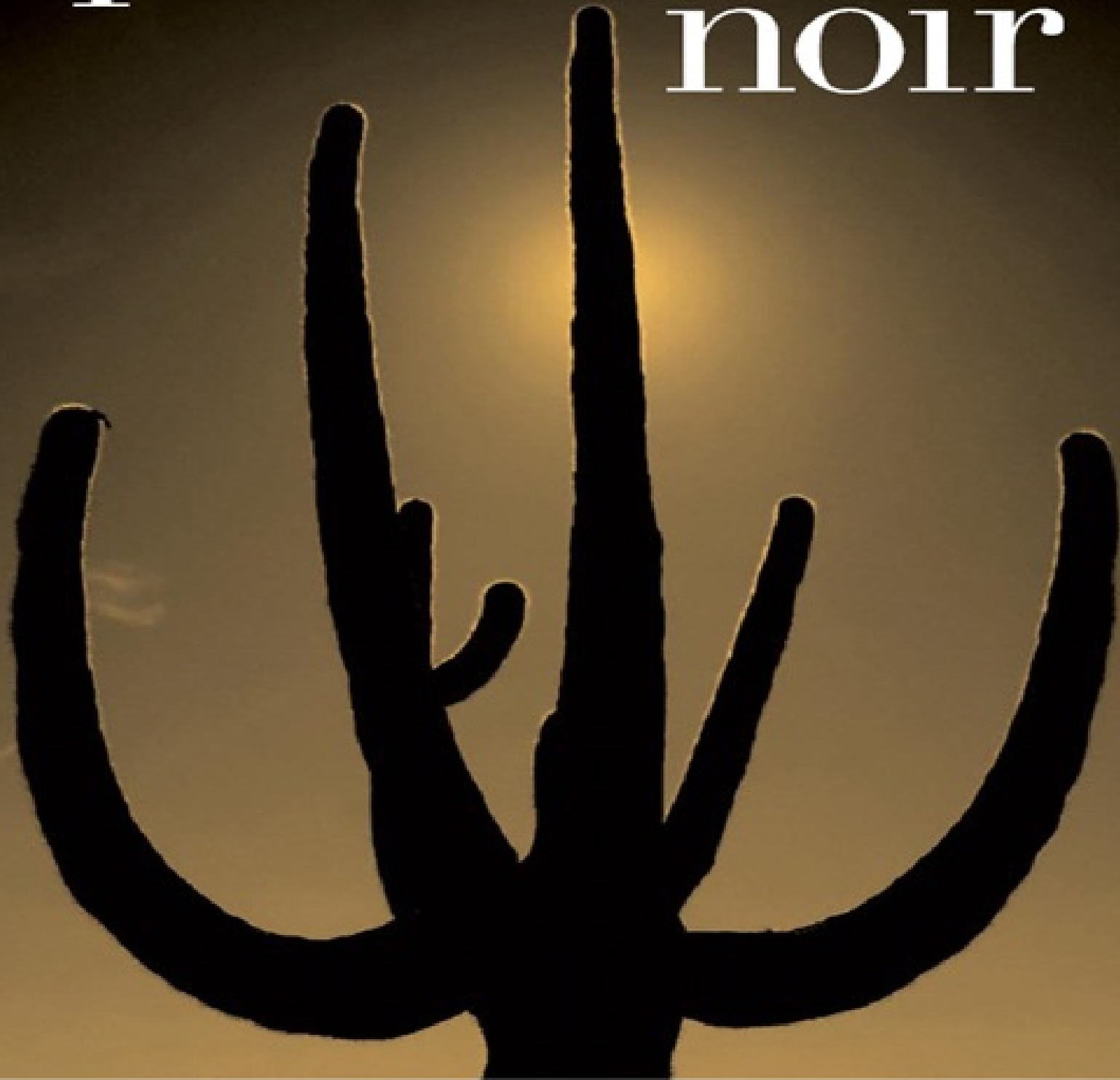


phoenix noir



EDITED BY PATRICK MILLIKIN

DIANA GABALDON + LUIS ALBERTO URREA + JAMES SALLIS
LEE CHILD + JON TALTON + DON WINSLOW + AND OTHERS

PHOENIX NOIR

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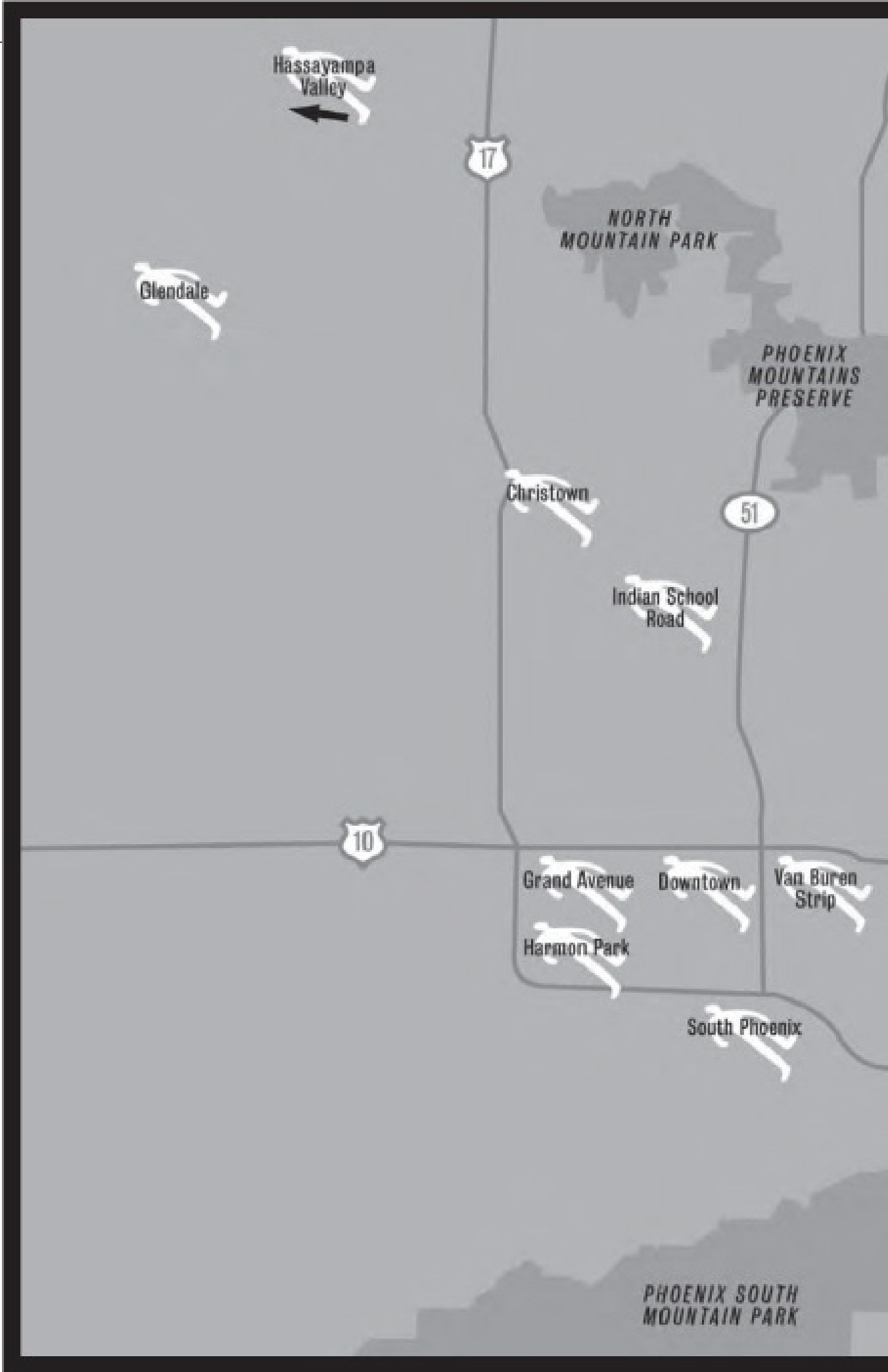
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PHOENIX



Paradise Valley

Scottsdale

PAPAGO PARK
Desert Botanical Garden

Toveria Castle

Tempe

Apache Junction
→

Chandler
↓

10

60

101

202

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Introduction](#)

PART I: THE BIG HEAT

[JON TALTON](#)

[Bull](#)

[Downtown](#)

[CHARLES KELLY](#)

[The Eighth Deadly Sin](#)

[Hassayampa Valley](#)

[DIANA GABALDON](#)

[Dirty Scottsdale](#)

[Desert Botanical Garden](#)

[ROBERT ANGLIN](#)

[Growing Back](#)

[Apache Junction](#)

PART II: WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS

[LUIS ALBERTO URREA](#)

[Amapola](#)

[Paradise Valley](#)

[LEE CHILD](#)

[Public Transportation](#)

[Chandler](#)

[PATRICK MILLIKIN](#)

[Devil Doll](#)

[Tovrea Castle](#)

[LAURA TOHE](#)

[Tom Snag](#)

[Indian School Road](#)

PART III: A TOWN WITHOUT PITY

[JAMES SALLIS](#)

[Others of My Kind](#)

[Glendale](#)

[KURT REICHENBAUGH](#)

[Valerie](#)

