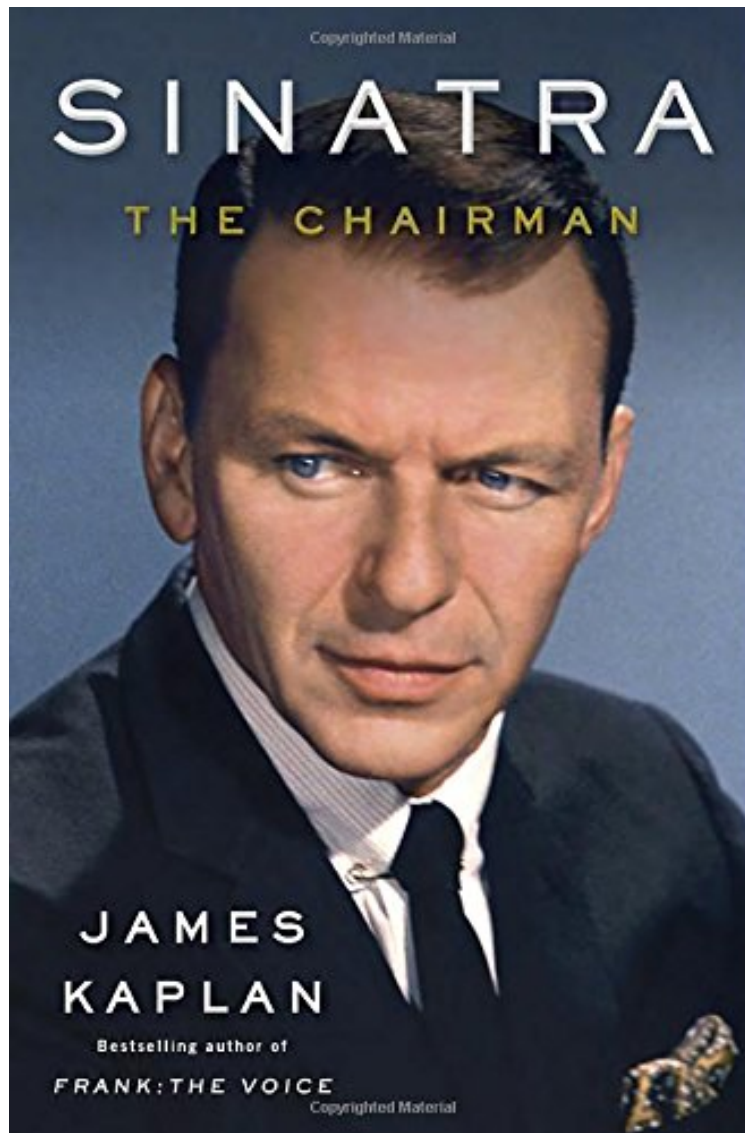


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Sinatra: The Chairman

James Kaplan

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#244006 in Books James Kaplan 2015-10-27 2015-10-27 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.60 x 2.01 x 6.50l, 2.88 #File Name: 0385535392992 pages Frank: The Voice | File size: 67.Mb

James Kaplan : Sinatra: The Chairman before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sinatra: The Chairman:

44 of 45 people found the following review helpful. Kaplan completes gossipy biography, but is it history? By S. A. McMullen This has been called the best biography ever written on Frank Sinatra, and it most likely is. Nearly 2,000 pages when combined, the two volumes by James Kaplan, this being volume 2, covers an extraordinary life in much detail, mixing music history, social commentary, movie lore, and gossip. Some of it reads cheap; some of it profound. But what is open for serious critical debate is if this impressive work is actually a history book. It relies on

too many secondary sources, on tabloid facts, and debatable musical insights of the non-musician author. For example, Kitty Kelly should get co-author credits, gossip columnists are quoted and relied upon for contemporary assertions, songs are discredited with criticisms that Sinatra didn't connect with them, and performances are repeatedly singled out for being off key, always flat. Didn't connect with Send in the Clowns? Watch the performance now on DVD at Caesar's Palace. Flat on Come Back to Me? It's a minor dissident chording that ends the song and Sinatra nails his note. Credit is due for the author's research. It must have been exhausting. He did it all by himself (I'm tempted to write His Way). He catalogues so very much of the work of Sinatra, which I greatly appreciate. When he discusses the artistic value of that work, more so on the music than the movies for me, I cringed and disagreed and was left wanting to ask the author "Why should your likes and dislikes of songs and singing matter in a biography?" When it comes to music, Kaplan is a painter - literally. He studied painting in college and after. There is so much gangster talk, much more than my attention span could cover. But for some, that might be great news. Kaplan does a lot of heavy lifting preserving all the connections, casino contracts, and favors owed. There are also a lot of women. Ol' Blue Eyes' back is seemingly at work every night with women he starred with, drank with, talked with, or paid for. There is also antisocial behavior in such frequency and depth that the reader is left gasping in disbelief and, for the romantics and idealists, in deep disappointment. What this book does very well is describe the remarkable output that Sinatra accomplished in the late 50s and 60s in every possible expression of his art and of his personality. The drama that was his life and his unique contribution to the American social and artistic history of the mid and latter twentieth century deserves this book's breadth and reach. And clocking in at just under a thousand pages, the following criticism may seem strange: this book is too short. After writing in excruciating detail on the 50s and 60s, with the hoodlums, dames, casinos, fights, fits, friends, feuds, and the affliction that was Ava, Kaplan races to the finish. In the dust are many interesting and worthy topics which would have been supported by first-hand accounts, primary sources that the entire book is light on. For example, what about Frank Jr. and his developing relationship with his father, including his turbulent stint as his music director. Frank Jr. disappears very quickly in the tale soon after he reappeared upon being kidnapped. Nowhere is there serious discussions on the way Sinatra changed his singing in his old age, relying upon his knuckleball, as so perfectly