

Melody

A Novella by Amadeo L. Gauthier

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A Note From The Author...

I left New York City in a whirlwind of madness. Why I did doesn't matter anymore now, and why I returned to that majestic city in the first place is another story entirely. Still the fragmented memories I've ascribed to paper here are all that now remain of a phrase, a complex combination of notes, a symphony, or a *Melody* most precious in any incarnation...

When all else fails, and it does, memories are all that's left to us. But memories can be created, forgotten, or even lost. In the end, all that matters are the ones we choose to keep.

From those first few months back in New York City, when summer was still in its dawning stages, and winter guarded its wake nightly...

These are the memories I chose to keep.

Dedicated to Jack Frost
Thank you.

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Book 1: Melody

Chapter 1: Johnny and June

The cellar smelled of dew, dust, and the piercing frost crystallized on the broken shards of glass. Shards that held together the empty space where there had once been a window to keep the cold out, and the heat in.

It had been lifetimes and a day ago it seemed, since anybody'd been back around this way. Old dusty-had-been white sheets draped over the bones of some stranger's lost dream, spared by the human scavengers and estranged souls losing in losing. The skeletal infrastructure of the old American dream. Two-thousand dollar sofa's time torn and worn to the brim, water stained decaying teak cabinets, and an old Persian rug that had once been somebody's pride and civilized joy whenever the Jones' came around for tea. But all of this had long since seen its day, left behind in the crazy whirlwind of somebody's enlightened night, now literally rotting at the edge. Timelessly poetic.

Something scurried off into the shadows as we came down from civilization and descended into the concrete cellar. It stretched from the side entrance where we'd come in, all the way down to the other side of the building – about a quarter of a block.

Dale and I had broken into the metal seal bolted to the concrete over the basement entrance the last time the place was raided by the pigs. Apparently the building had been abandoned for a while. Melody and a mutual friend Jesus kept watch.

I wondered what kinda folks might've lived here, if they'd been happy, and now – when passing by – turned to look at the front door and remembered their kids growing up, taking their first steps on the old Persian rug, and down the hallway. Eventually rushing out that front door and into the storm.

I wondered what could've led them to abandon the place. Asbestos? A business deal with fate gone wrong? The boiler was cold, a steady stream of water had left its mark on the chilled dusty metal, left drained till there was nothing left. There's nothing like that smell of old hard water and rust bled over grainy concrete and solid brick.

“Shit man, this here’s copper,” Dale said, you know how much this stuff’s worth? Hell, there must be at least a coupl’a hundred bucks here, shit load a’ yay man!”

“Yeah? ...hell, I’m down...gone get me some sleep first though...bet there’s a goldmine upstairs too...”

My Melody, in the meantime, was laying out our cardboard. I looked at her and for a minute remembered exactly why I’d been so crazy about this girl. I headed on over to her - vicious ol’ memories spinning around my head - and smiled as I bent down to kiss her. I’d been so sure of her once. The world could’ve crumbled down around us and it wouldn’t have mattered me any, hell I might not’ve even noticed... She looked like diamonds, even in her rags and street gold...

We were gonna be Johnny and June, Melody and me.

I dreamt we’d end up like the pair ‘em over at Cinnamon Hill, at the Cash Estate, halfway cross the world, pretending to be back in the mid-west. Singing ‘bout home, old, grey, and madly in love. The last American hero and his country princess.

The first time I’d met her was at Strawberry Fields in Central Park, introduced by friends, and from that very first time on it was like a whirlwind of love and an ecstatic type a’ magic. I’d told her about some songs I’d written...

“Hey, darling...” I’d said, as if we’d known each other for years.

“Why don’t you come sing with me some time?”

“I’d love to...” she said, casting me the sweetest of smiles.

“We could be like Johnny and June Cash...”

Her cheeks had turned a rosy shade of red, radiant with the thought of a shot at this thing called love, even under these glowing heavens of the starless nighttime New York City sky.

I knew she loved the Cash’s almost as much as I did. I’d heard her walkin’ round singing Jackson and the ol’ Folsom Prison Blues, I Still Miss Someone...

“So you know we’d have to get married then right?” I said smiling one of them half smiles dreamy eyed.

For a moment she was quiet. There must’ve been a million thoughts a racin’ through that pretty little head of hers. Thinking back on that evening now it’s encased in my mind as

one of the few moments of fractured time one occasionally comes across. Shards of this existence very near to perfection. When I imagine being at the end of my road, thinking back on my life as it once was, this memory - amongst a precious few - is one I'd choose to carry on with me.

"Yeah...sure" she said "I'd love to..."

"So that's settled then?" I asked, a short grin traced over the unadorned naked mask I wore then.

She looked at her hands fidgeting with a leaf on a dead twig, and gave me the sweetest smile I ever did see, eyes sparkling like in the old movies... *Gone With The Wind* or something.

The night after that one was the first time we made love. It was a love lost amidst a mad world running parallel to our own. But we, we were still coveted then, by the early summer sun a' setting; oh so warm and wise to the songs of love that summer so often brings with it. Full of hopes and dreams, convinced that so long as we were here, alone and together, the world would be fine settling its scores without us. Ah, the grimy grandeur of love...

Back now, in our abandoned cellar, I watched her put her hair up, take her shoes off, and curl up on top of the makeshift queen sized cardboard bed we'd strung together. As I watched her watch me, empty eyed, I couldn't help but think of that first night...and of how we were so sure of the way things were gonna be.

I thought about Johnny and June, I thought about the vows we made that day, I thought of everything that had happened since, and how now, a mere few weeks but lifetimes later, we were left only with our memories scattered out in the dust of this dingy old cellar.

Ah but what golden memories they once were...

I took off my jacket, lay down beside her, and pulled it up over us. She pulled my arm loose and crawled up against me. Not saying a word, though I think she felt exactly as I did, lost and losing, trying desperately to hold on to each other for everything it was worth or wasn't. I wished I could've promised her the world, lied and told her we'd be alright. I wished I knew where I'd be headin' myself, but I no longer had any answers to give.

Jesus in the meantime, ever quiet, had fallen asleep and a few feet from us Dale was trying to break into the door at the end of the staircase that led up to the first floor.

She lay there, beautiful in her penniless riches, her eyelids fluttering in tune with her

breath. You know, the strangest thing about it all was that despite everything, at moments like these; defeated and alone, together in this dusty concrete cell that might've once marked freedom and adventure in a child's daydream, everything still felt right when she curled up against me like she did and put her cold tiny hands under my shirt.

A few fierce minutes past quietly, after which she took my right hand in both of hers, and as if to comfort me, kissed the palm of my hand and held it against her cheek.

"Damn" I thought...

My reality was fragmented then, as was hers - I've come to believe. I couldn't have told you then what love meant, what it should be, or shouldn't, but I knew what I wanted it to be... Despite that cruel fact, however, love was the only thing left for us to cling onto. It was the only thing keeping us alive in this damp, shearing, cold cellar...this was our world now.

At the time we still held onto the possibility, or at least the memory, that everything was or could be alright, at the very least...and maybe secretly, though I shouldn't now, at times I still do.

The night wasn't. The fierce cold tantalized every one of my senses, I imagined my June to be even colder, tiny as she was, so I made every effort to keep her warm enough to get some sleep and make it on through to morning. The others were off in their own game; I glanced up at some point during the night to see a mean twinkle of a fierce needle sparkling across the room.

"I hear that train coming..." I thought to myself.

My June, my Melody, however, she slept and was warm, and I made every intention to keep it that way. She had seen enough turmoil to be let down now, and I wanted so desperately to give her back the life or childhood she'd lost. At the very least I hoped to give her back the ability to dream. Lost in an attempt at righteousness, however, near the end I would end up close to losing my own senses to the peripheral lines of madness and submission to the great divide.

She answered my thoughts with the sweetest of kisses, timeless, and wrapped herself around me.

"Come here, you're freezing babe" she said.

I was glad to be...

Chapter 2: Strawberry Fields Forever

“Living is easy with eyes closed
Misunderstanding all you see
It’s getting hard to be someone, but it all works out
It doesn’t matter much to me”

-John Lennon

As the end of 1950’s America dawned on a new day, Allen Ginsberg rang off the decade with a loud shriek still reverberating the deepest punctures of our soil now. “Howl” he called it, but to me it sounds now – in retrospect – more like that low grumble has disintegrated to reveal nothing like a Phoenix rising, instead it has shown us, over and again, that our envious observer, Ginsberg, pinned down not only the end of a decade, but an end of an era...

“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix...”

Here now at the dawn of the 21st century, Strawberry Fields was San Francisco circa 1960 all over again. Though it wasn’t always what it turned out to be in the end, there aren’t many left standing now that can recall it in its glory days.

I'd first reared into its lonely depths a dreamy eyed child, unaware and eager. We of this generation, the children of the decaying millennium, we have nothing now but the most fervently frayed and desperate of dreams. We are the remnants of the atrophied 20th Century. We've heard tales told. We were promised freedom, our forefathers fought for equality, righteousness, justice, and instead we find ourselves disintegrating into a voidless abyss, where even an ending would not be granted to us in the most desperate of moments. For this is freedom.

I'd come from out of the old world and into the concrete cellar that is New York fervent and willing, a rock and roll pilgrim aged all of who knows what. I'd come to remember a memory not my own. John Lennon, I'd heard, was shot here... 72nd Street and Central Park West. They'd built his memorial on lucid consecrated grounds "all of this here used to be junkie territory, before it became Strawberry Fields..." I'd heard a stranger once say. If it was or it wasn't, I was still alive then, alive with illusions and dreams that would eventually go sour.

John McLean kept watch.

He stood tall at a little over six feet, had long frayed reddish-brown hair, had a tapering nose and carried himself with a slight slump. The brown corduroy jacket forever slung over his shoulder looked a size or two too small, and then there was that "wretched guitar" (as he dubbed it), which he cradled and bore with him wherever he went.

He was a reminder. John Lennon's doppelganger in every sense but the personal one. He could've been his twin brother on looks alone. Perhaps he was a shaman of sorts, a rock and roll warrior priest witch doctor. Sole survivor of the plague that was flower power. Savage remnant of the turbulent 60's. Nearly all I can now recall of my time as a friend of his is a single remark he made in reply to my agelessly youthful query into how he'd learned to play.

"This thing...the guitar..." he said, strangling it by the neck.

"This is the worst thing that ever happened to me."

He tried to tell me then, but blinded by confusion and certainty, blinded by my faith in the shadows of an era long past, I could not understand.

The souls you'll come across in the reading of this memoir, young and old, were souls and survivors, the disdain and broken... shadowy eyed dreamers devoid of sleep. I was still years away, by far and wide, from seeing the gritty cold steel truth. But when I'd first come across the illusionary pearly gates of strawberry fields I had thought to have found my place in this inexplicably distorted incarnation of life.

I'd dawned on the scene eager and proud of it.

John, the doppelganger, showed me the reigns, and as Melody put it, "I wouldn't have made it out here without him."

He *showed us where to look among the garbage and the flowers*, as the Leonard Cohen song goes.

Hunger is a fierce motivator and in this city, truth is, you're hard pressed to go hungry.

Nightly we would go down to *City Pizza* down on 72nd street to await closing time. John had struck a deal with the owner that all the pizza left over by the end of the night was given to him, in exchange for a courteous smile and a polite thank you... and so we fed the homeless band that had become our family nightly.

The pizza was cold and old and crusty and not surprisingly un-sold, but we were alive and thankful for it.

On a night much like any other, there was food aplenty. The tribe was gathered around candles lit on the Imagine mosaic placed there by Yoko commemorating Lennon, and the guitar strings rang loud in commemoration.

"Have you ever tripped" John turned to me in query.

"Once" I lied.

"I got some primo shrooms the other day, we should do it man! I've never tripped with you before..."

Fear took hold tight and quick. I had never gone there much less thought of it.

"I tripped on Molly last time" this much was true, "never shrooms though..."

"What? Really? Man, even more of a reason to do it then!"

He went on to give me the spiel everybody that's taken shrooms always does. It'll do this for ya, it'll do that for ya, it'll open *the doors of perception* and all that jazz... I was pretty skeptical though and – admittedly – kinda scared.

"I dunno man..."

"Ah don't worry about it, I'll be right here..."

“Yeah that’s kinda what worries me, hahaha.”

And as I spoke these words of fruition, in went that magic substance, the Psilocybin Mushroom.



