

The Exile

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1

twenty years later.

Amtrak Station, the desert community of Barstow, California. Tuesday, March 12, 4:20 a.m.

John Barron crossed toward the train alone in the cool of the desert night. He stopped at car number 39002 of the Amtrak Superliner Southwest Chief, waiting as a mustachioed conductor helped an elderly man with bottle-thick glasses up the steps. Then he boarded the train himself.

Inside, in the dim light, the conductor wished him good morning and punched his ticket, pointing him past sleeping passengers toward his seat two-thirds of the way down the car. Twenty seconds later he put his small carry-on bag into the overhead rack and sat down in the aisle seat beside an attractive young woman in sweatshirt and tight jeans curled up against the window, asleep.

Barron glanced at her, then settled back, his eyes more or less on the car door through which he had entered. A half minute later he saw Marty Valparaiso come on board, give the conductor his ticket, and take a seat just inside the front door. Several moments passed, and he heard a blast of train whistle. The conductor closed the door, and the Chief began to move. In no time the lights of the desert city gave way to the pitch-black of open land. Barron heard the whine of diesel engines as the train picked up speed. He tried to picture what it might look like from above, the kind of aerial shot you might see in a movie — of a giant, half-mile-long, twenty-seven-car snake, gliding west through the predawn desert darkness toward Los Angeles.

2

Raymond had been dozing when the passengers came on. At first he'd thought there were only two — an older man with thick glasses and an uneasy step, and a dark-haired young man in jeans and windbreaker who carried a small athletic bag. The older man had taken a window seat down and across the aisle from him; the younger man had walked past him to put his bag into the overhead rack a dozen rows behind. It was then the last passenger had come on board. He was slim and wiry, probably in his late thirties or early forties, and dressed in a sport coat and slacks. He'd given the conductor a ticket, had it punched, and then taken a seat just inside the door.

Under ordinary circumstances Raymond wouldn't have given it further thought, but these were not ordinary circumstances. Little more than thirty-six hours earlier he had shot two people to death in the back room of a tailor shop on Pearson Street in Chicago and very shortly afterward boarded the Chief for Los Angeles.

It was a train trip that had been unplanned, but a surprise ice storm had closed Chicago's airports and forced him to take the train instead of flying directly to Los Angeles. The delay was unfortunate but he'd had no choice, and ever since things had gone without incident, that was until they stopped in Barstow and the two men had come on board.

Of course, there was the chance they were nothing more than everyday early morning commuters on their way to jobs in Los Angeles, but it didn't feel likely. It was their physical manner, the way they moved and held themselves, the way they had taken up positions on either side of him, one in the aisle seat by the front door, the other in the dark behind. In effect they had boxed him in, making it impossible for him to go one way or the other without encountering one of them.

Raymond took a breath and glanced at the big, ruddy-faced man in the rumpled jacket dozing in the window seat next to him. He was Frank Miller, a fortyish, somewhat overweight, divorced paper-products salesman from L.A. who wore an obvious hairpiece and hated to fly. Across the narrow table, Bill and Vivian Woods from Madison, Wisconsin, a fifty-something couple on their way to a California vacation, slept in seats facing him. They were strangers who had become friends and traveling companions almost from the moment the train left Chicago and Miller approached him as he stood alone in the lounge car drinking a cup of coffee, saying he was looking for a fourth for poker and asked if he'd like to join them. For Raymond it was perfect, and he'd agreed at once, seeing it as a way to blend in with the other passengers in the unlikely event someone had seen him leave the tailor shop and the police had put out a bulletin for someone of his description traveling alone.

From somewhere in the distance came two long wails of train whistle. A third came seconds later. Raymond looked toward the front of the car. The wiry man in the aisle seat sat motionless, his head back, as if he, like most everyone else, were dozing.

The ice storm and resulting train trip were troublesome enough by themselves, another kink in a series of meticulously planned events gone wrong. In the past four days he had been in San Francisco, Mexico City, then Chicago, arriving there via Dallas. In both San Francisco and Mexico City he had gone after vital information, failed to find it, killed the person or persons involved, and immediately moved on. The same maddening thing had played out in Chicago. Where he should have been able to extract information there had been none. So he'd had to move on to his last planned stop in the Americas, which was Los Angeles, or rather Beverly Hills. There, he was certain he would have no trouble whatsoever in garnering the information he needed before killing the man who had it. The trouble was time. Today was Tuesday, March 12. Because of the ice storm he was already more than a day late on what had originally been a precision schedule and one that, even now, needed to see him arrive in London no later than noon tomorrow. Still, while that was frustrating, he

realized things had only been delayed and nonetheless remained workable. All he needed was for the next few hours to go off without a hitch. But now he wasn't so sure that was going to happen.