[Grand Avenue](#)

[GARY PHILLIPS](#)

[Blazin' on Broadway](#)

[South Phoenix](#)

[MEGAN ABBOTT](#)

[It's Like a Whisper](#)

[Scottsdale](#)

PART IV: THE CRY OF THE CITY

DAVID CORBETT

Dead by Christmas

Tempe

DON WINSLOW

Whiteout on Van Buren

Van Buren Strip

DOGO BARRY GRAHAM

By the Time He Got to Phoenix

Christown

STELLA POPE DUARTE

Confession

Harmon Park

About the Contributors

INTRODUCTION

SUNSHINE IS THE NEW NOIR

Phoenix is a young city, even by Arizona standards. The desert metropolis, easily the largest in the Southwest today, wasn't established until 1867, much later than Tucson, Prescott, and other Arizona towns. As the legend goes, fortune-seeker and former Confederate soldier Jack Swilling noticed the ruins of the extensive Hohokam canal system while passing through the Salt River Valley and recognized the economic potential in getting the irrigation ditches up and running again. Centuries earlier, the Hohokam Indians had disappeared, no one really knows why, but the elaborate canal system they left behind provided the foundation upon which a new city would arise. Swilling battled alcoholism and opiate addiction and would later die in Yuma Territorial Prison under suspicion of highway robbery (he was posthumously cleared of the charge).

