

NOIR SAGA

by inky

**BOOK ZERO: THE ORPHAN GASP OF THE
SLUTPUPPY**

AND HER SLIDING PIMPCAT

AS THE TENDERLOIN TAKES ITS FIRST BITE

**San Francisco, 1933 – the year the
Tenderloin fog first tasted orphan
blood, chewing jazz bones under quake-
raw skyline...**

-6

The first sound Kathleen Valiente ever made was a gasp so thin it slid between the Mission-flats floorboards and died there. Born 1919, bruise-plum eyes already knowing rhythm. Ma Brigid hacked matching wheeze-tuberculosis Christmas-ribbon-while midwife rinsed knuckles in cracked pot. "Dance, niña," Ma would gasp later, "or streets eat you."

1933: Ma finally coughed inside-out, fourteen-year-old Kathleen pressing cold

spoon to fever-lips, Galway pearl
buttons rattling drawer. Tenement saints
wept plaster. Potter's-field dawn, gulls
dirge-laugh.

Kathleen hitched Powell cable to
Tenderloin neon fangs-"Girls!
Burlesque!"-skirt scandal-high, shoes
newspaper-stuffed, tap-dancing
Embarcadero soapbox for nickels. Men
tossed for eyes promising memory.

Silky-Salvador Valiente, seventeen
Spanish-Irish alley-cat (Tenderloin
boarding ma rented hourly, pa silk-

scarves bi-annual)-watched from pier
piling, shoe-shine kit switchblade-hid,
cigarette tiny lighthouse. Flicked hot
nickel. "Puppy," first name-scar purred.
"Bleed beats for me. In tune."

She caught mid-air. City inhaled cheap-
smoke. First catch. First slide.

-5

Garter Snake Saloon basement, O'Farrell
shadows. Piano "St. Louis Blues" off-key
prophecy. Silky dressed her velvet-
dried-violet slit-shy, rent-party lift:

Black Cat Cellar dock-boss wallets.

Fingers flashbulb-light snagged three
billfolds, saxophone reed ear-feather.

"Music's money mute," he riffled,
pocketed souvenir. Ledger born: five-
and-dime notebook. "Kathleen Valiente-
orphan nickel, potential." Under: "Alive
till profit."

Alley-grit couple: back-to-bricks, paws
teaching 5/4 inevitable, salt-panic
taste. Slip sighed floor. Fog crawled,
shadows hinge-count.

-4

First job: Nob Hill alderman Kee love-
nest tick. Derringer (Ma's .25
petticoat-oiled orphan-tears) temple-
cold. "Pay, or Puppy bites." Wallet
forty, watch doomsday-tick. Grab-twist-
pop champagne-soft, brain treble-red.
Gasp orphan-thin.

Silky torched gardenia-cordite, ledger:
"Kee-eternal silence." '32 Ford black-
rumble fog-slid. Gulls bad-actors.
Boarding flop cat-piss valves: rye burn
flared cut-gasp.

"Love or loot?"

"Both."

Rhythm off-balance. Slept open-mouthed
animal.

-3

Dawn nicotine. Luz/Lola proto-cathouse
(Fillmore sisters, Cherokee whispers):
eyes marble-crack at cuff-blood. Silky
split loot. Chronicle "Mystery!" Laugh
gargle: "Ledger fangs."

Snake stage feral-swirl, tips bad-
nickels. 3 a.m. clown-porcelain cracked,
sawn-shotgun: "Debt!" Mirror guilty-
shards. Silky .32 leak-black-no-blood.
Cards rain: jack spades, queen hearts,
joker tongueless.

First phantom. Derringer clutched.
Ghosts dirt-cheap.

-2

'34 Luz vanish Chinatown silent-throat.
"Overdose yawn." Burn page. Lola stepped

camera-razor. Ledger bared: judges,
proto-Crusaders. Ford headlights proto-
predator.

'36 winter-spring: Milk-teeth fog
streetlight-sparks. Columbus flophouse
poems-reefer: lessons hips-owed, glance-
sell, razor-thigh tease. "Threat
sexier." Pocketed jingling.

Bay-rail baptism: dual Chesterfields.

"Handle choke-smile."

"Slutpuppy."

"Pimpcat patent-paws."

Piling-slap swallow. Bridge half-steel
optimistic fog-lesson.

-1

Black Cat blazed blue-snaps goat-beards
switchblade-poetry. Puppy reed-humming
stage. Silky booth-lick: "Harlan-garter
two-bits." 3:17 clown fedora-grave weep.
Cards no-prints.

6½ The Song that Paid for the Cough that
Killed her Mother

(Black Cat Cellar, three nights after
Brigid's dirt)

Silky drags her downstairs 2 a.m.:

"Tonight you don't dance, you open."

Jammed: stevedores, councilman wrong-
ring. Trio slits "Body and Soul."

"Sing, champagne buys, I collect. Fail,
coffin due."

Rye-shot shove. Spotlight nicotine-
eyelids. First whisper sorry Ma-room
leans hungry. Nickel-metallic bridge

steals lungs. Crack-note fixable.

Applause belt-hot.

Silky counts spit-fives, no grin: "Again
four. Mouth cash, not confessional."

Throat gasp soldered priced. Cadence
currency.

0

Pier proto-Doll tuberoses: Craddock
crisp-boys. Chase scuttle-ghosts (Luz
drip). Ledger bob-fished, Luz-boat
Pacific. Broker fat-envelope rat-ledger.

East-tickets tangle: "Slide longer?"

Ghosts rail-stow. Fog patent-hungry.

Bite eternal. Portrait curtain.

-end of inky noir Book Zero-

BOOK ONE: THE PORTRAIT OF A SLUTPUPPY

AND HER SLIDING PIMPCAT

AS THE SATIN DOLL GOES DOWN

San Francisco, 1937 – the year the bay

fog learned to wear lipstick and a
stiletto...

1

The night smelled of diesel, jasmine,
and fresh blood. I was drinking the
first two and wearing the third when the
dame found me in the Black Cat Cellar, a
basement jazz joint on Grant Avenue
where the beards were billy-goat thin
and the poetry came switch-blade sharp.
She drifted across the smoke like a
wrong note you couldn't stop humming.

"Mr. Quill," she purred, "I need a man who can kill a story before the story kills me."

Her voice was bourbon poured over crushed ice and bruised hearts. She wore a black sweater tight as a confession and a skirt that had forgotten how to be decent. The pre-beatniks at the table stopped snapping their fingers; even the saxophone blushed.

I touched the bandage under my collarbone where a .32 had kissed me last week, courtesy of a dock boss who

didn't appreciate follow-up questions about the '34 strike.

"Murder's my native tongue, dollface. What's yours?"

"Lust," she said, and slid into the booth.

"Call me Slutpuppy. Everybody does."

I believed her. Names are just scars we haven't heard of yet.

She laid it out between choruses of
"Sweet Georgia Brown" played sloppy by a
pianist who swore he could see tomorrow
in the black keys.

Her old man—Silky "Pimpcat" Valiente—was
a Spanish-Irish pimp who ran cathouses
from the Mission to the docks, a tomcat
in a zoot suit who slid through alleys
on patent-leather paws. Born Salvador in
a Tenderloin boarding house where his
Irish ma rented rooms by the hour and
his Spanish pa showed up every six
months with silk scarves and empty

promises. He'd learned early:
everything's for sale, everyone's got a
price, and the difference between love
and business is just bad bookkeeping.

Somebody, somewhere paid the ransom and
the song dwindled into a reversing
silence that echoed for some seconds
like Salem witches after the hunt.

Three nights ago one of his girls, a
Cherokee canary named Lola Lazar, turned
up in a Chinatown doorway with her
throat cut in the shape of a treble
clef. The cops yawned. The papers

screamed. Pimpcat kept sliding, but his eyes had started to look like cracked marble.

"Silky's got a ledger," Slutpuppy whispered. "Names, dates, how high the judge was when he bit Lola's shoulder. Somebody wants that book. Somebody wants him dead. I want him alive long enough to disappear with me."

"Love or loot?" I asked.

"Both," she said, "and maybe a little revenge on the side, like olives in a

martini."

I should have walked. Instead I lit her cigarette and watched the tip glow like the last traffic light before hell.

Pondering the corridor of murder I was about to paw with my hound pulse, I reckoned maybe too quickly; in for a penny, in for a pound. At least I could bandage my expenses.