Cautiously, Raymond leaned back and glanced to his valise in the luggage rack above him. Inside was his U.S. passport, a first class British Airways ticket for London, the .40 caliber Sturm Ruger automatic he'd used in the Chicago murders, and two extra eleven-round clips of ammunition. He'd been bold enough to carry them past the sharp-eyed antiterrorist security detachments patrolling the station and take them onto the train in Chicago, but now he wondered if he should have brought them at all. The guns he'd used in the San Francisco and Mexico City murders he'd had sent in plain wrapped packages for pickup at Mailboxes Inc. stores where he'd earlier had accounts opened and where he had a numbered box with a key. In San Francisco he'd collected the gun, used it, then dropped it into San Francisco Bay, along with the body of the man he had killed. In Mexico City there had been a problem finding the package and he'd had to wait nearly an hour until the manager was called and the package found. He had another gun at a Mailboxes Inc. in Beverly Hills, but with his schedule already stretched to breaking because of the need to take the train and with the problem in Mexico City fresh in his mind, he'd decided to take the chance and keep the Ruger with him and not risk another foul-up that could further delay his getting to London.

Another distant blast of train whistle, and once again Raymond glanced toward the man dozing near the front door. He watched him for a moment and then looked up at the valise on the rack above him and decided to take the chance. Simply get up, take the bag down, and open it as if he were looking for something inside. Then, in the dim light, carefully slide the Ruger under his sweater and put the bag back. He was about to do just that when he saw Vivian Woods watching him. She smiled when he looked at her. It was a smile not of politeness or the acknowledgment of a fellow traveler awake as she was in the early morning, but of sexual longing, and it was hardly unfamiliar. At thirty-three, Raymond was hard-body slim and rock-star handsome, with blond hair and large blue-green eyes accentuating a face that was delicate, even aristocratic. Moreover, he was soft-spoken and extremely well mannered. To women of nearly any age the combination was deadly. They looked at him carefully and often and with the same kind of yearning Vivian Woods showed now, as if in an instant they would run away with him to anywhere he wanted. And once there, do anything he asked.

Raymond smiled gently in response and closed his eyes as if to sleep, but knowing she would continue to study him. It was flattering, but a vigilance that, at the moment, was most unwelcome, because it made it impossible for him to stand up and take possession of the gun.

3

amtrak station, san bernardino, california. 6:25 a.m.

John Barron watched the string of early commuters come onto the train. Some clutched briefcases or laptop computers; others, paper coffee cups. Here and there someone talked on a cell phone. Most looked as if they were still half asleep.

Several minutes more and the conductor closed the door. Another moment and the train whistle sounded, the car gave a slight jerk, and the Chief began to move. As it did, the young woman in the seat beside Barron stirred and then went back to sleep.

Barron glanced at her and then down the aisle toward the line of passengers still waiting to find seats. He was impatient. Since first light he'd wanted to get up and walk past where the cardplayers were sitting and try to get a glimpse of their man. If he was their man. But it wasn't the tactic, so he stayed where he was and instead watched a four-or five-year-old clutching a teddy bear toddle by. A handsome blond woman followed, and Barron assumed she was his mother. As they passed he glimpsed Marty Valparaiso in his seat by the door. He was dozing, or pretending to. Barron felt sweat on his upper lip and realized his palms were wet as well. He was nervous and didn't like it. Of all the things to be, nervous was not one of them.

Now the last of the new commuters walked past looking for a seat. He was tall and athletic, dressed in a dark business suit and carrying a briefcase. He looked like an eager young executive. He wasn't. His name was Jimmy Halliday, and he was the third of six plainclothes detectives assigned to take the cardplayer into custody when the Chief reached Union Station in Los Angeles at

8:40 a.m.