How should I continue from here on in?

How can one produce an adequate sum of words that, alone, would surmise nothing short of a hysteric condemnation to madness?

How many writers have gone on to explain the perversion and distortion of time, the wonders of magic mushrooms, the dangers, the bliss, the fear, the childlike wonder by which one that dosed sees the waking world?

The negro sky becomes a waking dawn. Colors where there were none now arise from nothing. The blending of planes. The bending of space. The infinite pools of swirling patterns. The hills of consecrated ground. The march of the infinite soldiers. The paranoia. The pain.

My first trip was one of awe and wonder, one of reflection and disregard for all but the finite connection that despite my mortal being became infinite.

The great connection.

I soon lost sight of all but my own mind and took to wondering off into the lucid night that dawned over New York City.

Ah the wonders. The panic street cars swirl in instant darting motions leaving behind only a trail of light. The towering looming concrete tree trunks that were our skyscrapers became wisdom in all their infinite structures towering into the heavens as if they were staircases into mount Olympus itself.

People became pawns on the great chessboard of life. Pawns I say, Pawns, the whole lot of you. Empty vessels filled with the universal mind. We were all one and we were all none. We were all.

I looked at my Melody, who had faithfully remained at my side throughout the ordeal, and saw radiance. I saw passion, I saw light. She was lady Godiva, she was Aphrodite, she was Zeus in female form. Commanding my heart and soul into loving submission. She was mine to please and mine to hold.

The tense by which we live became one, the past is now, the present was then, the here and now was long gone by the time I realized I was there.

The veins on my hands began to pulsate and swirl, extending to the very tips of my fingers, vivaciously throbbing in an incandescent shade of red.

The hillside that is Cherry Hill, down the path from Strawberry Fields became a vivacious mountain side, with atop it the magic mind tree, our place of rectitude and requiem.

I was a soldier, I was a king, I was a peasant, I was a god, I was a walking incarnation of a fragmented soul bound into one being.

One step bequeathed the next until I stood at the very brink of that atrocious soliloquy we call madness, and all of a sudden (for one very brief moment) beauty was in her eyes and her eyes alone, then... beauty was everywhere.



One day bled into the next and I survived the ordeal.

I found my way back to Strawberry Fields a few days later and found John sitting atop the hill, the Buddha underneath the tree...

“Hey I never did get a chance to thank you for that...”

“I’m not sure that you should.”

“Well, thanks anyway... it was pretty insane man. I realized a lot about a lot of things.”

“Shhh... your revelations are for you alone”

He was in one of those moods.

“What’s that you’re playing there anyway?” He had his guitar in hand.

*“Trip to heave and ho, up down, to and fro’
you have no word
trip, trip to a dream dragon
hide your wings in a ghost tower
sails crackling at ev’ry plate we break
cracked by scattered needles
little minute gong
coughs and clears his throat
madam you see before you stand
hey ho, never be still
the old original favourite gran
grasshoppers green herbarian band
and the tune they play in us confide...
so trip to heave and ho, up down, to and fro’
you have no word
Please leave us here... ”*

(Octopus by Syd Barrett from “The Madcap Laughs”)

Chapter 3: Try And Catch The Wind

We soon took to living by night and slept a coupl’a hours by day, partly because spending even a second away from consciousness meant not being together, and partly because there wasn’t anywhere to sleep. That is, without getting frostbit, arrested, or robbed.

The city by night is an all together different ballgame then it is my day. By night it lay covered under a sleepy fog, weary lost souls limping in the thick of it. When you're seriously sleep deprived everything's tuned down a notch or two. The howling packs of strangers all revolve in slow motion, which for New York standards translates to a regular pace – since regular here is twice as fast as in the outside world. The city never sleeps they say, and indeed it doesn't, but in those scarce hours just before dawn, it gets a little drowsy and worn down...

We'd wandered around a while, mostly quietly content, or walking down the road singing outlawed tunes... 42nd street at 4 in the morning is just as bright as ever, 90 foot electric neon signs entombing the city streets and fogging up the stars. I figured this might be the street Dylan was talking about when he wrote *Desolation Row*, least at this time a night anyway... almost like a deserted ghost-town from out'a the old John Wayne westerns on a larger scale. Dark and dreary with the exception of a wailing lone candle lit saloon where the drunks and cowboy's come to spend the night.

For some reason, standing on the corner of 42nd and Broadway, roused by the occasional passerby, the concrete lit like a halo, and my Melody's songbird voice floating on the breeze I felt a nostalgic aching for a yesteryear type 'a fix.

I pulled out my harmonica and played a lone accompaniment to my June singin' the ol' *Folsom Prison Blues*, to easy my weary soul... The lights turned green and we headed on down the block.

Occasionally a lone stranger would pass by asking for cigarettes and a dime, I'd spare 'em a drag and left it at that, wishing I had more to give. I'd pay to hear their stories if I could.

I had no idea where I'd come from, I had no idea where I was heading, but I knew damn well where I wanted to be.

I wouldn't have traded those hours for the world, not even dreams could take you where we were then.

The street numbers dragged on by like the hour hand on the watch I didn't have and soon the solitary night gave way to an oasis of life amidst this concrete desert.

Right along 34th street we came to Penn Station, which provided for most of our shelter for the rest of the night.

We went in and sat down in the waiting area for a while, pretend to have missed the train...the train to New Orleans, the train to California, the train to Texas. Our dreams and the station's heat vents kept us warm, distracted from our mutual hunger, and awake.

We were travelers, lovers, strangers, and vampires. Not the Bram Stoker kind, but more with an Anne Rice type of flair. The kind that once you get to know them turn out to be a whole lot more human than most ordinary folk do. Disconnected from the busy rousing joust of life.

During the day we'd sleep, we agreed. In truth because it was easier to get away with, and it was a whole lot warmer outside round noon. It appears that sleep, for those of lesser economical value, isn't much more than a crime though. A luxury that wasn't meant for the free or less fortunate. Tucked away out of sight in an empty entirely desolate park round this time a' night wasn't laid out for us, though we'd tried anyway. Simply wanting to be permitted to dream. Money apparently buys that right though, and without it, well...you might as well give way and throw in the towel, or the gritty stone ax.

It lasted a while, but eventually around four or five o'clock in the morning *the Blue's* came and told us to skedaddle.

Passing over the subway vents on the way out I thought of something my sister'd told me when I was real little, and still had a home to call home.

"When I was little my sister used to tell me that if you pass under a bridge while a train passes over you, you're supposed to make a wish, and it'll come true. So what if the train's under you, like, say, when you're walking over a subway grill? Does that take your wishes away from you?" I thought out loud.

"If it does that explains a lot..." Melody said. "But hey, I guess after a while, being out here, you don't have much use for wishin' anyway, the subway vents are a hell of a lot warmer...dreams or no dreams."

I wondered if she grasped the painfully poetic beauty of what she had just said...trading away wishes for a glimmering shard of worn and rusted old warmth...recycled air, steam and grit, dirt and ash, the excrements of industry and economy. If it wouldn't have been already, my heart would be breaking.

I put my arm around her, kissed her on the cheek, and wished that there was something I could have said to make things better, to give this beautiful yet painfully fragile girl another chance at all of this, this... I wished that I could lie to her, convince her that there was reason enough to dream, but such vows weren't meant to be. Those wishes simply couldn't be spoken aloud because of a million different reasons. Or perhaps it was simply because they too had just been swept away by the C train...

We watched a police car drive by us as we eventually neared the entrance to Strawberry Fields by west 72nd West, a while later – the hours passing by the minute. In a little bit

Central park would be officially open again. So the rich folk up in the Dakota could go jogging in the park. We were still aiming for a couple hours of sleep though, a crime that seemed preciously difficult to commit.

The cops looked at us as they drove by, so we decided not to go through the main entrance. We were nearly on a first name basis with this entire precinct by now.

“You’d think they’d have something better to do...shouldn’t they be worrying about rapist or drug dealers or something?”

“Hey Mel, we should probably just jump the fence here before they drive back around the block.”

We did just that, ran down hill for a while, hoping nobody had seen us. Crossed the road, ran up another hill, pushed back the bushes, and stepped into our sanctuary at the back of Strawberry Fields. Strange thing was, I felt more at home coming into those fields at that moment then I’d ever done before.

As we sat down at the top of the hill, tucked away behind a forest of hope and an ecstatic type of quiet love, the sun just barely began to rise and it twinkled in the early morning dew. I looked into her eyes, my Melody, my June, and she smiled the sweetest of smiles. Her eyes twinkled too, but not because of the sun, or her tears. Despite everything, the only thing that sparkled those beautiful eyes now, after all they’d seen and shouldn’t have, was the simplest, and a most innocent glimmer of love. We kissed as we’d never kissed before, and as the morning dawned the sun rose and basked us in its warmth and reverie. I picked up my guitar and played an old folk song I’d heard somewhere, far away, and a long, long, time ago...

*“In the chilly hours and minutes,
Of uncertainty,
I want to be,
In the warm hold of your loving mind.
To feel you all around me,
And to take your hand,
along the sand,
Ah!!!
But I may as well,
Try and catch the wind.*

*When sundown pales the sky,
I wanna hide a while,
behind your smile,
And everywhere I'd look,
Your eyes I'd find.
For me to love you now,
Would be the sweetest thing,
't would make me sing,
Ah! But I may as well,
Try and catch the wind...”* ¹

Chapter 4: Jesus thought you were a cocaine dealer...

Rail it, Rail it, Rail it... my little heart cried in anguish.

Melody came to as if lifting her head out of a dark blue ocean, her body still wading beneath the cold waters.

"Are you going next?"

That first rush is always the strongest, the first and the last.

*Come, my baby
Dressed in white
Hey, baby
Won't you stay the night*

*Cocaine
All around my brain*

The first longing, the last temptation. Everything in-between is divinity.

"You know this stuff is the only thing that makes me feel anymore, the only thing that makes me feel whole, complete, content. You know?"

"That's not so good Johnny, I mean... I do it too, but you've got so much to be proud of."

I chuckled with a dishonest grin. You reach a point, doing what I do, where that kinda talk is almost humorous if it weren't so damned sad.

*Hey, baby
Won't you please come quick
This old cocaine
Is making me sick*

*Cocaine
All around my brain*

"You know, I've always wondered about that first time we met" Melody said smiling.

"Yeah, that night at the back of the fields..." I tilted my head up over to her, "Some night

huh?”

“Hm Hmm, really was” she spoke with a smile.

“I don’t think I’ve been as happy as I was that night in...well, pretty much my whole life. I was thinking about the very first night though, remember?”

Remember? I thought to myself...*Remember??* As far as I was concerned that was the first night. Rummaging through a string of dusty memories I thought to myself; maybe I’d been chasing the dragon that night or something, and had fancied her to be just a passer by... maybe she was.

“You were talking to Jesus and you had a twenny bag ‘a yay.” She replied as if reading my mind, “you took a bump with that crucifix on your rosary and you turned to me and said ‘you wanna do a line?’ ... remember?”

“Oh that first time” I said smiling with a huge sigh of relief, “that’s right...” thinking back on that night with a vague sense of familiarity.

“Why did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Well, there isn’t really anybody else around here that would do something like that, just give away some yay.”

I shrugged and said, “Just thought you looked like you could use some, and I had some, so I figured that worked out alright...”

“Oh thanks, did I look that bad?”

“No no, not at all, I don’t think it’s humanly possible for you to look bad, no matter what the occasion”

This much was true, she looked as precious as ever, even on the verge of collapse, with her rags and concrete diamonds. She still had her little girly sides to her, even out here in the rubble. Amongst the ruins of collapsed fortresses built over broken dreams. The dusty, grim, dingy, concrete streets were the closest to home she’d known. But she still had her mascara and nail polish on her at all time, armed to the brim.

Occasionally, when walking down the street, whether it’s in New York, Amsterdam, or Paris, every once in a while some girl walks by wearing that exact same vanilla-sugar body spray she always wore too. I guess every so often fate feels the need to remind me

of her, or perhaps in its scanty attempt to lure me back there, whether in truth or fiction, it reminds me of a distant memory... rusted gold now worn only by faint apparitions ascribed to a stranger's fate, and to the tales told in these pages.

"You were right though you know..."

"Yeah?" I said wondering, "About what?"

"That I needed it I mean, before I met you, I wasn't doing so good back then..."

