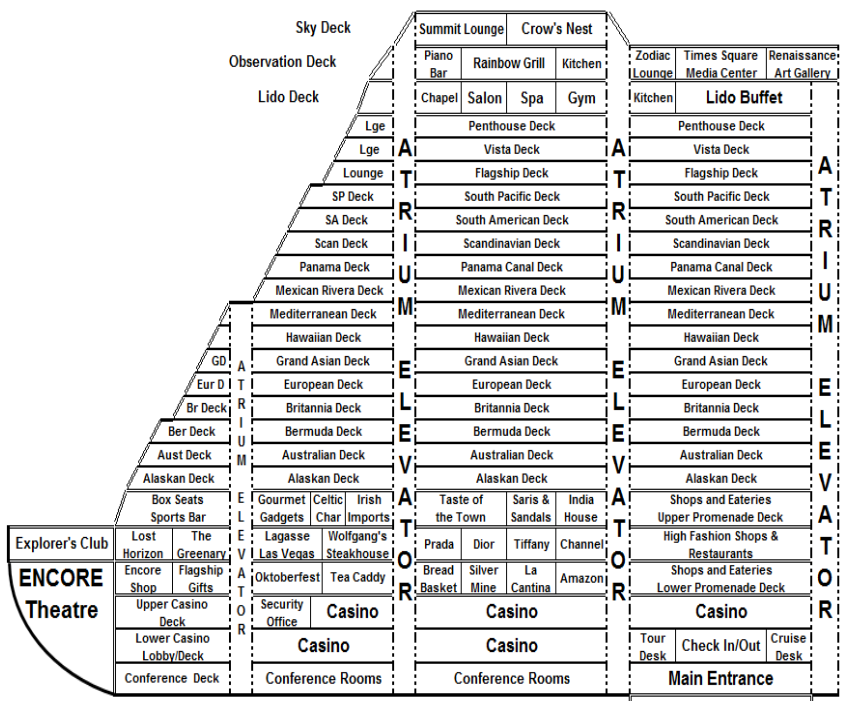


To Frank Sinatra,
the Chairman of the Board,
for bringing the
Great American Songbook to life

The Ship

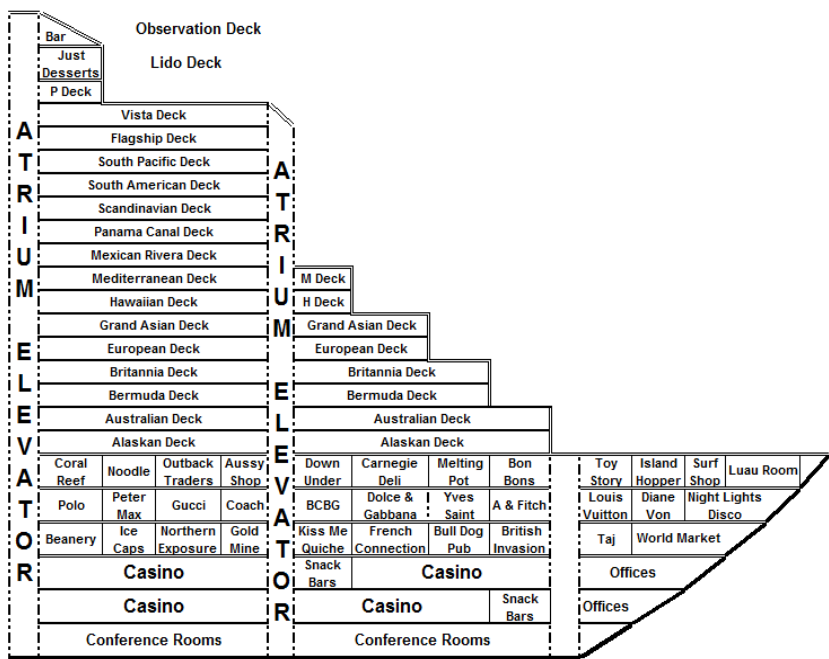
Las Vegas Boulevard



Aft Section

The Ship

Las Vegas Boulevard



Bow Section

Contents



Prologue.....	1
Chapter 1: “Viva Las Vegas”.....	8
Chapter 2: “Let's Face the Music and Dance”.....	13
Chapter 3: “You're Nobody ‘Til Somebody Loves You”..	21
Chapter 4: “My Way”.....	28
Chapter 5: “Just in Time”.....	37
Chapter 6: “Too Close for Comfort”.....	46
Chapter 7: “This Town”.....	55
Chapter 8: “That's Life”.....	61
Chapter 9: “Luck Be a Lady”.....	70
Chapter 10: “Witchcraft”.....	78
Chapter 11: “The Best is Yet to Come”.....	89
Chapter 12: “I Only Have Eyes for You”.....	100
Chapter 13: “Anything Goes”.....	109
Chapter 14: “How Little We Know”.....	119
Chapter 15: “Speak Low”.....	127
Chapter 16: “Maybe This Time”.....	134
Chapter 17: “Feeling Good”.....	143
Chapter 18: “Angel Eyes”.....	152
Chapter 19: “Where or When”.....	162
Chapter 20: “What a Diff’rence a Day Made”.....	169
Epilogue.....	178
Copyright Acknowledgments.....	183

PROLOGUE

**Sunday Afternoon
14th of April
5:00 PM PDT**

“We’ll be landing in Sin City soon,” Alec announced.