described elsewhere by Jonathan Schwartz. The Future, the third album of the Trilogy release, by far the most controversial recording ever offered by Sinatra, is not mentioned. LA is My Lady, the reunion of Sinatra with Quincy Jones, is treated as if it never happened. And the feud, still ongoing both in commercial interests and most likely personal ones as well, between the Sinatra children and Mrs. Sinatra IV is left unplumbed. Perhaps the story is just too big to be fully told in a format that is marketable. Churchill's official biography was 8 volumes. Sinatra's could easily have been three. But with what we have in The Chairman, we should be glad. It is a noteworthy and in many ways a praiseworthy try at capturing what drove this artist into his grandeur and, apparently, out of his mind. 109 of 115 people found the following review helpful. The Greatest Singer, The Worst Person By Mark Mellon With almost nine hundred pages of actual text not to mention an extensive bibliography and notes, this is probably the closest to a definitive biography of the singer well ever see. This is especially true since so many quoted sources were from live interviews with people who knew Sinatra, some tangentially, others deeply. As time inevitably passes, those sources can be expected to shuffle off this mortal coil. The bio also quotes extensively from other Sinatra books to include the tell-all from his fired valet of many years, George Jacobs. My most important impression from the book is the very serious nature of Sinatra's musicianship. He cared deeply about the music that he made, worked unceasingly to put together the best material, musicians, arrangers, and producers, and labored mightily to produce the finest possible version of each and every song, not hesitating to do over twenty takes in one session to make sure every note, either from his throat or his accompanists, was absolutely perfect. This could lead to outright tyranny on Sinatra's part (one favorite stunt was to fix an erring musician with an icy glare and ask So, where you working next week?), but I and millions of others think that the results were worth it, sheer musical magic. Yes, I'm a gushing fan of Sinatra as a singer, what do you expect? Lots of intricate detail is provided that will fascinate and delight Sinatra musicologists with good capsule bios and descriptions of some of his most important collaborators, Bill Miller, Jimmy Van Heusen, Nelson Riddle, et al. And then, and then, there's the dreary, miserable side of Sinatra. There's really no way around it, not if you're realistic: the guy was just horrible. From loyal friends dumped for no real reason to lovers and wives abused and reviled to just perfectly vile public scenes including frequent violence that absolutely nobody should be allowed to get away with, Sinatra was simply the worst. Kaplan discusses one incident where circumstances strongly suggest that Sinatra had a man murdered by having his car run off the road to repay him for the unpardonable affront of objecting when Sinatra came on to his wife. One of the most memorable incidents is the massive public tantrum Sinatra threw at the Sands when they cut off his gambling credit, a freakout that culminated with the casino manager punching the caps off his front teeth after Sinatra ethnically reviled him (couldn't have happened to a nicer guy). Another depressing aspect is the wearying sameness of Sinatra's private life. He just never really grew as a human being after a certain point. Each night the same drunken revels until the dawn with the same gang of hangers-on and made guys, and always the same stories repeated ad infinitum. It's no wonder some people (the ones with some self-respect) finally got tired of Sinatra and wanted nothing to do with him. All of this is true and still, there's Sinatra's music, something that will endure long after his multiple villainies in life. I hope readers

