gang, the Scorpions. As with any good crime story, things go pear-shaped from there. As *Lightwood* progresses, we are introduced to the preacher Sister Tulah and the Last Steps of Deliverance Church of God as well as the members of the dilapidated motorcycle gang, the Scorpions. Post develops all her characters fully whether it is from Judah to his life-long friend, Ramey, or the sinister Sister Tulah to her tortoise-collecting idiot nephew, and even the president of the Scorpions, Jack O' Lantern, with his rather large orange head.

As one would expect from a novel set in Florida, the weather has a strong presence throughout *Lightwood*.

The air conditioner in Ramey's Cutlass had been broken since last summer. Even with all four windows rolled down, it was sweltering inside the car. The sun seemed to radiate off the black vinyl interior and dash, intensifying the stifling heat. They were driving down Highway 18, taking the back way up to Kentsville, and Judah had cautioned Ramey not to exceed the 35 mile an hour speed limit. The last thing they needed was to be pulled over by the police on their way to stake out the Scorpions' clubhouse. Consequently, however, there wasn't much of a breeze.

*Lightwood* is great noir filled ravaged dreams and brutish crime. If you are a fan of crime fiction, you should do yourself a favor and read *Lightwood* — you'll be recommending it to your friends soon enough.

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## **Richard says**

When I read the plot for this upcoming novel by Steph Post, I was a little disappointed as it seemed very similar to her last novel, *A Tree Born Crooked*, and I was worried that it would simply be a rehash of the same ideas. But although there are similarities, where we follow a man returning to his small-town Florida home after time away, kindling a romantic flame and reluctantly reuniting with family knowing that it will only bring trouble, ultimately this book felt like a totally different beast and was even better than the first book in every way.

After getting released from the slammer after three years, Judah Cannon returns home, consummates his love for childhood friend Ramey, and is set on starting over on his own. But he feels like he has no choice but to help his outlaw family on one last robbery, leading to a nasty web of violence between his father Sherwood, his brothers Levi and Benji, a two-bit biker gang, and an intimidating fire-and-brimstone preacher named Sister Tulah.

And while there are some similar themes, *A Tree Born Crooked* is about a man accepting the fact that he can't escape family, and *Lightwood* is ultimately about Judah rejecting family. And while I enjoyed the first book, I felt like Post really stepped up the writing in this one, not only keeping a great pace, but also drawing vivid imagery and skillfully juggling multiple points of view. It was also pretty cool to see how she ratcheted up the tension as all of the players in the novel begin to converge. One of the most interesting things about the novel was also how each character underestimates everyone else, whether it's the Scorpions

underestimating Sister Tulah, or Tulah underestimating the Cannons, or everyone underestimating Judah, it's a cool underlining theme and makes for some great drama.

If you're a fan of southern grit, check out Steph Post's work, especially this book.

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## **Craig Pittman says**

You won't find a more cinematic opening and closing scene in a novel this year than the ones in this gritty Florida rural noir novel by Tampa author Steph Post. She kicks it off with Judah Cannon, a member of the mostly criminal family of Cannons in the small Florida town of Silas, getting out of prison after three years and discovering no one is waiting to meet him. He ends up walking 20 miles to his hometown -- and straight into a bar.

What I liked even better than that opening scene was what happened next, and after that, and after that. After years of reading thrillers, I can often predict the next step in a plot. I could not do that with "Lightwood," and that's quite an achievement.

Cannon hooks up with a childhood friend named Raney who has her own tragic backstory, and together they resolve to start a new life together. But Cannon's crooked father immediately ropes him into one more heist, and it sets off a series of reprisals, attacks and other ramifications that no one could have foreseen.

Post does two things very well. She does a great job of describing the woodsy North Florida setting, which is a far cry from the beaches and theme parks that most people associate with Florida. She also writes some mighty vivid characters, including a doomsday prepper whose hobby involves taxidermy. Raney, in particular, turns out to be quite the female badass, to the point where I liked her better than I did Judah.

Post even achieves the unheard of feat of making a reader feel sorry for a biker gang. The Scorpions get caught in the coils of this bizarre situation and their hapless orange-haired leader, known as Jack O'Lantern, can't quite figure out how to get them out of it.

I have two quibbles with "Lightwood," one of which I noticed while reading the book and one that didn't occur to me until afterward.

The one I noticed is that one of the major characters, a fire-and-brimstone preacher named Sister Tulah, while functioning well as a villain, isn't believable as a character. I've seen and known plenty of fiery Southern preachers over my life, and sat through my share of revival services, and never seen anyone like her. Some of her sermons sound awkward, as if the author were working in an unfamiliar language.

The second thing, the one that didn't occur to me until later, is that there are a couple of incidents involving retribution from Sister Tulah falling on the Scorpions, mysterious and frightening incidents that are quite dramatic. But we never get an explanation of how she did it. I figured someone in the biker gang was working for her, but if so he's still undercover.

