

A bank robbery leads Conte to a serial murderer. The murders all are related to the Ripper's Friends, a punk rock group from the 1980's.

The Punk Rock Murders: **An R. Blaise Conte Mystery** by Robert Jamelli

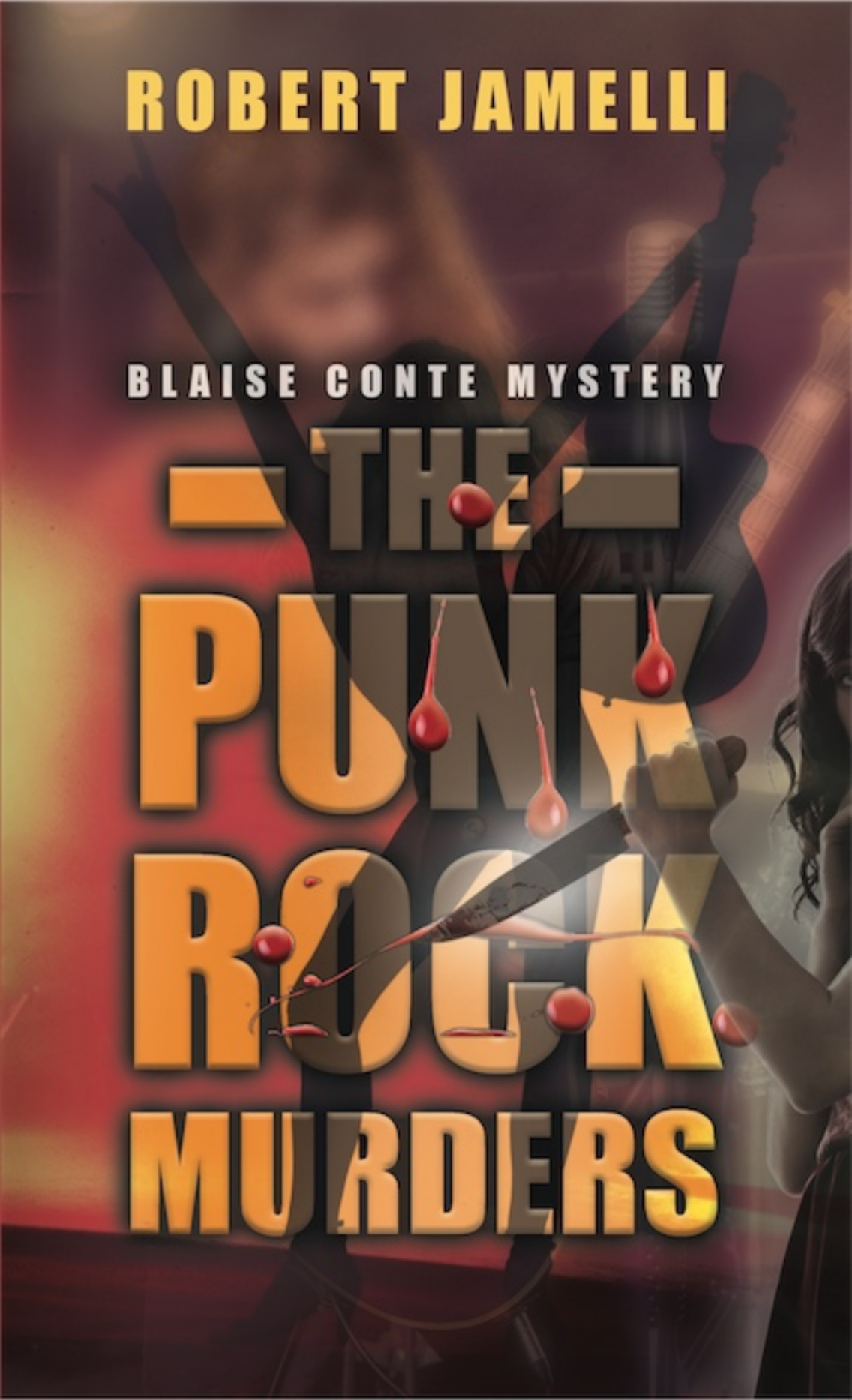
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ROBERT JAMELLI

BLAISE CONTE MYSTERY

— THE —
PUNK
ROCK
MURDERS



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Chapter 1

Give Me a Ticket for an Airplane

The night had been one of their better ones. Sitting at their favorite Italian restaurant, Justine Mayflower and R. Blaise Conte made small talk without one argument. Their on-again-off-again romance had begun back when Conte was a major player in the Homicide Division and Justine had just come over from Vice. When they slept together, she enjoyed slowly getting out of bed, watching him sleep. He could sleep through a bomb blast, but if she nestled up and softly kissed his ear, he was up and ready.