don't get a negative impression of the book based on the previous discussion. Kaplan tries his hardest to give an unbiased portrait of Sinatra in full and in the round, warts and all, and succeeds admirably. Anyone who likes Sinatra's music, gets a kick from reading about Old Hollywood, or would just like to learn some interesting details about American history (there's a good discussion of the Kennedys and their relationships with the man) should read this book. I just can't recommend it highly enough. 15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Fifty Shades of Enormous By Beth Anderson aka Hotclue One thing that struck me about Sinatra's life, and I have never veered from this opinion, was that without realizing it, Frank married his mother when he married Ava, and that explains some of the source of their off and on turbulent relationship. I don't know what Ava's problem was, and I really don't care because I always thought she was a pig. Dolly was rough and foul mouthed as they get, so was Ava. Dolly tormented him, and so did Ava. The resemblance is just way too obvious. And yet, he loved both of them, so Freud wins again. Aside from that comment about that marriage, Kaplan's two part compilation of Sinatra's tumultuous life was pretty well documented. I learned a lot about Frank that I hadn't read before. I have to feel sorry for Frank, because he had so much money, so much opportunity, and ran into so many people who just used him and used him and then turned their backs on him. What the Kennedys did infuriated me, but then the Kennedy males were not nice people in any sense of the word. When they betrayed Frank, that was the Kennedy men doing what the Kennedy men did. I always thought Ava was a horrible woman, and honestly, I never thought she was so gorgeous as to get away with destroying Frank again and again the way she did. All the details in this book gave me a good look at both the genius and the personal inner fury of this man. I was disappointed in the rushed info of the last few years of his life, but then again, when you reach a certain age not too many good things do happen and a lot that did happen were better off unsaid. I'm still up in the air about his last wife. I read her own book, *Lady Blue Eyes*, and came out of that pretty convinced that if she ever loved anyone, it was probably Frank, because she did stay with him and she did take care of him till the end. You have to give her that, because a lot of women would not have, especially as volatile as he was throughout his life, and those last years of anybody's life are not easy to live through even if you do have others to do most of the bull work. Still, she did it, so I'm giving her a pass. Nancy would have done it too, for sure, but he seemed to have never really loved Nancy as a woman for long, through no fault of her own, which is a terrible shame. It seems as though in that strata of show biz society, everybody in it uses everybody else, and that's what I read of his whole life. A lot of high strung, famous people, a lot of money, sex and booze, that goes on all the time so Frank's friends and his life were not actually that unusual except for the scope of it, which was definitely *Fifty Shades of Enormous*. I did not enjoy all the pages at the end of footnotes. I didn't see the point of any of that. A little would have been fine but not 25 % of the book, for God's sake. I read the Kindle's edition and I got my money's worth and I can definitely say Kaplan did a mammoth, masterful job of it. This was an inside glimpse of the life of a very loved entertainer who was a huge part of my teen years. As obnoxious and self destructive as he was many times, he'll always be one of those people whom I wish could have lived forever. I can still hear him singing "Put Your Dreams Away" on those long ago Saturday nights. The man is gone, but the voice lives on.