Barron sat back and looked out the window past the sleeping girl, trying to shake off his nervousness. It was the job of the detectives on the train to verify that the cardplayer was indeed the man wanted by the Chicago police. If so, they were to follow him if he got off the train before it reached L.A. or, if he stayed on board, as they suspected he would because his ticket was straight through to Los Angeles, to follow him off when it arrived. The idea was to sandwich him between themselves and the three other plainclothes detectives waiting on the platform at Union Station and quickly take him into custody.

In theory the concept was simple. Do nothing until the last second and then close the vise with as little risk to the public as possible. The trouble was, their man was an unusually perceptive, emotionally explosive, and excessively violent killer. What might happen if he sensed they were on the train and took action inside it, none of them wanted to guess. But it was why they'd boarded separately and had deliberately kept a low profile.

They — Barron, Valparaiso, and Halliday, and the three waiting at Union Station — were homicide detectives, members of the Los Angeles Police Department's 5-2 Squad, the famed hundred-year-old "special situations" section that was now part of the Robbery-Homicide Division. Of the three riding in car 39002, Valparaiso was oldest at forty-two. The father of three teenage girls, he'd been in the 5-2 for sixteen years. Halliday was thirty-one, had five-year-old twins and a newly pregnant wife,

and had been in the squad for eight years. John Barron was the baby, twenty-six and unmarried. He'd been on the squad for a week.

Reason enough for him to have sweat on his palms and upper lip, and why the young girl sleeping next to him, the toddler with the teddy bear, and everyone else in the car made him nervous. This was his first potential live-fire situation in the 5-2, and their man, if he turned out to be their man, was hugely dangerous. If something happened and he missed a cue, if he screwed up in any way and people got hurt or killed –

He didn't want to think about it. Instead he looked at his watch. It was 6:40, two hours exactly before they were to arrive at Union Station.

4

Raymond had seen the tall man in the dark suit come on board, too. Confident, smiling, briefcase in hand, looking like a young businessman ready for a new day. But, like the men who had boarded the Chief in Barstow, his presence was too keen, too studied, too authoritative.

Raymond watched him as he passed, then turned casually to see him stop two-thirds of the way down the car to let a woman settle her toddler in a seat, then he continued on and went out the door at the far end of the car just as Bill Woods came through it the other way, smiling as he always did and balancing four cups of coffee on a cardboard tray.

Vivian Woods smiled as her husband set the tray on the card table and slid into his seat beside her. Immediately she took the coffee cups and handed them around, purposefully trying to keep her attention from Raymond. She turned sympathetically to Frank Miller instead.

"Are you feeling better, Frank? You look a little better."

By Raymond's count the salesman had been back and forth to the toilet three times in the last two hours, waking them all to some degree each time he left or came back.

"I'm better, thanks." Miller forced a smile. "Something I ate, I guess. What do you say we play a few hands before we hit L.A.?"

Just then the conductor passed. "Good morning," he said to Raymond as he went by.

"Good morning," Raymond said absently, then turned as Bill Woods picked up a deck of cards from the table in front of him. "You want to deal, Ray?"

Raymond smiled easily. "Why not?"

5

los angeles, union station. 7:10 a.m.

Commander Arnold McClatchy drove his unmarked light blue Ford through a dusty construction zone and stopped at a secluded graveled parking area just across a chain-link fence from track 12, where the Southwest Chief would come in. Less than a minute later, a second unmarked Ford with detectives Roosevelt Lee and Len Polchak inside pulled up beside him.

There was a brisk slam of doors, and the remaining three members of the 5-2 Squad crossed under an already hot sun to the track 12 platform.

"You want coffee, there's time, go get it. I'll be here," Mc-Clatchy said as they reached the platform, then watched his senior detectives, one tall and black, the other short and white, walk off and down a long ramp into the cool of Union Station below.

For a moment McClatchy stayed where he was, watching, then he turned and walked down the deserted platform to the end to stare out to a point in the distance where the tracks vanished around a bend in the bright glare of the sun. Whether Polchak or Lee had wanted coffee made no difference. They knew he wanted time alone, to get the sense of the place and how the action would play when the train came in and they went to work.

At fifty-nine, "Red" McClatchy had been a homicide detective for more than thirty-five years, thirty of them as a member of the 5-2. In that time he had personally broken one hundred and sixty-four murder cases. Three of his killers had been put to death in San Quentin's gas chamber; seven more still sat on death row awaiting appeals. In the last two decades he had been nominated to become chief of the Los Angeles Police Department four times, and each time he had brushed it aside, saying he was just a working stiff, an ordinary cop, not an administrator, psychologist, or politician. Besides, he wanted to sleep at night. Moreover, he was head of the 5-2 and had been for a long time. And that, he said, was enough for any man.