Anyway, in spite of those flaws, the book is well worth reading, and I look forward to Post's sequel, "Walk in the Fire," which is slated for publication early next year.

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## **Belle says**

This was a good thrill ride through rural Florida. It was done right. I have a nagging feeling that I have read or seen this plot on TV before and it bugged me all the way through reading the book. The ending was well done and I will read the next in the Judah Cannon series just to see how it goes with Judah and Ramey.

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## **Ben says**

You will be propelled from the start.

More - <http://www.changeyourlifethiswill.com...>

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## **Jeff Zentner says**

Steph Post's writing is a sawed-off shotgun full of double-ought buckshot, a Saturday night bar fight and a Sunday morning hallelujah. It's blood on pine needles and taking a rise in the road too fast on a Harley. She writes like the marriage of William Gay and Flannery O'Connor at a midnight crossroads.

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## **James Thane says**

All things considered, Judah Cannon probably should have just stayed in prison. Instead, once released, he discovers that no one has come to pick him up, which should be the first clue as to where he ranks with his bottom-feeding family and his on-again, off-again wife. That notwithstanding, he makes his way home to the small rural town of Silas in northern Florida. His preference would be to make an honest life for himself and for the woman he has loved all his life, his childhood friend, Ramey Barrow.

Fat chance.

As soon as Judah arrives home, his low-life father and brothers rope him into another of their half-baked criminal schemes. It involves robbing a down-at-the-heels biker gang called the Scorpions of \$150,000 in drug money. The bikers are in league with a charismatic preacher named Sister Tulah, and when the Cannons rip off the bikers, Sister Tulah determines to bring down the wrath of God--or at least the wrath of Sister Tulah--upon both the Cannons and the hapless bikers who lost her money.

What follows is a dark gritty tale that explores the bonds of family ties and the compelling desire for retribution. The Cannons, Sister Tulah and the Scorpions are thrown into a bloody Mixmaster of violence and revenge that will take a very heavy toll on the innocent and the guilty alike. The story brings to mind the backwoods noir of writers like Daniel Woodrell, and while it's hard to find any sympathetic characters in this tale, it's also impossible to look away.

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## **Kate says**

2017 is barely a month old and **LIGHTWOOD** by Steph Post has already set the bar mighty high for any other books scheduled to be released this year. **LIGHTWOOD** explores family dynamics, both in the families we're born in to and the ones we choose.

How far will you go to protect your family?

Steph Post does an excellent job balancing the concurrent story lines. While Judah Cannon is the driving force of **LIGHTWOOD**, Post gives equal time to both Sister Tulah and the Scorpions. The tension between the three groups continues to grow throughout the book. The book's climax moves seamlessly from Judah's point of view, then to the Scorpions, and then to Sister Tulah's.

Post packs a lot of character development into each chapter. None of the characters in **LIGHTWOOD** are without flaws: a self-righteous preacher, drug dealing bikers, and a family out to get what they think the world owes them. The reader understands why the characters behave as they do. You almost begin to sympathize for some of them, like when you learn why Sister Tulah's brother came to live with her. But then they do something that reminds you that these are all people choosing to live outside of the law, or who believe that they can live apart from society on their own rules, and you realize that their story can only end in tragedy.

There has been a lot of buzz around **LIGHTWOOD** and Steph Post, and it is well deserved. She weaves a strong story about families and what people will do for theirs. Pay attention to Post. She's going places.

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## **Brian Panowich says**

First of all, I'm not going to rehash the plot of this novel. Buy it and read it yourself, but I will tell you this: Steph Post doesn't just write stories, she writes fables. With character names like Judah, and Ramses, you'd think a reader would pick up on that from the beginning, but you don't. Instead from the first few pages, you find yourself being drawn into a story that could be taking place right next door, involving real people, that everyone knows. I could be a chanter in a Post novel, and found it impossible not to care about these people as if they were my own kin. This novel solidifies Post as the official voice of working class literature in Florida, akin to what Woodrell has done for Missouri, or Rash for the Carolinas. Yes, she is that good. With *a Tree Born Crooked*, Post proved she could tell an engaging story of family and dysfunction, but with her bold new family drama, *Lightwood*, she expands her literary prowess, to include an almost timeless feeling, using stark prose like a razor sharp blade, cutting through the bleakness of struggling America, to expose the beauty behind that dysfunction, and lets her fans know that hope can be found in the darkest of places. I was already a huge fan of Ms.Post's work, but with *Lightwood*, I also became a student. *Lightwood* is the kind of novel that will make you hold your own family a little closer, and keeps you believing that the power of family is at the heart of everything. A brilliant read from one of the best fiction writers alive today.

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