



## Hassie Calhoun

Pamela Cory, Scarletta (PGW, dist.), \$16.95 trade paper (396p) ISBN 978-0-9824584-7-1

Nostalgia takes it on the chin in Cory's overdramatic but atmospherically pleasing debut, the beginning of a projected trilogy about Hassie Calhoun, a 17-year-old Texas rose who arrives in 1960's Las Vegas with a big dream of becoming the next Peggy Lee. Any notions of instant stardom are disabused when she is dismissed as just another working girl (in the Vegas sense) by Jake Contrata, the Sands' tough guy general manager, but plucky Hassie talks Jake into hiring her as a cocktail waitress for the Copa Room, where Frank Sinatra is the headline attraction, and before you can say "ring-a-ding-ding," she's sleeping with both Sinatra and Jake, and is introduced to soon-to-be-presidential candidate JFK. Hassie endures a violent relationship with Jake, but her perseverance wins her a singing gig at the Tropicana, and, inevitably, Sinatra's support and Jake's jealousy lead to a confrontation that will force Hassie to re-evaluate her goals and her relationships. Though Hassie loses her innocence a little too quickly and her masochistic attraction to Jake grows tiresome, Cory's alternately gritty and sudsy depiction of early '60s Sin City transports the reader back to a time when the Rat Pack ethos ruled. (June)

