

Amadeo L. Gauthier's

Une Chanson d'Amour

A Novella



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Dedicated to Marie-Pierre Perrin-Ravier

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Une Chanson d'Amour has been a journey, a journey that has taken me through the very depths of my consciousness and through deep self-reflection, has helped me to confront the worst of my demons. Demons from my past, shades of nightmares long gone but still reflected in the present, and unlike the fictional character whose mask I wore throughout the creation of this story, to a future now filled with a light shining brighter than I have ever known.

This is a tale of survival, it is a tale of self-prosecution, and learning to live with the notion that the redemption received is undeserved and that survival itself can seem like a form of punishment.

As I write this, nearing only my 29th year on this earth, I write to you an aged old man. A man weathered by the inferno of a lifetime past and the burden of memories which have weighed down upon my shoulders as if in retribution for the times I too have failed to stand against tyranny, oppression, and the often self-inflicted destruction of the soul.

As a child I was prey to the worst of humanity. I stood witness as those closest to me, cast too by a loss of faith and who in turn had their fair share of grief, became themselves the hands of destruction. After a childhood of violence in several forms I was cast into a spiraling abyss of self-destruction and soon found myself homeless in the streets of New York City strung out on nearly every drug imaginable to most who read this.

But dream I did, and they were good dreams. Dreams of a better tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, dreams of righteousness, dreams of love and retribution, retribution not through vengeance but through survival and living a good life. Fueled only by these dreams I clawed my way through the muck and the mud of those streets, bleeding through my nails and fingertips, and set out on a journey of a lifetime that would take me through two continents, several heartbreaks, and a little over two years, armed with the ammunition of music and the imagination and set out to create a work of a lifetime... *Une Chanson d'Amour*.

I leave you now, my dear reader, with a tale as ancient as time. A tale about the struggle between good and evil and the overwhelming power of love, and though we all are bound to fall at one time or another, this is a tale which mirrors my own survival through the dark woodland of life and the shining beacon that is love.

Amadeo L. Gauthier

Paris, France

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1927

Chapter 1: Baby, Get Your Gun!

Hiiiiiiiiighhhhh rolllerrrr! Somebody screams from behind me. A gentleman at the poker table hid two aces in his sleeve. Some floozy stood around eyeing her next big prize. There ain't nothing like the smell of dirty cash and bootleg liquor in the dead of a summer night at some lonely speakeasy in the middle of Paris. Club 30's, the place was called. We were just coming out of the roaring twenties and the dirty thirties were right around the corner.

But there wasn't a doll in the place that could outshine my Maggie... my dearest Maggie. Flapper chic in every sense of the word. She wore high heels, a beautiful sheer dress, and a silver cross. Her hair slightly cropped short, as was the fashion in those days, was painted a beautiful shade of crimson.

Roulette was my game. The feel of the gambling chips, the spinning of the wheel, the stack of cash. Definitely my game. I was damned good at it too. I knocked back a metallic tasting shot of what was supposed to be whiskey but good liquor was hard to come by back then with prohibition and all.

I notice some fella dressed in a white suit leaning up against his cane taking a long gander at my Maggie but brushed it off, hell, there wasn't a guy in the place that hadn't noticed her curves and that porcelain body of hers. I was a lucky guy.

"So what's it gonna be Monsieur Gauthier?" the dealer asked in a thick French accent. My comrades in the game whispered to themselves in Corsican as the leader of that pack let lose a slight holler of a laugh. He had a mean air about him and you could just tell he was up to no good.

Maggie leaned up behind me, the soft curves of her chest pressing up against my back. I reached over my shoulder to stroke her cheek; she kissed me on the back of my head.

"Three fifties on number nine"

These Corsicans were definitely up to no good and had a lean mean gangster typ'a feel about them. I eyed the leader of the pack carefully as he couldn't keep his eyes off of my woman. My suspicions were confirmed when he ran out of chips and shoved a brick of cocaine under the table and gave the waiter a mean grin. The waiter obliged and handed him the biggest stack of Roulette chips I ever did see and he placed his bet.

And on the wheel spun. Rattling like a wild snake on the prowl. A hundred and fifty bucks was big money in those days but I was rolling in it that night. Another win, tonight was my night for

sure. The crowd around us let loose in a holler at my delight and I let loose a shout of victory to the waiter... "Another round for the lot a you scoundrels!"

Slam! A cold rush of biting liquor hit me on the side of the face before I even knew what hit me the minute the waiter set down the drinks. It was the Corsican. I got up and wiped my face off with my handkerchief and raised my head up a little, waiting for his next move.

"Maybe I should just take my money's worth Monsieur Gauthier here stole from me out of you eh?" he said as he walked over to Maggie, who had stepped to the side.

Money? What money... this was Roulette... to each his own.

He gave my Maggie the dirtiest stare and I said as calmly as I could, yet dead serious...

"I'd be real careful 'bout choosin' the next words I hear comin' out'a your mug big six."

I stepped aside fast as he came swinging at me and he fell to the floor. I gave him a good hard kick to his ugly mug and that's when it happened.