"Neither was I darling" I said with a worn and neglected sigh of comfort. Comfort at the thought that it was all in the past now.

I took her in my arms, and she gave way, curling up to me in an almost infant like manner. She was beautiful, but seemed so very fragile to me.

"Hey I'm gonna take care 'a you alright? Don't you worry about a thing..."

The times they were a' changing.

And with a sweet kiss and a grin on her face she said, "You know, Jesus thought you were a cocaine dealer..."

Ah to be at the edge again... I thought to myself. Right up there by that metal railing between this side and that. Clinging to the wire fencing, your finger nails reaching for the cold, endless blue ocean on the other side. Pleading to be let go... to be released from here.

I had once known this desperate plea for release... I had once known. Oh how savagely I had known. How desperately had I plead this same plea over and over again... but all this was but a memory to me now...

We sat there for a while, a red-tailed hawk passed along the big blue. Off in the distance a Raccoon scurried off into our tree. It was raining and the last of winter bled along the roots and was swept off into barren earth. We took shelter for a while at one of the other ferns that stood watch along Cherry Hill. The rhythmic pitter-patter of that hard New York City rain seeped up alongside us through the sleeping grass...

"Well I guess I look the part, in a 1920's sorta way."

Chapter 5: Diamonds and Rust - Lost in the Village dressed like Bobby and Joan

*"Now I see you standing
With brown leaves falling around
And snow in your hair
Now you're smiling out the window
Of that crummy hotel
Over Washington Square
Our breath comes out white clouds
Mingles and hangs in the air
Speaking strictly for me
We both could have died then and there..."*

-Joan Baez

It was the 21st of April and outside of these streets there was a war a'ragin. The kind fought with guns and faceless rounds of ammunition. The papers in the rack of the Newsstand on the corner of McDougal and Bleaker spoke of democracy, occupation, immigration laws, and something about the FDA and the medical benefits of Marijuana.

I stole me a candy bar as we walked by. Snatched it faster then the eye can see...and that's mighty fast, even for New York standards.

"Hey June, you still got that Ganj?" She smiled at me and looked at the candy bar as I unwrapped it.

I smiled back, "You wanna piece?" and handed her half before she answered.

"Yeah I still got about a nick left..." she said while munching away on our stolen goods.

As we walked down the block some groovy looking girl stepped out of a brightly lit doorway, smiling at us as she walked by, Richie Havens' voice poured out onto the street as the door shut behind her. I caught a glimmer, he was saying something about freedom and whatnot...I wished it was me in there.

There's one thing most folks'll never get without having been here a while. These walls were closed. Whatever happened out there, outside of these streets, stayed out there...

We'd come from far and wide, from the country, from the city, from valley's half-way 'cross the world, we'd all had our share of living one way or another, most of us anyway, but whatever had happened out there, it stayed out there...we just sang about it 'round here. Masked and dressed in the sweetest of lies we had each of us dealt with our own wars, but out here, this place was home, the way I imagine home is supposed to be.

"We could probably hit that Ganj at Washington Square, I know a good spot down there..."

"Yeah alright, no doubt..."

On the way to Washington Square Park we were met with a million sights that, taken out of context, could have spoken for many a generations. The humble stranger, the lonesome hobo, the marble carved beauty strolled straight out of Michelangelo's studio. There were a million stories and a thousand souls...and I suppose I was the eccentric. The court jester and haruspex in one, folk troubadour, mysterious wanderer, poet. A stranger in a town entangled and intertwined in the vines of a ruthless joust with the trials of time. The trials of generations to come, and to wane.

The streets were lined with thrift stores, cafés, liquor joints, candle lit restaurants, shady old second hand bookstores, dust, and a long forgotten romance. We stumbled across the window of an old hat store, the kind you'd expect a raggedy old cowboy from the Midwest to drag on out of, limping, with a new hat already suited and worn to adapt to his aura, topped off with a pair of shiny old cufflinks. A gift from a long lost lover.

Shaking the nostalgic fog from behind my eyes I took my Melody by the hand and we headed in stride towards the door. It chimed on the way in, a warm yellow haze met us (a suitable substitute for candle light) and after a minute or two a sparkling smile - draped in beads and a long flowing skirt - appeared from around back.

"Hi, can help you guy's find anything specific?"

"Hey, umm...not just yet thanks..."

They carried hats for every possible occasion, from Russian-roulette, horse-and-carriage rides, rigged blackjack games, all the way down to snake hunting in the outback. They had it all. Each one wrapped in an abundance of character; enough to make the Queen of England look like a middle aged poker-dealer or transform William Wallace into a down right proper old 17th century Irishmen. It was like picking out a name though, if it didn't fit to your souls measure perfectly it would just wear off after a little while.

Just then my eye caught hold of an off-white fedora with a jet black hat band. I walked over, took it off the shelf, and headed on over to a tall mirror beside an oak cabinet. It was a perfect fit, the mirror said. I imagined myself walking out that doorway and into a

grimy street, saloon doors swinging down the block, a lone stranger making love to his harmonica by the water hole outside...

"You look incredible in that one" Melody said, peeking over my shoulder and into the mirror. I wondered if she saw the same thing I did. A road bound time torn stranger, alone – out on a dusty road in the hot sun, scuffling down the street to a heart wrenching wail of a rusted steel harmonica. I reckon she didn't, though she would've fit right in if she'd only give way. The hat fit like a glove though. The price tag didn't. Ah, but hell, I thought to myself... leaving behind a hat like that is like leaving behind your favorite guitar.



Four hours earlier before going down to meet Melody, I'd just gotten fired. I was working as a professional activist, selling excuses to people in business suits selling lies, pretentious middle aged women, and overly eager college students looking to buy themselves a purpose in life on their two dime budget and maybe get laid.

So I'd cashed in my four-hundred dollar paycheck and bought my teary eyed x-supervisor a drink down the block at some local restaurant bar. We settled on the terrace outside and she'd said she had no idea I was gonna get fired, and that it was all some top cat's doing. I smiled and took a sip of my hot whiskey. She seemed oblivious to my pretentious air of indifference.

I'd gotten up that cold Monday morning greeted by the dew and wet leaves overhead. Melody, at my side, looked up wearily at the clouds traveling over Strawberry Fields that day, I kissed her passionately and said I had to go to work; I'd be back at five thirty I told her and wished I could stay. Normally I would've but alas I had someone to look after just then and I wasn't planning on going back to the ol' stolen sandwich diet. After a couple weeks living off-of Wonder Bread® and American-cheese even the smoggy New York air began to taste like rubber, steeped in hunger with every breath. So I'd trotted off to work, unkempt and dreamy-eyed, out to sell someone's delusions of an answer to all of life's troubles. Greenhouse effects, and taking environmental action and things like that. I'd found out soon enough I make a horrible salesman but at least it wasn't toasters.

I stood on the corner of 72nd and Central Park West waiting for the lights to turn green, across the street from where John Lennon had been shot only 25 somewhat years ago. I was hung-over on love and a bit of everything on the side. I wondered to myself if I would've taken the bullet for him if I'd been around back then. Maybe. Dragging those thoughts around and an aching to be home, home on the wet grass in the early morning breeze, home beside my darling dreamy eyed and overcome with only love and a pulsing jiving sensation that could only be attributed to freedom, and away from the consumer

driven whirlpool – the devil’s playground – where eventually even the freest of souls are iron bound and time torn. I headed over towards to subway stop underneath the Dakota ‘soon as the chipper green fella on the streetlight said it was cool.

The New York City subway system is like an endless burrow, zigzagging and intertwining all across the city, I’d always loved jumping the rail road, regular ones too. Riding the rails late at night when the rest of the world’s got their lights a’ twinkling behind barred windows and brick walls. Looking out that scratched up stained train window late at night, going a hundred miles an hour, that was almost like the comfort of a warm fireplace and a tiny cabin to call home...but even so, the NYC subways had something special. Besides the stench and layers of black tar, decomposed filth, leftover sandwiches, bubble gum that somebody’d chewed intently for a loving 5 minutes – pink eye lashes a’ fluttering – then spit out before heading back up into the cold. A friend of mine that had called this endless labyrinth home for a coupl’a years had claimed to have seen all sorts of the greatest artwork graffitied up on the walls further down in the darkness, all over – underneath the city. There was even a replica of the Mona Lisa down here somewhere he’d said. We’d made plans to go underground for a coupl’a days with a camera to document it all, but alas we hadn’t gotten around to that yet – but as soon as he’d get out of jail we would, we’d agreed.

The tell tale lights rushing out from the depths like a night cat on the prowl brought the C train a’ rushing my way and I got on before it took off again, fierce and relentless like a rodeo bull or a buffalo tearing away from a stray bullet.

Morning filled the empty subway cart, devoid of all of last nights drowning shades of hopeless strife, troubles, and passion fueled loss. I was the only remaining relic. Out here night and day are oceans apart but parted only by the hours and the twinkling of dawn and dusk. If you zone out for a moment or two around the time of the changing of the guard, you’ll be left between both worlds, neither here nor there.

Two stops down an old black woman with a white child stepped in. She wore the lines of the old south. I bet she had some stories to tell, but caught up in servitude to the mighty dollar that didn’t count for much round here unfortunately. She was one of those people that communicates through their charges – “Say hi to the nice young man Mattie...” she ordered in a raggedy worn voice. The kid gave me one of those half smiles and mouthed a soundless “hi” then buried his face in his caretaker’s long skirt. I imagined what I might’ve looked like to the kid. Dark brown corduroy jeans, cowboy boots, eagle buckled belt, rippled tan jacket over an old light-brown army shirt, unshaven and sporting a hairdo that would’ve rivaled Dylan’s legendary wild perm. I nodded a sly grinned hello and the old lady smiled back and settled in across and a coupl’a seats down. Truth is, nothing’s really changed, most folks just like to pretend it has. The human heart is dishonest and relentlessly deceitful above all things.

I often wonder why country folk move out to a big city like New York. Were they all once as uncompromising and idealistic as I? Willing to settle for the concrete above the woodland? The smog over the country sun? For what? Freedom? Money? Dissatisfaction with tradition and the ways of old... fed by a steady diet of commercialization and industry? *Just like the Jones'* and all that? Don't get me wrong, I knew why I was here... New York City to a Yankee is like Dixie to a southerner. "*You can take a boy out of ol' Dixieland lord, but you'll never take ol' Dixie from a boy...*" ²

As the train drew closer to my destination the comfort of morning solitude wore off. Pretty soon I'd be steeped to my neck in the tides of consumer driven egos and capitalist nightmares. Where the end of the world was losing 2 cents on a stock exchange, and that meant waiting a week to buy that new futon from *Ikea*®. Every next stop took me further down hill and away from my Melody, away from my world. I had no place out here and I knew it. But this was the game we played, at least until fate provided the opportunity to move on, though few ever get that chance.

Eventually while lost in a million thoughts about everything and nothing I got to where I was supposed to be. Right on time too. On the way in the receptionist gave me a pleasant smile and a gracious *good morning*. She was a pretty little thing, young but wearing the newest Prada's on the block. A week or two ago she'd asked me to go dancing with her, I'd told her; "I'd love to darlin', but you've got the wrong guy." She disagreed and said she didn't think so, and I'd left it at that.

On the way up I made a hopeless attempt to fix my unruly reflection in the elevator mirror and wondered if it wasn't a two-way with a dandy little camera behind it. I pictured some old guy drabbed out to be a security guard laughing in jumbles watching the monitors down in the basement. Waiting for the elevator doors to open, I thought of Melody, she seemed so very far away...

I thought of the life I'd left behind to play my part in the game. Seceding to someone's burlesque version of morality. When I'd first seen the add in *the Village Voice* I'd thought it'd be cool to be able to answer when somebody asked me "what do you do for a living?" – "Oh I'm a poet folk musician and a part-time political activist..." I'd marveled at the idea of earning a decent bi-weekly pay for a cause which I avidly supported. I found out soon enough though that it takes a lot more than an honest yet obese dose of idealism to run the show. It takes a conflicting money hungry scavengers tongue. Truth is though, I needed cash, without the usual risk of doing time, so I tried my hand at sales, and figured – if I'm doing it anyway – might as well do it for a good cause.

