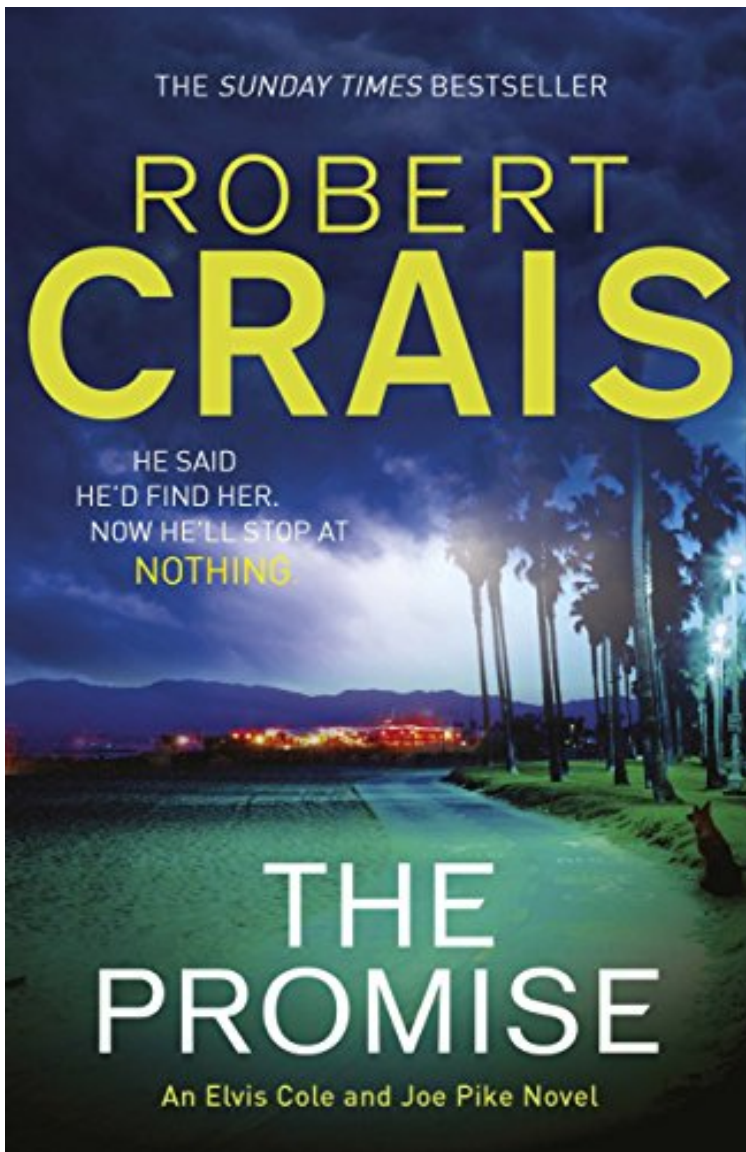


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The Promise: An Elvis Cole and Joe Pike Novel



Par Robert Crais
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurLoyalty, commitment, the fight against injustice - these are the things that have always driven Elvis Cole and Joe Pike. If they make a promise, they keep it. Even if it could get them killed. When Elvis Cole is hired to locate a woman who may have disappeared with a stranger she met online, it seems like an ordinary case - until Elvis learns the missing woman worked for a defence contractor and was being blackmailed to supply explosives components for a person or persons unknown. Meanwhile, in another part of the city, LAPD officer Scott James and his patrol dog, Maggie, enter an abandoned building to locate an armed and dangerous thief, only to discover far more than they expected. Soon, Scott and Maggie find themselves targeted and, as their case intertwines with Elvis and Joe's, join forces to follow the trail of the

missing woman as well. From inner-city drug traffickers to a shadowy group of Afghan war veterans with ties to a terrorist cell, the people they encounter on that trail add up to ever-increasing odds, and soon the four of them are fighting to find the woman not only before she is killed ... but before the same fate happens to one of them.

CHAPTER 1: Mr. Rollins

The woman stood in the far corner of the dimly lit room, hiding in shadows like a fish in gray water. She was small, round, and dumpy. The fringed leather jacket probably made her seem rounder, but she'd never been a looker. She reminded Mr. Rollins of an overripe peach, and the peach was clearly afraid. A steady rain fell from the overcast night. The dingy, one-bedroom bungalow west of Echo Park reeked of bleach and ammonia, but the windows were closed, the shades were down, and the doors were locked. A single yellow twenty-five-watt lamp provided the only light. The chemical smell gave Mr. Rollins a headache, but he could not open the windows. They were screwed shut.

Rollins wasn't his real name, but the man and the woman probably weren't using their true names, either. Amy and Charles. Amy hadn't said three words since they arrived. Charles did the talking and Charles was getting impatient. How long does this take? The chemist's answer was resentful. Two minutes, dude. Relax.