His two Corsican lackeys were on me so quick I didn't have a minute to breath. *POW* came the first blow while the other grabbed me by the arms as he snuck up behind me. I quickly broke free and ran over to the bar, the guy in the white suit disappeared around the corner as if nothing was amiss and the bartender took cover as I grabbed an empty bottle off of the bar and busted against the metal railing.

"Bring it in fellas, I dare ya..." I spoke with mock confidence. I wasn't no tough guy but I could handle myself in a fight... but all three of 'em... I wasn't too sure how I'd get out'a this fix.

Big six had gotten to his feet in the meantime and his two lackeys cleared the way like God parting the sea for Moses. He stood slightly hunched over and stumbled over his own feet while wiping the blood off of the side of his face.

"You..." he said pointing at me with his bloody finger, the collar of his shirt turning a deep shade of red. "I've had enough of you..." and he mumbled something half to himself in Corsican. He jolted his head to the side towards one of his lackeys and pulled out a nine inch buck knife, tossing it over to the lackey. I took my chances and lunged forward, trying to get the first move, but was caught by the other guy before I could even make it.

Before I knew it they me pinned down on the floor with a blade being dragged slowly across my face as the two men holding me down cackled with a mean laugh. Big six stood over me with a sly grin across his bleeding face. I'd gotten *him* real good at least.

Nobody noticed as Maggie lifted up the skirt of her dress, revealing her porcelain legs and a sexy little garter belt... nobody noticed the little hand gun she had tucked in-between there either. Nobody noticed her pulling it out and the only warning sign was the cocking of the gun and with a loud deafening bang the bullet went straight through Big Six's head, comin' out of the other side like a knife through butter.

It took a minute before he fell to the floor, knees first, and then toppled over.

Maggie stood there, silently, not even flinching an eyelash. She had a cold expressionless stare on her face that meant business. With the gun still in her hand, raised up high, I got loose and grabbed her by the waist as fast as I could.

All I could hear was her heavy breathing...

"C'mon baby!"

As we got out'a there as fast as we could I looked back as the two lackeys, covered in their boss' blood, got to their feet and came running at us.

We left Big Six there... in a pool of his own blood. The bullet had lunged right into the bar and was stuck to the wood, having gone right through the front of his face.

Chapter 2: Heaven Made

We fled through the streets of Paris like a pair of wild eagles soaring over this city of stone gargoyles and ornate architecture after a fierce instantaneous kill. The image of Big Six's faceless body permanently etched in our minds. But fleeing for our lives regret had no place in consciousness just then.

The Seine, the backstreets just behind Champs-Élysées, the little side streets with their ornate French café's and bistros flashed by in a vague barrage of imagery as if from a distant nightmare.

The conviction with which this pearl of a woman had stood in my defense was somewhat overwhelming. What grander a proclamation of love is there than killing a man in cold blood, with no hesitation? Yes, perhaps these were extenuating circumstances, but still... Her heart pounded for me alone, her trigger finger clasped the cold trigger of that gun for me and me alone, that final shot to Big Six's head too was for me and me alone.

But who was I to deserve such a grand assertion of her devotion. Did I deserve such commitment? I was far from a man heaven made, I had lived my life with no regard for the consequences of my delusions of grandeur. Up until now I had thought myself the grand hero that would withstand anything. Heartbreaks and victories alike. After the murder I felt painfully vulnerable, she had killed for me.

I held onto Maggie's hand as tight as I could, I held on so tight that I could feel the blood rushing to her fingertips. She ran through these ancient streets like a woman possessed, her calm demeanor now nowhere to be seen. It was a feeling of pure dread.

The faceless hordes of those we passed by looked on with guileless empty faces. Big Six's lackeys not far behind us we rushed through the cobblestone streets of ancient Paris... Paris... the city of love, the city of splendor, this antique city draped in a soft cloud of dew from a distant summer storm. Candles and faintly burning streetlights lit our path, but they burned not for us, no.

As we weaved in and out of Paris' many little curving side streets, carved into the city's concrete hide like an ancient carving of an emperor snake, in a bewildering mess of scrambled time we eventually seemed to have lost Big Six's men.

In a rush of fear and adrenaline we somehow made it back to our hotel. It seemed by all counts that we were home free. But unbeknown to us, our race against retribution and the law had just begun.

Maggie tried to fix herself in the reflection of the murky glass door before entering, I did the same.

The concierge there to greet us looked on as if nothing was amiss, completely unaware of our malevolent predicament.

“Bonsoir monsieur...” Maggie said in the calmest of tones, perhaps even slightly flirtatiously.

I nodded my head in silent acknowledgement.

As we went up the ornate carpeted bronze staircase my legs felt as if they were shackled as if I were chained to a chain-gang of regret and a deep seethed feeling of remorse. Maggie, meanwhile, marched on in fierce determination, yet strangely composed in her indifferently pristine feminine way.

As we entered our room the old wooden door creaked and thumbed closed with a dull thud. The room was elaborately adorned with the art-deco style of the time. Maggie sat down in my favorite chair and I walked over to the window, peaking out of the blinds.

“I think we’ve lost ‘em...” I said with a heavy aching sigh.

Maggie looked up from her hands and stared straight ahead with a blank expression. I walked over to her and stood close to her as I took her in my arms, her little face pressed against my chest.