Lessons learned, however, included the realization that nobody's got any damned answers. Every line was scripted, every thought directed, and every free thinking idea saved for the playground. I wasn't out to follow a capitalist organization fighting capitalism, and sure as hell wasn't about to lend my body for the cause. Not this one

anyway. Hell, I was out doing that every godforsaken day out there. I was doing that just by loving this girl, by playing the troubadour, singing my songs, passing the flame along to lone strangers and rebel wanna-be-beatniks. I was doing that just by being myself, and by chasing freedom in its only real incarnation. I didn't need nobody in a black suit and a blue collar behind an oversized calculator and a bank account full of bread telling me what's wrong with our system...

But idealism, unfortunately, doesn't buy you no burritos. *Fuck, it'd be so much easier just robbing the damn place*, I thought as I stepped out of the elevator looking at the million-and-a-half diamonds dangling from the chandelier in the lobby. I'd gotten this idea stuck in my head though that I was gonna shoot a hand at being righteous for a change... *but what the hell does that mean anyway?* - I thought to myself. Is this righteousness? The relentless race and corporate scheming under the pretension that we're bettering the world? For what? I was beginning to doubt if it was worth the burritos let alone the gold.

Hands in my pockets, I swore to myself to keep it all in check for now though, it was six o'clock in the damn morning, and I'd hardly slept 'cause it was so god damn cold out there at night, no hypocrisy intended, a warm bed can be a mighty good thing, at least in-between winter and summer. I had my mind set to get some monthly-contributors signed that day – *commission's a bitch* – Save up a little, hit road again in a month or two when the weather would be on our side again. That was incentive enough. That and putting a smile on my Melody's face.

So I turned the corner to the office and with a skip in my stride and a grin that would've made the president proud I stepped in for the morning briefing and canvassing assignments.

"Alright, group 1 – you'll be at 92nd and Lex today... group 2, down at 22nd and Broadway....group 3, oh-Amadeo, you're here, boss wants you in the office..."



Yeah so I'd gotten fired. I guess I was asking too many question. Whenever I'd brought up a counter point, or disagreed with one of the marketing tactics they'd throw me a scowl and a fierce shrug before turning away pretending they were in charge and knew what they were doing. It was probably for the best, and I bet I wouldn't have been able to put up with the accountants much longer anyway. These are the folks in charge of fighting the system. These are your modern hippies. Protesters and political activists.

Ask too many questions and you're out. Make a dollar less below the quota and you lose. They spend so much time working the system from the inside and planning their next move to make a coupl'a bucks extra that they've got no idea what's out there or even what was worth fighting for. Could people really be so blind? Revolutions are fought by revolutionaries. Revolutions are lead by leaders, by visionaries, by dreamers. Revolutions aren't won by accountants.

Four hours later though, everything was just as it should be. We were lost, we were hungry for life, and we were free. With nothing but the earth beneath our souls and the starless New York City sky above our heads. Armed with love and a coupl'a hundred bucks.

From the first day I'd met her, my Melody, she'd reminded me of Joan Baez. She was olive skinned, her hair was the warmest shade of black and she wore it long and naturally wavy. She was part Irish and part Colombian; Joan Baez was Daleish and Mexican. She didn't think so, but I thought she was beautiful. For a while everything fell into place to the extent of near perfection. There aren't many folks that can put up with dreamers and their eschewed lives, I'd learned that the hard way. But at that single fracture in time, I can honestly say that I was perfectly content, and completely alive. Where we'd come from, where we'd been, the lives we'd led...it didn't matter nothing if we didn't want it to. It's almost like starting over, stepping into a new life like putting on a new coat. Mine's was one past along down the line, from Billy the Kid to Arthur Rimbaud all the way down to Dean Moriarty, Bobby Dylan even tried it on for a while. Melody borrowed it from me when she got cold, and otherwise wore her pretty smile like a naked mask golden and proud. Though each of us down the line would always carry with us a part of that soul, a part our past when we wore Jack Kerouac's old coat, the sad part was that you couldn't take it outside, into the real world, it had no substance there. These were the streets of legend, and round here everyone knew what was what. Eventually we'd all travel on, play our parts in the grand scheme. For now though, it fit me like it was tailor made.

Back in the hat store the beaded lady was about to ring up the newest additions to our trademark wardrobes. I'd of course gone with the black banded white fedora, and Melody settled on a perfect wide rimmed type of flapper hat, old school and screaming femininity. It seemed she'd held up her part exquisitely after all...

She'd protested at first, saying it cost far too much, but I insisted, explaining how you simply couldn't leave behind something that fit so perfectly, how it was like leaving behind a guitar whose strings you'd plucked and loved intently for such a precious time, or a flower you'd dried out in-between a stack of books to keep it from aging. She sparkled and agreed, feigning reluctance, but when we took to the streets in that first instance after leaving the store, oh the sight of her!

The world around us was transformed the very second we stepped out of that doorway. It was just like I'd envisioned it. The world was ours for the taking, the poet reigned here, and the white dove of freedom took flight.

Crossing down Laguardia Plaza on the way to the park, just for a little while, we were lost in the Village, dressed like Bobby and Joan, and it was the 21st of April, at the dawn of the 21st century, but time had no place here, whatever happened out there, it stayed out there.

We settled down in the middle of Washington Square Park, and I sat cross legged with my guitar at hand and my Melody by my side. I played us a tune that had echoed through these streets before, a long long time ago. It was a song about a love gone wrong, a song about *Diamonds and Rust*, a song about dealing the cards out straight.

Melody joined in on the last verse as a crowd began to gather around us, passerby's drawn in by an old familiar sound...

*"Yes I loved you dearly
And if you're offering me diamonds and rust
I've already paid..."* ³

Chapter 6: Coney Island

*"But remember the princess who lived on the hill
Who loved you
even though she knew you was wrong
And right now she just might come shining through
and the glory of love, glory of love
Glory of love, just might come through*

*And all your two-bit friends
have gone and ripped you off
They're talking behind your back saying, man
you are never going to be a human being
And you start thinking again
About all those things that you've done
And who it was and who it was
And all the different things
you made every different scene*

*Ah, but remember that the city
is a funny place
Something like a circus or a sewer
And just remember,
different people have peculiar tastes
And the Glory of love, the glory of love
The glory of love, might see you through
Glory of love, the glory of love
Oh, my Coney Island baby, now*

*...and the Lord appeared
and he has one made of two
Coney Island baby
Man, I swear,
I'd give the whole thing up for you."*

The pier stretched out from the boardwalk like a modern incarnation of the path Moses carved out through the sea. Complete with all of liberty's relentless cruelties. A treacherous path carved through a dark, dark woodland...where the waves were the bellowing trees, and the sun a barking crow. Whatever it was, the horizon, it whispered - nearly hissing - freedom! Freedom! Freedom ho!

At the end of this path there was a little town called Eden...of that I was sure...it had to be.

The ocean had always ignited an overwhelming sense of tranquility inside of me. It spoke of a life now so very far from any road one might take. It spoke, in a calm yet pristinely assuring intonation, of absolution.

"I used to wanna be a pirate, when I was little..." I said. "You know, if I had the money to do anything I'd ever wanted, I'd buy me a boat, and head out there...just run...and run...and run...until I'd forget what I was running from, so I'd have even more of a reason to keep at it..."

"Could I come with you?" asked Melody.

"Of course..."

These were the crossroads where them old blues players went and sold their souls. If I should've recognized the Devil though - I didn't - but I sure looked hard for him.

"Where would we go?"

"Oh I don't know, wherever you'd like... maybe Paris, or Rome...or we could find us an island in the middle of the ocean and sing songs all night at the beach, build us a campfire and all..."

"...and then go to Paris?"

"Of course, if you'd like...we could go wherever we'd want..."

"...and walk down the Champs Elysees..."

"Sure. We could cross down under the Arc de Triomphe...Paris in the spring, flower

peddles sailing on the breeze...settle down and watch the world go by at one of them terraces on the way to the Louvre. There's some great little cafés down there where we could order drinks, in French of course..."

For now the passage underneath the Coney Island pier would have to suffice though, the old pillars of weathered wood clearing the way for us. But maybe we would get there some day, maybe, just maybe.

We walked along the shore for a while, hand in hand. It was pretty quiet round here for this time a' year. Seagulls picking at a dead fish. In the distance the Ferris Wheel moaned. Timeless. The clutter of laughter intermingled with the seagull's call.

I looked down just in time to see the edge of the ocean tide scurry up, engulf my toes, and retreat in slow-motion.

These waves had seen the Great War. They'd seen soldier's saying goodbye to their sweethearts before shipping out. Lone strangers spending the night by their side. The gentle sea breeze and clear skies their only comfort. Lovers in love. They'd come down from the Hudson after the towers fell. They'd seen an empires fall. They'd come to bear witness.

These waves would go a long way, perhaps reach some other shore one day. Maybe they'd follow me down to the shores of Ireland, pounding on the cliffs of Bantry a few years from then, like an ancient Celtic god pounding a bodhran.

Over time they'd see me off to many a shores, many a inland roads, at times accompanied, and often alone, with only memory to serve as friend and mentor.

Once upon a time Woody Guthrie had walked these very shores, these very sands that now swathed my feet once enveloped his, and these waves... These waves had once swept away his ashes. These vast waters were now the domicile to one of America's greatest heroes. Freedom to one of America's freest spirits, and sanctuary now to me. The Coney Island boardwalk seemed eons and many a miles away. With my mind still at sea, I felt her soft skin reach up slowly and touch my hand. Every sensation I shared with her reminded me that we were alive. Beautifully sensual in ever respect. I felt more alive just then, then I'd ever had before. Her smile reminded me that I was dying.

She leaned her head against my shoulder and we stopped a while, looking out towards the horizon. Overhead the sun was setting in all sorta shades of red, white and blue. Colorblind.

"Are you sure you wanna do this?" she whispered, smiling up at me.

“Sure as I’ll ever be...” I said, still wishing I was miles away out at sea somewhere.

Woody was out there though, and I just had to see for myself.

“So where’d you learn all of this anyway?”

“Catholic School” Melody said. “Take your shirt off and come into the water with me...”

She took my hands, smiling at me, luminous with love and serenity. I turned around and gave way as she held me and took away any doubt I had left.

Immersed, my consciousness lost to the ocean – I heard her voice in a whirlwind and a distant daydream away.

“I baptize you, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”



I suppose I was looking for answer where there weren’t or might not’ve been any. I’d put all my faith in a losing hand and had one of two choices; either a – forfeit to defeat and relinquish anything that might eventually have led me to where I was supposed to be, or b – take a shot at wherever it was that fate meant to lead me. I went with the latter.

My perception of faith or fate, whichever, had nothing to do with kneeling down or relinquishing control. It wasn’t about going to war over some crazed idea that righteousness is spread by the gun. Neither was it about going to church every Sunday and keeping the ol’ bank account rolling the rest of the week. To me it meant giving a long lost lover a reason to keep the porch light burning while her darling’s been lost at war for the past three years. It’s about courage, and trying to live right, not because some two-bit old god tells you so, but because of the simple fact that every decision we make is one we choose of our own accord. Free will is what it is, and that entails a lot more than most folks care to admit, or forfeit to...but the very fabric of righteousness, however, is meaningless without its wicked adversary.

What lead me to that beach at the start of that warm and rusted summer was nothing but a rowdy twist in fates design. I’d sat at that beach many a lone evenings, come to watch

the sun retreat. Images had flashed through my mind of the great American frontier, the mystery of what lie at the other end of the ocean, and a longing for a home I'd never known.

It was more than a nostalgic daydream. Far more. I felt connected being here, a soldier, a beatnik soldier; one in a long line of vagabond poets and dreamers that had come before me and drafted freedom to their endless cause.

The baptism meant more to me than a simple symbolic religious confirmation, I'm not even sure now if it ever had anything to do with that at all actually. To me it was about sealing the pact. With whom I couldn't tell you, I simply knew it was meant to be and it felt like the right time. I like to believe it was a pact with a righteous entity, whatever shape or form that might take, though as fate has it we'll most likely never know. That day marked the end of a journey, and the beginning of another. I felt like my whole life had been leading up to this moment and it had to be overcome, overrun, if I'd wanted to get on with living.

Perhaps it was a right-of-passage of sorts, or maybe Woody had something to with it, who knows...

