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Letter to Tobi from Willcox, Arizona

by J.C. Alfier

The plangent rumble of the Union Pacific
is closer than a guardian angel. A dust devil

gathers what debris it needs to dance beyond
the rusted arrow all desert towns have that point

to shops and motels no longer there—none
can tell me how long they've been gone.

In Rix's tavern, I dump whiskey into my beer.
The man next to me has the eyes of someone

staring deeply into fire. His day job is hauling off
foreclosed and abandoned trailers—anything

metal, he adds. Today, he's in town to fetch
his grandson, whose mother can't be found.

He abruptly digresses, says storms in deserts
show the world's forgotten that water can cut

stone. A man comes up, and they both move
to the open patio and light up. In a surge

of shadow, desert doves sweep past them,
a lumbering grace, hushed by distance.