

Rome by Night

J. Gennaro Albano

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The death of a showgirl whose escort business could expose corrupt political and social forces drives the mystery novel Rome by Night.

In J. Gennaro Albano's mystery novel *Rome by Night*, powerful forces rush to conceal the scandalous contents of a murdered showgirl's black book.

Sabine, a showgirl based in Rome, is found dead, floating in the Tiber. To protect her influential clientele, who know her through her escort services and drug and sex trafficking dealings, the police hurry to pin the murder on an unsuspecting victim and wrap up the case. Thus Gianni, a freelance photographer, becomes the prime suspect. He struggles to prove his innocence and escape the grasp of Rome's criminal kingpins.

The book's string of sleazy characters include Elio, a devious, acquisitive cabaret owner; Don Armando, Gianni's uncle, who has a dark past; Annabelle, a calculating woman who is connected to Sabine's dealings; and Estelle, who appears interested in Gianni. This cast drives the story, and all have some sort of link to the black book and the efforts to conceal it. Without knowing whom to trust, Gianni struggles to find out the truth about the murder, dodging the suspicions of others. His troubled background adds layers to the mystery, particularly his past associations with a stripper who was also found dead, which make it more challenging for him to exonerate himself now.

The book opens with a riveting, revealing scene, as furious Gianni arrives at Annabelle's door ready to confront her for her claims, which implicated him in Sabine's murder. A fierce exchange follows; it reveals the plot's direction, as each participant accuses the other of their possible involvement in the murder case. Other captivating scenes, as when Gianni is caught in multiple run-ins with the police and assassins, make the story tense. In one, his car is almost forced off the road on a long climb; elsewhere, he and a friend are stalked by suspicious men, and later, he is threatened with a gun.

The vicious sex and drug trafficking underworlds are highlighted, including how both persist, in part, because of government and police corruption. Here, celebrities, high-ranking professionals, and government officials are Sabine's main clientele, and they work with the police to conceal the truth. But much of the story concentrates on Gianni and his efforts to sidestep the people who are after him. Facts regarding the murderer, and other surprising reveals, come through an explanation at the end of the book.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (March 17, 2021)

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