I suppose we've all got a past we'd like buried, or burned, or maybe simply forgotten. We'd all like to put on a new coat and step into another life whenever the previous one doesn't seem to fit anymore. I soon came to realize though, that those of us that forfeit the comforts of restricting oneself to simply growing satisfied with the way life's dealt to us, are left – unaware – with an emptiness that grows exponentially with every passing day. Forfeiting the race unknowingly before it's even started, and what is criminal to me is the fact that the majority of dreams tend to be forgotten with age. Diamond dreams, dreams that – looking back – meant something, once upon a time. The world, the open road, be it the dusty endless highways of the Midwest, the shores of this coast, or one halfway across the world, the woodlands, or the deserts, the valley's or the mountains, they continue to grow more desolate with every passing generation, and yet the eternally patient host, sunrise, is forever only a day away.

The sand was still warm though the sun had almost retreated entirely, leaving in its wake a bursting spectacle; a tyrant of color in slow motion. As I lay there on that rusty Brooklyn shore, though seemingly miles and miles away from the concrete beyond, for the first time in as far back as I can remember I felt like I felt like I was at peace with the world. A step away from the battle lines. The warm summer breeze felt like God's very breath bringing us to life for the very first time.

We'd built a sandcastle and looked for seashells, ran along the shorelines like children at play on a warm summer day. We'd shared dreams that had been only ours to share. We'd shared the gentlest of kisses, and we'd shared the type of comfortable silence that

only lovers can share. I felt her heart beat and her petite exquisite little body intertwine with mine, her soft flowing hair rained against my arm. She held onto me like she meant to protect me from the world's woes, yet sought comfort, tranquility, and shelter of her own at my side and in my arms.

"I love you" she whispered.

"You read my mind darling..."

She'd closed her eyes and I smiled, overcome with bliss. She was beautiful. She was even more beautiful as she slept. Her little black skirt and her little feet resting over my leg. Her little hands at her chest, pressing against mine. I felt her eyelashes flutter against my skin. She lifted her head up, kissed me, and smiled the sweetest smile, she climbed on top of me and we made love like we'd never had before. Her curvature silhouetted against the evening sky, writhing like a revelation of sunlight in a dense woodland. The remnants of sunset bore witness to a perfect union.

As we both began to climax she lay down on top of me and I felt warm graceful teardrops scurrying down her cheek and onto my skin as she gave way to a silent passionate ecstasy. One of love's most exquisite gifts.

"Are you alright babe?" I asked her and kissed the top of her head.

"mmm-hmmm" she nodded, biting her lip.

I tried drying her tears and kissed her eyelids as she turned and looked up at me, smiling teary eyed.

"It's just that...this is all too perfect, I'm just so happy, I haven't felt like this in a really really long time...it's kinda scary"

"Yeah I know what mean, I hadn't counted on any of this, but truth be told, I love you June, I mean that, and I'm gonna take care of you alright?"

"Yeah, and I love you too, but that's just it, it scares me how much I love you. I'm afraid that I'll wake up one day and it'll all be gone, I almost feel like I don't deserve it or something."

"Darlin', I'm not complaining. I wish you could see what I see when I look at you. I wish you could feel what I feel when I see you. I'm not planning on going anywhere anytime soon, and when I do, it surely won't ever be without thinking of you ..."

And ironically, that promise was one I'd end up keeping around for a long time, even

when she wasn't around to witness it.

She smiled and lay back down on top of me.

"Thank you" she sighed...

Her kisses tasted like summer, and her soft, warm skin, felt like love. I held her and wished that dawn would never come, and consequently, that the sun would never again set. I wished that that momentary glimpse of twilight would last forever, and as I felt her tears crawl from her cheek over my shoulder and onto the sand, I held her and prayed that this love would never end.

Chapter 7: Je Ne Regrette Rien

We'd gone to see *La Vie en Rose*, the movie about Edit Piaf. As a child my mother had spent many a night singing her songs to me, beautiful nostalgic songs about love and loss, love and loss... to me it was almost like a glimpse of home. I'd wondered throughout what she thought of it, my Melody.

The movie was showing, ironically enough, in the old Paris Theater on 4 West 58th Street. The very same theater where the stunning Marlene Dietrich had cut that red ribbon on it's opening day in 1948. I wondered, perhaps Miss Piaf herself had visited the place on occasion during her gallivanting escapades into our stone city. I imagined her walking at my side... but oh my Melody... she was stunning in her stead.

Inside the theater it might've still been 1948, everything still had that old world golden hued mirage like quality to it. The lights dimmed down low, a stunning likeness of Edit Piaf on the silver screen.... She had been entwined in my arms throughout the movie, her soft skin warm and snug against mine, the occasional stolen kiss in-between scenes, around the changing of the guard.

That cold night wind pulled us out of that wistful melancholic dark theater as we stepped out of the doorway. But she was lost in thought. She leaned her head against my shoulder and smiled graciously as I kissed her on her forehead. I was ecstatic to find her running alongside my own daydream of better days. *Perhaps even better days ahead...* I thought to myself, but better days then these were inconceivable.

We walked through those dizzy city streets of New York, two love stoned lovers. Edith Piaf stood her ground in our hearts and minds and every breath was poetry in prayer. She sang her song in broken French, as a rose is to the blind. The words were mere sound to her, but the power behind her song was strong and sincere. My June, as I came to call her affectionately, she sang in a diamond voice, crooning through those alleys, between the concrete mountains, these cold city streets, I joined in midway...

Je Ne Regrette Rien (I regret nothing)
Non, rien de rien, (No, Nothing at all)
Non, je ne regrette rien, (No, I regret nothing)
Ni le bien qu'on m'a fait, (Neither the good things)
Ni le mal, tout ça m'est bien égal. (Nor the bad, they are the same to me)

Non, rien de rien, (No, nothing at all)
Non, je ne regrette rien, (No, I regret nothing)

*C'est payé, (It's been paid for)
balayé, oublié, (swept away, forgotten)
Je me fous du passé. (I don't give a damn about the past)*

*Avec mes souvenirs, (My memories)
j'ai allumé le feu, (I have burnt my memories)
Mes chagrins, mes plaisirs, (My sorrows, my pleasures)
je n'ai plus besoin d'eux, (I don't need them anymore)
Balayées les amours, (Swept away the love affairs)
avec leurs trémolos, (and all their tremblings)
Balayées pour toujours, (Swept away forever)
je repars à zéro (I start anew)*

*Non, rien de rien, (No, nothing at all)
Non, je ne regrette rien, (No, I regret nothing at all)
Ni le bien qu'on m'a fait, (Neither the good)
Ni le mal, tout ça m'est bien égal. (nor the bad, they are all the same to me)*

*Non, rien de rien, (No, nothing at all)
Non, je ne regrette rien, (No, I regret nothing at all)
Car ma vie car mes joies, (For my life, for my joys)
Aujourd'hui, (Today)
ça commence avec toi. (they start with you).*

We ran through those early hours in dreams of old Paris, Edith led our way out of here... out of the grime and grandeur that is New York City, into a solemn dream, a nostalgic romance, a prayer in song.

I looked at her and saw a woman. I saw strength, I saw fragility, I saw beauty, I saw pain... she was everything I had hoped for and more.

She skipped a step and asked me that enduring question.

“Will you take me there someday... to Paris?”

Chapter 8: The Agave Worm

"Melody! Fuck... Melody! Look at me...!"

She was miles away, her pretty little body now an empty shell filled to the brim with Absinthe and hints of cocaine. The Absinthe had been my doing, *undoing*.

"Mel, listen, you need to get up...i'm gonna help you alright?"

She was possessed, possessed by a demon I'd tempted over and again. The demon of madness, a sumptuous idyllic rare form of freedom. A freedom I'd embraced and betrayed time and time again, in a humble attempt to live to tell the tale. A shamanic dance with divine madness spiraling out of control. I'd fed her to him unknowingly. My June, my pretty Melody.

She had been on her own soul run, she'd said, chased her own demons. I had believed her. I'd looked and seen her through my own old shattered drinking glass, and had imagined her to be a fragmented reflection of my own consciousness. A kindred spirit, a kindred soul...perhaps I was wrong, perhaps I wasn't, I'm not sure... Perhaps it was just a rancorous attempt at justifying the gruesome odds that divine madness is only attainable through not only a prolonged, but *a permanent chase in the derangement of the senses*. Bullshit. This wasn't worth it.

"Fuckin' leave me here" she managed to mumble, stumbling.

I admit I considered doing just that but tried desperately nevertheless to hold on. Hold on to her sanity, her love, perhaps forgetting mine in the process.

I wasn't sure if we'd get through this night alive, around ever corner lurked the dangers and threats that this might be it. Our final flight. Every next avenue drawing us closer into this bottomless pit of madness and perversion. Helpless, hopeless, and clinging onto anything that might ease our fall.

"I can't anymore" she managed to spit out. "I can't anymore, I can't do this anymore..."

When we'd first met she'd come to me like one of Dionysus' maenad, young and proud to be the stray traveler. Disillusioned and sensually alive for being so... and she was starry-eyed at the sight of me, that - and perhaps the prospect of hope. She had stood aware and ready to embrace love's aberrant madness amidst the wilderness of a deluded vagrant disconnected strain of consciousness. We had chased our most transcendent dreams and had found emptiness. We were faced with the gritty concrete at our feet, a lusciously condensed smoldering fog at hand, and a failure to live up to our vows and promises looming above our heads.

I made way through the denseness of the city, lost in my own delirium, fighting desperately to get my Melody to higher ground. I was afraid. I was afraid she was too far gone. I was afraid I'd lose her...

I cleared the way and carried her on and off as she faded in and out of consciousness. In her waking state she was vicious. Fierce tongued and seemingly loathing my very presence. She was possessed. Possessed by a demon I'd nurtured and harbored in-between my own states of fragmented delusions and reality.

Every attempt I made to bargain with her for a momentary diversion from her viscous ramblings were answered with an even fiercer scowl. I don't deny that I played my own part in the outcome of the game, but I don't defend it either. I wonder what she saw when she looked at me with those fiery eyes. She looked like she loathed every breath I took, rage... misplaced rage? I wonder who it was she saw when she looked at me, her eyes stained with the white-devil and tainted by the green-fairy. The past is a heartless and cruel entity.

This was the outcome of the hand we were dealt, and I'm pretty sure now that nothing done differently might've changed anything; you can tell yourself a million things to justify anything, and though that might be a comfort at present, it doesn't change the outcome of the game in the long run.

It's very easy to feel lost in a city as big as New York. Even if you've spent your whole life on these streets. At one time or another everybody becomes invisible whether they deserve it or not, for better or worse. The endless masses of people make for a great way to lose your identity, but rise above it and the roles are reversed. I'm pretty sure that any given day, at any given time, there somebody out here on the edge just about ready to give in and jump, you can count yourself lucky if there's anybody around that notices.

An old soldier that had stood by my side ages ago lived around here somewhere, and though we'd grown apart, separated by the ages, at times like these he was the first to come to mind.

He was the type of friend you'd want at your side down by the front lines with bullets shearing through the night sky, somewhere in a lost land, forgotten and nameless. He was a brother. At times when the world crumbles around you, those left standing are often limited and few, but the ones that do, leave their scars in a faint memory, as reminders of a long lost battle.

"Jesus Christ, what the hell are you doing here?" The faceless soldier said as I rang the buzzer down on one of the countless human filing cabinets scattered throughout the city.

"Hey man, how've you been? S' been a while huh?"

"Haha, yeah you could say that. I've been alright man, no complaints really; you two look like hell though..."

"Yeah bit of rough night...this here's Melody..."

She was lost in delirium, and said nothing, I was grateful she wasn't on the rampage.

"Listen, I was wondering if you might have a roof available..."

"Oh yeah, of course man, come in – come in, I'll grab us a coupl'a drinks and you can tell me what's been going on..."

"Thanks man, hey help me get her up will ya..."

He was part Sioux and wore its connotations proudly, he would've been a fierce warrior back before the colonies, akin to Sitting Bull, Cochise, or even Crazy Horse.

We'd spent many a night out on the rooftops, before the war, indulging in life and telling tales of where we had been, and dreamt of where we might go. Watching the night sky; waiting for the resident hawk to greet us with its soul chilling call before it set out into the night.

I took my Melody up in the elevators alone as "Crazy Horse" went down to get us a pair of sleeping bags and a coupl'a drinks for him and I. She came to momentarily on the way up, mumbling something about why we were going down so fast. I told her she'd be alright and to just go to sleep, I'd take care of her... Just as I'd promised, what now seemed ages ago, out on a sandy sun-drenched beach. It was a different world, *oh how I wish I was back there now*, I thought to myself.

