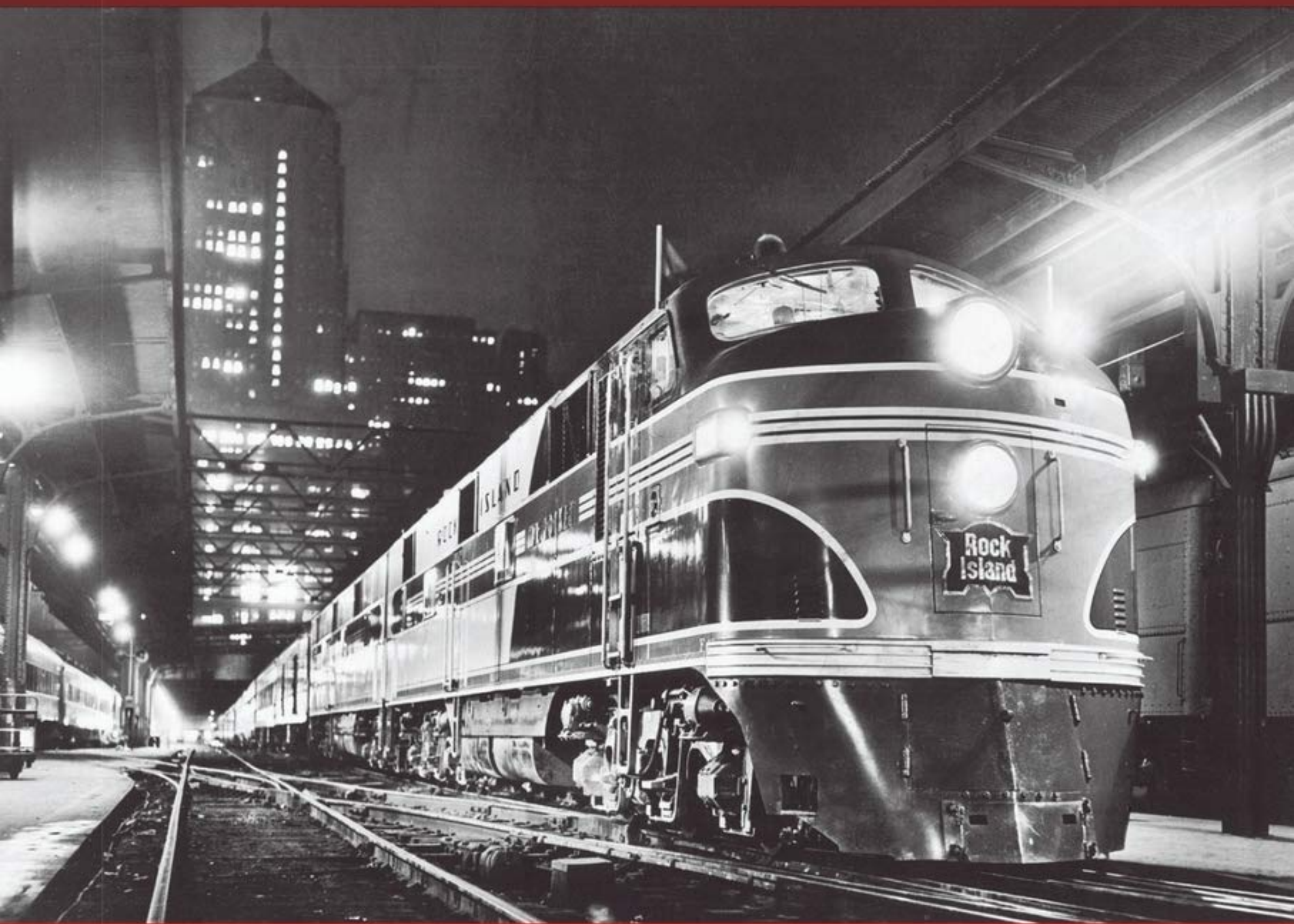


MURDER on the Golden State



MARK MALMKAR

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CONTENTS

PART I: THE FAMILY

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	14
Chapter 3	28
Chapter 4	47

PART II: THE INVISIBLE MAN

Chapter 1	79
Chapter 2	89

PART III: THE FBI

Chapter 1	99
Chapter 2	113
Chapter 3	123

PART IV: THE GOLDEN STATE

Chapter 1	131
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CHAPTER 1

Antonio Fiorelli put his foot on the brake and brought his Oldsmobile to a stop as the crossing arms dropped down in front of him, its bells clanging and red lights flashing.