And obviously it was, because in all that time, through the scandals and the political and racial wars that had tarnished the name and reputation of both the city and the department, this "working stiff" had kept the long and rich tradition of the squad above reproach. It was a history that had involved incidents making worldwide headlines, among them the Black Dahlia murder, the suicide of Marilyn Monroe, the Robert Kennedy assassination, the Charles Manson murders, and the O. J. Simpson case. And all of it was surrounded by the aura, the dazzle and glamour, that was "Hollywood."

That the tall, broad-shouldered redhead with touches of white beginning to show at the temples looked every inch the classic frontier lawman only served to enhance his image. In his trademark starched white shirt, dark suit, and tie, with a .38 caliber pearl-handled Smith & Wesson revolver in a reverse-draw holster at his waist, he had become one of the most publicly known, respected, and influential personages

within the LAPD, perhaps even the city, and was nearly a cult figure inside the worldwide law enforcement community.

Yet none of it changed him. Or the way he worked, or the way the squad worked. They were bricklayers. They had a job to do, and they did it day in and day out for better or worse. Today was the same. A man was coming in on the Southwest Chief. They were to apprehend and detain him for the Chicago police while at the same time guarding the safety of the public around them. Nothing more, nothing less. It was as simple as that.

6

7:20 a.m.

Raymond took a sip of coffee and looked at the cards Frank Miller had dealt him. As he did he saw the Barstow man in the sport coat get up from his seat by the door and start down the aisle toward them. Raymond glanced at his hand, then at Vivian, and discarded three cards.

"Three, Frank, please," he said quietly.

The man in the sport coat walked past as Miller dealt him his cards. Raymond picked them up and turned in time to see the Barstow man pass through the door at the far end of the car. Just as the man in the business suit had done earlier. A heartbeat later the younger Barstow man got up from his seat midcar and casually walked back down the aisle and went out through the same door.

Slowly Raymond turned back to the game. If before there had been two, now there were three. Without doubt they were police and they were there for one reason alone.

Him.

"He's our man, no doubt about it." Marty Valparaiso stood with Jimmy Halliday, John Barron, and the train's conductor in the gently rocking vestibule between the passenger cars.

"Agreed." Halliday nodded and looked to the conductor. "Who are the others?"

"Far as I've been able to tell, just people he met on the Chief when it left Chicago."

"Okay." Halliday pulled a small two-way radio from his jacket and clicked it on. "Red," he said into it.

"I'm here, Jimmy." Red McClatchy's voice came back with crystal clarity over Halliday's radio.

"It's a confirm. We're going to sit tight as planned. Car number three-nine-zero-zero-two—" Halliday looked at the conductor. "Correct?"

The conductor nodded. "Yes, sir. Three-nine-zero-zero-two."

"We on time?" Valparaiso asked.

"Yes, sir," the conductor said again.

"On time and set, Red. See you in L.A." Halliday clicked off the radio and looked to the conductor.

"Thanks for your help. From here in it's our job. You and your people stay out of it."

"One thing." The conductor held up a warning finger. "This is my train, and the safety of the crew and passengers on it is my responsibility. I want no violence on board, no one hurt. You wait until he's on land before you do anything."

"That's the plan," Halliday said.

The conductor glanced at the others. "Okay," he said. "Okay." Then, with a tug on his mustache, he pulled open the door and went into the coach where the cardplayers were.

Valparaiso watched the door close behind him, then looked to the others. "Game's started, gentlemen. No further radio communication until we get there."

"Right," Halliday said. "Good luck."

Valparaiso gave a thumbs-up, then opened the door and followed the conductor into the car.

Halliday watched the door close behind Valparaiso; then his eyes went to Barron. It was he who had first learned of the young detective's meticulous and uncompromising work while in the Robbery-Homicide Division, breaking open a murder case long considered a dead end. Because of it he had brought him to the attention of McClatchy and the others in the squad and ultimately into the 5-2 itself. In short, Barron was in the squad because of him, and here on the train for the same reason. Halliday knew Barron would be nervous, and he wanted to address it.

"You okay with this?"

"Yeah." Barron smiled and nodded.

"You sure?"

"I'm sure."

"Then here we go."