As Melody slept beside the chimney vent, "Crazy Horse" and I sat by the ledge under the stars and shared half a bottle of Mezcal. I told him about the life I'd led and the shore's I'd seen. I told him about Melody and how we met. I confided in him that I'd lost my

way. He shared my grief and we took it upon ourselves to deal us out a new a hand.

He spoke of visions he'd seen, and journey's he intended to make. We'd travel to Mexico when summer would wane, we agreed. We dreamt of the desert sun, Peyote and Ayuhuasca visions. Coyote howls in the distance upon sunset.

Eventually the echoes of a distant automobile reminded us of our whereabouts instead, as the first signs of dawn began to bleed through the night sky.

Before retreating back down, he offered me the Agave Worm at the bottom of the bottle; I heeded the gesture and took the last swig.



In the quiet hours of the early American morning, on that rooftop looking out over the cold blue city, Melody slept, and for the first time in as far back as I can remember I cried, silently. I cried for her, for the unreachable finish line. I cried for a world I'd been looking for a half a century too late. I cried for fate's viscous brutality. I cried because I could no longer fool myself into thinking that I wasn't completely and utterly lost. I cried because it dawned on me that I had no place here anymore, and though as all things in time, I knew change to be the one certain principal in life, nevertheless, I cried for what I knew was soon to be an unfulfilled promise, and nothing more then a memory lost to the winds of time.

As I shook off my dreary anguish, a city bird came fluttering down and sat perched at the ledge of the rooftop, chirping and bustling around cheerfully. I sat up and watched it a while, scrubbing his beak along the brick, picking at the concrete grains before hearing my boot heels grind along the cement as I got up and strolled over to the edge. In the distance the city was awaking. The light crawled down to the distant most reaches of the horizon now. The city glowed. Remnants of the night before slowly drained into the concrete earth, and the day brought with it old games and new prospects.

Melody gazed up at me as I turned around. I wondered how long she'd been awake. She said nothing, her eyes; eyes that had ones looked into that mirror and had seen the same reflection that I had, now looked up and were entirely empty to me. Spent. Her eyes said what neither of us could... The winds were changing and it was time to move on.

After a silent – endless – few minutes, I went down to say farewell to “Crazy Horse,” I thanked him and assured him we'd meet again soon, he wished me the best of luck and I

set out into the iron bound city, with my Melody at my side, silent.

There were a million things I'd wanted to say, and I tried to conjure up the words that spoke of forgiveness, forgiveness at both ends, but I couldn't. I'd wanted to tell her how I wished we were back at Coney Island, lost and hopelessly in love. I wanted to tell her everything could be alright again.

She beat me to it.

"I'm sorry" she said teary eyed, as she looked into mine, and for a minute I thought I saw a spark there that I'd thought lost amidst the wilderness of the night before, but I was deceived. I wanted to tell her we could fix things, that it didn't matter... but this was another one of those times fragmented to eternity. An immeasurable minute passed, I took her in my arms and whispered softly in her ear, giving way...

"It's alright..."

I let go and she turned around, her pretty little face tear drenched, she walked away down 9th avenue towards Central Park, disappearing into a crowd of a millions souls lost in losing. Losing faith, losing love, losing time...

I stood there, hands in my coat pockets; this old coat that I'd borrowed had taken me places. Down back alleys and crooked brick covered creeks.

I watched her for a while.

Her long dark hair flowed past her shoulder as she stepped in tune to the rhythm of the murmuring city. I wondered what she'd be thinking right about now, though it wasn't so hard to imagine. I wished I could ask her, but this was the story we shared, and this was its ending. I imagined her looking back at me, but she didn't. I imagined her tears falling in rhythm too. A whisper and a murmuring sigh.

It was getting dark out here, and the lights that had once kept these cold streets lit, and had pointed the way, weren't bright enough anymore.

Chapter 9: Jailbird

“Hey your girl got locked up” Jesus said as I walked up Cherry Hill, he was fixing himself up a sweet spliff.

I sat down on the damp grass. Home.

“She did, did she?”

“Hmm hm” he murmured, licking the edge of his rolling paper.

“What for?”

“Some crazy shit went down after you left man... her and Dale went back to that basement you guys broke into a coupl’a weeks ago... she seemed pretty fucked up...”

Off in the distance the red-tailed hawk soared across the morning sky. I traced his trail across the endless horizon, at the end of it, an old man sat by the lake. He tore off pieces

of stale bread and threw them into the lifeless pond. He looked as if he carried around an old raggedy bundle of tales nobody cared to hear anymore.

I sighed, and for a minute I let the silent remnants of the sleepy early morning breeze fill my lungs up to the brim...and exhaled.

“Damn, it’s been what, three days since we had that fight? Lo and behold she gets herself locked up not even a week later...”

Words, just words, I thought to myself. Truth was I didn’t really blame her for what happened that night. I couldn’t really bring myself to hate her, but for some reason I couldn’t explain, my demeanor told a different story than what I really felt about the whole deal. I pictured her sitting there in the jailhouse, the rattling steal and scruffy clanging of thoughts and voices native only to those worn down by the helpless grasps of the law’s concrete fist. *Justice, injustice. The lines get blurred after a while, but righteous it sure ain’t, that much I’ve got figured by now...* I thought to myself. I was worried about her.

“Were they carrying anything?”

“Hmm hm, some heavy shit too from what I hear” ...

“So I guess it’ll be at least a coupl’a weeks then huh?”

“My guess’ as good as yours bro, sure don’t hope so for her though, she never done no time before man.” He said, sparking up.

After a long drag and a bellowing cloud of smoke, a visionary’s lamenting thoughts drifting on the morning breeze, we sat silently for a while and shared a serene and solemn smoke... like a calumet, or peace pipe, shared by two tribesman.

The winds were changing. We were drenched in summer by now and I was painfully aware that its climax would soon come and go. Eventually the autumn winds would drift into town again, slowly but surely the leaves would turn a deep shade of red, gold, and green, and eventually a grim shade of brown. Shriveled like ash and laid to rest along the green grass. For now though, we let the summer tide engulf us for as long as it was still worth it, and forgot about the changing of the guard.

“You happen to know where they took ‘em?”

“Yeah, Ripper said he called up and they told him they were in Precinct 20...”

“Fuck man...”



I soon found myself at the steps to some police station, walking through the metal detectors.

Beep, Beep, Beep...

Shit I thought to myself. I'd forgotten about the knife I carried.

"Please step over here sir"

And on they went padding me down.

"Do you have anything on you we should know about?" asked the big black female officer as she padded down my sides.

"Umm, well I'm an art student you see, and I have this knife I use for carving things. Sculptures and such..."

Good cover, I thought to myself... though I was pretty sure they wouldn't buy it.

"May I see it please..."

"Sure thing, here you are." Handing her the knife handle first.

"This is well over 6 inches sir, you are aware that anything larger than that is considered a weapon?"

"No I wasn't aware of that ma'am"

I just came from art class you see and had forgotten about it.

"You know I could lock you up for this don't you?"

Shit, shit, shit... this can't be happening

I didn't have any pretty words or excuses left to fling at her.

“Well I apologize for the inconvenience, I didn’t know.”

After a long pause that must’ve seemed like hours she spoke...

“Well I’ll let it go this time... but I’m confiscating this knife.”

“Could I get it back when I leave?” I had to try, that knife had gotten me out of plenty a tight spots.

“You’re kidding me right? You just nearly got arrested for carrying an illegal weapon and you’re asking me if you can get it back? Get out’a here before I change my mind! What are you doing here anyway?”

“Oh just looking for a friend of mine...”

“Well, the information desk is over there, now hurry up, I don’t wanna see you around here no more.”



I picked up the telephone...

“You really did it this time huh babe?” I asked Melody from behind the murky glass.

“Just shut up alright... I’m fuckin’ sorry enough as is.”

“So what happened?”

“Nothing, they just saw us break into the house again and before you knew it they slapped these cuffs on... they hurt my wrists too.”

“Shit sweetheart, I’m sorry, I wish I could’ve taken’ you away from all this...”

“To Paris right?” she asked with a sad smile.

“Yeah... something like that.”

“Where were you anyway? We waited for you.”

“I just... I couldn’t, not after that night, I just needed a break... I guess I stepped out at

the right time huh?”

“Yeah, you lucky bastard.”

“Hey I’m sorry alright... you don’t even know... so how long are they holding you?”

“I don’t know, they haven’t told me anything.”

“One day darling... one day we’ll get the fuck out of this godforsaken city. We’ll run away together, to Paris, or Amsterdam, maybe London... where-ever you like...and...”

“I wanna go to Paris”

“Then we’ll go to Paris...” She looked down, tears began to fall, I placed my hand on the glass.

“Hey, you’ll get out of this...”

“I’m breaking up with you.” She said as my heart sank into my stomach with a dull thud.

“Babe... I know times are tough now but...”

“Shhh. I love you, alright, you just remember that and don’t worry your pretty lil’ head about me.”

“Darling... I...”

“Don’t say it now, please, I can’t take this right now... I’ve gotta go...” and she hung up the phone at her end, got up, and didn’t look back as two guards escorted her away.

Chapter 10: Coney Island Revisited - Che Guevara, Jesus, and Jack the Ripper

These very shores had been home to such magic once. But now, generations and worlds later, there were the projects, Nathan’s hot dogs, fair rides and boardwalk attractions (“shoot the freak!”), the grim, grime, gritty ghosts of dreams past, and the countless lives lost to living. That and the ocean.

It was all that and more, and perhaps a little less, but to us, for those precious two days, it was so very much more...

Summer was fading on our twofaced city. That Saturday would be hitting close to the last 90° of the season they'd said on the news. But we were a hundred miles away from the concrete, the television confessionals, and the boardwalk abode. Another thousands miles away from home, and a million yet from being...but the one thing we were that weekend was free.

By the time we got there it was near dusk, Friday afternoon, somewhere between spring and summer. Most of us were broke, but we'd managed to gather together enough for our customary rounds of Guinness. Rounds and rounds, and rounds. Our aspirations exceeded our wallets, but none the matter. Where there's ambition, well, there's ambition...

"How's about over here?"

"s' good as anywhere else around here I guess"

"Hey Amadeo...A-ma-de-o!..... Che? (-'maybe that'll work') Hey Che! Señor Guevara!"

"Hmm? Sorry, 'd you say somethin'?" my mind was wandering round the twists and turns of days past.

"You think this spot's alright?"

"Oh yeah, sure...I used to come here all the time actually..."

"Hey you alright man? Looked like you was about a million miles away just now..."

"About a million and two I'd say..."

"Ah, don't worry about it. This place just brings back some viscous ol' memories ...hey d'you know what's left of Woody Guthrie is way out there in the water somewhere?"

"For Real?"

"Yeah, Arlo threw his ashes way out there in the water after he was cremated. Woody used to chill here all the time...he lived up in one a' them buildings back there too..."

"No shit?"

“Yeah for real man...pretty crazy huh?”

“Cool...” said Jesus, forever ambitiously in pursuit of his goal to form the most perfectly blunt one worded response.

“Hey I wanna build a campfire later” I said, “after the sun sets...”

“Oh Hell Yeah! That’s a great idea...”

“We could dig us a big ditch and light up some driftwood or cardboard or something, so nobody’ll see it from the boardwalk.”

We were way down, down hill, by the water.

“Anybody got matches?”

“Lighter”

“Cool, hey bust out the Guinness and that...”

It took a while for the sun to set, but it did...and it pulled out all the aces a’ blazing.

“Last time I saw a sunset like that I was down here with Melody” I said as we watched the evening dawn. Our eyes cast in dreams, grand dreams of love and glory, dreams cast out all over these rust-stained shores of Brooklyn.

“Yeah, she told me that was one of the best days of her life...” Jesus said, eyes cast down.

“...She did, did she? I’m glad she remembers it that way.”

I looked over at the pier. It wasn’t more then half a mile away from us, less probably. In memory though, it was a different world.

Slowly, minutes turned to hours, and darkness now sparkled over the water like sunlight. We’d done dug out a two foot ditch all around by now. As I scooped out the last of it I looked out over the water and noticed the tide coming in closer with every wave that washed up on shore.

Looking out over the ocean I dreamt of distant shores. I imagined us to be lone hobo’s traveling along the shores of the mighty stone river. Roasting the days catch by the rogue fire, meats and fish. Telling tales of the old country and sharing dreams, dreams of mother’s homemade Sheppard’s pie, an afternoon’s journey down the glen, playing down

by the forest edge. Memory's served now simply as no more than a blaze of a distant dream.