“I’ll make this right” I promised her... “I swear to you I’ll make this right”.

Chapter 3: Une Chanson d'Amour

I offered my hand to my Maggie and as she took it she at long last let go of her protective façade. Her tears fell silently like pearls falling from heaven and I couldn't help but think of how beautiful she looked in her fragility.

"I will make this right my love..." I repeatedly promised her again as she held my hand up to her cheek and kissed it.

"I trust you with my life", she spoke in-between her silent sobbing. "I did it for you my love... they were... there were going to kill you... I did it for you..."

"Shhh..." I told her lovingly... "I will make this right".

I endearingly pulled her up by her hands and edged her towards the bed and laid her down. She looked like Aphrodite incarnate. Her little dress hitched up to her thighs, her pearly tears trickling down her cheek and onto the pillow. She looked up at me.

"Je t'aime mon loup" she spoke softly.

I sat next to her and bent down to kiss her... "moi aussi mon cher amour".

I laid there in her arms and stroked her hair with my right hand, "I really do my sweet sweet love".

I ran my hand along the curves of her little body and as I kissed her again I reached between her porcelain legs.

Words would never have been enough to express what I felt for this angel of a woman. As I continued to caress what was mine and mine alone she let out a soft moan and I realized she had stopped crying, though her cheek still bore a glimmering trail of tears.

After some time she sat up and pulled me in with both hands and clung to the fabric of my shirt and as she kissed me in a heat of passion she proceeded to undress me. I sat silently smiling and this perfection of womanhood kissed my bare chest. I slowly hitched up her dress further as she lay back down and I slipped off her little panties.

We continued making love as if tomorrow and the time before this one were all just a part of someone else's twisted imagination, releasing our fear and turmoil in a fit of passion.

I held her by the neck as I thrust up inside of her over and over again, gently caressing the side of her face. She gave in, completely, leaving her own life in my hands, submitting to me in an extreme yet beautiful display of femininity.

After some time I zipped down her dress to reveal the beauty that were her porcelain breasts, perfect in every way imaginable, and kissed them gently as I continued to make love to her.

She began to moan heavier with each thrust and I could feel her thighs begin to clench tight, knowing she was close to release I thrust even deeper and harder inside of her as she began to tremble with anticipation. Time became immeasurable as she gave in and exploded with satisfaction and afterwards blissfully sighed... "thank you my love... thank you so much... let me take care of you..."

She beckoned me to lie down and got on her knees in-between my legs and proceeded to take the crown of my manhood in her mouth, stroking it with her other hand in loving submission. I caressed her and beckoned her to go deeper, and she did so – slightly gagging, until I too burst loose in blissful anticipation and eventually let go with an excess of heavenly ecstasy.

Afterwards she laid her head down on my thigh and whispered one more time... "I love you so mon loup", closing her eyes to dream of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, when a new day would greet us in the warm Parisian summer.

And awake we did the next morning our spirits somewhat renewed. It's incredible the hope a warm summer sun and a gentle warm breeze can bring.

I laid in bed silently for a few minutes and didn't realize Maggie was awake yet. She had her pristine naked back turned to me. I stumbled out of bed and grabbed a cigarette off the nightstand and lit it with my old zippo lighter, striking it against my pants. Maggie remained motionless until a few seconds passed and looked up at me with a smile, silently.

"Mornin' sunshine...So last night wasn't so bad huh?" I said in a course whisper, jokingly.

Maggie let loose a slight grin, reflecting on the absurdity of my statement considering what we'd been through.

"T'exagères..." she replied.

She got up and put on her silk bathrobe, taking the phone off the hook gently.

"Bonjour, je voudrais un café noir pour la chambre 33, s'il vous plaît?" she ordered room service. "Do you want something Chéri?"

Picking up my guitar I replied, "Coffee, 2 sugars with milk and a shot of Jack on the rocks s'il vous plaît..."

"Ajoutez un café au lait, 2 sucres et un whiskey avec glace. Ce sera tout, merci" she translated.

"You shouldn't be smoking." She said, hanging up the phone and walked over to me, grabbing the cigarette out of my mouth. She stood by the window and time seemed to stand still. She looked perfect in her fragile beauty... I strummed my guitar absentmindedly as she held my cigarette in-between her fingers by her mouth, but never touched it to her lips.

"How 'bout you come on back to The States with me baby?" I said in as comforting a tone I could.

She nodded in reply, resigning her fate to "cette belle Amérique"... America the beautiful.

Chapter 4: The United States Of Jazz

One month later...

We made our way to America by boat and arrived at Ellis Island, New York, greeted by Lady Liberty herself, France's gift to these United States. For Maggie it was a reminder of home and as we stepped onto these new shores we were engulfed in a breath of all the promises America had to offer. Liberty... Liberty... Liberty ho!

What had transpired in Paris already seemed so distant and simultaneously so close to the surface of our consciousness. But the streets of "le nouveau monde" provided all the distraction we needed. Jazz ruled in those days and everywhere we looked there were shining beacons of hope in this new and wild form of expression.

As we made our way to Grand Central Station we were greeted by the sounds of the great gods and goddesses of Jazz and, passing Broadway, the grandeur of the stage.

Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five were brand spanking new and the smooth crooning of ol' Satchmo trumpet was enough to leave your feet doing a crazy tapping and your girl's lean body swaying to the rhythm of that Jazz.

Scat singing was all the craze in those days and on he would go, a million miles a minute, *skit dibly doom bop rittlytat skit dooblydoowop shhboom...* and in would come that trumpet droning away like the call of a siren in the dead of night.

But it wasn't all fun and games. Prohibition had just taken effect, the stock market crash was just around the corner, and the flooding of the Mississippi was only a few years past. There was simultaneously a distinct sense hopelessness and a riveting sense of urgency. It was a time of great social and political importance and a time of great changes in our great nation. But at the time, we were living in the now and nothing could rip us out of that crazy thing we called Jazz.

As we got to Grand Central Station we were alive in ecstasy at the world of possibilities that stretched out before us. The new world... with all its splendor and promise lay right at our fingertips.

We boarded a train headed to Mississippi and had a coupl'a changed along the way, but off we were, bound for new adventures and the tragedy that had struck us in Paris began to feel further and further away.

A few days later we made our way to the Dockery Plantation which was located between Ruleville and Cleveland, Mississippi. It was a magical place in all its old fashioned authenticity. Time moved slower in these parts and it was a great contrast to the bustling of the big city.

"How you doin'... Lowell?" I read the name off the name plate pinned to his vest.

"Pleased to meet you, how may I help you?" he replied.

"Well, me and the misses were lookin' to rent a room."

"Surely, there's a nice one jus'opened up. It's yours for five dollars a night."

"We'll take a look first if it isn't a bother?"

"Not at all sir, follow me please..."

Lowell stood in the corridor and let us take a peak in the room. It wasn't what we were used to but charming in its own right. There was a large wooden bed, a dresser, and the walls were cracking with paint. A small metal rotating table top fan stood in the corner on top of a night stand.

"So this is it, it's yours if you want it."

Glancing at Maggie for approval I replied, "Yeah we'll take it".

As we settled in Maggie got ready for bed, exhausted from the long journey. There she sat, by her dresser in one of her ornate silk nightgowns. She looked so good I wanted to undress her right then and there.

With a hairclip still in her mouth as she fixed herself for bed she spoke softly, "thank you for this wonderful day mon cheri".

"Thank you my darling girl... for being you".

Not long after she fell asleep and I lay next to her, dreaming of tomorrow and every day after that. We were back home where I belonged and we were free.

Chapter 5: Walking With The Devil

There's nothing like a Mississippi summer. Crickets chirping in a warm breeze, the scent of country bread pouring out of somebody's window like honey, and the lonesome dark nights in an open field.

The Dockery Plantation stood its ground against the test of time. 'Round here it could've been a century or so earlier save for a certain lack of sophistication. Back in the day this place would'a been swarming with men in fancy suits and top hats, ladies in the most exquisite of dresses, corsets and heaving bosoms and all that jazz. These days it was swarming with regret. The warm summer breeze always defeated by the breath of winter clinging to its heels. No more were the endless summers.

But in the depth of these old summer nights nothing felt quite the same. In the caress of the arms of summer's folly I always felt a certain kinda magic tugging at my soul. Something beckoning for salvation, surrender, a warm breath of air on sleepless night... something beckoning for the blues.

My Maggie lay fast asleep... beautiful in her slumber. Her curvaceous body draped only by her silk nightgown and the soft cotton sheets. It almost felt like a crime leaving a woman like her alone on a pristine night like this. But there was an aching shard of penitence calling me out. The winds were changing and I could feel it in my bones. Something was amiss and I needed a minute to breathe and swathe my soul in the forgiving breeze of the Mississippi summer.

Just before midnight I took my old music box, my guitar, out on the plantation and contributed my offering to the sounds of the deafening silence of the night. Out poured those droning notes begging for forgiveness. How the hell did we get into this fix I thought to myself as the blues poured out'a my fingers like a deep cut made by a cold steel blade. The music felt like an offering of my own blood drenching the guitar strings in a murky red hue. This music didn't speak to my soul...it was my soul.

Time stopped. Just for me. A relief of a barrage of anguish, this salvation which entranced every part of my consciousness was just what this tired old soul of mine needed, or so I thought at the time.

What would you give for the thrill? The rush of life seething through every vein of your body...

A slow steady pair of footsteps coming my way ripped me out of my reverie. My fingers ripped off of the strings and damned near tore them off of my soul. A matchstick flared up in the shadows and that's when I first saw him.

"Well pardon the interruption sir but that there was some mighty fine pickin'" he said while taking a drag from his cigarette with a low grumble and a lean southern drawl. The devil was dressed in white and for all intents and purposes could'a been an aging St. Michael come to bring down the sword of vengeance against the forces of darkness.

"That's very kind of you to say... thank you... didn't realize anybody was still out here" I replied with a startle.

"Well there usually ain't. Some say it ain't too safe out here round them Crossroads back yonder, especially at this time a night... but well... I caught me an earful of them blues you was playin' there and I just had to come out and see who it was that was beckoning that mojo like you were. That there was some fine fingerwork son, it sure was..."