Although historians debate whether Swilling or fellow pioneer Darrell Duppa first named the town "Phoenix," the idea it evoked, a new civilization rising out of the ashes of a previous culture, is revealing. It implied new beginnings, a place where hard-working young families from the East could start over anew. Of course, it wasn't always such a great deal for the nearby Pima and Maricopa Indians.

Early boosters promoted Phoenix as a desert paradise, a lush resort town where health-seekers could enjoy the benefits of clean dry air and warm winter weather. The burgeoning city was quickly infested with "lungers"—people suffering from tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments—that alarmed citizens pressured advertisers to downplay the palliative effects of the environment. Magazine ads from the '40s and '50s show squeaky clean white families enjoying the "relaxed pace" of desert living: children playing in the sunshine, Dad practicing his golf swing or sipping a highball by the swimming pool.

From the very beginning, Phoenix has always had a darker side. It is a city founded upon shady development deals, good ol' boy politics, police corruption, organized crime, and exploitation of natural resources. Close proximity to the Mexican border makes the city a natural destination spot for illegal trafficking of all kinds—narcotics, weapons, humans. These days, "America's Toughest Sheriff" Joe Arpaio routinely makes headlines for his vigilante-style hunting of illegal aliens and his casual disregard of human rights. And he keeps getting reelected.

Modern-day Phoenix is a textbook case of suburban sprawl gone unchecked. Endless cookie-cutter housing developments, slapped up on the cheap, metastasize outward into the desert, soaking up energy and water that we don't really have. All of that concrete and asphalt traps the heat, raising temperatures to apocalyptic extremes. During the summer, these "heat bubbles" can be lethal (during one record-breaking month in 2004, fourteen people died from heat exposure, most of them homeless).

The city recently overtook Philadelphia to become the fifth largest city in the country, and the Phoenix metro area now rivals Los Angeles County in size. As in all major cities, the gulf between Phoenix's haves and have-nots continues to widen with the steady decline of the middle class. The affluent northeast valley—Scottsdale, Paradise Valley, Carefree—has little in common with the sunburned working-class neighborhoods of South Phoenix and much of the west valley, though the developers are trying to change that with gentrification. The population of the city continues to grow

and morph, but the legacy of the early ward system, in which much of the political representation resided in the wealthier—and whiter—first and second wards, lives on to this day.

What does all this mean? Crime, and lots of it. The stories collected in this anthology provide a revealing glimpse of a dark underbelly that the tourists rarely see. Novelist and veteran journalist Jon Talton provides a masterly portrayal of WWII-era Phoenix, back when The Deuce, our old skid row, was in its heyday and the city's corrupt power structure already firmly entrenched. Edgar Award-winning author Megan Abbott offers a stylish interpretation of the notorious Bob Crane murder, and brilliantly captures the mellow, sun-baked vibe of Scottsdale during the 1970s. Diana Gabaldon takes the lid off contemporary Scottsdale with a dark and sordid tale combining such disparate elements as squirrel genocide, an illegal orchid smuggling operation, and a murdered Welsh botanist. Investigative reporter Robert Anglen gives us a tour de force of noir depravity about a career loser from East Mesa who is forced to live his miserable life ... backwards. Up-and-coming Phoenix scribe Kurt Reichenbaugh delivers the goods with a lean and nasty tale of betrayal along downtown's storied Grand Avenue. Longtime Phoenicians will dig Gary Phillips's contribution, in which L.A. detective Ivan Monk comes to town to investigate some loose ends surrounding the early-'70s murder of a local soul singer. The story was inspired by the real-life slaying of Arlester "Dyke" Christian of funk/R&B group Dyke and the Blazers, whose big hit "Funky Broadway" few realized was based on the main drag in South Phoenix. And then there's Navajo writer Laura Tohe's bad-ass riff on the femme fatale convention when her womanizing protagonist meets his match with a lady who just ain't human. This is but a sampling of the dark and diverse tales you'll find in *Phoenix Noir*.

I hope you enjoy this collection. The stories represent our city in all of its contradictory glory, the good and the bad, urban blight and stark natural beauty, everything jumbled together and served up smokin' hot, just the way we like it.

Patrick Millikin
Phoenix, AZ
July 2009

PART I

THE BIG HEAT

BULL

BY JON TALTON

Downtown

Union Station

I should have been suspicious when Logan said it was a routine job. It wasn't that there were no routine jobs, only that Logan lied routinely. He was a short man with toad lips and a head that was bald and blotched except for a small tuft of dark hair just above his forehead. Always sitting behind his desk made him appear even shorter.

"Get out to Twenty-seventh Avenue, know where it is?"

He knew I did. I was one of the few people who had actually been born in Phoenix. I tamped out my Lucky Strike in the big ashtray on his desk. "It's just fields out there."

"Yeah, well, they found a foot at milepost 903."

That sounded pretty routine. People fell under trains and lost things. It had been a lot worse a few years ago, during the Depression, with all the bums and alkie stiffs.

"The Golden State will drop you off."

My suspicion made me light up another cigarette. "The Golden State Limited is going to slow down to let a bull get off two miles from here?"

He pulled the cigar from his mouth. A string of saliva kept it tethered to his fat lips.

"*Bull*. I hate that shit. You're a special agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Have some pride."

I took a drag and drew it down to my shoelaces. I walked to my desk, opened the drawer, and pulled out my Colt .45 automatic, taking my time about slipping on the shoulder holster and replacing the jacket.

