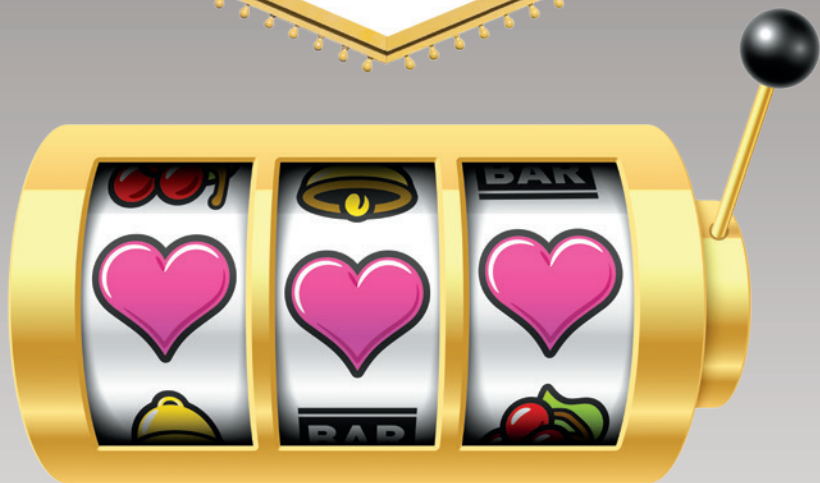


MELODIE CAMPBELL

THE  
GODDAUGHTER  
DOES *Vegas*



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ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Campbell, Melodie, 1955–, author  
The goddaughter does vegas / Melodie Campbell.  
(Rapid Reads)

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-4598-2115-6 (softcover).—ISBN 978-1-4598-2116-3 (PDF).—  
ISBN 978-1-4598-2117-0 (EPUB)

I. Title. II. Series: Rapid reads  
PS8605.A54745G6323 2019      C813'.6      C2018-904884-0  
2018-904885-9

First published in the United States, 2019  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2018954144

**Summary:** In this work of crime fiction, mob goddaughter Gina Gallo discovers while visiting Las Vegas that her identity has been stolen. (RL 3.2)



*Orca Book Publishers is dedicated to preserving the environment and has printed this book on Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.*

Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Cover design by Jenn Playford  
Cover photography by Shutterstock.com/Alhovik and  
Shutterstock.com/trekandshoot

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS  
orcabook.com

Printed and bound in Canada.

22 21 20 19 • 4 3 2 1

# ONE

“**I** get it. You’re sad about not getting married in your hometown.” Pete gave me a little sideways squeeze. Awkward to do on an airplane when you’re buckled in.

“It’s not that.” I tried to figure out how to explain it. “I like Hamilton,” I said. “It’s home. Sure, I’ll miss the smog. How do people breathe in that clean Nevada desert air? It’s not natural.” I tried to make a joke of it. No point upsetting Pete with my sense of foreboding.

“You aren’t worried about the family, are you? No one is going to object to us

being married. They like me. Your uncle Vince gave me that Glock and all.” There was pride in his voice. Probably I should be worried about that.

“You wouldn’t understand,” I said. Pete had no idea what would be waiting for us when we returned from Vegas.

I didn’t know for sure, of course. But we’re Italian. I am the goddaughter of the local crime boss. Reluctant goddaughter. I do my best to stay on the nice and friendly side of the law. You might even say it is an obsession for me. Certainly my wayward family thinks so.

The problem was, my Christmas wedding was being relocated to Vegas. Pete and I were eloping. We had good reason to do so. Our wedding hall had burned to the ground two days before the big day. This was not a particularly good sign. And it wasn’t the first bad omen. Just before the fire, my great-aunt Zia Sophia had seen a crow.

That was never good. Sure, she was in Sicily, but omens were omens.

I might have been slightly superstitious. Not Pete. He just wanted to get married. So we'd escaped the next day and hitched a plane to Vegas. We'd kind of left everyone behind. This might be a mortal sin in an Italian family.

But there was no use ruining Pete's mood until we landed. Who knew? Maybe it would all work out.

I looked out the window. We were thirty thousand feet in the air. No crows around that I could see.



Two hours later we landed. So far, so good. The gods were on my side for once. We got off the plane with no incident and made our way to the baggage-claim area.

"You can sure tell we're in Vegas," said Pete.

I nodded in happy agreement. I'd never seen an airport like this before. There were slot machines everywhere. With all the blinking lights and dingle noises, you couldn't help but feel excited just walking through the terminal.

We followed the signs, and within minutes Pete was hauling the first of our bags off the baggage carousel.