"So you're a bluesman yourself then are ya?"

"Well, yes, you could say that... but i'm a man of many trades."

He stepped out of the shadow and offered me his hand. The golden adornment of his walking stick twinkled in the soft yellow candle light. He held it like a sword, pointing it at my shoulder as if he were about to knight me.

"Round here they call me Legba... Papa Legba... oh and umm... son... your music box is just a slight bit out'a tune there. I can fix that for you if you like."

I couldn't help being a slight bit offended.

"So umm... are you in the business of tellin' another man how to tie his shoes too?"

And that's when it happened. Lemme tell ya, I know the blues. I know every intricacy of the melancholy throne of the mystic pantheon of music. But this... this wasn't just any blues... he took my guitar out'a my hands, put his cigarette between the strings up top as the smoke weaved it's way around my head, pinned down my soul with his boot heels and proceeded to stab my heart with the most painful and dangerous of blues any man has ever played. This was blues country alright. I felt every vein in my body piercing open with anguish, every hue of my soul turned a murky dark blue, every valve in my heart stopped for an eternal second and I was left yearning to be released from this dark dark magic that was the blues... and after what felt like an eternity he stopped. He tuned up the guitar pegs a little and strummed it one more time before taking back his cigarette and usurping a long drag from it and blew the smoke out across the strings... tugging me in closer... connecting my with my instrument like I had never felt before.

"No, but I can play the gitar better than any man North, West, East or South of the Mississippi River" he said with a mean grin.

Catching my breath with a sigh of relief I sought for the right words to say, something wasn't right here and I could feel it in every part of body.

"That was... how'd you umm... learn to play like that?"

"Well... whyn't you come with me and I'll show you."

"Where to?" ...is all I could ask.

"There's this ol' juke joint down yonder where a bunch of us like to let loose once in a while. Play me some of them blues you was fiddlin' around with and we'll knock back some hooch."

How do you refuse something so unquestionable it ensnares every one of your senses? How does one rise above the temptations of ones humanity and turn away from the realization of truth? And what if that truth comes draped in the darkest of cloaks, veiled beneath the promise of true expression. How does one refuse unimaginable power... even if it is of the darkest sorts? Dear Lord in heaven I have failed you in my humanity. I have failed you, I have failed you, I have failed you.

We came past a dark crossroads obscured by a single looming tree which cast an ominous shadow enough to leave your spine tingling. It was as if the tree of life itself stood rotting at it's very roots. Seeping with the blood of those fallen before me. More so, it's leaves rained down as if heaven itself were bleeding in agony. There was no life here... only this seeping darkness and the scent of death.

Not long after we came to an open field at the very end of which stood the juke joint looming over a barrage of miscreants and ornately masked creatures which seemed all but human. But human they were yet all traces of their humanity lay long cast aside.

There stood a fire spitting strongman, a women caressing a snake as if it were her dearest of lovers it's long cold body intertwined between her legs and it's slithering tongue tasting the spirit of life from her very lips, various angelic demons and jesters clad in the fanciest of venetian dress and masks, and Legba called them all to his attention with the slightest nod of the head arrogantly raised to the heavens as if defying the Lord God himself.

The smell of sawdust, bootleg liquor, fire torches and old rotting wood intoxicated every one of my senses.

Legba beckoned me forward as he led the way through the crowd as every one of them bowed their heads at his passing.

We entered the old wooden structure which didn't appear as much from the outside, it's cracking dirty windows glazed over in a pale glow from candle light inside but fogged up as if it were the abode of two lovers or some wicked steaming orgy. The building itself seemed to breathe, heaving with every thrust into its cracking body.

As soon as I stepped inside I felt an inebriated sense of longing wash over me. A dirty corroded rust stained sense of longing.

All eyes were suddenly cast on Legba and slowly traced to me. Every breath from those inside seemed to stop and all I could see were more of those ornate venetian masks along with scarred old black faces weathered with age and a hard knockin' life wearing their fedoras like Jesus' very thorny crown itself their hands and feet bearing the stigmata of regret. A few women gravitated towards Legba, their breasts aching to be freed from their confining corsets and legs without end. You could smell the musk of sex seeping off of them from a mile away... mingling with the smell of burned wax, booze, and rotting wood. Legba took two of them by the arms and beckoned me to the stage in a deafening silence that would stop anybody's heart... no matter how cold.

With every eye turned on me I did as I was told feeling no desire to resist despite the unspeakable truth that I knew this wrong... very very wrong.

And so I took to the stage and played my song "Walking With The Devil" to a crowd of faceless, masked, silent strangers. My juror, Papa Legba with his whores as tribunal judges stood in the corner and whispered in the dead silence, laughing dangerously as one of them engaged him in a lethal kiss while the other caressed him between his legs.

But it mattered nothing to me... it was as if I were playing the blues for the very very first time and with every note that I played and every verse that I sang I could feel my heart bleeding from inside my chest and every nuance and hint of breath spoke of perfection. This was the blues... the blues I had sought for but had never attained. The blues one does not ever attain and remain alive to tell the tale.