"Go, you son of a bitch!" he hollered, spitting tiny tobacco leaves across the room. At the door, I heard his voice again: "And be on good behavior for a change. Got it?"

I got it, all right. I took the back stairs out of Union Station, avoiding the mob of young guys in uniform in the waiting room. I crossed the brickwork of the platform and made it to one of the dark green Pullmans on the Golden State just as the whistle screamed highball and the big wheels under the cars started moving. I flashed my badge at the conductor and he let me on, giving me a vinegar look. He didn't want to be slowing down for any damned bull. I let him brush past me and I stayed in the vestibule. It wouldn't be a long ride. The town passed by out the door. Over the red tile roof of the Spanish-style station, the Luhrs Tower marked downtown. If I turned the other way I could have seen the shacks and outhouses south of the tracks. Warehouses and freight cars gradually gave way to open track.

Five minutes later, I dropped off the train into the rocky ballast and found my footing. The air tasted like dust and locomotive oil. There wasn't much out here: the single main line that ran through the desert to Yuma and Los Angeles, a few Mexican houses, the Jewish cemetery. Then there were the fields, regimented rows of green with lettuce, cabbage, and alfalfa running out along the table-flat ground until it met the mountains and the sky. Stands of cottonwood bordered the irrigation canals where I used to swim on the oveny summer days. Now, in January, the air was dry and cool and familiar. I couldn't believe it was already 1943.

The town was changing. It had slept through the Depression like a kid in a fever dream, but the new war had brought Air Corps training bases, a new aluminum plant a ways from town, a camp for Kraut POWs, and endless streams of troop trains. Patton had trained his tank corps down by Hyder. The paper said Phoenix's population was now an unbelievable 65,000. Out here Van Buren petered down into a two-lane road, concreted over by the WPA. I could see somebody had gotten past the shortages and rationing to throw up some temporary housing a little north of the tracks, ratty little one-story jobs made of cinder blocks. They would probably tear it all down once the war ended.

I adjusted my hat and tie and walked toward the crowd a hundred yards back down the tracks. It didn't look good. Too many suits, and not the Hanny's special I had on, but nice ones, and men in them who were all looking at me. Fifty feet away, on the other side of the track, stood a new Lincoln and, outside it, four tough-looking guys carrying Thompsons. Just a routine job. Before I got far, Joe Fisher walked up, moving fast on his wide, thick legs.

"Bull, what's all the company about?" He nodded toward the men in suits.

"Beats me, but looks like Espee brass."

"Your problem," Fisher smirked. His face wasn't built for it. It was thick and immovable, the color and texture of adobe.

"Who are the ones with the Tommy guns?" I asked.

"I was going to ask you that."

Fisher was a Phoenix homicide dick, and he wasn't a bad guy when you compared him to his pals, one of whom awkwardly crossed the tracks and poked me in the chest.

"Jimmy Darrow." He spoke my name accusingly. "This ain't a railroad problem. Take a powder

Frenchy Navarre's coat was open so you could see the two revolvers he carried in shoulder holsters. He wanted you to see them. He had a failed boxer's face and a killer's heart. I'd seen a lot of guys like him in the war, the Great War. My war. I pushed his hand away just slowly enough, tossed aside my cigarette, and walked past him.

More railroad honchos than I'd ever seen in little Phoenix, Arizona, surrounded me. The introductions were perfunctory: the general manager, a vice president, the head of the mechanical department, and the chief special agent. Names I had only seen on company stationery and timetables.

The chief special agent did most of the talking. "Darrow, you need to work with these local officers to get this cleared up, and I mean soon."

"Sure," I said. Best behavior. "Any dope you can give me on this?"

Heads shook adamantly.

"Son, we need you to double-check everything on this line, make sure it's shipshape." This was the basso of the general manager.

"Yes, sir." I stood awkwardly, waiting to be dismissed.

The chief drew me aside. He had the type of kindly face that I had grown to hate on sight.

"It's wintertime, see, and all the bosses are here for the nice weather," he said conspiratorially. "So they have nothing to do but go out and do our jobs for us, get it?"

"Sure."

In a louder voice, he said, "We need to make sure this line is secure. I want a report by tonight. Let's make it 8 p.m. Sharp.

I'm at the Hotel Adams." I said my yessirs all over again. The chief took my arm. "Remember, serve in silence." I waited for them to climb into a shiny black Caddy, then I lit a Lucky.

Another train trundled slowly by, the big grimy 2-8-0 locomotive making the ground shake. *Southern Pacific Lines*, proclaimed the tender. It must have had twenty cars, old Harriman coaches,

faded black from smoke. Through the open windows, I saw the passengers. Black and brown faces in olive green. Colored troops. They looked with curiosity at our little party. The locomotive smoke sent me into coughs that made my lungs feel like they were on fire. For a moment, I bent over with my hands on my pants legs while my head stopped spinning. I felt better when I took a drag on my cigarette. After the train passed, I crossed over to where Fisher and Navarre had parked their Ford.

“Here it is,” Fisher said, standing by the open trunk.

He pointed to an old citrus crate. *Big Town Oranges*, the label said. Inside I found a bulging, bloodstained towel. They let me unwrap it.

“You find it this way?”

“No, genius,” Frenchy said. “We gotta save it. Evidence. You see that train, Fisher? More nigger than in Nigger Town and they’re giving ’em guns.” His small, dark eyes focused on me. “What the hell are you doing here, goddamned bull? Go roust some lowlifes down at the yards.” He stalked off.