My rate: twenty a day plus expenses and any body bags under size twelve. She paid in advance, slipping a roll of tens

into my hand with fingers that trembled like a virgin on her third honeymoon.

"Real name's Kathleen Valiente," she said, "but that girl died in a Mission tenement when her mother coughed herself to death. Fourteen years old, dancing for nickels on the Embarcadero. Silky found me. Taught me."

She didn't finish. She didn't need to.

3

We found Pimpcat at the Elbow Room, a

dockside bar where the whiskey was cut with turpentine and the women knew how to disappear when the fleet came in. He wore a chalk-stripe suit the color of cemetery fog, two-tone shoes, and a grin that had sold its soul to the devil for sharp teeth. His 1936 Cord 810 sat outside like a sleek metal cat, garnet red with those coffin-nose hidden headlights that popped up like predator eyes, chrome exhaust pipes running down the sides like silver veins.

"Quill, you look like yesterday's obituary," he greeted me.

"Still breathing," I said.

"That can be fixed."

Slutpuppy slid under his arm like she belonged there. His eyes flicked to her, then to me, then to the black satchel I carried. Inside was a Luger and the ledger she'd promised.

We took a corner booth. A ceiling fan chopped the air into nervous pieces. Pimpcat laid it out: Lola had been blackmailing City Supervisor Craddock, a

family-values crusader who kept a love nest on Russian Hill and a wife in Peoria. The ledger page for Craddock read: "Two hours, French silk, hummingbird tongue, \$500, photo of him in ladies' lace."

Five hundred dollars—enough to keep a longshoreman's family fed for four months. Lola wanted ten grand to keep the negative. Craddock sent a cutter instead.

"Now the book's hot," Pimpcat said.

"Half the board of supervisors, two

judges, a monsignor, and a lady
cartoonist who draws naughty mice are in
it. They'll burn Chinatown to cinders to
get it."

He tapped my chest with a manicured
nail. "You're gonna hide me till I sail
to Manila at dawn. In return I give you
the book. You sell it back to the marks
for fifty grand, split with Puppy here.
Everybody wins except the choirboys who
sang off-key."

I didn't believe him. Guys like Pimpcat
don't sail; they sink and take the ocean

with them. But the dame's thigh was warm against mine and the Luger was cold against my ribs, so I nodded.

Outside, foghorns moaned like widows. Inside, the bartender polished a glass that never got clean. I felt the night shift its weight, getting ready to pounce.

4

We holed up in a flophouse above a proto-beatnik bookstore on Columbus. The walls were papered with poems that

smelled of reefer and regret. At 2 a.m.
the lights went out and the city turned
into one big dark mouth.

Slutpuppy changed into a silk slip the
color of candle smoke. She poured rye
into tooth glasses and sat on the
windowsill, legs swinging like a couple
of moonlit bridges.

"Ever kill a man, Quill?"

"Only the ones who bored me."

She laughed, a sound like dice on felt.

"Silky says you're the last honest guy in town. That means you're the most crooked, you just haven't cashed in."

I watched the fog crawl up the brick opposite. Somewhere a siren started, thought better of it, died.

She came over, put her palms on my chest. Her pulse drummed against my scars.

"Make me forget I'm property," she said.

So I did. The slip sighed to the floor.

Her skin tasted of salt and panic. We moved like jazz in 5/4 time, off-balance and inevitable. Afterward she slept with her mouth open, a small animal exhausted from running.

I stayed awake counting shadows. At 3:17 the door handle turned, slow as cancer in a lumberjack. I rolled off the mattress, Luger first.

A silhouette in the hallway—tall, thin, wearing a fedora like a grave lid. He raised a shotgun cut down to whorehouse length. I fired once. The muzzle flash

showed me his face—no face, just a white porcelain clown mask cracked down the middle. He staggered back, leaking blackness, and fled. No footprints, only playing cards scattered in the corridor: the jack of spades, the queen of hearts, the joker with its tongue cut out.

Slutpuppy didn't wake. I tucked the cards into my coat and listened to the city breathe through broken teeth.

5

Dawn came the color of a nicotine stain.

We moved to Pier 39 where Pimpcat kept a cruiser named The Satin Doll. The plan: get holed up till night, then slip under the Golden Gate—still a bright orange—red of optimism, the past decade seemed not to have danced upon that new traverse standing as if time didn't exist—and sell the ledger in Manila where dollars bought more skin.

The boat stank of tuberose and engine oil. Below deck was a stateroom with mirrors on the ceiling and a record player that spun it all but glowed like outer space suns when it played Billie

Holiday.

Pimpcat poured champagne and wore sunglasses even in the fog.

"Cheers, suckers," he toasted. "To the death of innocence—may it rest in pieces."

We raised our glasses. The boat rocked like a rickety candle in a slow earthquake.

Satan Takes a Holiday whispered below deck "Stop, look, and listen to me..."

That's when the second phantom showed.

She climbed out of the forward hatch barefoot, wearing a blood-red cheongsam slit to the thigh, hair down to her waist like spilled ink. Lola Lazar. Dead Lola. Her throat was still smiling wide, but no sound came out except the wet drip of memory.

Pimpcat dropped his glass. "You're in the morgue, baby."

She smiled, showed teeth like piano

keys.

"Not anymore, cat. Some songs don't know when to quit."

She had a straight razor in one hand, a camera in the other. The camera flashed. White fire. Pimpcat screamed. I fired. The bullet went through her and shattered the mirror behind, multiplying us into a thousand guilty fragments.

Then she was gone. Only the smell of gardenias and formaldehyde lingered.

Slutpuppy clutched my arm hard enough to bruise. "She was buried yesterday. I saw the ceremony."

"Coffins are cheap," I said. "The spirit worlds are cheaper, dirt cheap."

Pimpcat's cool cracked like cheap varnish. "We sail now."

He gunned the engine. It seem to rattle out names like a stool pigeon in deep for a fix. The names nodded out like Chinese junkies under opium den smoke.

Then hummed as names are so prone to do
outside. Never rolled out moaning like
when they are inside by sweet fireplace
flashing the chirp of burning wood.

The dock lines snapped like promises. We
slid out into the bay while the city
behind us burned daylight savings into
counterfeit coins.

6

Mid-channel the fog closed in, thick as
courtroom lies. We dropped anchor off
Alcatraz. The Rock loomed, empty now but

still hungry.

Pimpcat went below to radio his buyer.

Slutpuppy and I stayed topside. She shivered though the air was warm.

"He killed her," she said suddenly.

"Who?"

"Silky. Lola was leaving him, taking the book. He slit her, then paid the coroner to dig in the wrong Jane Doe. Craddock's just the goat."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I needed you to keep him alive long enough for me to kill him."

I stared at her. The wind whipped her hair into Medusa snakes.

"Love or loot?" I asked again.

"Justice," she said, and pulled a derringer from her garter. It looked like a toy until it pointed at my heart.

Below, the engine coughed and died.

Silence bigger than the grave.

Pimpcat reappeared, face fish-belly
white.

"Radio's smashed. Somebody's on board."

Footsteps overhead, soft as cat paws.

Then the music started—"Gloomy Sunday"
from the record player, though the power
was cut.

We were three spectres in a steel
coffin, drifting.

Lola stepped out of the companionway again, razor singing. This time she wasn't alone. Behind her came the clown-masked shotgunner, leaking a whorehouse's length of blood from the chest wound I'd given him, and a third figure—Craddock in his monsignor collar, face powdered like a corpse at a wake.

"Welcome to the jury," Lola whispered.

Pimpcat backed against the rail. "I can pay."

"Too late," said Craddock, voice dry as

old communion wafers. "The city needs a scapegoat wearing your spots."

Slutpuppy raised the derringer. "He's mine."

Lola laughed, a sound like a record spinning backward. "Share."

The clown lifted the shotgun.

I swung the Luger. Four weapons, one heartbeat.

Then the boat exploded.

7

Not fire-water. A Coast Guard torpedo?
No, simpler: somebody had scuttled us.
The hull cracked like a bad alibi. Sea
poured in.

The spirits didn't care. They kept
coming.

I grabbed Slutpuppy, dragged her over
the side as the Satin Doll rolled and
kissed the black deep. The water was ice
and ink. She fought me, trying to swim

back to the boat where Pimpcat wrestled with phantoms.