When the song was done the place burst open and it seemed I was welcomed into the wicked parade, I was now one with the perpetual storm of chaos and as I stepped off of the stage I felt as if I was Zeus incarnate descending from mount Olympus itself. As I neared Legba I could hear one of his whores whispering with distinct intrigue...

"Who's the new guy?"

Before the words were even spoken Legba pulled out an old crumpled piece of paper from his inside pocket and handed it to the woman in question who at once noticed my arrival and

proceeded to laugh seductively as she caressed the paper along her breast as if daring me to take it from her. Daring me to take what was hers to give...

In a whirlwind of madness, still high from my performance, I took the bait and tore the page from her chest... and my heart stopped as I read the headline inscribed upon it...

"Wanted for murder..." and up from the poster the eyes of my beloved Maggie stared back at me.

Chapter 6: Going To Baton Rouge

In a fit of fear and confusion I rushed back to the plantation. An overwhelming feeling of dread and terror encased every part of my body. I felt frozen, mummified by my own failure. How could I have been so blind to the game at hand? As Papa Legba pulled the ropes were we merely his marionettes? What could possess a man to play such a cruel game? I knew the instant I saw that poster at the juke joint that everything was bound to go amiss if we stayed put even a second longer.

Passing by the crossroads the rotting tree of life which stood to bear witness to what had perspired seemed alive. The dark brooding branches seemed to move but didn't. The shadows unfurled into a spiraling abyss. A dark black crow cawed from behind me as I ran as fast I could and cawed in its passing.

Arriving back at the plantation I stormed into the room and Maggie stirred as I entered. She looked up at me with such endearing beauty. A twinkle in her eye, the faintest smile traced upon her face. Her hopefulness quickly turned to dread as she saw my expression. My face drawn in terror, paralyzed in fear at the thought of losing the woman I loved so dear. I might've appeared to her the gaunt phantom I was fast becoming. The realization of what I had done. The reckless abandon with which I'd nearly thrown away everything, thinking back even further I realized the predicament we found ourselves in was only because of me... and everything led to this point.

"What's the matter mon amour?"

I failed to find the words... a silent minute passed which felt like an endless nightmare from which I couldn't wake. Standing there draped in shadows I couldn't help think back on earlier that night when I'd first met him. Papa Legba, the orchestrator of our demise.

"Quickly! Gather your things... we're leaving."

Hearing my own voice I could not recognize that it was mine. I could not express to her the regret I felt. *What have I done... dear God what have I done?* I thought to myself. There is a price to all things and it was in those fleeting moments that I realized the fine for my deal was losing the woman I loved more than the air I breath, more than the pounding of my own heart, more than this wickedly corrupted wine of life that pulsed through my entire body. But I would not lose her... not now... not ever... not this way.

"What happened? What happened?!"

"There's no time my love... we have to leave... now. I came across a poster. A wanted poster. They know baby doll! They know!"

"Oh mon Dieu, my love... no!"

"There's no time... we have to leave... now!"

On the way out the door slammed and clung desperately to its hinges as if holding on for dear life. On passing a candelabrum left in a nearby window blew out in a phantom gust of wind, and off we were.

We made our way back to the train station where we had arrived and having spent nearly the last of our money on the rent for our room we were resigned to jumping a boxcar. My beautiful woman, the incarnation of Eve, my queen, my goddess... I can't describe the pain I felt at having to inflict this on her. As we climbed aboard the nearest boxcar her soft cotton dress clung to a rusty nail and tore it, and with it my heart.

As we departed the sun began to rise over the Mississippi countryside and America passed us by. America the beautiful, America the just, America... America, America, America.

As we passed by an endless cornfield a flock of birds arose and scattered, as in the distance a mean storm lurked on the horizon. Fierce, dark, menacing apocalyptic clouds at our heels.

Inside the boxcar a stack of crates provided some shadow as a new dawn arose and I laid my love down on some old hay and held her close to me as I sat and watched the countryside role on by.

She clung to me as if for dear life itself and as she closed her eyes I felt her silk tears trickle down my arm.

When we awoke we had arrived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Broken, defeated, lost.

Baton Rouge was a bustling city in those days, but even the romance of the French tinged Cajun culture wasn't enough to snap us out of the rut we were in. Maggie said it reminded her of home but home was now a place as foreign to us as these old Cajun streets. Mere shadows of a faraway dream.

Lawlessness reigned beneath a perfect guise of propriety. At every street corner we found boarded up bars due to the recent prohibition act with its back doors curiously bustling with life. The ornate balcony clad buildings proudly boasting of its French heritage. A sign read "Papa Dixie's Jambalaya" but you could smell the scent of bourbon pouring out onto the streets from about a mile away.

"I need a drink mon coeur..." Maggie read my mind.

"Yeah we need to figure out where to stay tonight too."

"We don't have much money left either."

"Well let's check out this place and I'll see what I can do. My music box here's never failed me."

"Music box?" Maggie inquired... "You've never said that before."

"Well never mind that... c'mon."

Our suspicions were of course correct and "Papa Dixie's Jambalaya" turned out to be a Jambalaya of all sorts of miscreant figures, the strongest hooch in town, mingling with the scent of freshly lacquered wood. Upon every second table stood an ornate little Absinthe fountain and the shelves behind the bar were stocked to the gills with every kind of bootleg liquor imaginable. With my guitar case in hand and Maggie by my side I felt confident that we could take this place for everything it was worth.