“It was found in the middle of the tracks, right back there.” Fisher pointed to where the brass had been standing. “Cut off neat as can be. Mexican found it.”

It had been a pretty foot once, pale, petite, with tiny well-shaped toes and the kind of ankle that gives men the shakes when it’s attached to a live woman. It was held in a new strap-around black shoe with a medium heel made of leather. And all had been sliced off at the shin. A railroad car will do that. This was no hobo.

“Where’s the rest of her?”

Fisher spat into the dust. “Beats the hell out of me. We’ve been a mile up and down the tracks in either direction, looked in the ditches, nothing. There was blood on the tracks but no woman. Trail of blood didn’t even go as far as the road.” He pulled out a handkerchief and ran it over his forehead before replacing his fedora. “She musta been a looker.”

The Westward Ho Hotel was the tallest building in Phoenix. It had sixteen stories and refrigeration. When I walked in a little after noon, the lobby was crowded with men in pricey suits and expensive cigar smoke. There wasn’t a single uniform. You’d think the world was at peace and nice girls weren’t getting their feet cut off by trains. Actually, I wasn’t sure she was a nice girl, which was one reason I had come to the hotel. I crossed the lobby and told the elevator operator, an ancient colored man, to take me to the eighth floor. I walked down the hall past three doors on carpet so soft it massaged my feet through the soles of my shoes. I put my hat in my hand and knocked on the fourth door once.

Strawberry Sue might have struck you as the prettiest girl you’d ever seen, if you saw her from behind and the dress fit right—and maybe twenty years ago it would have been true from the front to the back. But the sun had ravaged her skin, leaving her face rough and cut with lines and creases. Her face looked like the desert. I thought her figure was nice, but it went out of style in the ’20s. She was small, so thin I could almost touch my middle fingers if I wrapped my hands around her waist, and her hair was bright orange, worn unfashionably in a ponytail like the child of the ranch she was. Her real name was Ruby, but she hated it. The radio was talking about the big Allied landings in North Africa. I asked her to turn it off. She poured me a Scotch while I took off my shoes. As I sipped the drink, she pulled down her hair and took off my tie real slow.

Afterwards, we lay on the soft bed and I stroked her hair while she had her head in the notch where my neck met my shoulder. “My spot,” she called it. She didn’t seem to mind the scar there that looked exactly like the shape of the Grand Canyon. I had to smoke Chesterfields because that was what Sue smoked and I was out of my brand.

“You could fall asleep and get some rest, Stuck-On,” she said. “I’d take care of you. You

wouldn't have to be scared of nothing."

~~"I'm doing good, Sue." I let out a long blue plume of smoke and talked a little business.~~

"She doesn't sound like the kind of girl I associate with." Sue was like that, using big words, reading books, trying to better herself. I admired it.

"She looked like she could have been a high-end call girl, from what I saw of her. Nice shoe. Pale, nice skin."

"Why would she end up under a train?"

"Maybe she steamed up a certain friend of yours."

She made a small, indeterminate sound.

"He's done it before, when a girl crossed him," I said.

She stroked the hair on my chest with her small hands. "Don't talk about that now, Stuck-On ... You know why I call you that?"

I knew why but just ran my hand against the softness of her red hair and tapped some ash in the direction of the ashtray.

"Cause I'm stuck on you, silly," she said. "Why don't you get a real job and we can run away?"

Instead of answering her, I climbed out of bed and walked to the window. It faced north and I studied the palm-lined streets below, where neat bungalows had crew-cut lawns. They gave way to citrus groves and fields, dairies and livestock, and finally the desert. Camelback Mountain was miles away but it looked like I could lean just a little out the window and touch it. Phoenix was an oasis. It was a shame, some of the people an oasis attracts.

"What about it, Sue?"

She lay there naked, her small arms wrapped around her smooth young-girl breasts. "I haven't heard anything, Stuck-On. Honest. I'd tell you. There's lots of new people in town. Maybe it was the Japs?"

I looked back out at the crisp blue sky. "Most of the Japs are gone, you know that. They sent 'em to the camps. Their land's just dying out there."

"Maybe it doesn't have anything to do with call girls, or him."

I used her fancy shower and felt better than I had in a month. Downstairs, I stopped at the smoke shop and nearly made it out the door. But he was fast for a fat man and suddenly his big saggy face was inches from mine.

"Well, Frank Darrow's son. How's Strawberry Sue this fine day?"

I moved back a step so I didn't have to smell his cologne. "I'm sure she's good."

He laughed, a disconcerting gurgling sound, and offered me a cigar. I shook my head. Duke Simms was in his fourth term as a Phoenix city commissioner, but he wore suits and smoked cigars that didn't come with a municipal paycheck. I wished I'd never met him.

"Who are all these people?" I indicated the crowded lobby.

"Businessmen, entrepreneurs. You know what that word means?"

"Friends of yours?"

"Yes, indeed. This is a business-friendly city, Jimmy."

"Why the hell aren't they in the service?"

"Now, don't be that way. They're supplying the air bases, building our defense plants." His chest swelled and he ran his stubby fingers down his lapels. "This town is changing, son. You're not even going to recognize it."

I shook my head and tried to walk past him, but he blocked my way.