Just in time for the Chairmans centennial, the endlessly absorbing sequel to James Kaplan's bestselling *Frank: The Voice* which completes the definitive biography that Frank Sinatra, justly termed the Entertainer of the Century, deserves and requires. Like Peter Guralnick on Elvis, Kaplan goes behind the legend to give us the man in full, in his many guises and aspects: peerless singer, (sometimes) accomplished actor, business mogul, tireless lover, and associate of the powerful and infamous. In 2010s *Frank: The Voice*, James Kaplan, in rich, distinctive, compulsively readable prose, told the story of Frank Sinatra's meteoric rise to fame, subsequent failures, and reinvention as a star of live performance and screen. The story of *Ol Blue Eyes* continues with *Sinatra: The Chairman*, picking up the day after he claimed his Academy Award in 1954 and had reestablished himself as the top recording artist. Sinatra's life post-Oscar was astonishing in scope and achievement and, occasionally, scandal, including immortal recordings almost too numerous to count, affairs ditto, many memorable films (and more than a few stinkers), Rat Pack hijinks that mesmerized the world with their air of masculine privilege, and an intimate involvement at the intersection of politics and organized crime that continues to shock and astound with its hubris. James Kaplan has orchestrated the wildly disparate aspects of Frank Sinatra's life and character into an American epic a towering achievement in biography of a stature befitting its subject.

Praise for *Sinatra: The Chairman*: "Fifty pages from the end of *Sinatra: The Chairman*, the second and concluding volume of James Kaplan's magisterial biography of Frank Sinatra, I guarantee you'll begin to weep. Not because you've finished a 900-plus-page book (though you will feel relief), or because Kaplan so persistently details the ugly truth about Sinatra... No, you will weep over the death of a massive and unforgettable talent whose style of living helped define post-war America, and you will weep for an America that no longer exists, whether you lived during those years or just yearn for their return." Sibbie O'Sullivan, *The Washington Post* "Kaplan's second volume is a hand-stitched tapestry with many, many recurring motifs... The remarkable thing is that Sinatra's career is such a compelling transit of the 20th century in American entertainment and politics and an early and prophetic blending of the two that the

endless Kaplan book is endlessly engaging. His Sinatra is a magnificent monsterimperial and callow, thuggish and tender, an exquisitely lonely man forever surrounded by a posse of hangers-on."Edward Kosner, Wall Street Journal"Do not be deterred by the books heft. Sinatra: The Chairman is a riveting read a juicy, painstakingly researched, excitingly written examination of a brilliant musician, an uneven and temperamental actor, and a charming, erratic, deeply flawed man."Julia M. Klein, The Boston GlobeDefinitive, and irresistibly engrossingKaplan is terrific dissecting Sinatra and the mob. His elucidation of Sinatras contribution to the shadowy Kennedy presidential campaign is exemplary. He is at his best reporting 'the less than sublime goings-on,' as he terms them, that always in Franks lifebracketed sublime music.Barry Singer,USA Today"The degree to which that brutality is from reality and not just comic mythology in Vegas lounges can be read about in full glorious technicolor detail in one of the huge, and hugely compelling, books of 2015, Sinatra: The Chairman, the second volume of James Kaplans wildly readable doorstop biography that began with the near-definitive Frank: The Voice.Jeff Simon, The Buffalo News"Hugely readable, vastly entertaining, a page-turner.Adam Gopnik, TheNew Yorker"I think James Kaplan's two volume set is the definitive word on Frank Sinatra, as definitive as any biography of any public figure can be. It's jammed with something juicy on almost every page. It has been written with integrity and affection. It neither sugar coats or demonizes. It presents what all stars areordinary mortals with ordinary cares, writ large by fame, and in Sinatra's case, a peerless talent. Sinatra concocted a towering life on the American landscape."Liz Smith"Such a book stands or falls on its author's storytelling ability. In that regard, Kaplan does admirably, with a sense of momentum and a fair, balanced tone."James