Noting his wife’s furrowed brow, he gently patted her knee. “Don’t worry, Lass. I’ll interview your ex-husband tomorrow. Once that’s out of the way, you’ll feel better. When was the last time you saw him?”

Paige grimaced, as she scanned the desert landscape below. “It was the day I found Tony in bed with one of his ‘lady friends.’ I took one look at them and left without saying a word. That was eleven years ago.”

“We should be grateful that he was such a scoundrel,” Alec remarked pointedly. “If he hadn’t been such a louse, you wouldn’t be married to *me* now!”

As Paige turned to face him, Alec leaned over to kiss her. The DunBartons were still honeymooning, and Alec didn’t think a public display of affection was out of order.

The Singing Sleuth Does Vegas

Paige sighed and relaxed against Alec's shoulder. It was fortunate that they were seated together. There had only been a few vacant spaces on the aircraft when their reservations were made.

Thinking about their upcoming assignment, Alec removed an e-mail from his breast pocket. Together, he and Paige reread the message that they had received Friday morning from Collin Woodward, the Vice-President of Flagship Cruise Line.

Subj: Problems in Las Vegas
Date: 12th of April, 5:51:13 AM BST
From: CWoodward@fcl.com
To: AlecDunBarton@aol.com

Alec,

I hope by the time you've read this, you know how serious conditions are in Las Vegas. The local police officers are idiots and have done nothing to find out who has been trying to ruin the reputation of Flagship Cruise Line's latest venture.

My sister Dorothea is at her wit's end. Our resort, *The Ship*, is due to officially open its doors the first of June. For the last six weeks, we've allowed a limited number of guests to stay and use our facilities (known as a soft opening). It's a tried and true method to work out kinks prior to the "hard" opening that I'm afraid will be a disaster.

Here is the situation in a nutshell. A fortnight ago, a horse's head was found in the deep end of the hotel's swimming pool. It cost FCL thousands to get the equine blood cleaned up. A week later, the Mustang convertible of the casino's pit boss was filled with cement.

Last evening, two of our lounge singers, Dean Martini and Frankie Sin (their theatrical names), received blood-spattered ice picks a half hour before their show. I've been told that Dean's impersonator, Tony Bianco, took it especially hard.

As I've mentioned, the police are NOT taking this seriously and have done little to catch the culprit or culprits. At this stage, we don't know whether these are the acts of a competing hotel, a disgruntled employee, or the works of a lunatic. The local press is now calling our resort the "Titanic," and it must stop!

My secretary has reserved seats for you and Paige on a non-stop flight from Miami to Las Vegas this Sunday. As usual, I want both of you to poke your noses where they *don't* belong and find out what's going on. Dorothea will have a car to pick you up at McCarran Airport and a suite ready on *The Ship*.

Please let me know if you'll require anything else. I'm relying on you.

C.W.

Paige watched Alec fold the e-mail and put it away. Appearing more relaxed, she suggested, "You might be able to eliminate Tony Bianco and Phil Carson early in your investigation. They were obviously victims of the prankster."

Alec wasn't so sure. As the go-to person for solving mysterious deaths on Flagship Cruise Line property, he had seen outlandish behavior exhibited by killers and innocent bystanders. Curious about "Frankie," the other half of the Martini and Sin act, Alec asked, "What do you know about Tony's co-star?"

Wistfully, Paige replied, "He's about ten years younger than Tony. When I last saw their show, Phil was perfect at mimicking the gestures and behavior of Frank Sinatra from his Rat Pack days. The chemistry between him and Tony was terrific. I can understand why *The Ship* hired them.

"Unlike my cad of a former husband, Phil is, or was, a sweet guy. Offstage, he was awkward around females, even though there were always plenty of groupies waiting for him after his act. I think the ladies were more interested in partying with Frankie Sin than Phil."

The Singing Sleuth Does Vegas

Paige, who'd had a couple of sleepless nights before leaving Florida, closed her eyes. It gave Alec an opportunity to reflect upon Paige's previous relationship with Tony Bianco.

She met Tony twelve years earlier, when he and Phil had performed on the stage of FCL's Aquarius. Paige found herself drawn to Dean Martin's charismatic double, but had kept her distance from him, knowing that shipboard singers were all too often the "love 'em and leave 'em" types.

Tony, equally interested in Paige, refused to take no for an answer and had pursued her with a passion. For the ten months that Martini and Sin were under contract to the ship's entertainment department, Bianco spent nearly every free moment with Paige. After his show, they would have late suppers and dance the night away. When Tony proposed, Paige accepted without hesitation.