"Come outside, son," he drawled, "I was just thinking of you." He wrapped an arm around me

and steered me out onto the sidewalk, far enough away from the door to give us some privacy. Simms wore a bright red tie and had a matching handkerchief in his coat pocket. An American flag sprouted from his lapel. "What's going on down at the Espee these days?"

"What do you want, Simms?"

"Such a blunt young man, and after having had a good time just now."

My fingers ached from making a fist.

"I need a little reciprocity," he went on. "Just a little shipment coming to the freight station tonight."

"Things are different," I said. "It's wartime."

The gurgling came again from the back of his throat. "Is that why I had to pay to bring in thirty new clean girls from Texas and Oklahoma? Wartime, yes, indeed. Now, son, we have an understanding."

"Tell me about a girl who had her foot cut off by a train west of town."

He ignored me and put his hand on my bad shoulder, digging his fingers in. I set my face so the pain wouldn't show. "Our understanding is you get to be entertained by Miss Sue complimentary, and you do some things for me. It's worked out well. And it's not as if Strawberry Sue is a spring chicken. Get it? If you went back on our deal, who knows ...?"

He released my shoulder and the sensation of knitting needles probing somebody else's flesh replaced the pain. I managed, "You're a son of a bitch."

"I am," he agreed. "But you have to live with certain disagreeable realities." He smiled through yellow teeth. "Here's what I need."

I rode a crowded streetcar back downtown, then waited for a long string of boxcars to be pulled along Jackson Street before I could walk the block to the depot. They told of faraway places: Baltimore and Ohio, New York Central, Pennsylvania, Frisco, Missouri Pacific, Burlington, Denver, and Rio Grande Western. Anywhere but here. The station sat at the end of the street, gracefully reigning over the surrounding hotels and warehouses. Mail and Railway Express Agency trucks crowded before the long building adjacent to the waiting room.

The Western Union sign hanging from one arch of the building was like a beacon for me. I wasn't sure what the hell the brass wanted me to do about the girl attached to the foot, but I could send wires to station agents east-and westbound from Phoenix. Had anyone reported a passenger who didn't arrive? Had any conductors noticed anything funny on their trains? Later, I'd take a car and check the rail yards, the Tovrea stockyards, Pacific Fruit Express icing docks, the bridge over the Salt River—make sure the line was secure, whatever the hell that meant. It didn't seem to have much connection with the severed foot. Logan was conveniently gone.

When I was finished, I walked back downstairs to the waiting room which was nearly deserted. Out on the tracks, a switch engine was moving baggage and mail cars, but the next passenger train wasn't due to depart until 4:30. The high ceiling of the room held a fog of cigarette smoke and dust, caught in the rays of the sunlight. Over by the newsstand, a couple of young GIs were horsing around in their uniforms new, their faces untouched by death. For just a second I saw myself in a magic mirror, May 1918, and my shoulder throbbed and everything in the world seemed broken. A bird colonel brushed past, glaring at me as if he expected to be saluted. The big wooden benches looked lonely. On one of them, a bum pretended to snooze under a sweat-stained Panama hat. One of the ticket agents watched me from under his eyeshade, then cocked his head as if he were trying to toss it as a shot put. From that direction, two women were coming my way.

“You’re the railroad police?”

~~I said I was. The question came from a short, stooped old woman in a blue dress that was too light for the season, even in Phoenix. With her was a younger woman, blond, blue-eyed, fair-skinned, and pretty in a damaged way, like a china bowl that had been shattered but carefully glued back together, the cracks showing only on close examination.~~

“That man said you could help us. It’s our Mary.” The old woman stared at me as if I should understand, and somewhere something crawling in my gut winked at me.

“It’s my sister Mary,” the blonde said. “She was coming home from Los Angeles. She’s been in school, you see, and she was coming home for a visit. She was supposed to be on the train last night. She sent us a telegram telling us to expect her.”

The old woman grabbed my sleeve. “We’ve been here all night waiting!”

“She never showed?”

Two heads shook in unison, and I wondered if it could be that easy.

“Do you live here in town?”

“We live out a ways,” the mother said, sticking her chin at me. “In Palmcroft.”

I nodded: nice big houses by the new city park. She wanted to let me know money was involved. She didn’t bother with anything so unsavory as introducing herself to me. I sat them down on a bench.

Fifteen minutes later, Joe Fisher and Frenchy Navarre walked in and heard the story for the second time. Mary Becker took a train out of Los Angeles, due to arrive in Phoenix just past 9. The girl was nineteen. The younger woman, Anna, did most of the talking, with the mother nodding. Becker. I knew the name. They owned big cotton farms west of town.

“She’s a very sweet, innocent girl,” Anna said. “I just can’t bear to think that anything could have happened, that someone might have taken advantage of her.”

“Wouldn’t have been the first time,” the old lady said.

“Mother!” Anna looked at the two cops, then me. “You have to help us.” She reached in her handbag and passed us a photograph. It showed a pretty girl with curly dark hair and large, knowing eyes. She was standing on a pier, smiling at the photographer. “That’s Mary.”

Navarre took it and studied it, handed it to Fisher, who tucked it in his pocket. “Go up to the station house and make a missing person’s report,” Navarre said. “We’ll see what we can do. But you gotta understand, it’s wartime. Lot of people coming through, lot of people on the trains.”

“Maybe she was just delayed,” Fisher said softly.

The cops rose in unison and I followed. Navarre turned on his heel once we were through the front doors. “I can’t believe you’d waste our time with this shit.”

