



## Champagne and Cocaine

**Richard Vetere**

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*This well-crafted thriller will appeal to fans captivated by noir and the mystique of mob life.*

In *Champagne and Cocaine*, a compelling noir-style suspense by Richard Vetere, Danny Ferraro, an aspiring novelist, is fired from his teaching job in New York and drawn into the intriguing but dangerous mob world, where poker, cocaine, and champagne are components of an ideal night out.

Wanting to join the literary world but looking for a “rush” out of life, Danny turns to experimenting with drugs, having one-night stands, and playing high-stakes poker while doing small jobs for the mob, like airport pickups. Poker is a consistent theme and serves as a metaphor for life, in many respects. Characters assess risks and try to predict outcomes as they seek a big win.

Characters are developed and progress emotionally. Dialogue is economical, with short, to-the-point staccato fragments that convey Danny’s surface connections with people in the mob world. These are contrasted with a few longer conversations between Danny and his childhood friend Michael, a traditional, married restaurant owner. Former hippies of the ’60s, they are idealists disillusioned by the excess and greed of the ’80s. Danny partakes in the excesses, but Michael is on the fringes, serving mobsters in his restaurants while resisting the temptation to join them as Danny does.

Vivid, detailed descriptions in this fast-paced narrative conjure images of the smoky rooms where the poker games take place. The 1980s setting, among mobsters surrounded by gambling, women, and money, is realistic. The threat of violence always looms, a constant reminder of their precarious lifestyle. Several musical references contribute to the rich setting and the main character’s emotional development, such as when he reminisces about a connection to Dylan folk songs in the ’60s, or repeatedly noticing present-day ’80s background music playing in a club or on a car radio.

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MARIA SIANO (Summer 2016)

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