To his left he could see the oscillating headlight of the oncoming train. Ahead of him, on the other side of the tracks, he could see his workplace, a block and a half ahead on the left. A mile in the distance Lake Michigan was bathed in early morning sunlight. A quarter of a mile away, the train's horn blared, a long, and another long. The headlight thrashed back and forth—right- left-right-left, rushing ever closer. A short bleat came from the horn at a hundred yards away then the yellow locomotive sounded one long continuous blast as it rocketed toward him.

A flash of headlight caught him as the diesel engine streaked by, pulling five yellow and green passenger cars southbound toward the Northwestern Station. Tony looked at his watch—it was six-twenty-two a.m. The Chicago and Northwestern overnight train from Green Bay was probably on time. They frequently crossed paths on his way to work.

Tony toyed with the button on the shift knob on the console while he waited for the crossing arms to rise. His foot on the brake held at bay the power of the big 394-cubic inch V8. The 1962 Oldsmobile Starfire two door hard-top was new: a metallic orchid color, with a wide chrome and polished aluminum band that ran down both sides from headlights to taillights. He sat on black and gray bucket seats and was surrounded with black, gray and silver trim. He glanced down at the tachometer in the upper part of the console. It was reading about 700 rpm. The railroad bells and lights were suddenly silent and the red and white striped crossing

arms rose above him. With a little pressure on the gas pedal, the automatic transmission eased the Starfire across the tracks.

Tony turned left through the front gate of J & L Express in northern Chicago.

He was one of five dispatchers for the trucking company. He was thirty years old, five feet eight inches tall and had a slender build. He swung the Starfire to the right, parking in an empty space next to the chain link fence surrounding the property. He twisted the rear view mirror around to check his appearance before stepping out. His dark hair was neatly combed and he subconsciously rubbed his pencil thin moustache before readjusting the mirror.

In the center of the lot was a two-story brick office building attached to a twenty-four-bay freight building with loading docks on both sides. A metal building extended out behind the large building. The buildings were surrounded by trucks and trailers with some parked against the fences on three sides. As he walked across the lot, to Tony's right was a four-bay mechanic shop for servicing the trucks. Bernie's blue Ford cab-over was backed up to the first bay.

Bernie Verone grinned and waved. "Good morning, sunshine!" Bernie was standing behind the truck's single axle holding a can in his left hand slathering grease on the fifth wheel with a spatula.

"Is she ready to roll?" Tony asked, walking toward him.

"Oil change and lube job overnight." Bernie pushed his black-framed glasses back up his nose with the handle of the spatula. His fingers were coated with grease. A lock of Brylcreem coated black hair flopped down over his forehead. He wore a dark blue western shirt that hung loose over blue jeans, which held a big wallet that was tied to his belt by a thick silver chain.

Bernie took good care of his trucks. This one was a 1959 C700. They'd shared many miles together in an over-the-road Ford cab-over before Tony became a dispatcher.

Tony asked, "Do you like this Ford better than 'Helmethead'?"

"Definitely," Bernie said with a laugh. 'Helmethead' was the 1954 Ford they drove. "Do you still remember those damn door latches?"

"How could I forget?" The Ford's door latches were round metal spurs that engaged a notched plate that often shifted out of alignment when worn and they slammed the doors.

“Remember that steel load to New Orleans?” Bernie went on. “We ran into that snowstorm north of Memphis and had to drive with our left hand, and hold the handle with our right to keep the damn door shut. When shifting gears I had to hook my elbow out the open window. Snow blew in like crazy.”

Tony smiled at the recollection. “I don’t remember it being quite as cold as you make it out to have been.”

“Hell! I was the one who drove most of the way home.”

A few months after Tony became dispatcher, he persuaded Bernie to take a local route instead of over-the-road. Bernie could then spend more time with his growing family.