Gavin, NewsdayIn the first volume of his Sinatra biographyJames Kaplan provided a gripping, novelistic account of the singers roots and the development of his craft, deftly mapping his assimilation of early influences and his discovery of his own voice. Sinatra: The Chairman, the concluding volume to that biography, does a similarly nimble job of tracing the singers continued rise to international fame, and credibly explicates the alchemy behind the singers collaboration with Nelson Riddle and their amazing achievement during the Capitol Records years with masterpieces like Frank Sinatra Sings for Only the Lonely and Songs for Swingin Lovers!Michiko Kakutani, TheNew York Times"Engaging to the point of addiction,The Chairmanprovides a spirited romp through the prime times of Sinatraland and the September of his years. It also reminds us why Kaplan grew enchanted enough with Sinatra to spend 10 years writing about him But oh, that voice. It made up for so much. It cut through the clutter of everything else. Before Sinatra, there was really no such thing as a standard. Before Sinatra, youd be hard-pressed to associate the Great American Songbook with any particular singer. Such was his impact. So bring on the tributes. And start withThe Chairman.Chris Vognar, The Dallas Morning NewsThe book is detailed enough about Sinatras music, movies and complicated personal life to satisfy completists, but Kaplan always has his eye on the big picture.Lloyd Sachs,Detroit NewsKaplans Frank came out in 2010do we need 900 more pages on Ol Blue Eyes? This intriguing bio, timed to his 100th birthday, will convince you we do.People MagazineIf you ever wanted to know exactly what Frank Sinatra was doing on every single day of his life, Kaplan is your man. The Chairman is rich with fascinating detail, much of which Id never heard. When Kaplan describes Sinatra the singer, The Chairman soars: a flawless legato, perfect diction, and graceful phrasing based on a total mastery of breath control.Allen Barra, TheDaily Beast.comScrupulous, entertainingly eye-openingYoull dig Kaplans highbrow down-low of Ol Blue Eyesduring his controversial and powerful reign in the 1950s and 60s.Elle Magazine"..."[R]emarkably insightful, gracefully, often eloquently, written history of popular music and celebrity culture in twentieth-century Americaall viewed through the lens of an iconic singer and undervalued actor whose wildly contradictory personality and tempestuous personal life built the legend but detracted from the mans genius as an artist....As astute in his psychological analysis as in his music criticism, Kaplan makes sense of the singers insistence on taking way too many encores by noting Sinatras need for constant movement: 'He was like a whole body case of restless leg syndrome.' That restlessness finally shook itself out, but, along the way, it drove a skinny kid from Hoboken to live a life that, as Kaplan concludes, 'touched almost every aspect of American culture in the twentieth century.' Thats a bigstatement, but this big book makes us believe it."Booklist,starred review"The great singer-actor contains multitudes in this vast, engrossing biography of Frank Sinatras mature years... Kaplans sympathetic but unflinching narrative revels in the entertainers scandalous private life while offering rapt, insightful appreciations of his sublime recording and stage performances. It situates him and his Rat Pack at the Vegas headquarters of a postwar American culture that yoked mobsters and prostitutes to Kennedys and other luminaries. His Sinatra is often appalling, sometimes inspiring, and always a fascinating icon of an energetic, resonant, yet doomed style of masculinity."Publishers Weekly,starred review"The meatiness of the material justifies the length of the author's second (and concluding) volume of his biography of Frank Sinatra (1915-1998). Just as his subject matured into a far more compelling artist than the one who had elicited squeals from bobby-soxers, the follow-up to Kaplan's Frank: The Voice (2010) is far more substantial than that initial volume.... An appropriately big book for an oversized artistic presence."Kirkus s, starred reviewAbout the AuthorJAMES KAPLAN's essays, stories, reviews, and profiles have appeared in numerous magazines, including The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, Vanity Fair, Esquire, and New York. His novels include Pearls Progress and Two Guys from Verona, a New York Times Notable Book for 1998. His nonfiction works include The Airport, You Cannot Be Serious (co-authored with John McEnroe), Dean Me: A Love Story (with Jerry Lewis), and the first volume of his definitive