It was just after lunch, local time. The flight from Toronto to Vegas had been four hours long. We had left Hamilton, also known as The Hammer, three hours before that. I was really looking forward to getting to the hotel. A shower was in order. And real food. Then we had some things to organize. Or, at least, I had some snooping to do. Pete claimed he had a place booked for the wedding. But he wouldn't tell me anything about it.

This was unacceptable. A girl needs to know. So I considered it a challenge to find out what Pete had planned.

I watched Pete lift the second bag off the carousel.

“Surprise!” a voice sang out behind me.

I whirled around. “Nico?”

There he was. All 145 pounds of lanky, grinning Nico. Complete with bleached blond hair and black eyeliner.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?”

I yelled in delight.

My favorite cousin raced up to give me a hug. I squeezed him back. Behind me I could hear Pete chuckling. There was a slightly unhinged quality to it.

“You didn’t think I could let you get married without me.” Nico pushed back from the hug and grinned.

“How did you get here?” I demanded.

“Oh, simple,” he said. “I caught the earlier flight. Hi, Pete.” He did a little floppy-hand wave.

Pete had both arms occupied with suitcases. He answered with a chuckle and



shake of his head.

“I can’t believe it! How did you even know we were coming to Vegas?” I asked. We headed toward the exit.

“That’s easy,” Nico said, loping along beside me. “I just had our mutual friend in the security business check flights for your name. You know how he is with computers.”

I gulped. “Stoner hacked into—”

“Shhhh!” said Nico, putting a finger to his lips. “No names. The walls have ears.”

“So you came by yourself?” I said.

“Caught the last seat on the flight right before yours. I was lucky. They only had a single seat.” Nico sounded proud, even smug. “I’ve already been to the hotel. Just had time to check in.”

“Which hotel?” asked Pete.

“The same hotel as yours, of course!”

Pete did that snort-chuckle again. I noticed he didn’t ask how Nico had

found out. Probably our mutual friend Stoner had helped. Heck, I didn't even know the name of the hotel. Pete had kept that a secret too.

"Well, really," said Nico. "Where else would you stay in Vegas but the newest and coolest place? Never mind that it's owned by the family."

"It's owned by the family?" Pete's voice had an unusually high pitch to it.

"Well, distant family. Somebody's great-grandfather married someone's great-aunt. That sort of thing. Doesn't matter. It's still the coolest thing on the planet. Wait until you see it!"

We made it through the sliding glass doors. It was cool, all right. I always think of Vegas as being hot because it's in the desert. But this was December. While the sun was bright, the air was brisk. I was glad I had brought my leather jacket.

Pete found the taxi stand and hailed a cab.

My cell phone made a *ping* sound. I took it out of my purse. “This is weird,” I said.

“Pete, you get in the front,” said Nico, reaching for the back-door handle. “Gina and I will sit in the back so we can talk.”

“Nico, listen to this,” I said. “I just got a message from Amazon on my phone, confirming my order from Linda’s Luscious Lingerie.”

“Oooh, Pete will like that.” Nico waited for me to get in. I slid over so he could get in on the same side.

Pete was busy with the driver, loading luggage into the trunk of the cab. That was a good thing. He didn’t need to hear this.

“No, listen, Nico. The thing is, I haven’t ordered anything from Linda’s Luscious Lingerie. I don’t even know that store.”

“What do you mean? Everyone knows it. It’s like Frederick’s of Hollywood.”

*Slam* went the lid of the trunk.

“But I didn’t place an order there, Nico. Why is Amazon saying I have?”

“Let me see that,” said Nico.

I handed him the phone.

“You didn’t place an order for the Naughty Nites peekaboo teddy and two pairs of crotchless undies?”

“Ick, Nico! Keep your voice down.” The front passenger door opened, and Pete plunked himself onto the seat.

“Well, it should be easy enough to cancel. Obviously it’s a mistake. Just go to Amazon and cancel the order when we get to the hotel.”

Right. The hotel. I couldn’t wait to see it.

## TWO

**A**bout twenty minutes later I was standing inside the lobby, gawking in amazement.

“The NECROPOLIS?” My screech was drowned out by the cacophony of voices around us.

“Isn’t it brilliant?” said Nico, flinging his arms wide. “Did you ever see such a great theme? And the execution is terrific!”

“Execution. Yup, that works, Nico. I could execute certain people right now.” I wasn’t such a fan of the theme.

Pete snorted beside me.

I continued to stare at the decor. Problem was, Christmas was only a week away. And a Vegas hotel, no matter what its theme, was not about to ignore Christmas.

So the lobby was a crazy combo of Christmas decorations and creepy hotel theme. I made myself look beyond the cheerful tree.