The tide whooshed in and retreated with a solemn *shhhhhhiiiiiooooooooooooo*...breaking the grand chorus with a bashing crash over alongside the endless pier, before returning to verse in slow motion.

"Hey, how's about that fire now?"

"Yeah, sure, it's getting fuckin' cold out here man..."

Jesus was off somewhere, trying to score some dinner.

Ripper and I went off looking for dry driftwood. I led the way over to the pier, remembering some debris washed up under there. The pier was lit like a lighthouse in the distance, and as we pulled out of our seclusion towards it, our time seemed to meld with that the outside world's. All around us the harsh and concrete plasticity of these times collided with our fragile and fragmented illusions ascribed now only to memory, that and perhaps fate. Our aspirations for freedom, our mutual dream, vision, or hope that there must be more to this adaptation of life...this other world felt cold, lonely, futureless, and without sin. But reaching the pier I felt myself sinking back into a state of isolated reverie known so well to us, it was to an all together different tune that my mind trotted now. To the *melody* of change, hope, fortune, misguided-fortune, faith, love...what have you... My memory was left flooded.

"Hey what's going on man?"

"Oh...nothin'..." I said in a coarse whisper.

"It's her ain't it?"

Grinning I sighed, "Is it that obvious?"

"I don't know, seems like it...you've gotta put your guard up with a girl like that though man, don't even worry about, you could do a hell of a lot better."

"That's just it though, I saw another side to her...right here actually, under this pier... she's just broken man, just like the rest of us, and I thought I could fix things for her, or I wanted to at least...It just ain't right man...none of this is... Everything out here just seems like some twisted version of a crazy Fellini movie. *La Dolce Vita* meets *1984* or something.

"Some people just have more of a hand in choosing their own misfortune... by the sound

of it you were pretty crazy about her though...”

“Yeah, I was, or at least I thought I was...and I sure as hell didn’t see that coming. It’s just that, man, last I remember things were a whole lot different, and now...nothing’s the way it ever was, or was supposed to be. It all seemed like the right move at the time though...but I didn’t count on any of this...if I’d known...”

“You wouldn’t have done anything different and you know it.”

I thought about what he said for a while, and smiling faintly I replied, “Yeah I guess you’re right...”

Thinking aloud, I sighed and whispered, half to myself, “to live without regret...”

Silence filled the air for what seemed like a minute or so.

“You said it man...” said Ripper.

I looked out over the ocean. The path I had once seen carved through the tide wasn’t there anymore now. Maybe it was just overgrown, or maybe it was drowned underneath the water. Stretching like a long lost road in ruins underneath the waves, leading to an Eden drowned.

“Hey, let’s get this fire burning.”

As we walked back to our campsite I saw Jesus in the distance, along the horizon. He looked as if he were a million miles even further away then I’d been. Far out of reach.

I had felt the way he looked just then for a very long time. As if fate had nothing to do with anything. I wanted to tell him that things might change for him too if he stuck around long enough, but I couldn’t. There weren’t any answers I had to give him, or anybody for that matter, there were no promises I could make. These were trials each of us had to endure on our own. I only hoped we’d meet again one day, miles from here, and speak a million words with a single gesture, as if to say...“you made it, old friend...”

I realized just then that I had known which way to go all along. I’d always known just where to find what I’d been looking for. It had been right there all along, right along side this shore I’d been waiting on for so long, but just out of reach, counting the hours until the right moment would come along to let me through its clasped gates...to that open road. There’s wasn’t anyone standing in my way anymore now, I’d seen to that.

Meanwhile we’d gathered up enough dry driftwood for a pretty decent campfire. Wood that had once been carved into a wooden raft, or housed a squirrel in a pine tree.

“There’s something drifting up this way from the water” Jesus said as we walked up to where we’d settled a few hours ago. “Something big...”

“God damn” Said Ripper... “maybe it’s a body or something”

I watched it a while, the very last remnants of sunset sparkling across its jagged edge.

“It’s headin’ right at us too by the looks of it...” I said, “Let’s go get it...”

We walked over barefoot to the water’s edge. The warm sand just out of reach turning into a sandy muck with each step we took closer to the shoreline.

“There’s two of ‘em man!” Ripper said excitedly.

“That one on the left looks too small to be a body though”

“Unless it’s a kid or something...”

“Look’s like it’s wrapped in plastic” Jesus said.

We watched it a while, with each swooshing motion that Davy Jones’ locker made towards our rusty golden shores. A million thoughts of dread and adventure tore through our faint Guinness stained minds.

Soon it became apparent though that what we were faced with wasn’t some elaborate attempt by the Italian mob to get rid of the head of the Irish rebels, as Ripper was contemplating.

As it became clearer what we were faced with here, I couldn’t help but nearly fall to shambles laughing. Getting into the water to fetch our prize I smiled and mouthed silently, “thanks Woody...”

A surreal type of excited laughter and chatter filled our midst as we carried our treasure up to our unlit fire-pit. Woody, it seemed, had come down for a while and brought us a brand new cooler full of soda cans and a coupl’a beers, the larger plastic wrapped body turned out to be an untarnished blue tent, large enough for the three of us...

Checking out our treasure chest’s loot I picked out a cold foreign sounding beer, cracked it open, and took the first swig...

“Tastes freaking great!”

Tossing one to each of ‘em, I made a toast,

“To Woody!”

“To Woody!”

“To Woody...”

As I lit the fire, surrounded by friends, I realized that all that mattered now was the journey – not so much the destination anymore. And even though some of us would make it, others would not. Then eventually, in the end, those that did and didn’t would both be left only with shattered memories...memories that would build and break empires, and memories that would last lifetimes...

We spent the night awake, building bridges in friendship and turning tides in change. Searching for that last glimmer of freedom to chase, in a world that had damn near forgotten the meaning of the word.

Just before the dawn of daylight, we set up the tent. While Ripper and Jesus quickly fell asleep inside, I stayed up and watched the distant stars fade to blue and the morning sun rise. Lying there bareback on that lonesome beach, out on those rust stained shores of Brooklyn, I fell asleep under and beside the endless big blue.

In the early hours of that summer afternoon, as the rest of the world began to wake on their own time, we eventually found our way back to civilization. Chasing that dim light through crowds of millions lost in losing their own game. As I looked back to the shore that had taken us so far from here, even if just for a while, I realized that the magic I had thought lost was still very much alive here... And as the D train pulled out of the station, and Coney Island disappeared out of our view, I thought I heard Woody’s voice just for a split second, and with his lean southern drawl he sang, “*this train is bound for glory... this train...*” ³

Chapter 11: Kerouac and Burroughs - the Barnes & Noble® Bandit

We had a mere hour till sunset and the scorching summer heat was still breathing down our necks. I'd stumbled upon an old friend along the tracks; they called him Burroughs – the Barnes & Noble Bandit...

He and I'd met up unscheduled and took to gallivanting into the night, making preparations for a foray into what would soon prove to be a most memorable evening, book worthy to say the least. A dance with delusion, a jab and a hollering smile at the grim reaper, and a simple twist of faith. Beat.

I hadn't really gotten to know ol' Burroughs (as he affectionately came to be called because of his flair for poetics and his irrefutable love for needles) until some time after me and melody split up. I had, however, been aware of him in a gadfly type'a way for some time prior to that eventful night.

I'd seen the perilous grit of these concrete times divulge to him the great secret that all of life could very possibly be just a pin-prick away. Around every corner lurked the possibility of that next high, and every steel stringed music box and free flowing pen would in turn prove to be the perfect outlet for a literary nausea and an asphyxiation of the senses. Some time back, however, he used to be a dreamy eyed kid lost in a dump yard of teenage angst and fantasy, just like the rest of us.

Riverside park 'round sunset takes to salvaging each fragment of daylight round every corner while harboring the darkness of night just within reach, under the metal railing, the tunnel leading to the water, and finally up above ground – behind the towering trees rooted in the city street's concrete grit. Shadows cast in the breeze, reflected on the dirt beneath our feet, rodents scurrying in the underbrush alongside the lifeless dead leaves from a season past.

Burroughs sat cross legged, my old guitar in hand, playing a haphazard version of "I'm Waiting For My Man" by the Velvet Underground. *"I'm waiting for my man, twenty-six*

dollars in my hand... ” 4

Years ago I would've glanced back at myself and thought different, now – however – it didn't really matter. I was crazed and craving the next line, the next bump, the next dance with *el Diablo Blanco*, just as much as the next vagabond soldier in line. The simple rush and irresistible reminder that forgetting was only twenty something bucks and a phone call away. These days though, twenty soon turned to forty and doubled.

Feel sick and dirty, more dead than alive...⁵

Waiting is just one of those things; your senses start to mingle with the rush of that summer breeze. Minutes drag, they stretch out like a meandering snake anticipating it's murderous bite, that sweet sweet poison rushing through your arm, into your chest, past your heart... only another eternal minute away... anytime now, anytime.

“Hey you wanna take a walk with me?”

“Sure” I said... “where you meetin' him?”

“Oh just down under the tunnel, by the street light to the left there.”

Pointing off downhill I glanced in the general direction that he'd indicated, a shadowy soul marched down towards the designated spot.

“That him there?”

“Yeah, I think so...”

“Alright, let's go then.”

I wrapped up my guitar and thought about going home. Home, that fragile yet painfully distinct word. I had no clue where exactly that was anymore.

Here he comes, he's all dressed in black, PR shoes and a big straw hat, He's never early, he's always late, First thing you learn is that you always gotta wait... 6

I handed Burroughs the cash, my half of it anyway.

“Yeah, probably best if I just deal with him... these cats are always high strung 'bout strangers.”

“I hear ya”

High strung about strangers, I suppose that's all I'd amounted to, despite the changing winds. Weary and torn.

Look, I can call it here, pretend to have some kind of answer to your prayers and have some stunning words of wisdom to feed the anti-drug machine, but I'm not going to. Nobody chooses to born stark naked and raging at the world, crying hysterical. Nobody wants to feel that pain, to see and feel that lifeless carcass of humanity and recognize that you yourself are the foot of the beast, looking up into a mindless void that leads nowhere.

There's many things that can be said about Burroughs, that he was a keniving junkie wanna be, some lost soul or a dreamy eyed kid looking for a rock & roll fantasy... He many a things and probably all of those, but he was also a kindred soul, despite our inherent differences. He turned out to be the type'a guy that would follow you into hell at the mere suggestion of the thought, and in the end he was the one that ended up falling into the frame, as if stumbling into some obscure Van Gogh painting where everything is illuminated and just slightly disproportionate, yet from afar – while squinting your eyes – everything would seem picture perfect.

I leaned against an old oak tree heard a rustling in the underbrush and watched a rat or a sleepy squirrel scurry off into the distance, I couldn't tell which. I watched him, ol' Burroughs . I remembered him when he was all of 16, still living at home with his folks out on Staten Island, eating his meals out of his parents fridge every night, not a worry in the world... and now here he was, not but 3 years later and in his place stood the rogue junkie poet. Five foot ten, skinny as a twig and mean to the bone, chip on his shoulder bigger then his ego of a head, that white poison rushing through his veins thicker then blood... notebook cast to the side, his poetry forgotten in the endless chase.

But tonight we were alibis, tonight our spirits shared a vision in the feast before the hunt. We would indulge like a native shaman and his tribe would curare, or a peyote vision, only ours was like everything else in New York City; artificial, rusted, and gritty beyond proportion.

He'd marched back and spoke;

"Hey hold this a minute", handing me the nights loot while he pulled out a new needle from under his jacket.

"You wanna go first?" he said while he ritualistically prepared our fierce poison.

"Sure..."

I imagined my soul was dislocated in those spare minutes in-between living, I watched myself and took to wading in the pain that was every sigh as the needle pierced my arm.

This wasn't my game, but pain is a strong incentive.

The pain of awaking and to a living world, living in the sense that death is around every corner. Growing into a world where the comforts of a child's dream are dead and dying eternally. Forever is the pain that our dreams are rotting carcasses of some fabled lie upon a dingy beach. Our dreams portray these shores as something romantic and precious. But in those moments all I could spare for you, you... my precious reader looking for a daydream... all I could spare for you were tears.