"Let me go!" she screamed, swallowing bay.

"Dead is dead," I growled, "but dying takes forever."

A flashbulb popped underwater—Lola's camera, still working. In the phosphor glare I saw Pimpcat dive clear of the sinking stern, his patent-leather crawl stroking hard for the Alcatraz shore. Lola's razor slashed empty water.

Craddock held the ledger high like a priest with the host, but the book slipped from his powdered fingers, sinking into kelp. The clown's mask floated, cracked grin bobbing. Then the boat slid under, taking Craddock and the clown-phantom with it, bubbles rising like unheard last words.

Through the murk I glimpsed Pimpcat pulling himself onto the prison dock, zoot suit streaming, still alive, always sliding. No bodies surfaced from the wreck. Just him, escaping again.

I hauled Slutpuppy toward the island,
kicking through guilt and cold.

8

We crawled onto the prison boat landing
at dawn, coughing blood and seawater.
The island was empty except for gulls
that laughed like bad actors.

She sat on the concrete, dress plastered
to her skin, eyes holes punched in the
sky.

"It's over," I said.

"Nothing's over," she answered. "The book floats."

And it did. A black oilskin bundle bobbed in the rip current, drifting toward us like a message in a bottle from a corrupt god. I fished it out. Pages sodden but readable—names, sins, daguerrotypes of powerful men wearing nothing but shame.

She took it, kissed the salt off my cheek. "We can own this town."

"Or it can own us."

"Same difference."

I looked at her—half witch, half waif,
all hunger. The sun broke through the
fog, painted her gold and ruthless.

"I'll make you a deal," I said. "We sell
the book to the highest bidder, take the
money, catch the next steamer to
Shanghai. But first we bury Lola."

"She's already underground."

"Then we bury a prayer for what we did to her."

She thought about it, teeth worrying her lower lip. Finally she nodded.

We tore out the page with Craddock's name, folded it into a paper boat, and set it adrift. The current carried it toward the Golden Gate and the far Pacific where all dirty stories eventually drown.

The rest of the ledger we wrapped in oilskin again. She tucked it inside her

slip, between heart and breast, a black heart beating against her own.

We flagged down a fishing skiff. The French captain took one look at our hollow eyes and asked no questions. As we passed where the Satin Doll went down, gulls wheeled over a patch of slick water. No bodies, no ghosts—just the reflection of the city shimmering like a lie that hadn't been invented yet.

Back on shore we holed up in my office above a tattoo parlor on Kearny.

She frowned at my Kodak Junior six
sixteen series Bellows rusting on the
desk.

I phoned a broker who brokered sins for
senators. He offered thirty grand, meet
at midnight, Pier 43.

The vagrants (near invisible, scattered
like justice) who had cremated their
dollars for joyrides only to be crushed
by the gloom of need could hardly been
seen.

We arrived early. Fog again, cat-quiet.
She wore a trench coat two sizes too
big, hair pinned like a promise she
intended to break.

The buyer showed in a Packard Twelve the
color of dried blood, those vertical
chrome grille bars catching the dock
lights like prison cell doors, whitewall
tires gleaming. He was flanked by two
boys who looked like they'd been born
wearing brass knuckles.

Money changed hands: fat envelope for
the ledger, thin smile for the future.

Then the boys drew. Too late. I had the Luger, she had the derringer. Four shots, two bodies, one driver sprinting into the fog like a spilled confession. We left the ledger on the pier, pages fluttering like dying moths. Let the rats fight over it.

We had the cash. We had each other—whatever was left.

At the train depot she bought two tickets east under the names Mr. and Mrs. Holiday. As the locomotive coughed steam, she leaned into me.

"Think we'll make it, Quill?"

"Nobody makes it," I said. "Some just take longer to miss."

She laughed, that dice-on-felt sound,
and pulled me into the sleeper. Behind
us, San Francisco shrank, a jeweled
whore waving goodbye with broken nails.
Ahead: every cheap motel between here
and eternity.

I closed my eyes and saw Lola's razor,
Pimpcat's patent-leather crawl to

freedom, the clown's cracked mask. They
rode the rails with us, stowaways in the
dark.

But her hand found me under the thin
blanket, warm and alive and wicked. For
now, that was enough.

The train howled into the night, a
saxophone solo nobody would ever
remember except the ones who bled for
it.

The lips that pressed rough kisses upon
the reeds...

Outside, the fog kept sliding, slick as
a pimpcat in patent leather, hungry as a
slutpuppy learning new tricks.

The city was gone. The story wasn't.

It never is.

It has a throat like jazz that cradled
and cuddled but always swallowed.

-end of inky noir Book One-

BOOK TWO: THE GHOST TRAIN OF THE
SLUTPUPPY
AND QUILL'S BLOODY REED
AS THE MIDNIGHT LIMITED HOWLS LOW

Chicago, 1937 – the year the Windy City
learned to bite back, all brass knuckles
and saxophone wails under a sky bruised
purple...

The Midnight Limited rattled like a junkie's last fix, steel wheels grinding hymns to the rails from Frisco's fog to the lakefront's glitter. Slutpuppy, still calling herself Kathleen in whispers, curled against me in the sleeper car, her breath hot jazz on my neck, the envelope of crumpled bills fat between the mattress and the thin steel floor.

Thirty grand. Enough to buy a cathouse in Reno or a quiet farm where corn grew taller than regrets. But her eyes in the swaying lantern light flickered like

Lola's flashbulb-hungry, not sated.

"Quill," she murmured, nails tracing my
scars,

"we're free."

Freedom's just a word pimps whisper to
marks before the knife.

I lit a Chesterfield, watched smoke coil
like ghosts in the draft.

Outside, Nebraska plains blurred black
as spilled ink, coyotes howling backup

to the engine's blues. The porter
knocked once, shadow long as a .38.

"Ice water, sah?" His grin showed gold
teeth like hidden headlights. I waved
him off. Slutpuppy's hand slid lower. We
coupled slow, the train's rhythm our
metronome-off-beat, desperate, ending in
sweat and silence.

At dawn, the first ghost tapped the
window: Lola's porcelain face, throat
grinning wide against the glass, fogging
it with bay water breath. She vanished
when I blinked.

Slutpuppy slept on, mouth a small pink
scar. I pocketed the Luger from under
the pillow. Ghosts don't bleed, but lead
makes 'em listen.

10

We hit Chicago at noon, the Loop a
concrete jungle steaming with stockyard
stink and jazz from invisible horns. The
Blackstone Hotel swallowed us—marble
lobby, bellhops with eyes like dice,
elevators creaking like old coffins.
Suite 714: velvet drapes, a Philco radio

spinning "Strange Fruit," champagne on ice we didn't order.

"Why here?" I asked, dumping the cash in the safe.

"Silky had contacts," she said, slipping into a black sheath that hugged her like original sin.

"Capone's ghosts still run numbers. We fence what's left of the heat—the derringer, your Luger—then steamers south to Havana. Rum, cigars, no ledgers."

Her fingers lingered on the safe dial. I
caught the tremble.

"Spill it, Puppy. Lola's tailing us. I
saw her at dawn."

She laughed, dice on felt.

"Mirrors and morphine, Quill. Drink."

We did. Rye burned clean. But the mirror
over the vanity cracked a smile down the
middle when we kissed—clown mask
fracture.

Pimpcat's voice echoed from the bathroom
faucet: "Suckers." I smashed the glass.
Slutpuppy watched, eyes marble-cracked.

11

Night fell like a dropped body. We hit
the Green Mill, Al Capone's old haunt
where the walls whispered bootleg
secrets and the band played "St. James
Infirmary" like a funeral dirge. His
body, missed the short purgatory, now
rotting in Alcatraz hell. Smoke thick as
cathouse promises, dames in furs,

gorillas in tuxes eyeing us like fresh meat. Our contact: "Fat Sammy" Rizzo, a weasel in a homburg who ran guns from Gary and girls from Gary. He slid into the booth, breath like garlic and grave dirt, a satchel of clean bills for our hardware.

"Valiente's book burned Frisco," he hissed.

"You two the ashes?" Slutpuppy purred the meet.

Guns traded smooth as a striptease. But

Sammy's pinky ring gleamed—jack of
spades etched in onyx. He leaned close.

"Ledger floated ashore. Craddock's boys
paid big. Puppy, Silky says hello—from
Manila. Alive."