She remembered the first time they had met. She had been on a call with her new partner, Big Jim Scarpati. It was a shooting in an apartment. They were doing preliminaries when R. Blaise Conte strolled in.

“Hey, Big Jim, you need any help?”

“No, Blaise, we’re good.”

Conte looked over at the five-foot-eight, long-legged, well-built woman near Big Jim and smiled. She had long, dark hair. Her brown eyes could pierce you, and they did when Conte looked at her. Her face was soft and cute, but not one you would say is drop-dead gorgeous. But Conte couldn’t stop looking at it.

“Big Jim, I have all the information. Should I put out an APB for Romano?”

“Yes, Justine. Did you know the plate number of his car?” She answered yes and left the room.

“Jim, who’s the babe?”

“Conte, you don’t need to go sniffing around her. She’s just over from Vice. She’s a good cop. She even has two commendations to prove it. And she is a dead shot.”

“Looks a little green around the edges.”

“Lay off of her and stay away.”

Conte left the room and was heading down the stairs as Justine was coming up the narrow staircase. He moved back against the wall as she pushed through against the other wall, stopping to look him in the eye.

“I met better come-ons in Vice,” she said. She continued up the stairs. Her walk up the stairs was just as hot as her tone.

Justine thought back on it as Conte rustled in bed next to her.

“Conte, I don’t how we ever got to bed. You are one asshole at times.” She sank back on her pillow and thought back to their first case together ...

It came back to her clearly. She remembered Conte had asked her at the crime scene, “Mayflower, are you finished here?”

“Just about. I think we should go and see this guy’s brother?”

“Good thinking. I’ll drive.”

They went to see the brother. As they drove, they had their first real conversation—not about the case, but a general, get-to-know-each other. By this time, Big Jim had transferred to another precinct and Justine was partnered up with Conte. After they closed the case, he offered to take her to dinner at one of his favorite restaurants.

“It’s a little Italian place,” he said. “You’ll love it.”

It was still a nice place, and they had had many dinners there that would lead to one thing and another—and then to her place. She thought, *It’s always my place*. Conte rolled over and looked at her, as he had many times. For some reason, he suddenly remembered their first argument. It had been triggered by “Hey, babe.”

“I am not ‘Hey, babe.’ I am not your babe,” she said. “It can be Justine, Tina, Mayflower, but never ‘Hey, babe.’”

He was still remembering it when he turned to her in bed and said, “Hey, Justine, are you on late shift today?”

“Yes, but I have to go in early. You want some coffee?”

“Yes.” As he got out of bed he crossed over to her and hugged her. “You know, this was the best time we’ve had since the Sunnery case.”

“Yes, Conte. We seemed to find each other. You’re not thinking anything stupid, are you?”

“Not really, babe.”

The “babe” word had just slipped out, and sparked another argument. As they bantered back and forth, Conte got dressed and started to leave.

“Hey, Mayflower, I still love you,” he said, then left.

Mayflower stood there and shrugged it off. She mouthed back at the door, “Conte, you asshole, I love you, too.”

Conte got down to his car and jumped in. He was heading back to Secaucus to his office. He had just completed a case for an insurance company and the bonus was nice. Since leaving the NYPD, he had been doing well. Driving back across the George Washington Bridge, he wondered if Mayflower would consider ... He shook the thought out of his head.

Entering the office, he picked up his mail and saw the voice mail blinking on the machine.

“You have three messages,” he heard the robot-like voice say. “First message ... ‘Conte, it’s Dirty Harry. Do you have anything for me or could you spot me a C-note? Call me.’”

Next message ... “Conte, it’s Fingers. I gave your card to this friend. He’s okay.”

Next message ... “Mr. Conte, my name is Attorney Jarrod Smythe. I would like to set up an appointment. Please call me at 609-555-3434. This is my private line.”

Conte listened to all three messages again. He noted the phone number in the third one. It was nine

in the morning. He thought, *Smythe will be in his office now*, and called. It rang several times, then went to voice mail.