“I dunno, Frenchy. You have a missing girl and so do they. Maybe that’s too complicated for you.”

He pushed up his chest, showing the crossed shoulder holsters. “Don’t think you’re special because you’re with the railroad, you cocksucker. Any time you want to find out, let me know.” He strode angrily to the car.

“Show them the shoe, Joe. That’ll settle it, one way or another.”

Fisher looked at me sadly and said, “He thinks he’s got a lead. What’re you gonna do?” He handed me the snapshot.

I went back in and sat down with Anna and her mother. The benches were starting to fill up for the afternoon Santa Fe train.

“Anybody in Los Angeles you can call? Any friends of Mary’s?”

“She lived with three other girls in a very nice apartment,” Anna said. “We talked to them long

distance this morning. They drove her to the depot and saw her get on the train.”

~~I asked why she was coming home. The old lady's face had hardened into a sullen mask while Anna and the cops had talked. Now she looked at me fiercely. “That's none of your concern. My daughter is missing from one of your trains. That should be your concern.”~~

Anna touched my arm. “Mother is very tired. Mary was coming home on family business. It's nothing.”

I found myself studying the blonde's ankles. She probably thought I was just being fresh. They were nice ankles, naked thanks to the nylon shortage. I pulled out my smokes and offered them. Anna took one and I studied her face while I lit her cigarette. It looked like a face that might tell me things if the mother wasn't there. Then I asked her what her sister might have been wearing on her trip home.

After I left them, I made a few checks with the dispatcher. He was already in a bad mood. Extra engineers and firemen had been called in and he didn't know why. The section foreman had been out all day on the line. “Nobody gives me the word,” he mumbled. After a few minutes of commiseration he told me that the train Mary Becker boarded in Los Angeles had arrived on time the night before. It had been divided into three crowded sections, the last one coming in shortly after 10. It stayed fifteen minutes then departed for Tempe, Mesa, Tucson, El Paso, and points east. Next I went to the baggage room through the double doors just beyond the ticket counter. Anna had described Mary's luggage: a matching suitcase and overnight bag, burnt-yellow and streamlined, with three brown stripes. The baggage men let me be: they were loading carts for the Santa Fe. It only took a few minutes of prowling to find the set. It looked almost new and the tag said, *M. Becker*, with an address in Los Angeles. I told the head baggage man to set them aside and headed back to the waiting room.

The women were gone.

It would have to wait. I needed to check the line and report to the chief at 8 o'clock “sharp.” I pushed through the front doors and heard a woman yell. She sounded a lot like Anna Becker. Looking around an archway, I spotted her with a man, standing beside a roadster with the top down. The car glistened red in the afternoon sun. So did Anna's golden hair. She was in an agitated conversation with the man, chopping the air with her hands. Twice I made out the name Mary, said with urgency. They couldn't see me. The thick pillars and archways of the station portico concealed me. Anna moved enough that I could take him in: dark hair in a crooner's hairstyle, a kid's face but the muscular body of a twenty-five-year-old. He was wearing a leather jacket and driving gloves. I didn't see many able-bodied men his age around, and I wondered how he'd bugged out of the draft. He didn't look like 4-F material, but you couldn't tell. He sneered at something Anna said and she screamed, “How could you! What kind of man are you?” That's when he hit her, so hard that the sound echoed in the portico.

That was enough. I knew what kind of man he was. But when I stepped out, the car was already speeding up Fourth Avenue, Anna's blond hair fluffing out in the wind. I tapped the roof of a taxi and got in. In only seconds the cabbie had caught up. They paused at the light at Jefferson, then turned right. I didn't know what I was doing. At that moment, I would have showed the kid in the leather jacket what it was like to be hit by somebody his own size. By the time we reached Second Street, however, I had hold of myself again. They turned south and parked. I sent the cab half a block past, paid him, and got out.

We were a long way from Palmcroft. The sidewalk was filthy and broken. The buildings were seedy single-story affairs with fading paint and dark entrances, broken up by seedier three-and four-story hotels. It was the heart of the Deuce, where the bars, brothels, hock shops, and flop houses intersected with the remains of Chinatown and the busy produce warehouses. It had enough to interes

soldiers on liberty, Indians, old cowboys without pensions, off-duty farmers, miners, and railroad men. The street was crowded, so Anna and the kid didn't notice me. He walked around to the passenger side, opened the door, and yanked her arm sharply. She came out of the car flashing a pale leg up to her thigh. Then they disappeared into a doorway. I didn't need to walk close to see where they'd gone. It was a bar I knew well, the Phone Booth, and it was sure as hell a long way from Palmcroft. A cop walked by twirling his billy, a reminder that I could mind my own business, the railroad business I got paid for. I lit a cigarette and leaned against a brick wall, covering up the Pepsodent ad, hating some of the things I knew. One was that the Phone Booth was quietly owned by Duke Simms, and that he used a private room in the back for special meetings. I hated knowing about those too. Even with 65,000 people, Phoenix was still a very small town.

I walked out of the Hotel Adams at 8:15. A dry chill was drifting in from the desert and the sidewalks were jammed with soldiers and airmen in town on liberty. I was wearing a fresh shirt and tie, and the chief special agent seemed pleased with my report. To me, there didn't seem much to it. I had checked the line through town, run some bums out from under the Tempe bridge, and looked over the blocks of boxcars down at the SP yard, searching for broken seals on the doors or other signs of pilferage. I had left word for Joe Fisher where he would find Mary Becker's luggage. I carried my own kind of bag and it was full of questions, maybe even a little kit of suspicions inside. Who was the punk who had slapped Anna, and why had she been so upset? She had yelled at him and said the name of her sister. And she had ended up at a place nice girls shouldn't even know existed in this town. Now all I could do was buy an evening paper and read it as I walked vaguely in the direction of the depot.