biography of Frank Sinatra, *Frank: The Voice*. He lives in Westchester, New York, with his wife and three sons. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Act One The Whirlwind 1 Eleven days after winning the Oscar for *From Here to Eternity*, Frank Sinatra sat down and typed a note to a friend, clearly in response to a congratulatory letter or telegram. The note, on Paramount Pictures stationery and in Frank's customary, too-impatient-to-press-the-shift-key style, began, April 5, 1954 dear Lew my pisan Mr Sinatra is still on cloud nine and the bum refuses to come down That bum Mr Sinatra was so thrilled, the note continued (still all lowercase, still in the third person), that he was ridiculous. And then, after a final thanks to the recipient, came the signature: *Maggio*. It's a charming letter and a fascinating one. Throughout his life, Sinatra employed secretaries who answered his voluminous mail, often signing his name themselves. From time to time, though, when the spirit moved him, he penned or typed his own missives, and the letters are him, revealing his restless intellect, his sense of humor (always more spontaneous in personal circumstances than onstage), even a literary sensibility. And why not? As a great singer, he was a great storyteller; why should that faculty switch off when he was away from a microphone? In this note, he is writing in character, as PFC Angelo Maggio, the role that won him that Academy Award, and the voice is perfect: the bum refuses; he's so thrilled he is ridiculous. From the moment he'd first picked up James Jones's blockbuster novel, Sinatra had completely identified with Maggio, the feisty little private from Brooklyn who speaks in a kind of Damon Runyonese. He had campaigned, hard, for the movie role by barraging the filmmakers Columbia Pictures president Harry Cohn; producer Buddy Adler; director Fred Zinnemann; screenwriter Daniel Taradash with telegrams touting his perfect suitability for the part, and he had signed every wire just as he'd signed this note: *Maggio*. Frank Sinatra had identified so powerfully with the character not only because Angelo Maggio was a skinny, streetwise Italian-American from Brooklyn like Sinatra's native Hoboken, close geographically to Manhattan but oh so far away but also because Maggio was one of the world's downtrodden, a little man who drank to ease his sorrows and spoke truth to power with wisecracks. When Sinatra first read *From Here to Eternity* in late 1951, he was feeling considerably downtrodden himself. His records were no longer selling; he was having vocal and financial problems; the IRS was after him. He had become infamous, pilloried in newspapers across the United States, after leaving his wife and three children for Ava Gardner. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had recently terminated his movie contract, and he would soon also be dumped by Columbia Records, as well as by his talent agency, the Music Corporation of America. He's a dead man, the talent agent Irving Swifty Lazar declared in 1952. Even Jesus couldn't get resurrected in this town. Maybe not, but Frank Sinatra could. Literally overnight after the Academy Awards ceremony on March 25, 1954 Sinatra brought off the greatest comeback in show-business history. And he had done it all in Hollywood, a ruthlessly Darwinian company town that reviles losers but has the sappiest of soft spots for a happy ending. His Oscar underlined the fact that he was also a freshly viable recording artist with a new contract at Capitol Records, where he and a brilliant young arranger named Nelson Riddle had begun creating the string of groundbreaking recordings that would revolutionize popular music in the 1950s. And quite suddenly that spring, without a shred of embarrassment about its fickleness, the entire entertainment industry began throwing itself at his feet. The whole world is changing for Frank Sinatra, Louella Parsons wrote in her syndicated column of April 19. Today he has so many jobs offered him he can pick and choose. Parsons was talking about movies, although television, radio, and nightclubs were also calling. Among the film possibilities offered to Sinatra: a supporting part alongside the hot-as-a-pistol young Robert Mitchum in the medical melodrama *Not as a Stranger*; the second lead in a Warner Bros. remake of *Four Daughters*, the picture that had catapulted John Garfield to fame; a co-starring role alongside Marilyn Monroe in the 20th Century Fox musical *Pink Tights*, even though Monroe soon dropped out when she heard how much more the studio was offering Sinatra than her. And, lo and behold, MGM where Louis B. Mayer had personally fired Sinatra in 1950 after he made an impolitic joke about Mayer's mistress (and where Mayer himself was now history) wanted him back, for the long-discussed *St. Louis Woman*, alongside Ava Gardner. This was distinctly problematic for several reasons. For one thing, Gardner, who'd been outraged that Metro had dubbed a professional singer's voice over hers in *Show Boat*, was determined never to make another musical. For another, she had come to hate Hollywood with a passion. She was living as an expatriate, cohabiting in Spain with the charismatic and brilliant bullfighter Luis Miguel Domingun, the darkly handsome torero whose rivalry with his brother-in-law Antonio Ordez would later inspire Ernest Hemingway's long *Life* magazine piece *The Dangerous Summer*. Most important of all, however, she was about to file for divorce from Frank. While the Hollywood of 1954 bore some similarities to today's entertainment capital, it was altogether a sleepier, more rustic town. Not a more virtuous one by any means, but more tightly bounded. The studios still held sway; their publicity departments controlled access to stars and information about them, even when it came to police matters. There was a certain code of conduct for the press and other prying outsiders when it came to celebrities. It is, for example, impossible to imagine any major star today living, as Sinatra did in the spring of that year, in a garden apartment, albeit such a glamorous one as Frank's five-room bachelor pad in a redbrick complex at the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly Glen. A decade before, when he had first come to Hollywood, he had resided in a pink-walled stucco mansion in Toluca Lake. It was a mark of both his change of fortunes and his maturity (not to mention the change of times) that Sinatra no longer had to ward off hordes of bobby-soxers, or hordes of any kind. In the spring of 1954, he was approaching thirty-nine lean and balding, not settled by any means (his defiant hedonism and

overweening ego would guard against such a fate for a very long time), but grown up, in his own particular way. His oaken baritone on the Capitol recordings, rich with sad knowledge, on up-tempo numbers, with swaggering authority was a sea change from the tender Voice that had soothed America through the war. But the secret was that he was still yearning. (He would always yearn, even after he had gained all the world had to offer.) He had spent the previous Christmas and New Years in Rome, where Gardner was shooting Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *The Barefoot Contessa*, desperately trying to hold on to her, even as she was edging away, already in love with the bullfighter. Ava loved Frank too she always would but her passion for him had ebbed, diminished in good part by his plummet from success, which had coincided with her own rise to stardom. He had drained her scant reserves of patience and sympathy. Unknown to her, just before she left for Europe the previous November, he had made a serious suicide attempt, cutting his left wrist in the New York apartment of his close friend the songwriter Jimmy Van Heusen: he would have bled out had Van Heusen not returned and found him. And Ava smelled his desperation and hated it even as she loved him. She was heedless and restless and easily bored, and she was in love with another man. The gossip columnists (Sinatra read them as closely as any fan) cobbled up a sweet fantasy: Gardner would come to the Oscars that March she herself was up for Best Actress, for Mogambo and the couple would reunite. But she stayed with her lover in Spain. If Frank himself had harbored any fantasy that his renewed fame would bring her back, he was rudely disappointed. One night we went to Franks for a dinner party, recalled the lyricist and screenwriter Betty Comden, and we saw that one of the rooms was filled with pictures of Ava, and around the pictures