“I’ve got something for you,” Bernie said then set the can down on the truck frame, pulled a rag from his other back pocket and wiped the grease from his fingers. Walking forward, he opened the cab door and stepped up to reach into a satchel on the floor next to the gearshift. He stepped back to the ground and shoved the door closed. He handed Tony a brown paper bag tied with string. “I didn’t have time to stop at Bertolli’s. It was after five before I got back. All the paper work is on your desk.”

Tony took the sack and pulled out a pocketknife, cutting the string. “I’ll take care of the late paperwork.” Tony peered into the top of the sack, expecting exactly what he saw--a three-inch thick stack of twenty and fifty dollar bills. “Did everything go okay?” Tony asked, rolling up the sack.

“Mostly,” Bernie shrugged and picked up the grease can again. “Aside from the road repair outside of Gary, everything went fine.”

“An hour wait?”

“Forty-five minutes – each way!” Bernie replied, walking toward the open bay.

“I figured a detour would cost me thirty-five to forty minutes anyway, so I waited in a long line of cars on the way back, too.” Bernie deposited the grease can on a workbench, and cleaned his hands again while Tony walked back to his car and stashed the brown bag of cash in the trunk.

Tony returned from his car and said quietly, “I’ve got two premium loads for you today.”

Bernie looked at him quizzically. “Two? So soon? We’ve only been getting premium loads every week or two.”

Tony smiled, “Well, Connecticut and France both came through on the same day. I don’t control the trains, or the boats. I wrote up the manifest yesterday afternoon.”

A wide grin spread across Bernie’s face. “I guess Eva and me will have to dine at a swanky restaurant Saturday night--if we can get her mother or sister to watch the kids.”

Bernie drove the truck around toward the backside of the loading docks as Tony strode to the office.

* * * * *

Tony looked up at the Chicago city map stuck full of colored pins on the wall above his desk and made another entry in the dispatcher sheet in front of him. He would route Phil Nese to Calumet City with tomorrow’s load and keep Donny, his shag driver closer to downtown.

He looked around the large room on the ground floor of the two-story brick office building. The room seemed to vibrate. On his right, other dispatchers were talking on phones at their desks. Before them were walls covered with maps of Chicago, also dotted with colored pins. The long distance dispatcher, at right angles to Tony, had a map of the whole USA before him. Clerks and secretaries scurried around the room moving bills of lading from their desks to the dispatchers, and trip reports from their desks to the marketing department on the second floor – the “girls upstairs.” The wall calendar displayed the month of April, the year 1962. The clock on the wall showed that it was 7:15 a.m. on a Tuesday morning--the busiest time of day.

All the dispatchers wanted to get their trucks out early to the various freight houses around the city--especially the produce haulers. The idea was to get products to the stores sooner, which would boost the reputation and business of J & L Express, and to avoid the traffic jams. But just maybe all the LTL trucks converging on downtown Chicago created the traffic jams.

Along with three of the other guys, Tony dispatched LTL trucks, “Less-Than-Truckload” trucks, usually sixteen to twenty-foot straight trucks, with whatever loads came in, to wherever they were sent. Generally, he worked with a pool of ten to twelve drivers who delivered south of downtown Chicago. His drivers learned to know all the streets and alleys

in their turf. The other dispatchers handled northern Chicago and west into the suburbs of Cicero, Naperville, Des Plaines, and the like. Tony had two drivers that had routes south into cities like Gary, Hammond and Calumet City. Bernie was one of them.

One of the “girls upstairs” dropped a handful of papers on his desk. “Englewood Consolidated Foods has a half load at the North Western Freight House going to seven drops,” she said.

“Refrigerated?” he asked, looking up. She was the blonde one. For some unknown reason he instantly compared her to Sheila.

“No. Cereal from Battle Creek.”

“Pallets or cartons?” He looked down at the typewritten sheets.

“Cartons.”

“Thanks. Did you get my trip reports from yesterday? I’m sorry they were late,” he said and smiled. “Two of my drivers didn’t get back here until after five p.m.”

“Peggy gave them to me this morning,” the upstairs girl said and nodded toward the desk behind and to Tony’s left. Peggy was the log clerk, who checked the drivers’ logs, ultimately making sure they got paid. Tony turned in his chair to see her. She looked up at him and smiled. He politely smiled back. She was married.