Science takes time. The chemist was a juiced-up, sleeved-out rock pile hunched over the coffee table. A hiker's LED headlamp blazed on his forehead. He was heating the contents of a glass jar with a small torch while watching two meters that looked like swollen TV remotes. Rollins had found him cooking meth eight years ago and used him often. Charles was a trim man in his forties with neat brown hair and the tight build of a tennis player. Mr. Rollins had made three buys off Charles in the past year, and all had gone well. This was why Mr. Rollins let him bring the woman, only now, seeing her, Rollins wondered why she wanted to come. She'd damned near pissed herself when Rollins searched her and made them put on the gloves. He made everyone who entered the house wear vinyl gloves. Rollins did not allow food or drinks. No one could chew gum or smoke cigarettes. The list was pretty long. Mr. Rollins had rules. He smiled as he adjusted his gloves. They make your hands sweat, don't they, Amy? I know it's a pain, but we're almost finished. Charles answered for her. She's fine. Tell your man to finish up so we can get out of here. The chemist mumbled without looking up. Fuck off. Rollins smiled at Amy again and glanced at the round plastic container beside the chemist. It was filled with a material that looked like yogurt and felt like modeling clay. Where'd you get this? Charles stepped on her answer again. I told you where we got it. Rollins considered pushing his pistol up Charles's ass and popping a cap, but he did not let his feelings show. I'm just making conversation. Amy seems nervous. Charles glanced at Amy. She's fine. Amy's voice was whisper-soft when she finally spoke. I made it. The chemist snorted. Yeah. Right. Then the chemist sat up and gazed at Rollins. Whoever made it did a righteous job. It's the real deal, brother. Charles crossed his arms. Smug. You see? Rollins was impressed. The material in the Tupperware was not easy to come by. Charles claimed the woman had two hundred kilo-grams. What about tags? The chemist turned off the torch and unplugged the meters. Ethylene test shows zero. I'll know parts per million when I run a sample at home, but the stuff is clean, bro. No tags. Untraceable. Rollins thanked the chemist, who packed his equipment into a green backpack and let himself out through the kitchen. A light winter shower pattered the roof. Charles said, So now what? Are we in business? Rollins sealed the lid on the Tupperware. The buyer will test it himself. If his results are the same, we're golden. Amy spoke again and this time she sounded anxious. I'll make more for the right buyer. I can make all they want. Charles took her arm, trying to turn her away. Let's see their money first. Amy did not move. I have to meet them, you know. That's a requirement. Not now. Charles steered her toward the front door like a shopping cart. Rollins quickly stopped them. Back door, Charles. Never the front. Charles swung the woman around and aimed her toward the kitchen. After insisting she come, Charles couldn't get her out of the house fast enough. Rollins opened the back door and asked for their gloves. He gave Amy a gentle smile. Buyers don't like to be met, but they'll make an exception for you, Amy. I promise. She seemed ready to cry, but Charles pulled her out and they disappeared into the rain. Rollins locked the kitchen door and hurried to the front door, where he peered through a peephole. When Charles and Amy reached the street, he returned to the kitchen and opened the back door to air the place out. The tiny backyard was dark and hidden from neighbors by overgrown bushes and a sprawling avocado tree. Rollins stood in the door breathing air

that didn't stink of ammonia and called his buyer. Good news. A coded way of saying the tests were positive. Very good. I will send someone. Tonight. Yes. Now. You have the other things here, too. I've told you for a week to come get this stuff. I am sending someone. I want it gone. All of it. He will take it. Rollins put the Tupperware in the bedroom with the other things and returned to the kitchen. He still wore his gloves and would wear them until he left. He took a one-liter spray bottle from beneath the sink and sprayed bleach on the kitchen counters and floor and door. He sprayed the coffee table where the chemist had done his work