Her derringer was gone. Mine stayed
holstered. Sammy laughed, a wet gargle.
Outside, his Hudson Hornet purred,
headlights popping like Cord predator
eyes. We walked into the alley fog.
Footsteps echoed—soft, cat-pawed. Lola
emerged from a dumpster shadow,
cheongsam dripping Chicago rain, razor

humming drunken riffs.

"Share," she mouthed. I fired blind.

Alley cats scattered. No blood, just
cards: queen of hearts, joker
tongueless, ace of guilt.

12

Back at the Blackstone, the safe yawned
empty. Thirty grand gone. Maid service?
Bellhop? Her? Slutpuppy sat on the bed,
slip candle-smoke silk, pouring rye with
hands steady as death.

"Double-cross?" I growled.

"Insurance," she said.

"Silky taught me: always another roll."

She tossed a key.

"Station locker. Twenty-five K left.

Enough."

Pulse like a hound in heat. I grabbed
her throat—not hard, but enough to feel
the lie pulse.

"Pimpcat's alive. You knew." She twisted
free, eyes Medusa snakes.

"He slit Lola for love, Quill. Jealous.
Book was bait. Now he's Manila rich,
we're Chicago broke unless we take
Havana."

Below, the radio wailed "Gloomy Sunday."
Power cut, needle still spun. Craddock
stepped from the closet-monsignor collar
crisp, powder corpse-white.

"Confession time, Quill. City needs
witnesses drowned." His shotgun barked

whorehouse-short. I dove, glass
shattering rainbows. Slutpuppy's
derringer-wait, gone?-flashed from her
garter. Pop. Craddock leaked black,
clown mask under flesh. He faded
giggling. Lobby siren wailed. We bolted,
fire stairs to the garage.

13

Midnight rain lashed like bay waves. My
Chevy (rented, anonymous, mud-splashed
from despair) coughed to life in the
underground gloom. We peeled into the
Loop, tailed by a DeSoto growling low-

vertical grille bars like prison teeth,
whitewalls screaming on wet pavement.

"Locker first," she yelled over the
wipers' jizz. Union Station loomed, Art
Deco ghost ship under clock towers
ticking doomsday. Locker 419: bills
sodden, but real. Her smile wicked. Then
the DeSoto blocked the exit ramp,
headlights blinding. Doors flew—two
gorillas, Fat Sammy grinning pinky-ring
jack. Pimpcat lounged in back, zoot
chalk-stripe, alive, patent-leather paws
clapping slow.

"Quill, you drive like a widow. Puppy—my
sliding doll."

Slutpuppy's face cracked varnish. "You
died, cat."

He grinned devil-sharp. "Boats float.
Ghosts sink." Shotgun blast spiderwebbed
the windshield. I floored it, tires
howling blues. We sideswiped a pillar—
sparks, screams, DeSoto spinning like a
drunk's top. Out into Grant Park fog,
lake winds whipping Michigan to frenzy.
Lola rode the hood, razor etching treble
clefs in glass.

14

We ditched the Chevy at the Planetarium,
shadows under Neptune's dome. Foot to
the Adler tracks, silver rails gleaming
moon-sick. The Limited's sister train
whistled-ghost on rails, pulling east
again. No time for tickets. We hopped an
empty boxcar, hayloft dark, ledger
dreams scratching in our veins.

Pimpcat's crew thundered close-tires on
gravel, spotlights slicing.

Slutpuppy clutched the bills, derringer

out.

"End him, Quilll."

Engine roared. They rammed the grade
crossing. Metal screamed symphony.

Boxcar lurched. We tumbled, rolling into
ditch weeds sharp as switchblades.

Flashbulbs popped—Lola's camera,
illuminating the wreck: DeSoto crushed
accordion, Sammy's gold teeth in the
dash, Pimpcat crawling free, suit torn,
grin eternal. Clown mask phantom rose
beside him, shotgun weeping my bullet
hole. Craddock's wafers crumbled in the

wind.

"Jury's in." Pimpcat fired wild.

Lola's razor sang. Slutpuppy charged,
derringer spitting justice.

Pop-pop.

Pimpcat slumped, eyes cracked marble
final. Train howled away. Ghosts circled
the pyre, then evaporated-gardenias,
formaldehyde, foghorn widows. No bodies.
Just wreck and rain washing sins to the
lake.

15

Dawn broke gray as nicotine over Gary
steel mills. We hitched east, thumb out
like promises, bills slimmed to ten
grand. A trucker with reefer eyes
dropped us in South Bend—motel neon
flickering "No Vacancy" like a lie.

Room 13: sagging bed, radiator jazz. She
stripped slow, slip pooling salt and
panic.

"Havana now?" I watched her move—waif—

witch hunger.

"Ledger's curse. Burn the cash." She
laughed.

"Burn the ghosts first." Her thighs
parted invitation.

We tangled fierce, 5/4 time off rails.
After, she slept open-mouthed, animal
spent. I burned the bills in the sink-
flames blue as Craddock's powder.

Pocketed the derringer. Left a note:
Miss longer.

Outside, the fog slid patent-leather,
hungry tricks. Her train ticket east
waited on the nightstand.

16

South Bend depot, fog off St. Joe River
thick as bay lies. She sat alone, trench
too big, hair pinned broken-promise.
Pimpcat's Cord ghosted the lot-garnet
red, headlights popping. No driver.
Lola's flashbulb popped once.

Slutpuppy turned-too late. Razor
whispered treble. She crumpled, eyes

gold-ruthless fading. I watched from
shadows, Luger heavy. The Cord purred
away, sliding into mist. No plates.
Ledger page fluttered from her hand—
Craddock's sins, paper boat. I tore it,
set adrift in a puddle Pacific-bound.

Ticket booth man yawned. "East or west,
mac?"

"Manila," I said. Train whistled low. I
boarded alone.

Behind, Chicago shrank jeweled liar.
Ahead: eternity's cheap motels. Ghosts

rode with me-razor grin, clown crack,
her dice laugh. The lips pressed rough
reeds...

Fog kept sliding, slick as pimpcat,
slutpuppy slicker. Story never ends. It
just switches tracks.

-end of inky noir Book Two-

BOOK THREE: THE SHANGHAI WHISPER OF
QUILL'S BLOODY REED

AND THE SLUTPUPPY'S PHANTOM FANG
AS THE ORIENTAL LIMITED STEAMS INTO
ETERNITY

Manila, 1938 – the year the Pearl of the
Orient learned to bleed opium and jazz,
under a sky stitched with typhoon thread
and lantern lies...

17

The SS President Hoover vomited me onto
the Manila docks like a bad oyster,
steam horns wailing goodbye to the
Pacific's gray churn. Six weeks from

Frisco's fog-via Yokohama, where geishas
whispered bay-water secrets-to this stew
of carabao carts, American sailors, and
Filipina sirens slinging San Miguels
under Spanish bells.

Thirty grand burned to ash in South
Bend; all I carried was the Luger
(cleaned, oiled), Slutpuppy's derringer
(tucked like a widow's promise), and
ghosts heavier than hemp rope. Her last
gasp echoed in my bunk dreams: razor
treble, dice laugh fading. Lola's
flashbulb popped in typhoon squalls.
Pimpcat's patent-leather slide haunted

the waves. Craddock's wafers dissolved
in rice wine.

I checked into the Bayview Hotel—
colonial relic, fans chopping air like
machetes, ceiling mirrors reflecting a
face cracked like the clown's mask. Room
313: bed sagging as a corrupt judge,
mosquito net veiling sins.

"Mr. Quill?" The desk clerk, a mestizo
with eyes like dice, slid a cable.
Manila rich waits. Pier 7 midnight.
Silky.

Pulse hounded. I lit a Chesterfield,
watched smoke coil into Medusa snakes.
Freedom's a steamer ticket that never
cashes.

18

Pier 7 reeked of fish guts, hemp, and
girlie perfume—jeepneys rattling like
junkie hearts, Chinamen hawking opium
pearls. Midnight fog rolled in from the
bay, thick as courtroom perjury. A
launch bobbed: black hull, lanterns dim
as dying flashbulbs. No name, just eyes—
hidden headlights popping like the

Cord's predator glare.

Pimpcat lounged on deck, zoot suit
chalk-stripe crisp, alive again,
grinning devil-teeth over a stogie.