"Lemme go talk to the barkeep over there and see what I can do..."

"Wait... can I have a kiss please?" Maggie said with a smile... there was my perfect little woman. I was afraid I'd lost that porcelain smile of hers.

I walked over to "Papa Dixie" himself and with all the charm I could muster up tried to convince him to let me seduce them with the blues in exchange for a hot meal and a jambalaya of some of their world famous hooch.

Turning back to gander at my doll of a woman I noticed her talking to some shadowy figure but couldn't make out his face and didn't hear what they were saying. I turned my attention back to "Papa Dixie".

The shadowy figure in the meantime whistled a familiar tune half to himself and Maggie inquired...

"Excusez-moi Monsieur, but where do you know that melody from?"

"Well, good evening ma belle... hmm... I'm not sure... I think it's from a fine little ditty I heard back in Mississippi. Do you know it?"

"Oui, I mean... Yes, my fiancé plays it all the time. But how do you..."

The shadowy figure, dressed in white, looked at his pocket watch and twirled his gold tipped cane.

“Right on time...” He whispered to himself with a distinct southern drawl. “Well pardonnez-moi madame it was a real pleasure making your acquaintance but I must be off to tend some business of mine.”

When I returned with good news the shadowy figure had stepped out of sight and I noticed Maggie slightly startled.

“Hey... so the barkeep says we can stay a while if I can get the crowd going, I’m just gonna go up and do a song or... you alright baby?”

“Yes, I... it’s nothing.”

“Somebody botherin’ you in here?” I asked feeling suddenly over protective.

“No, no... that’s great mon cheri, thank you so much.”

Maggie took a step closer as she stroked my face lovingly while holding the hem of her dress.

“What would I do without you?” She said with a smile.

“I don’t know baby, but I propose we don’t go about findin out.” I replied with a grin... thinking our fortune was changing and relieved to find that despite everything we still had each other.

Whispering in my ear she said as if reading my mind...

“Tu es la meilleure chose qui me soit jamais arrivée... you really are you know? The best thing that ever happened to me.”

“You got that right” I said with a cocky smile.

And as I took to the stage to perform my song “Maggie Le Fay”, my little lady danced to her heart’s content and every man in the room wished he was me. In the end, the sun always rises on a new day and happiness is always only a heartbeat away.

Chapter 7: Maggie Le Fay

My performance was a ravishing success. I was at the top of my game and I couldn't help but wonder if it had something to do with Papa Legba working his mojo on my guitar. But enthralled by the exhilarating rush of fame it didn't make a damned bit of difference.

The crowd cheered on in a fit of madness as everyone took to the dance floor and the place was in a rush of euphoria. There were fella's throwing their gals over the shoulder and all sorts of crazy swing dancing. My beautiful Maggie was in the midst of it all, the center of attention.

As I hollered out the lyrics to my song and banged away on my guitar, the house band backing me up on bass, drums, and horns, she danced to her little heart's content.

Every step she took slowed down time, her legs moved to the beat as her hands caressed her little thighs, she swung her little dress from side to side and then swung her hands up high, caressing her own hair and swinging her pristine little hips from side to side.

It was as if she was letting go of all the stress we'd been through, stomping out them sad old blues with every step and giving way into the swing of things.

There were a bunch of lonesome looking guys standing on the sidelines cheering her on. Lonely in their own little circle of miscreants, but my Maggie, she danced for me and me alone.

Once in a while she'd look up at me with those glowing eyes of hers and gave me the sexiest of looks, those big blue eyes of hers with her perfectly applied makeup and she almost made me forget the lines to my own song.

On she went, she stepped gracefully in tune to the beat and the sound of my voice seemed to guide her every move. It was as if the sound itself encircled every curve of her body, guiding it to move every which way to the minute variations in my growling voice.

Every time I got to the chorus the crowd burst lose and joined in... "Shoobiedoop pa pap doebiedoop nana naaa!" the mass of my faceless devotees cried out.

I was in ecstasy, the dreams of my musical ambitions at long last achieved. The indescribable frenzy of power I held over this hoard of bodies swaying and swinging to my song and the sound of my voice.

Meanwhile my Maggie, she danced a dance of seduction, I was Dionysus and she my Maenad, wild and eager for me alone.

A short while later I noticed a gentleman appear at the edge of the crowd, staring at me intently, this guy sure didn't look like he was having any fun, this guy meant business. At first I ignored him, thinking he was just a suit out looking for some much needed distraction in all the wrong places, but two more of them joined him and they became ever harder to ignore...

Chapter 8: The End

I'd gotten caught up in the music, lost its sweet restraints, lost its sweet release. I'd turned my back to the audience for a splitting second, reveling in the sound of the trombones playing their solo. That split second changed my life, it pulled apart my soul as if it were strung to a medieval breaking wheel. Tearing apart to shreds every bit of happiness I had left. It was as if dear God in heaven Himself was trying to break me like a wild stallion out of control.