and the stool on which the chemist had sat. He sprayed the living room floor and the doorjamb between the kitchen and living room. Rollins believed the bleach would destroy the enzymes and oils left in fingerprints or spit and erase DNA evidence. He wasn't convinced this was true, but it seemed sensible, so he bleached out the house whenever he used it. When Mr. Rollins acquired the house, he made several changes to better serve his needs, like screwing shut the windows and installing peepholes. Nothing fancy, nothing expensive, and nothing to attract the neighbors' attention, none of whom knew him, had met him or, hopefully, seen him. Rollins did only enough maintenance to prevent the house from becoming an eyesore. He let people stay from time to time, never anyone he personally knew and only long enough so the neighbors would think the house was a rental. Mr. Rollins had not built a fortress when he acquired the house, just a place of relative safety from which to do his crime. Rollins put away the bleach, returned to the living room, and turned off the lamp. He sat in the darkness, nose burning as he listened to the rain. 9:42 p.m. 2142 hours. 1742 Zulu Time. Mr. Rollins hated to wait, but there was big money at stake if Charles and Amy were real. Rollins wondered if Charles beat her. He seemed like the type. She seemed like the type, too. Rollins's older sister married a man who abused her for years until Rollins killed him. Rollins checked the time again. 9:51. Rollins put his pistol on the couch. He rested his hand on the gun, checked the time, and closed his eyes. 9:53. The rain stopped. 10:14. Someone knocked at the front door. Rollins jerked to his feet and moved quickly into the kitchen. The buyers' man would never use the front door. That was a rule. Everyone used the back. Rollins quietly closed and locked the kitchen door as knocking came from the front. Knock knock knock. Rollins slipped off his shoes and hurried to the front. Knock knock knock. Mr. Rollins peered through the peephole and saw an adult male in a dark rain shell. The hood was back and the unzipped shell exposed a loud patterned shirt. Average height, Anglo, dark hair. The man pressed the bell, but the bell didn't work, so he knocked again. Rollins held his pistol close as he watched. The man waited a few seconds and finally walked away. Rollins watched for another two minutes. Cars passed and a couple went by huddled beneath an umbrella even though the rain no longer fell. The world appeared normal, but a siren wailed in the distance. Rollins had a bad feeling. 10:32. Rollins phoned the buyer again. The person you sent, he knows to go to the back? Yes. Of course. He has been there before. If you sent someone, he didn't show. Hold on. I will find out. A second siren was screaming. Closer. The man's voice returned. He should have been there. This is not right. I'm jammed up here, man. I want to leave. Bring the material to me. Not here. Someone will meet you by MacArthur Park, there on the northeast corner. Rollins felt a flash of anger, but kept his voice cool. Rollins had made a fortune off this man and stood to make more. You know the rules, Eli. I'm not driving around with your things in my car. Come get this crap. Rollins was pocketing his phone when he heard a wet crunch in the yard and pounding on the back door. Rollins hurried to the kitchen, checked the peephole, and saw a face he recognized. Carlos, Caesar, something like that. His eyes were bright and he was breathing hard when Rollins opened the door. Rollins scratched gloves from his pocket. Put on the gloves, you idiot. Carlos ignored the gloves and ran to the living room, trailing mud and grass. He peeked out the nearest window, bare fingers touching the shade. A helicopter passed overhead so low the little house shook. Fuck your gloves. You hear that? The police are on me, bro. Aint this fuckin' cool? I smoked their blue ass! The helicopter rumbled away, but circled the area. Rollins felt a burst of fear. Thoughts of mud, grass, and fingerprints on the shade vanished. He touched aside the shade and saw a blazing searchlight sweep the next street. You brought the police. Carlos turned away, laughing. I lost them, bro. I could be anywhere. Rollins felt as if his head were filling with angry maggots. The helicopter orbited overhead, lighting up the shades. The chop of the rotor moved away and slowly circled. How the fuck did this happen? They made my face. I got warrants, yknow? Relax. Carlos flopped onto the couch, giggling, wired on adrenaline and chemicals. His muddy shoes were on the cushions. They don't know where I am. They gonna roll over us and keep right on rollin'. Rollins gathered his thoughts. The house was now lost. The goods in the bedroom were history. The mud and the grass no longer mattered. Rollins could not allow himself to be found here with the material in the bedroom and this giggling idiot on the couch. Rollins accepted these facts and the acceptance brought calm. The pistol was no good to him now. Rollins returned to the cabinet where he kept the bleach and took out a rusted, fourteen-inch pipe wrench. The wrench easily weighed three or four pounds. Carlos was still stretched on the couch when Mr. Rollins went back to the living room. He strode directly to Carlos without saying a word and brought the wrench down hard. He felt the head go on the first blow, but gave it two more. Rollins dropped the wrench and put on a fresh pair of gloves. He pressed the pistol into Carlos's hands, both hands so it would look like Carlos had handled the gun, and dropped it beside the wrench. If Rollins was picked up, he did not want a gun in his possession. The

helicopter passed again. The shades flashed into blinding white rectangles and once more filled with black. Rollins trotted to the front door and looked through the peep-hole. A police officer passed on the sidewalk and another spoke with people across the street. Rollins closed his eyes. He took slow, measured breaths as he counted to one hundred. He put his eye to the peephole again. The policemen were gone. Rollins returned to the kitchen. He wore a dark sport coat and slacks. There would be blood splatter, but the blood would be difficult to see at night on the dark fabric. He had a nylon rain shell, but decided not to put it on. The sport coat was better. The police were looking for a young Latin guy in a black T-shirt, not an older, well-dressed Anglo. His car was several blocks away. If Rollins could get away from the house and beyond the police perimeter, he still might survive. The light returned and slid away again. Rollins moved in the moment of darkness. He opened the kitchen door, peeled off his gloves, and stepped out. A cop and a German shepherd were in the backyard. The dog was a deep-chested brute with angry eyes and fangs like daggers. The cop shouted as the dog charged.

Revue de presse'Once again Crais has created a breathless thriller with an undercurrent of powerful emotion - and somehow made it seem easy' (EVENING STANDARD)Through the sheer plausibility of his plotting and the deft characterisation of even the most minor characters, Crais delivers as satisfying an addition to the Cole/Pike canon as could be desired (IRISH INDEPENDENT)'A Feat of good storytelling.' (SUNDAY BUSINESS POST)