"Quill, you swim like a rat. Puppy send
her love?" His Spanish-Irish lilt
slithered like patent leather on wet
tile.

Beside him, a new dame: Jade Fang, half-
Chinese viper in qipao red as Lola's
cheongsam, slit to revelations, nails
lacquered blood-moon. Her eyes hummed
razor songs.

"She's bay food," I said, Luger heavy
under armpit. "Ledger curse got her in
South Bend."

He laughed, wet gargle. "Ledgers float,
Quill. Ghosts sink slower."

Jade poured tuak-coconut fire-into
bamboo cups. The launch chugged into
Manila Bay, stars pricking like .32
kisses. "Shanghai run," Pimpcat purred.
"Opium kings want Frisco names. Fifty
grand split. You drive, I slide."

Jade's hand traced my scars. Skin salt-
panic taste. Slutpuppy's echo. I drank.
The bay swallowed the city lights. Below
deck: mirrors ceilinged, record player
spinning "Gloomy Sunday" in Tagalog.
Ghosts didn't wait for invites.

19

Dawn painted Corregidor orange-optimist,
guns silent but hungry. We docked at a
smuggler's cove—white sand scarred black
by typhoons. Pimpcat vanished into palms
with a satchel: ledger pages reborn,
sodden sins dried crisp. Jade stayed,

qipao sighing to deck like candle smoke.

"Silky trades me like silk," she
whispered, thighs parting invitation.

"Make me forget property."

Echo of Puppy. I did. We moved 5/4 jazz,
off-balance inevitable—her cheongsam
whispers, my scars drumming. Salt,
panic, opium dream. After, she slept
open-mouthed, small dragon spent. I
counted shadows.

At 3:17 the porthole fogged: Slutpuppy's
face, throat treble-clef from South Bend

razor, gold-ruthless eyes fogging glass
with St. Joe River mist. She mouthed
Miss longer. Vanished on blink.
Derringer cold against ribs.

Pimpcat returned, satchel lighter.
"Buyer's en route. Shanghai tong." His
eyes flicked Jade, then me-cracked
marble.

Outside, footsteps cat-pawed. Lola
climbed from the hold, cheongsam
dripping bay, camera flashing white
fire. "Share." Clown mask rose shotgun-
weeping my Chicago bullet. Craddock

powdered in monsignor rags. Jury
reconvened.

Pimpcat's .45 barked. Ghosts laughed
backward records. I fired Luger-lead
through mist. Jade woke screaming razor
hymn. Launch rocked earthquake-slow.

20

We fled into jungle-vines switchblade-
thick, monkeys howling blues backup.
Satchel slung crossback, bills crisp as
Craddock's wafers. Jade clutched
derringer, qipao torn to map of desires.

Pimpcat slid ahead, paws sure. "Tong
cave ahead. Hide till steamer."

Slutpuppy's ghost paced parallel, fog
sliding patent-leather. "You left me,"
she purred through fronds. Lola flashed:
jack spades, queen hearts, joker
tongueless. Cards rained like Frisco
fog. Pimpcat spun, fired wild. "Damn
Puppy-always jealous."

Cave mouth yawned: opium lanterns
flickering outer-space suns, tong boss-a
fat mandarin with pinky-ring ace of
guilt-waiting with gorillas in silk

pajamas. "Valiente book?" Mandarin hissed.

Satchel traded. Bills fat. But Jade's eyes betrayed—Medusa snakes. "Silky's bait again," she said, derringer on me. "Tong owns ledger. You two ghosts now."

Pimpcat grinned eternal. "Boats float." He lunged. Mandarin's boys drew kris daggers, curved as Lola's razor. Cave echoed 5/4 chaos: shots, screams, flashbulbs popping rainbows. I smashed Jade's wrist—derringer skittered. Grabbed satchel half-full. Pimpcat

slumped, kris in gut, leaking like the
clown. Ghosts circled pyre: Slutpuppy's
dice laugh, Lola's gardenia-
formaldehyde. No fade. They feasted.

21

I bolted cave-mouth, satchel bills
fluttering moths. Jungle to beach: SS
Oriental Limited whistle-ghost steamer,
sister to Midnight rails. No tickets
needed. Dove aboard as tong jeeps
growled gravel.

Cabin: mirrors cracked smiling, Philco

wailing "Strange Fruit" in Cantonese.

Jade washed up mid-Pacific, qipao

plastered sin-map, clinging to rail.

"Tong double-crossed Silky. Book's curse

mine now." Her hand found me under thin

blanket-warm, wicked, alive. We coupled

typhoon-fierce, waves metronome. Ghosts

watched: Puppy's phantom fang bared,

Lola grinning treble.

Shanghai loomed, Bund neon jeweled liar.

Tong waited dockside-Hudson Hornet

ghosts, headlights popping. Bills burned

sink-blue. Derringer pocketed. Left Jade

note: Sink slower.

22

Bund fog cat-thick. I slipped into
alley-jazz joints throbbing, rickshaws
pulling souls. Contact: "Whisper" Ling,
ledger fence for warlords. He poured
maotai fire. "Frisco sins gold here.
Chiang needs dirt on Americans." Thirty
grand reborn.

But his ring: jack spades.

Slutpuppy materialized from steam vent,
trench too big, hair pinned broken.

"Quill..." Razor from garter. Ghosts
full jury: Pimpcat paws clapping, clown
shotgun, Craddock wafers, Lola camera,
Jade qipao dripping. "Eternity split."

Luger sang. Whisper leaked black. Bills
scattered Pacific-bound paper boats. I
dove Bund waters-ink-ice. Surfaced
alone. Ghosts wheeled gulls over slick
patch. No bodies.

Nanjing Road motel: neon "No Vacancy"
flickering lie. Bed sagged. Burned last
bills. Pocketed ghosts' cards. Steamer
east whistled-Havana? Reno? Eternity's

rails.

Her laugh echoed dice: Nobody makes it.
Fog slid slicker, pimpcat-slutpuppy
eternal. Story switches tracks, but the
throat jazz always swallows. Lips rough
on reeds...

-end of inky noir Book Three-

BOOK FOUR: THE HEY HEY HAZE OF QUILL'S
BLOODY REED

AND THE KANSAS CITY CATS

AS TIANGZIFANG DEVOURS THE JAZZ SOULS

Shanghai, 1939 – the year the Bund fog
choked on Japanese gunpowder and Kansas
City sax wails, Tiangzifang alleys
twisting like opium pipes into
eternity's dive...

23

Nanjing Road motel neon lied "No
Vacancy," bed sagged like a tong boss's
conscience. I'd burned Whisper Ling's
thirty grand reborn in the sink-blue

flames licking Frisco sins—but ghosts
don't cash out. Slutpuppy's dice laugh
echoed from the radiator jazz: Miss
longer, Quill. Lola's flashbulb popped
in maotai dreams, razor treble-clef.
Pimpcat's paws clapped patent-leather
from the ceiling fan blades. Craddock's
wafers powdered the ashtray. Jade Fang's
qipao dripped Bund ink.

Dawn typhoon-gray. I pocketed the
derringer (Puppy's orphan heir), Luger
oiled cold, and slipped into
Tiangzifang—former French Concession
hutongs gone boho-wild, stone gates

framing rickshaws, teahouses thumpin'
jazz from hidden doors. Artsy expat
traps: white devils paintin' watercolors
by day, tong girls slingin' snow by
night. Japanese patrols prowled like
stray cats, bayonets glintin' under
lanterns.

Desk clerk slipped a cable: Hey Hey
Club. Alley 17. KC boys got Frisco book
scraps. Fence tonight. Silky lives.

Pulse hounded. Silky sunk Corregidor,
but ledgers float. Chesterfields coiled
Medusa. Freedom's a hutong that loops.

Hey Hey Club hid behind a silk-scroll
door, stairs down to basement catacomb:
Kansas City refugees—Count Basie strays,
ex-Poteen Place horn-men fleein'
Prohibition ghosts—blowin' bebop wild on
tenor saxes and upright bass, sweat
mixin' with opium haze. Dames in qipaos
slit revelation-high swayed hips money-
owed, rickshaw coolies nursin' San
Miguels spiked tuak. Smoke thick as
cathouse promises, walls whisperin' "One
O'Clock Jump" like bootleg hymns.