I was about to cross Jefferson Street when a car nearly ran me down. I jumped back and recognized the familiar black Ford. I followed it into the driveway by police headquarters. It was full dark, but the streetlights showed Frenchy Navarre getting out of the backseat, then pulling out another man. The handcuffs on the man's wrists glistened under the light. He was a kid really, a colored kid in fatigues, and his head and body slumped against the car. Navarre leaned in close and was talking to him. When the kid's head came up, I could see a bloody membrane where his lower jaw should have been. Then Fisher came around from the driver's side and they led him into the station. I let them get inside, and followed.

Navarre had the kid at the booking desk when he looked around and saw me. "Get lost, bull." He momentarily turned back to his prisoner to punch him in the kidney. The boy crumpled in agony. Navarre's hand looked odd, but then I saw it, a seven-inch blackjack protruding, and it had fresh blood on it.

"Here's your murderer," Navarre said. "Nigger playing soldier, really trying to rape a white woman."

"No, sir, I swear I didn't ... don't know nothing 'bout this," the boy pleaded with me, slurring his words through his ruined mouth. He spat a bloody tooth to the floor.

"Well, how you explain this, nigger?" Navarre held out an ankle bracelet. It had dried blood on it. "Tried to pawn it after you raped that girl and put her on the train tracks."

"No, no ..."

"Wasn't too smart coming into Phoenix, was it, boy? We make our niggers behave, keep 'em south of the tracks. So the government gives you a uniform, gives you a gun, makes you think you're special. You're just a black nigger, you murderous son of a bitch."

"Gotta call my commanding officer," the kid said.

"Shut up!" Navarre roared, his eyes bright and primal like an animal's.

I tried to catch Fisher's eye. This seemed all wrong. Anna Becker had mentioned nothing about an ankle bracelet.

"Did you find the body?" I asked.

Navarre brandished the blackjack toward me. "We don't need anything more than what we got to send this nigger to the gas chamber. Now get the hell out, bull."

With that he advanced on me in three fast strides, raising the sap with one hand and reaching inside his coat with the other. I took a step backward and I was faster. He had a .38 Police Positive in his left hand, but it was frozen uselessly in mid-air. My Colt .45 was five inches from his broad, veiny, ugly nose. His eyes were obsidian, dead.

"Kill him!" Navarre commanded, but his voice shook.

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke.

"I'll kill *you*, Darrow!"

But his arm remained where it had been, the pistol pointed out into the room.

I aimed, staring at him down the heavy barrel of the automatic. "You like to hurt people ... you like it ..." Those were all the words that would come out.

Then I felt Joe Fisher next to me and the spell broke. "Let it go, Jimmy." A stocky desk sergeant pushed Navarre away and I holstered the Colt.

"James, you're walking like an old man. That's not right."

I turned to see Mose, resplendent in his immaculate sleeping-car porter uniform. We stood at trackside, and it was oddly quiet. The usual call of train whistles was silent. My eyes roved over the station tracks and saw spikes and blocks of wood driven into the switches that connected the array of tracks to the main line. Alarm shot through me: *Secure the line.*

"Why are the tracks spiked? No train can switch off the main line."

"You're gonna see, boy," Mose said, his teeth huge and white.

"What are you doing here anyway, Mose? You should have departed an hour ago. Nothing seems to be moving."

He gave his deep, melodious laugh. "Some things moving. The pilot train came through twenty minutes ago, right on schedule."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Mose clapped me fondly on my good shoulder. "Son, you would be the only person on the Espee who don't know."

I was going to protest more but a thick, sharp whistle echoed through the dry air. I leaned over and could see a headlight in the distance. I pulled out my nearly empty pack of Luckies, offered one to Mose, and lit them both.

"I've got to go to the freight station, do Simms's dirty work."

Mose stared toward the black masses of the South Mountains. "You got your reasons, son."

Now the train was close enough that I could hear the engineer start to sound the bell.

"There's no goddamned justice in this town." I said it in a conversational voice, to no one in particular, drowned out by the locomotive's approach.

"You just finding that out?" Mose shook his head and laughed. "Oh, Jimmy, you a piece of work."

Then the train was on us, passing quickly. It was double-headed, with two powerful steam locomotives. Then a pair of baggage cars rolled by, one with an odd set of antennae on top, followed by a pair of sleepers. The last car rumbled heavily. It had new dark green paint that glowed under the

plat-form lights and fresh lettering on the side said, *PULLMAN*, but unlike every other car it had no number. The shades were down. Yet the rear window had light, and there ... right there inside. The familiar patrician head, the jaunty jut to the chin, even the cigarette holder in his mouth, just like in the newsreels. He looked at us. Mose stiffly saluted.

Then the train was gone. Nothing was left but the red marker on the last car, which quickly went around the slight curve and continued east.

Mose put his arm around me. "On his way home from a tour of bases on the coast, and the Espe handled it all the way," he said proudly. "See, boy, happy days are here again."

I walked toward the freight station and the song was in my head. But my head played it too slow like a dirge.

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