Blood-red velvet curtains trailed on the black-and-white marble floor. In the center of the lobby stood a statue of gargoyles with circular seating around it. Oh, wait—not a just a statue. A fountain! Fine streams of water spilled out of the creatures' wee-wees.

The rest of the seating in the room was fashioned out of overstuffed coffins. I squinted at the mural on the wall behind the coffins. Not one but—wait for it—a murder of crows. I was doomed.

Not only that. Those decorations on the Christmas tree? Candles. Mini plastic gravestones. And crows.

Nico could hardly contain his excitement. “Check out the name of the restaurant, Gina.”

I followed his pointing arm. “The Crematorium Grill?” I groaned.

“Wonder if they only do well done,” said Pete.

Nico pointed to a standing sign. “Look. A *zombie* convention! Just when we’re here. Aren’t we lucky?”

That was one way of putting it. The lobby was bustling with happy people who appeared to be extras from *The Walking Dead*. Some of them were wearing Santa hats. Which was seriously twisted.

“We seem to be the only ones alive here,” said Pete.

Nico grinned. “And all the staff members are dressed as morticians! It’s awesome.”

“So that’s why you’re wearing black and white.” I pointed to his white jeans

and black shirt with the tails hanging out. “Usually you’re more colorful. Like Pauly.” Nico had a habit of dressing like a parrot. One parrot in particular.

“Speaking of parrots and their owners, Lainy is all excited to see you. She’s doing a show tonight, but she’ll call you tomorrow. Since she’s your maid of honor, I’ll be the best man. That is, if it’s okay with Pete.”

Pete’s response was drowned out by the noise of the conventioners. At least, I think the moan I heard came from a zombie.

Just to the right of reception was a shop named Dead Gorgeous. The window was a sea of blingy mermaid-style dresses.

I stopped. “Hold on.” I pointed to a dress with blue sequins. “I am *so* going to try that on.”

Pete laughed. “You can do that right after we check in.” He took my hand and propelled me toward the reception desk.



“Better idea. Why don’t *you* check in, and I’ll check out that shop!” I was a girl on a mission.

Pete chuckled. “Okay. I’ll drop the luggage off and meet you back there in time for the fashion show.”

So now it was a “fashion show.” Pete knew me well. “Nico, are you coming with me?” I asked.

He hesitated. “Actually, I’m supposed to check in with someone. I’ll do that and then meet you at the shop.” He gave a little wave and sauntered off.

I stared after him. “Well, that was weird. Usually Nico loves to shop with me. Wonder what’s up?”

I found out soon enough.



Ten minutes later I was in the dressing room at Dead Gorgeous with a pile of

shimmering dresses. Vegas was all about bling, right? Neon lights and blinking slot machines. Hey, I was only doing my part to keep the strip dazzling.

They had the blue gown in my size, so I started with it. I placed it over my head and tried to shimmy it down. It wasn't easy to get into. This worried me a bit. In my experience, gowns that are hard to get into are even harder to get out of. I hoped Pete would show up soon, in case I needed the cavalry.

I was just straightening up to admire the dress when a movement in the mirror caught my eye. I heard a *whoosh*, like the sound of a door being opened. The wall of satin drapery behind me billowed out.

"Hey," I said, turning. A large hand covered my mouth, and I was pulled back through the curtains.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is Gina Gallo's sixth adventure, and I'm extremely grateful to the people who have provided encouragement and support for the series. Front of the pack are the deadly dames: Cathy Astolfo, Janet Bolin, Alison Bruce, Nancy O'Neill and Joan O'Callaghan, who serve as my beta readers. You rock!

I couldn't write comedy without the people who value it. Cheryl Freedman, Don Graves and Jeannette Harrison are always there to cheer me on. Thank you, dear friends.

I've been so lucky to have Ruth Linka and her team at Orca Book Publishers produce these books. They take my manuscript and make it better, every single time. Warm thanks to you all.

Billed as the “Queen of Comedy” by the *Toronto Sun* and called “the Canadian literary heir to Donald Westlake” by *Ellery Queen Magazine*, **MELODIE CAMPBELL** achieved a personal best when *Library Digest* compared her to Janet Evanovich. Melodie got her start writing stand-up and has since been a banker, marketing director, college instructor, comedy writer and possibly the worst runway model ever. Winner of ten awards, Melodie has been both a finalist for and a winner of the Derringer and Arthur Ellis awards for crime writing. She has over two hundred publications, including a hundred comedy credits, forty short stories and seven novels. Her work has appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, *Star Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Canadian Living*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and many more. Melodie lives in Oakville, Ontario. For more information, visit [melodiecampbell.com](http://melodiecampbell.com).