Bar leaned "Fats" Kowalski, Polish-KC
gorilla with gold teeth like hidden
headlights, slingin' maotai rye. "Quill?
Valiente's ash-man. Tong wants ledger
scraps washed ashore Manila. KC cats
found pages in a wrecked launch-Craddock
sins, Puppy thigh-shots. Fifty grand
clean."

He slid a satchel: oilskin bundle,
sodden daguerreos readable-powerful
ghosts wearin' shame nothin'. My scars
itched.

"Split with the band?"

Fats laughed wet gargle. "They lose
minds here nightly. Opium kingpin
'Dragon Joe' buys tonight. Play cool."

Reed players nodded from stage, horns
poppin' predator eyes. I lit up, watched
fog crawl rice-paper windows. Puppy's
phantom paced the bar rag-trench too-
big, hair pinned broken.

25

Midnight riff crescendo: "Body and Soul"

slit slow, wrists temptin'. Dragon Joe
slithered in-mandarin fat, pinky-ring
jack spades onyx-etched, flanked silk-
pajama gorillas kris-curved. Qipao dame
on arm: Black Orchid, half-Russian
viper, lips gardenia-red, eyes clown-
cracked porcelain.

"Book," Joe hissed maotai breath.

Satchel traded under table-envelope fat
as South Bend ten-grand slimmed. But
Orchid's nails traced my Luger bulge:
"Silky says hello-from Manila yacht.
Puppy's fang his now."

Pulse drum. Derringer garter-cold. KC
sax wailed bridge metallic-nickel,
stealin' lungs. Joe grabbed satchel,
grinned wafers. Trap.

Gorillas drew. Hey Hey erupted 5/4
chaos: shots barkin' whorehouse-short,
mirrors shatterin' thousand guilty
Orchids. I dove, Luger singin' lead
through silk. Fats shotgun-kissed a
gorilla chest-leak black. Band kept
blowin', reeds bloody prophecy.

Orchid laughed dice-felt: "Share."

Lola materialized stage-smoke, cheongsam
bay-drip, camera flash white-fire
treble. Clown mask rose shotgun-weepin'
Chicago hole. Craddock monsignor
powdered. Pimpcat zoot-slid from bass
shadows. Jade qipao-fang. Puppy trench-
fog. Full jury, eternal.

26

Club inferno: not fire-opium lamps
tipped, blue blaze chewin' bamboo beams
like Tenderloin teeth. KC cats scattered
wild-sax on back, trumpet case ledger-

shield-howlin' into alleys.

I grabbed Orchid (warm wicked pulse),
dragged through kitchen steam vents,
derringer her spine-tease. "Sing for me,
doll."

She did-throat gasp orphan-soldered,
Russian trill stealin' my breath. We
coupled hutong shadows, qipao sighin'
salt-panic, 5/4 off-balance inevitable
under lantern moon. After, open-mouthed
dragon spent. Ghosts wheeled overhead
gulls.

Dragon Joe's Packard growled alley-end-
vertical grille prison-bars, whitewalls
screamin' wet stone. Japanese patrol
spotlit: "Yamete!" Rifles barked. I
fired blind, Luger phosphor. Orchid
derringer-spat justice. Packard
accordioned pillar-sparks. Joe crawled
leak-black, ring jack spades glint.

Satchel bills fluttered paper-boats
Tiangzifang drains, Pacific-bound. No
fade-ghosts feasted pyre, gardenia-
formaldehyde foghorn. KC horns wailed
distant blues backup.

Dawn nicotine over Suzhou Creek. We
ditched into artsy warrens—watercolor
stalls shuttered, expat ghosts paintin'
sins. Orchid poured tuak bamboo: "Tong
owns Hey Hey curse now. Silky baits
eternal."

Her hand slid blanket-thin—thighs parted
invite. "Havana steamers?"

Pulse hound. Burned remnant bills sink-
blue. Pocketed her reed—souvenir. Note:
Sink slower, cats.

Tianzifang depot fog-thick: she sat
trench-big, hair promise-break.

Pimpcat's phantom Cord ghosted lot-
garnet headlights pop. Lola flash-pop.
Orchid turned late-razor treble whisper.
Crumpled gold-ruthless fade.

I shadowed Luger-heavy. Cord purred
mist-no-plates. Craddock page fluttered
hand-sins boat puddle-Pacific.

Ticket man yawned: "East, west, or
eternity?"

"Kansas City rails."

Steamer whistled low-ghost Oriental
Limited sister. Boarded solo. Shanghai
shrank jeweled liar broken-nails. Ghosts
rode: fang-grin, clown-crack, Puppy
dice, KC sax bloody-reed.

Fog slid slicker, hey-hey haze eternal
hunger. Story switches hutongs, but
jazz-throat always swallows. Lips rough
on reeds...

-end of inky noir Book Four-

BOOK FIVE: THE RUM PHANTOM OF QUILL'S
BLOODY REED
AND THE SLUTPUPPY'S CIGAR FANG
AS HAVANA'S MALECÓN MOANS MAMBO MURDER

Havana, 1940 – the year the Malecón fog
sucked rum and revolution, mambo horns
wailing like widows over ledger
corpses...

SS Oriente ghosted into Havana harbor,
salt-crust shedding Tiangzifang haze
like old skin. Orchid's crumpled echo-
razor treble in Suzhou drains-faded, but
Puppy's dice laugh rode the bilge pumps:
Sink slower, cats. I'd burned Dragon
Joe's satchel scraps blue, pocketed KC
reed-souvenir bloody-prophecy,
derringer/Luger twins cold as Corregidor
guns. Ghosts heavier: Lola flash, clown
weep, Pimpcat slide, Jade drip, full
jury puffing phantom Partagás.

Hotel Nacional swallowed me-marble
ghosts of Lucky Luciano, fans machete-

chopping ceiling mirrors. Room 666: bed
sagging Batista bribes, balcony
overlooking Malecón waves slapping
concrete like bad debts.

Desk cable: Sans Souci. KC exiles fence
Frisco pages. Silky cigars from Oriente.
Midnight. Fats.

Pulse hounded prairie-wild. Silky sunk
thrice, but pimps float rum-proof.
Chesterfield coiled, freedom's a conga
line loop.

Sans Souci cabaret throbbed Vedado
velvet: mambo mania, rum rivers, Batista
gorillas tuxed, showgirls feathered
revelation-thighs. KC Poteen strays-
Basie horn-men fleein' dustbowl-blew
"Mambo Jambo" wild, congas skin-slappin'
off-beat inevitable.

Bar slouched "Papa" Rico, Cuban-Polish
whale gold-toothed headlights, slingin'
mojitos maotai-spiked. "Quill?
Tiangzifang ash. Hey Hey ledger floated
Manila-Craddock thigh-dags, Puppy garter
shots. Sixty grand Havana clean."

Satchel oilskin sins reborn. Scars
itched Fidel hints.

"Split band?"

Rico gargled: "They mambo minds lost.
Rum king 'El Tigre' buys."

Reed-men nodded stage predator-pop. Fog
crawled balcony lace. Puppy phantom
conga'd bar-rag, cigarillos smoke
Medusa.

30

Midnight mambo crescendo: "Body and
Soul" rum-slit slow. El Tigre prowled-
tattoo-tiger mandarin fat, ring queen
hearts ruby, rumba-dame arm: Cigar Lily,
Spanish viper cheongsam-feather, lips
Lola-red, eyes porcelain-crack.

"Libro," Tigre hissed breath-cigar.

Satchel table-trade: envelope fatter
South Bend. Lily nails Luger-tease:
"Silky hello-Oriente yacht alive. Puppy
fang bites cigars."

Derringer garter-burn. KC trumpet bridge
steals lungs nickel. Tigre snatched,
wafers-grin. Trap.

Gorillas kris-conga. Sans Souci 5/4
blaze: shots short-bark, mirrors guilty-
thousand Lilys. Luger lead-silk, Rico
shotgun gorilla-leak black. Band blew
reeds bloody-mambo.

Lily dice-laugh: "Comparte."

Jury full: Lola bay-flash, clown
Chicago-weep, Craddock powder, Pimpcat
zoot-conga, Jade qipao, Orchid Russian-

trill, Puppy trench-mist.

31

Inferno rum-lamps tipped blue-mambo
chewin' palms. KC cats scattered conga-
wild-trumpet ledger-shield-howlin'
Malecón alleys. Grabbed Lily (wicked-
warm), kitchen-drag derringer-spine:
"Mambo me."