were lit candles. It was like the altar of a little church. Yet another night, Gardner's biographer Lee Server writes, Swifty Lazar, who lived in the same apartment complex as Sinatra, came home late and saw that Franks door was open. Wondering if there was a problem, he stuck his head through the doorway and saw Sinatra by himself, evidently very drunk, slumped in an armchair, holding a gun. Cautiously Lazar stepped inside and as he did he saw that Sinatra was aiming his gun an air gun, it turned out to be three large portrait images of Ava he had propped up on the floor. The three faces of Ava were full of pellet holes where Sinatra had been shooting at them all night long, as it appeared. If Gardner had been Delilah to Franks Samson while they were together, she would be his muse for years after they broke up specifically and crucially, the great Capitol years. Ava taught him how to sing a torch song, Nelson Riddle famously said. She taught him the hard way. On May 13, 1954, Sinatra with Riddle conducting a twenty-nine-piece orchestra recorded three songs that could have been addressed directly to his wandering wife: *The Gal That Got Away*, *Half as Lovely (Twice as True)*, and *It Worries Me*. On the last, Frank sang, Just what did I do as I mean to you? Taken as autobiography (which to some extent it must be), the lyric may look disingenuous of course he had been not just mean but brutal to her, and she to him, on innumerable occasions. But listened to, the line, sung with exquisite tenderness, is meltingly lovely. In fact, Frank in his new middle period was every bit the ballad singer that Frankie of the Columbia years had been and then some. He had lived more, suffered more. On June 12, 1954, Ava Gardner arrived in Lake Tahoe to begin the six-week Nevada residence required for her divorce from Frank Sinatra. Las Vegas, where she had sojourned while splitting from her first husband, Mickey Rooney, was out; Frank was in town, playing the Sands, and Vegas was a small place in those days. (And, extraordinarily enough, both Rooney and Gardner's second husband, Artie Shaw, were also appearing at casinos along the Strip: a constellation of exes.) While in Tahoe, Ava and her maid, Reenie Jordan, stayed in a lakefront house provided by her inveterate suitor, the epically weird, immensely wealthy oil and aviation magnate Howard Hughes. Hughes, a control freak to the nth degree and a paranoiac master of intrigue, especially when it came to affairs of the heart, had a habit of installing girlfriends both current and prospective in rented houses, sometimes in proximity to each other, the better to monitor their comings and goings. For years, he had been trying to reel in Gardner, to bed or to wed, without success. He showered her with expensive gifts, jewels and fur coats and convertibles; she accepted his presents and laughed in his face. Now he sensed an opening. Her marriage was ending; perhaps she needed a shoulder to cry on. But the emotionally tone-deaf Hughes needed data to press his campaign. He had the rented house bugged and retained a fancy Washington, D.C., investigator named Robert Maheu to surveil the premises while Ava was in residence. Maheu, whose specialty was high-level cloak-and-dagger work (in later years, he would be intimately involved in a CIA-backed plot to assassinate Fidel Castro), was understandably loath to make a long trip for what was plainly a jealous-boyfriend job. He subcontracted the work to a local private detective, who quickly ascertained that Hughes' competition was Ava's never-say-die, soon-to-be ex. One afternoon that summer, Frank showed up at the Tahoe house, no doubt with reconciliation in mind, and managed to persuade Ava to take a boat ride with him. Unwisely, the local detective elected to follow them in another boat. Sinatra quickly spotted him and gave furious chase; the detective just managed to make it back to shore and hightail it into the woods. Any hint of romance thoroughly spoiled, Frank left Tahoe without swaying Ava. Romantic history: first as tragedy, then as farce. At the end of July, she failed to show up for her court date for the divorce. She had asked him to repay the not inconsiderable sums she lent him when he was down-and-out; he had bridled at the request. They were at an impasse: still legally married, though apart. He would never get her out of his system, nor would she ever truly get him out of hers.