“This is Blaise Conte. I ...”

Smythe picked up. “Thank you for calling. I am Jarrod Smythe.”

“I am returning your call. How can I help you?”

“Mr. Conte, could you drive down to Atlantic City today? I could meet you in my office at, say, three o’clock?”

“Yes, I should make it.”

Smythe gave Conte the address and told him where to park his car. They hung up, and Conte wondered what this case would be about. His general rule was never to take certain types of cases—like divorce cases—unless it was something particular. No surveillance and photos outside motels.

He started to open the previous day’s mail. On the top was a Victoria’s Secret catalog, addressed to the previous owner. He thought again about Mayflower. The next piece of mail was a bill. The last piece had been post-marked in Florida.

He opened it up and there was a ticket to Tampa, on a Delta flight out of Newark for that Thursday. The note said, “I must see you. I have a problem and Fingers said you can handle it.”

Now he had two possible cases—and he needed to decide by Thursday which one to take. Two days to decide. He left the office and went upstairs to his

apartment. He wanted to shower and get some clean clothes on before traveling to Atlantic City. *Maybe I'll hit a casino while I am there*, he thought.

* * *

"Fingers, I sent him a ticket. Do you think he'll come and see me?"

Jimmy "Fingers" Walton said, "I called him ... left a message. I'll call him again. I wish I had his cell number. Maybe I can get it. I'll call you back."

Randy Felker was concerned about the note. He wanted to tell someone, but was leery about trusting anyone, not even Florida's finest. He didn't understand why he had been targeted. Then again, maybe he didn't *want* to understand. This PI from New York would find out.

"Happy Jack, this is Fingers."

"How'd you get this number? What the fuck do you want?" Happy asked.

"Happy, you gave me the number back a month ago. Remember?"

"Yeah, okay ... Fingers what do you need? That guy you sent me, he paid up fine."

"Do you have Conte's cell phone number?"

"That prick, yeah I have it. I think he ripped me off," Happy said. He was going to say something about dropping a dime on James Barba, but caught himself. He gave him the number. *It's always better to keep some things private*, Happy thought.

“Thanks, Happy. I know my friend appreciated your work.” Happy Jack Williams was one of the best document-forgers in the country. He kept a low-profile; people only got to see him through other people, and often only on the phone and in drop areas.

* * *

Driving down to Atlantic City, Conte’s thoughts were about the guy in Florida. How did he know Fingers? Why had Fingers given him Conte’s address? And what was with the one-way ticket to Florida? *It’s getting cold up here*, Conte thought. *I could use some sunshine. But the big question is: Can I work in Florida?*

He finally reached Atlantic City. The GPS took him to the address and he parked the car in the private parking lot. He was pointed toward the elevator, and about to head to Smythe, Taylor & James Law Offices. Just as he got out of the car his cell phone rang.

“Conte, did you get a ticket to ride?”

“Fingers, who is this guy?”

“I know him from back in the day. He’s okay.”

“Back in the day? *When* back in the day?”

“In the 1980s. I was just a kid hustling and doing whatever. I met the guy ... he was some kind of musician. Anyway, he helped me out of a jam. We kept in touch while he lived in the city. I lost track of him in the late ’90s. This past week, out of the blue,

he gets my number and calls me. Asks if I know any good PI's. I gave him your name and address."

"Do you know his problem?"

"No, but he sounded real nervous."

"Okay, Fingers. Keep out of trouble." They hung up.

* * *

Mayflower got to her office and dug into her reports. Her partner, Red Lyons, came in and sat opposite her, looking through files. It was a quiet night—a couple of shootings, but no murders.

"Well, Tina, no murders yet. Late November murders seem to drop off a bit. How was your night?" he asked with a crooked smile.

She looked at him. "Why do you ask such questions?"

"Oh ... Conte and Mayflower ... the hundredth rematch! I did not know. I thought you two were done. You guys fight like an old married couple."

"Married to him? I'd have to be sniffing some of the stuff I helped take off the streets back in Narco."

"I didn't know you were in Narco. I thought you came over from Vice. I mean, that was the word."

"Yes, I came over from Vice, but I was loaned out to Narco a couple of times as an undercover."

"Nice to know. You know Conte worked Narco, too?"

"Red, you really want me to shoot you in the precinct?"

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The phone rang and Red took the call.

“You’ll have to wait on that,” he responded. “We have a case.” They left.



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