Alec, prone to jealousy, had not been happy to hear that Tony used to woo Paige with Italian love songs. Since Alec drew on the lyrics of pop tunes to help him solve his mysteries, he often found himself on the verge of asking Paige whether Tony's voice was better than his.

At the completion of the singers' contract on the Aquarius, Paige and Tony were married in California. While the couple was honeymooning in Las Vegas, Tony was hired to perform at the Flamingo Hotel with Phil. Unfortunately, Paige could not stay. She was expected to finish the five months remaining on her contract as the ship's cruise-consultant.

Seven weeks into their separation, Flagship Cruise Line gave Paige permission to resign early. Elated about starting her new life, Paige flew to Las Vegas to surprise Tony. It was Paige, however, who had received the greater surprise. Her husband was not the man she'd thought he was.

Alec was wondering how to help Paige get over her apprehension about seeing her ex-husband when a flight attendant announced that the plane would be landing shortly and passengers were to turn off all electronic devices.

Paige raised her head in response to the notification and peered out the window. A moment later, she shrieked, “Oh, my God!”

Alec, in the aisle seat, leaned over to see what she was looking at.

Dumbstruck, he exclaimed, “I can’t believe it. There’s really a cruise ship, smack in the middle of Las Vegas Boulevard!”

Within ten minutes of disembarking the plane, Alec and Paige DunBarton were greeted in baggage claim by a chauffeur, holding a sign bearing their names.

While Paige was accompanying the fellow to the luggage carousel, Alec found himself mesmerized by the banks of one-armed bandits and video-poker games that were strategically placed throughout the huge waiting area. A visitor to the city didn’t have to leave the airport to start gambling.

Realizing that he was tarrying, Alec hurried over to help the driver transfer Paige’s numerous suitcases from the conveyor belt to a trolley cart. Paige had spent much of her youth traveling from San Francisco to Las Vegas. As a result, she knew that the weather in the desert town could be unpredictable and brought almost every article of clothing she owned.

When the bags were collected and counted, the threesome stepped onto the sunny sidewalk from the crowded terminal. It was 5:50 PM and a breezy 75 degrees. After passing a long line of people waiting for cabs, Alec and Paige were taken to a luxurious, stretch limousine parked nearby.

The inside of the vehicle was opulent. As the DunBartons sank into the tufted leather upholstery, Alec gazed longingly at the top-shelf liquors displayed on the polished wooden bar.

Noting Alec’s interest in the vehicle’s single-malt whiskies, Paige murmured, “I don’t think we’ll have enough time to enjoy the limo’s amenities. *The Ship* is probably just a fifteen or twenty-minute drive from here.”

Their vehicle smoothly pulled away from the curb and maneuvered into the airport’s exit lane. As they drew closer to Las

Vegas Boulevard, Alec, who had never been to Sin City, was gently reminded by his wife to close his mouth and stop gawking at the extraordinary hotels that lined the streets.

The limousine stopped at a side entrance of *The Ship*, where Paige was helped out. Alec followed, once again speechless.

Standing under the hotel's ornate awning, Paige took Alec's arm and suggested, "Let's walk around the grounds first. It will be getting dark in about an hour, and I'd like to see this edifice in the daylight. Tonight, it will look very different."

In response to overhearing Paige's comment, the limousine driver informed the DunBartons, "Your luggage will be taken right up to your room. You're in Suite 1906 on the Vista Deck."

Hesitantly, he added, "Will you ... be gone long? Ms. Woodward would like you to join her for dinner at 7:30 PM in the Rainbow Grill."

From the driver's behavior, it was obvious that Dorothea Woodward kept her hotel employees on a short leash. It led Alec to wonder whether she had pushed someone too far. Could that person be the one trying to ruin the hotel's reputation?

After circling the grounds and watching "ocean waves" crest and fall in front of *The Ship*, Alec and Paige headed over to the hotel lobby. It was decorated with enormous paintings of exotic and lavish ports-of-call that Flagship Cruise Line periodically visited.

Though Ms. Woodward had taken care of their registration, they needed to collect their room keycards. Alec was also given a nine-page map of the hotel, which indicated the locations of its two-tiered casino, shops, restaurants, nightclubs, health and spa facilities, and conference rooms.

Eager to see their living accommodations, Alec decided to study the floor plan later. With the help of the receptionist, the DunBartons found the atrium elevator closest to their suite on the nineteenth floor.

As Paige pressed the Vista Deck button inside the glass-enclosed elevator and it began to rise, they were treated to breath-

taking views of the casino, three promenade decks, and thirteen hotel floors named after foreign locales. By the time they arrived at their destination, it felt like that they had seen the entire world.

Paige was a step ahead of Alec when she entered their suite. He was surprised and delighted when she turned around to happily kiss him.

Relieved that Paige had finally shaken off the gloom she'd been carrying around for days, Alec lifted her into his arms. Upon locating their bedroom and hastily dropping her on their king-size bed, the two began to laugh heartily.