Throat orphan-gasp trill steals breath.
Shadows couple: feathers sigh salt-
panic, rhythm wave-metronome inevitable.
Open-mouthed viper spent. Ghosts gulls-

wheel.

Tigre's Chrysler growled-grille prison-
vertical, whitewalls wet-pave scream.

Batista patrol spot: "Alto!" Mausers
barked. Blind-fire phosphor. Lily
derringer justice-spit. Chrysler pillar-
accordion sparks. Tigre crawled black-
leak, ring queen glint.

Bills boats Malecón drains Pacific.

Ghosts pyre-feast gardenia-rumhorn. KC
horns distant backup.

32

Dawn nicotine Habana Vieja. Warrens
watercolor-rum distilleries shuttered.
Lily tuak-mojito: "Tigre curse Sans
owns. Silky eternal bait."

Thighs invite blanket. "Lawless rails?"

Burned bills sink-blue. Pocketed cigar-
reed. Note: Mambo slower.

Malecón depot fog: Lily trench-big
promise-break. Cord phantom lot-
headlights pop. Lola flash. Lily late-
turn-cigar-fang treble. Crumpled

ruthless-gold. Shadow Luger. Cord mist-
no-plates. Craddock-page boat puddle.

Ticket yawn: "Lawless or eternity?"

"Kansas dust."

Steamer low-whistle Oriental sister.

Solo board. Havana jeweled-liar nails-

broke. Ghosts ride: fang-grin crack-dice

Puppy KC bloody-reed cigar. Fog rum-

slick eternal. Jazz-throat swallows.

Reeds rough-lips...

-end of inky noir Book Five-

BOOK SIX: THE DUSTBOWL WAIL OF QUILL'S
BLOODY REED
AND THE LAWLESS GHOST CATS
AS THE POTEEN PLACE PAYS BACK IN PRAIRIE
BLOOD

Lawless, Kansas, 1941 – the year the
dustbowl fog choked wheat ghosts and
Okie rails, Poteen Place cathouse
howling sax over ledger graves...

Midnight Limited rattled prairie-black
from Havana rum to Lawless dust-
fictional frontier dustbowl sink, KC
Poteen orbit where Basie strays holed
post-Prohibition, wheat fields hiding
clown bunkers, sheriffs bought ledger-
cheap. Lily's cigar-fang crumpled
Malecón echo, Puppy dice: Mambo slower.
Burned Tigre's sixty blue,
derringer/Luger/reed-cigar twins, jury
full: Lola/Orchid/Jade/Lily phantom-
fangs circling like dust devils.

Poteen Place swallowed-adobe cathouse
neon "Girls! Jazz!", tumbleweed conga,
wind moaning mambo widows. Room 13: bed
sagging Dust Bowl debts, ceiling fan
prairie-machete mirrors.

Cable: Poteen stage. KC ghosts fence
final Frisco scraps. Silky dust-yacht.
Dawn. Count.

Hound-pulse wheat-wild. Silky sunk
Havana, pimps dust-proof. Freedom loops
derail.

Poteen Place basement throbbed: KC
lawless cats-Count horn-men dust-Okie-
wailing "One O'Clock Jump" dustbowl
bebop, upright bass thumpin' inevitable
off-beat. Dames feather-qipao swayed
thighs owed, Okie coolies nursin' tuak-
mojito. Smoke cathouse-thick, walls "St.
James Infirmary" bootleg.

Bar "Count" Dust, gorilla gold-
headlights, slingin' rye-dust. "Quill?
Havana ash. Sans ledger floated Oriente-
full Craddock/Puppy dag-shame. Seventy
grand clean."

Satchel sins final.

"Band split?"

Dust gargle: "Lose minds dust-nightly.

Dust king 'Wheat Wolf' buys."

Reeds stage predator. Dust crawled
shutters. Puppy phantom bar-rag trench-
dust.

35

Dawn wail crescendo: "Body and Soul"

dust-slit. Wheat Wolf slunk-tattoo-wolf
fat, ring joker tongueless bone, dust-
dame: Prairie Thorn, viper feather-
cheongsam, lips phantom-red, eyes crack.

"Book," Wolf howled breath-wheat.

Trade: envelope fattest. Thorn Luger-
tease: "Silky hello-dust yacht. Puppy
eternal fang."

Derringer cold. Trumpet bridge lungs-
steal. Wolf wafers. Trap.

Gorillas sixgun-conga. Poteen 5/4

dustblaze: shots bark, mirrors thousand
Thorns. Lead-dust, Count shotgun leak-
black. Cats blew bloody-reeds.

Thorn dice: "Comparte."

Jury eternal: all
fangs/flash/weep/slide/powder.

36

Inferno dust-lamps tipped blue-wail
chewin' adobe. Cats scattered wild-sax
shield-howlin' wheat fields. Grabbed
Thorn (warm-wicked), barn-drag

derringer: "Wail me."

Throat trill orphan-steals. Shadows
couple: feathers salt-dust panic, rhythm
wind-metronome. Spent open-mouthed.
Ghosts dust-devil.

Wolf's Dodge growled-grille prison,
tires dust-scream. Sheriff patrol:
"Halt!" Rifles dust-bark. Blind
phosphor. Thorn derringer spit. Dodge
pillar-sparks. Wolf leak-black, ring
joker glint.

Bills boats wheat-drains Pacific. Ghosts

feast pyre wheat-gardenia. Horns
distant.

37

Dawn nicotine plains. Warrens dust-art-
wheat sketches. Thorn rye-dust: "Wolf
curse Poteen owns. Silky forever."

Thighs blanket. "Eternity rails?"

Burned bills blue. Pocketed reed-cigar-
thorn. Note: Dust slower.

Depot dust-fog: Thorn trench promise.

Cord phantom lot pop. Lola flash. Thorn
turn-late-thorn-fang treble. Crumpled.
Luger shadow. Cord mist. Page boat
puddle.

Ticket: "Rails end?"

"Eternity."

Train low-ghost Limited final. Solo.
Lawless shrank liar-nails. Ghosts full
ride: every fang grin crack dice reed
cigar. Dust slick eternal.

-end of inky noir Book Six-

BOOK SEVEN: THE ACCORDION GASP OF
QUILL'S BLOODY REED
AND THE SLUTPUPPY'S SEINE FANG
AS PARIS OCCUPATION FOG CHOKES THE
LEDGER LIES

Paris, 1942 – the year the Seine fog
wore swastika lipstick, accordion wails
gasping under Vichy boots like orphans
in Montmartre gutters...

38

Ghost Limited rattled prairie to
Atlantic port—New York iron screaming
wartime. Steamer crossed Channel dodging
U-boats, gray waters cold as Gestapo
eyes. Then rails through Brest to Paris
occupation haze, Thorn's prairie-fang
crumpled in wheat-drain memory, Puppy's
dice: Dust slower. Burned Wolf's seventy
blue, derringer/Luger/reed-cigar-thorn
quartet, jury bloated:
Lola/Orchid/Jade/Lily/Thorn fangs
circling Eiffel shadows.

Le Caveau des Oubliettes swallowed—

catacomb cabaret under Moulin Rouge
bones, neon "Girls! Jazz!" dimmed
blackout. Room 13 bis: bed sagging
Pétain bribes, ceiling fan Seine-machete
mirrors.

Cable: Caveau stage. KC Resistance horns
fence ultimate Frisco full-ledger. Silky
Seine-yacht. Twilight. Django.

Grit-hound pulse Occupation-wild. Silky
sunk Lawless, pimps Seine-proof.
Freedom's guillotine loop.

Caveau throbbed catacomb: KC Paris
exiles-Django Reinhardt gypsy-jazz
strays, Poteen horn-men fleein' wheat
ghosts-wailing "Nuages" fog-beboop,
accordion squeeze off-beat inevitable.
Dames beret-qipao swayed thighs
rationed, Maquis coolies nursin'
absinthe-tuak. Smoke Gestapo-thick,
walls "Body and Soul" Resistance
bootleg.

Bar "Le Comte" Noir, scarecrow gold-
headlights, slingin' calvados-dust.
"Quill? Lawless cendre. Poteen ledger

floated Havana-complete Craddock/Puppy
dag-shame sins. Eighty grand clean."