When Tony turned his gaze back to the blonde, she was already bouncing up the stairs across the hall from the open door by his desk. The skirt bounced, too.

He consulted his map, identified the green pin locating Englewood Consolidated Foods then scanned his dispatcher sheet. Green pins, food and produce, were higher priority than yellow, blue, red or black pins. Carlo had room in his ‘Jimmy’. He’d give Carlo the load of cereal.

His phone rang. Tony picked it up as he jotted information on his dispatcher’s sheet. “This is Tony. Talk to me.” One of the girls upstairs was a switchboard operator who routinely routed calls to the appropriate extension.

“Tony, this is Bernie,” the man on the other end of the line spoke. “That *&^# Perillo just yanked my route!” Bernie sounded frantic.

“You’re kidding! #0%&^!” Tony spit into the mouthpiece. “When?”

“Five minutes ago. He gave my route to that pissant Zangara.”

“Why?” Tony demanded. It didn’t really matter why. Today was just not the right day to make such a stupid move! Not today!

Bernie answered, “Does Perillo really need a reason?” Both Bernie and Tony knew Frank Perillo could get away with whatever he wanted. Perillo was the senior driver at J & L, the shop steward of the Teamsters Union Local, and a real prick. And Guido Lucente, the “L” of J & L Express, owner and general manager, would not, or could not, stand up to him.

“Where are you calling from?” Tony asked.

“The phone at the north end of the dock,” said Bernie.

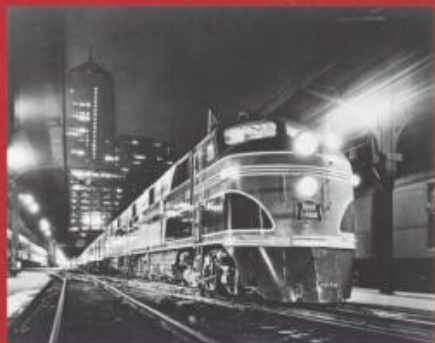
“Where’s Perillo and Zangara?”

“Zangara is driving out now, with my paperwork. I don’t give a damn where Perillo is! He’s still around here somewhere,” Bernie said before letting loose a string of curse words.

“I’ll be right out.” Tony slammed the back of his swivel chair and sent it crashing into the desk behind him, but he didn’t care. Two steps took him out the door into the long hall. He turned right then strode to the windowed door twenty feet away and rammed it open. Not today! He kept repeating to himself. *Not today!* He’d put too much planning into this for Perillo to mess it up.

Fear welled up inside him, but it wasn’t from the frenzied activity of the cavernous loading dock around him. The fear was the realization that things were going drastically wrong. He knew that shit could happen. But this . . . He didn’t even want to imagine it. He quickly looked around the throng of men moving pallets and crates and boxes around him. Twelve overhead doors were open to his right and twelve more to his left. Butted up against each open door was a truck or trailer being stuffed with pallets of goods wrapped in cardboard and cottonwood. Ahead at the far end, a big overhead door was flung open to the rafters, where a ten-bay metal extension had been added, where there was more of the same controlled chaos. A propane-powered forklift charged him from the right with a pallet of cardboard boxes, cinched-down by metal banding, floating on the forks a foot off the floor. He stopped momentarily to let the forklift pass.

He searched the dock for Perillo and found him at a desk next to a support post near the center of the dock talking to the cross-ship supervisor. Tony took ten bold strides, fanning the flames of fury inside him. Five more strides: more fury. Just how much fury would he need



Mark Malmkar

MURDER ON THE GOLDEN STATE

Wayne Darnell, a senior FBI agent in the Chicago field office picked up the phone. The Southern Pacific Railroad Police reported a crime scene in a sleeping car on one of their premier passenger trains, the ***Golden State***. The evidence was one of the bedrooms contained bullet holes and blood. As he listened to the agent on the phone from the train station in Los Angeles, he was stunned by one critical detail.

Tony Fiorelli, one of the dispatchers at J & L Express, a trucking company in northern Chicago, is confronted by the realization that he is a marked man. The mob is going to kill him, and it seems imminent that the Feds are going to arrest him. Can he get away from them both?



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