I was convinced I would never get there. There, beyond the hills, across the valleys. Alive and loved. Alive and fortunate in being so. We were vagabond soldiers fighting a dirty war. In war, death is the loss of hope.

Minutes turned to dragging hours. Our senses divulged a dark secret. This is happiness now. This is tranquility. Hope is no longer akin to it's definition. Hope is getting another fix.

Time passed as it always does...

"Is there any more?"

"A little bit."



"Hey man, you wouldn't happen to know where I could acquire a shiny six shot revolver would you?"

"What the fuck for?" asked Burroughs

"I dunno..." I shrugged... "I feel like we should be playing Russian Roulette right about now."

He laughed one of his unrestrained growls...

"We should... Crazy thing is you probably would too wouldn't you?"

I shrugged. Truth be told I probably would have.

“If I ever come across one I’ll be sure to get word to you and we’ll sit down for a round alright?” He said, mocking me with a grin.

Like I said, he was the kinda soul that would follow you into hell at the mere suggestion of the thought.

It’s hard to describe what it feels like coming down to somebody that hasn’t been there. The aching, longing for more... fuck dying, fuck living, fuck everything.

*Now I’m crashing through the clouds I used to walk on,
Reaching out for unfamiliar hands, Falling into the eyes of strangers,
I wanna cry but I can’t, I’m looking for a soft place to land...⁶*

I hummed half to myself, stroking my guitar strings desperately.

“What is that?” asked Burroughs.

“Something I heard a while ago...”

So this was the stuff of legends. It seemed so much more romantic when Kerouac and Burroughs wrote about it. Being out here, living the road, breathing the smog, where had this promised land gone? Where were the thriving streets of promise and legend? Where were the poets and troubadours? The romantic vagabond now lay strung out on dope singing a forgotten song.

Every time I swore would be the last. Every time I sought desperately for a scrap of hope, like a street cat licking a bone. It’s hard to tell the difference sometimes.

I had worn Dean Moriarty’s coat for so long now, disguised in a futile attempt to renounce this endlessly degenerative incarnation in this adaptation of life. Though I took the long way around getting on the right trail, every time I hoped I’d get there, and every night might’ve been the last. I dreamt of taking off that old coat in the fleeting summer sun, and one day, perhaps one day... I would be able to quote that I too once *began that part of my life you could call my life on the road...*

Chapter 12: A Lingering Note Farewell

I was gonna take to the road. I'd travel great distances, see a many things, and all the while chase but a singular vision, a one way day dream. Times of turmoil, and times of euphoria would carve out many a fragmented visions and memories that might eventually find their place alongside these...

But before taking off I came back to that very same spot. Back to those same rippling waves and grains of sand. That very spot where I'd been baptized in holy sacrament, or sold my soul at the crossroads, depending on who you answer to.

I came back to that very shore where Arlo Guthrie had stood to cast off his father's ashes into the lone wide oceans. Forever free to travel that dark meandering path through the woodlands, across Moses' path through the ocean, and finally to freedom. Or perhaps it was only in roaming that he'd found his paradigm Eden, never settling for home or comfort, forever on the run and forever leading the way. Telling us where we came from, and in turn, perhaps where we might be headed.

I came to leave her, my Melody, with an unwavering goodbye. One that I hoped would last her all the way through morning, or at least until the dusk would wake to warm her.

And the waves carried away and took with them my final plea and lasting vows; for freedom, idealism, innocence, youth, faith, sin, and a relentless yearning for righteousness...

But first and foremost I came to bid her farewell, my June, my Melody...whoever she was, or might've been.

Chapter 13: Mood Indigo

Ol' Frankie Blue Eyes was croonin' off in the quiet lone distance, his voice dancing in the stale air lingering from yesterday. Jazz bass moaning into a bleeding violin, from the first track to the last the vinyl grooves poured out that old world kinda nostalgic dreamin' only lost lovers or loving hopefuls know about. Could be that I hadn't noticed before but the drowsy late summer rain had started dripping in through the window down into the old chipped paint brushed of onto the floor occasionally. He was singin' a song about forgetting now. Forgetting a long lost lover, singing proud and fragile bound 'bout moving on. Springtime in New York City...

Cigarette smoke spills out across the ragged off-white sheets and down over the mattress... intertwining with spilled sound, them long droning notes Frankie put down all them years ago.

The old LP cover lays sprawled out on the floor, a dusty old long forgotten record you come across sometimes at them used bookstores down Amsterdam Ave. or Broadway. ... forgotten like the name scribbled across the front of it in worn down pencil lead – “Cassey”.

*I've forgotten you just like I should,
Of course I have,
Except to hear your name,
Or someone's laugh that is the same,
But I've forgotten you just like I should.*

*What a guy, what a fool am I,
To think my breaking heart could kid the moon.
What's in store? Should I phone once more?
No, it's best that I stick to my tune.*

*I get along without you very well,
Of course I do,
Except perhaps in Spring,
But I should never think of Spring,
For that would surely break my heart in two.*

The record sounds grainy like my black boots. Gotta get that sole fixed I'm a thinkin' in-between wondering about this town. I tell myself I'm onto something, smoke bellowing in the stale air, blue like Frankie's eyes. Smokey kinda haze that tells you you been smoking too long, dreamin'.

I wondered about “Cassey”. Was she pretty like the broad Sinatra was with on the album cover? Who had she been? I picture her sitting around now, lifetimes past, in a concrete garden behind some home for the elderly lined with little green – brown ferns that never get to growing more than a foot in the summer. Aged very much unlike good wine and wondering what the fuck is goin' on. An end to an end and a beginning somewhere down the line or lost and forgotten to that deafening thing we call the past.

Everything seems to go slower when I got Frank Sinatra singin' out'a my worn old suitcase record player. Out'a time and out'a place, little late, and slowly losing count due to my ties to what ol' Blue Eyes himself seemed to be after by the sound of it now.

What kinda color is indigo anyway? *Mood Indigo*, I hear what he's singin' about but ain't too sure. Somebody once told it was purple I think, or was that turquoise? I don't know, colorblind. I see the needle on the record player pull up just fine though,

weariness dragging me down and Frankie's voice still booming smoothly round my head I'm considering getting up to put that record back on.

My bottle of Dry Sherry is running dry. *Light in color and delicate in flavor with nuances of roasted nuts* – The label reads – leaving it out in the heat all night's left it warm and them nuances of roasted nuts seem stronger now. I'm a wishin' I had me some absinthe and wonder what Blue Eyes over there poured. The rain and a rusty old metal rotating table top fan provides for some much needed distraction... being alone with my own thoughts is a dangerous thing. It's too quiet in here.

Songs for Swingin' Lovers! I thought I'd found out soon enough about the ways of the world, in comes a stumbling that Frankie Blue Eyes and sets the records straight. I drop the needle down into the vinyl groove and after a rustling beneath the tracks Sinatra fills these paint crackin' dirty white walls once more.

There's a wailing street below here, New York City. The barred window lets through a little bit of that smoggy aura that stretches well past the city limits. Across the Hudson there Jersey lies looking on. Street lights mask the stars down here, every time I think of it I'm reminded of that night the lights went out on Broadway. I don't recall much of that night seeing as how a coupl'a side street Irish pubs were pretty much the only ones that stayed open after dark in gloomy candle light, and well... leave it to the Irish. But the one thing I do remember is all them stars, you wouldn't think it now lookin' up past the skyscrapers and concrete hills though. Must've been a while ago last time the only light round here were the stars above and candles in the window of some shady bar cozy with old world serenades.

A stale wind mingles with a strange breeze. Everything about August spells change. On the sunny side of Broadway, Fall's come a' knocking and summer's left swaying in the ocean tide down by Coney Island. Around this time a year is usually when I'd be packing bags.

If I didn't know any better I wouldn't know what time'a year it was, seemed like fall out there now at the end of summer. Should be better in a day or two I suppose, thought it won't be long now before the cold winds come a rolling into town again mean and fiery like in an old John Wayne Western. A lean silhouette looks up from aside the streetlight on the corner and leans in closer, waving up at somebody a coupl'a windows 'cross from mine. Cars chase past fast and leave a trail of dust behind 'em for the ones left behind. A rat scurries by out'a the garbage can and the silhouette looks back startled.

The record skips a beat and chimes me out of my reverie, charming me into that *High Fidelity* sound the record sleeve boasts about. The girl on the cover reminds me of her in some sweet way. Is it that unusual now?

What is it about leaving that always has everybody so enthralled? Everybody's always heading off thinking they're getting somewhere, riled up and ready to go, even faster in this city. Can't wait to get through them train doors down in the subways, catch a cab cause we're gonna be late, hit the elevator button five times in the hope it'll go faster, lock the door on your way out will ya? I've seen enough for a while, leave me with my records and fountain pen.

Chapter 14: Postscript

As middle-class American youth we're raised to believe in justice, equality, and the comfort of an ever benevolent presence. Uncle Sam and the top cats of industry still passing on the flame, leading the way, guarding the grail; the grail to a *restrained free idealism*, a *restricted free voice*, the grail to a generation lost in losing and completely unaware of it.

We're comforted by the thought that we reside in a land devoid of a class system, with freedom and justice for all, and we hide behind our white picket fences. Never knowing the cruel reach of helplessness and despair that stem from our very roots and become the only life known to those of us left with a yearning for truth and meaning.

What was once a bare few of us trotting along down Jack Kerouac's fabled road, past the back alleyways, covertly kept out of the line of sight of our generically commercialized symbol that is America, disguised under *freedom*'s cloak, has now silently grown into a generation of lost children. Cast aside for their dreams, visions, and cast aside into an inescapable fracture in our mighty flag.

While the war rages on, both "out there somewhere" halfway across the world in Nowhere Ville, Desert - Middle East, as well as out in our streets, in our cities, our suburbs, the countryside, the common everyday American man, women and child pride themselves on their ever growing hunger to fulfill the default rendering of the American Dream. While in the meantime, freedom has become a luxurious commodity in what we were promised was the land of the free.

Everyone speaks out against injustice, against cruelty, against peace, against war, and subsequently return to work, school, lunch, playing their part in the game as mindless, spoon-fed drones. Media and television dictate our every free thought, and meanwhile liberty is being shackled, inch by inch... and thrown down along with us, into the inescapable abyss amidst what was once a great nation.

The war isn't just "out there somewhere" anymore, it isn't just on your high-definition television screens. It isn't limited to a solemn memory of that faithful day in September of 2001, a memory that's grown far too faint in all too short a time. It isn't solely in the notion that we're "at war" one day, at yellow alert the next, and consequently at green, and when the presidential elections come back around back to red. Politics has very little to do with the root cause of the various fronts of the war our generation is faced with. The battle lines have spilled into our streets, bleeding underneath the wheels of the latest Chrysler model waiting at a red light on the corner of 42nd and Broadway, beneath a 6 story high billboard sporting a picture of the ideal man and women by Calvin Klein, engines revving.

I started out this journey looking for America. I had gone looking for the ideals and freedom that were promised me as a child, casting aside anything that was not purely original thought, and looking upon this world that I'd imagined for so long to be clustering and comfortable in that light, I found instead a world in which freedom is a dying breed.

We are no longer children to be held by the hand and promised the world in trade for

obedience. We are no longer the infantile slaves caught up in chasing a dream we know no longer exists. We are no longer chained down by the need to fill our communal spiritual void with the latest from the Macy's or Ikea catalogue filled with products made in some foreign country, while we pick and choose what exactly defines the "real me".

I found America that summer. I found it in the faces of strangers and friends. In the reflection in the mirror. I found it in love and loss, in fate and struggle, I found America in an innocence lost... I found it standing alongside the capitalist machine. Scrounging for humility at the foot of the industrial mountain. Our proud red white and blue corroded, tarnished, and stained in the grim and grime remnants of the American Dream. Lost, broken, and in love, out on the rust stained shores of Brooklyn.

She left me standing
With my heart in my hands
She said hunny hunny babe
I've tried to understand,

But the poison in that bottle,
Will be the end of us,

And my baby now in prayer she kneels,

While i'm...
Walk walk walk walking,
With the Devil at my heels,

But at least I ain't walking alone...

Now love is a funny thing,
Makes a grown man cry,
She used to love me,
But oh don't ask me why,

She said, the poison in that bottle,
Will be the end of us,

And my baby now in prayer she kneels,

While i'm...
Walk walk walk walking,
With the Devil at my heels,

But at least I ain't walking alone...