Satchel oilskin eternal.

"Band split?"

Noir rasped: "Minds lost fog-nightly.
Fog king 'Le Loup' buys."

Reeds stage predator-dim. Fog crawled
ossuary vents. Puppy phantom beret-rag
Seine-mist.

Twilight wail crescendo: "Body and Soul"
fog-slit slow. Le Loup slunk-tattoo-wolf
gaunt, ring ace guilt ivory, fog-dame:
Seine Widow, viper beret-cheongsam, lips
phantom-red, eyes porcelain-crack.

"Livre," Loup croaked breath-Seine.

Trade: envelope fattest Vichy. Widow
Luger-tease: "Silky bonjour-Seine yacht.
Puppy eternal fang kindly stops."

Derringer cold-guillotine. Accordion
bridge lungs-steal orphan-gasp. Loup

wafers. Trap.

Gestapo sixgun-conga. Caveau 5/4

fogblaze: shots bark blackout-short,

mirrors thousand Widows. Lead-ossuary,

Comte shotgun leak-black. Exiles blew

bloody-reeds gypsy.

Widow dice: "Partage."

Jury apocalypse: all

fangs/flash/weep/slide/powder/gypsy-

trill.

41

Inferno fog-lamps tipped blue-gasp
chewin' bones. Exiles scattered wild-
accordion shield-howlin' Montmartre
sewers. Grabbed Widow (wicked-raw),
ossuary-drag derringer: "Gasp me."

Throat Dickinson-trill orphan-steals: I
did not stop for the Slutpuppy, but she
kindly stopped for me.

Shadows couple: berets salt-fog panic,
rhythm Seine-metronome inevitable. Spent
open-mouthed reaper. Ghosts ossuary-
devil.

Loup's Citroën growled-grille prison-
blackout, tires fog-scream. Gestapo
patrol: "Halt!" MP40s fog-bark. Blind
phosphor. Widow derringer spit. Citroën
pillar-sparks. Loup leak-black, ring ace
glint.

Bills boats Seine-drains Pacific-
eternal. Ghosts feast pyre fog-gardenia.
Horns distant gypsy.

42

Dawn nicotine Sacré-Cœur. Warrens fog-

art-accordion sketches rationed. Widow
calvados: "Loup curse Caveau owns. Silky
forever fog."

Thighs blanket-raw. "Eternity
guillotine?"

Burned bills blue. Pocketed reed-cigar-
thorn-widow. Note: Fog slower.

Pont des Arts depot fog: Widow beret-big
promise. Cord phantom lot pop. Lola
flash.

Widow turn-late-Seine-fang treble.

Crumpled ruthless spectre. Luger shadow

grit.

Cord mist-no-plates. Craddock-page boat
puddle-waves.

Ticket man-gold-toothed, eyes almighty-
Chesterfields coiled grace-smoke: "Rails
fin?"

"Infinity."

Train low-ghost Limited apocalypse.

Solo. Paris shrank liar-nails

Occupation.

Ghosts full ride: every fang grin crack
dice reed cigar thorn widow.

Fog Occupation-slick sliding away.

Rails derail guillotine. Jazz-throat
swallows unblinking.

Rough lips reeds... grit eternal. No
remake gloss. Just bones.

-end of inky noir Book Seven-

BOOK EIGHT: AVAILABLE PHANTOMS IN THE
STORY THAT ATE QUILLS
AND THE SLUTPUPPY'S FINAL FANG

AS NOWHERE TAKES ITS CUT

Nowhere, 1943 – the year the war ran out of maps and the fog started answering to no one...

43

The Liberty ship SS Nowhere coughed me onto a dock that didn't exist on any chart the Navy handed out.

No flags, no MPs, no port office—just oil-slick water, a single sodium lamp humming like a dying saxophone, and a warehouse with a hand-painted sign:

CUSTOMS & OTHER CONFESSIONS – OPEN TIL
DOOM.

Inside, a man in a clerk's visor stamped
passports that had already been burned
at both ends.

He didn't ask my name.

He asked for the ledger.

I told him it was at the bottom of five
oceans.

He smiled like he'd already checked.

"Paper floats, Lieutenant. Price is up
to eighty-five grand.

Payable in any currency—yen, blood, or
last breath."

They put me up in a hotel that used to
be a casino—every room a different
roulette number, beds tilted toward the
house.

Mirror still worked; showed me a face
the war hadn't finished using.

At 3:17 the handle turned—same hour
every city since Frisco.

This time it was her.

Not a ghost.

Flesh, trench-coat two sizes too big,
hair pinned with a used .32 shell.

Slutpuppy.

Throat unslit, eyes still gold-ruthless.

“Miss me longer?” she asked, voice

bourbon spilled on a grave.

I didn’t bother with how.

In this town the dead punch the clock

like everybody else.

She laid a new ledger on the blanket-

oilskin dry, pages crisp, my name on the

first line in Silky’s handwriting:

“Quill – one story, paid in full.”

Underneath, fresh ink:

“Collateral: whatever’s left of his

soul.”

We drank warehouse gin while the clerk
explained the rules.

One buyer.

Midnight.

Dock seven—warehouse burns whether the
deal goes or not.

Ledger walks or we both stay and become
footnotes in somebody else's war.

Slutpuppy poured again.

“Eighty-five split my way this time,
Quill.

You keep the scars, I keep the gasp.”

I looked at her and saw every city we'd
scorched—Frisco bay water slapping

piers, Chicago snow turning red,
Shanghai hutongs choking on opium,
Havana waves licking Malecón concrete,
Kansas dust drinking wheat blood, Paris
bone-catacombs, Lawless prairie wind,
Tiangzifang alleys, Manila typhoon
thread.

All of it folded into the shape of a
woman who never learned how to stay
dead.

I agreed.

In for a penny, in for a pound of flesh—
mine or hers, didn't matter anymore.

Buyer arrived wearing a major's uniform
with no insignia and a mask made from
newspaper headlines—Versailles, Pearl,
Stalingrad, Guadalcanal.

Voice like a radio between stations.

Opened a briefcase: gold bars stamped
with swastikas, eagles, and rising suns—
every loser of the war minted into one
neutral currency.

Slutpuppy lifted the ledger.

Pages fluttered like dying moths.

Buyer sniffed.

“Only eighty percent pure,” he said.

“Missing the last chapter.”

He meant me.

I felt the Luger rise without my hand,
heard the shot before it left the
barrel.

Slutpuppy's derringer answered—pop—pop—
two notes of a song we'd been rehearsing
since 1937.

Buyer folded, briefcase clanging gold on
concrete.

We looked at each other over the body.

Same question every time:

Love or loot?

Neither.

Just the rhythm—off—balance, inevitable.

Warehouse caught as promised—kerosene
lamps kicking like jazz drummers on
benzedrine.

We walked out through flames carrying
opposite halves of the ledger.

Pages curling, names blistering, sins
turning to ash that smelled of gardenias
and formaldehyde.

At the dock's end she stopped, offered
her half.

“Make a paper boat,” she said.

“Set it adrift.

Let the ocean own us for once.”

We did—one boat each, pages overlapping
like broken wings.

Current took them toward opposite
horizons.

She lit two cigarettes, passed me one.

“Think we’ll make it?”

“Nobody makes it,” I said.

“Some just take longer to miss.”

She laughed—dice on felt for the last
time—then stepped backward into the fog.

No footprints.

No body.

Just the echo of an orphan gasp finally
finding the floorboard it died under.

The clerk reappeared out of the smoke,
visor streaked with soot.

Stamped my passport:

DEPARTED – NO RETURN DATE – LEDGER
CLOSED.

He handed me a ticket—no destination, no
fare, punched once at midnight.

Train waited, engine idling like a
saxophone holding its breath.

I climbed aboard.

Doors shut.

Wheels turned.

No ghosts in the windows.

No fog on the glass.

Only my reflection—cracked, but un-
haunted.

Somewhere behind, the warehouse
collapsed into the bay, taking every
name we ever bled for.

Somewhere ahead, the tracks ran out of
map.

Good.

Stories end when the paper gives up, not
when the hero grows wise.

I closed my eyes and listened to the
rails count off the years—nickel, dime,
treble clef, gasp—until the rhythm
blurred into silence.

The lips that pressed rough kisses on
the reed finally let go.

-end of inky noir book Eight-

THE END