The second I turned back to the audience I saw my Maggie being dragged away. The dance was over. In a rush of anguish I leaped off the stage like a bird of prey in attack.

"Maggie!!!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, my voice breaking with agony.

I heard her pleading for her life, all the beauty in her now wilting away into a painful barrage of dread.

"No, you have the wrong person, please, I don't know what this is about!"

The crowds screamed, and this time not in admiration for the power of my voice and the magic of my guitar, but instead sharing our primordial dread... fight or flee.

"Let go of her you god damned coppers!" I screamed and lunged towards them with my first flying.

Everything happened so quickly I couldn't wrap my mind around it or even get a fighting chance. They had me pinned to the floor so quick I couldn't get a word out of my mouth, I watched in absolute anguish as they restrained my Maggie and watched her once pearly tears flow down her face as they slammed the handcuffs to her wrists. Those beautiful tears now a murky shade of utter fear.

As I struggled to get loose I saw him standing there, at first it seemed like a mirage, a mere glimpse of a faraway nightmare, but when I looked again my heart began to pound as if begging to break free and leave my body lifeless, and the realization of what had transpired dawned on me.

There he stood... Papa Legba... leaning on his gold tipped cane with a dangerous grin on his face.

The Devil had come to collect his dues.

"God dammit, it was you Legba! It was you! No! Legba!!!" was all I could say and think. This was the price of falling prey to his promises.

They took Maggie away, and all I could do was look on as I too was put into handcuffs. I tried to fight them off but looking at my beautiful Maggie's face I knew... this was the end. She'd given up, and as I clung desperately to the last shreds of hope, a hope that was crumbling apart in my very hands, I too was shackled in the cold steel of those handcuffs and my Maggie stared me deep in the eyes for what seemed like an eternity. I'll never forget those fleeting moments forever etched in my mind... I'll never forget the pain in her eyes, and the last words she spoke to me in a whisper with her silken lips... "I love you mon loup... I'll love you forever" and I looked on as she disappeared into the distant crowd and I too was prepared for the long journey that awaited us, and dragged away defeated.

Where can you turn when the kingdom of heaven seems to come crumbling down like the walls of Jericho. How does one define good and evil? How does one distinguish between dark and light when the day and night are parted by twilight? The shades of gray which lie inbetween.

But everything in this life has a price... an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and perhaps sin for salvation. Is there heavier a price to pay? Does God seek His retribution at the end of the road? Or is all that we see or presume but a flapping of a butterfly's wings in the eye of the storm?

Chapter 9: When The Winds Changed

The times that followed seemed like an eternal night in a hell of my own making. A nightmare for which I alone was to blame. Nothing was worth this price. Damn the blues, damn the music, damn the dream. But all I had left was my song. I could not breathe, I could not lie to myself any longer, I could not see as my spirit had gone blind to the sweet light of day.

The fiery hellish Louisiana heat in August and the shackles on my feet were enough to leave any man broken in defeat. Endless days singing them chain-gang blues and working the land were the only thing I'd know for the next ten years... and this was only the beginning.

The sun shone bright but I could not see it, the air was warm but I could not feel, all around me life continued but the end had come nigh, or so I thought.

I was swiftly whisked away into a life of perpetual pain. *Ten years*, the thought echoed in my mind. My Maggie, I presumed, was shipped off to France to stand trial for the murder of Big Six... and justice, it was said, had come.

Where was the good hand of our loving God? Was this the impartial justice He promised us as a birthright?

My prison cell was cold and damp and every day would bleed into the next while we rattled the chains on our feet and sang to the chopping of our axes as we were forced to work the land. I'll never forget the endless rows of defeated, scarred, broken faces. I sought the blues and I found them. I found them in the dying hand of salvation, I found them in the rotting hand of a love gone awry, and I found them in the depths of my poisoned soul.

As we were awakened each morning before dawn by the growling screams of the guards and chained up like freshly killed meat hung up to dry, the blood dripping off of our carcasses, we began the day's work. Back breaking work, chopping wood, splicing stone, comforted not even by the blues we sang, but we sang for our lives, we sang for the spirit which was dying within us all, we sang for a salvation we would never find, but sing we did nevertheless. A song sung only because these songs needed to be sung. These were the blues, prison blues, the root of all blues. I'd found my way to the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. The warm soothing pool of love bled into the well of damnation, poisoning it eternally.

I thought of my Maggie night and day... would she find her way out through a blessed gift of God? Would she pay instead for my crimes? The thought of seeing her again, I thought to myself, would be worth the ten years I was given. I had to believe that she was out there somewhere, free to find a new life, free to dream on with the dreams we once shared, dreams

that had now wilted for me. I had to believe, I needed to believe, that God was good and salvation would come for her.

A world which once seemed so very small now felt like an endless ocean with no land in sight and I lay shipwrecked on the boat of damnation. The world of the living seemed inaccessible, as if I were damned to the very depths of Hades' underworld and could but dream of my Maggie, alive and well in a heaven of deliverance. But dream I did.

Chapter 10: Ave Maria

When her letter came my heart was lifted into heavenly heights... just to see her handwriting scribbled across the front of it was enough to make my soul melt into a mess of emotion. I'd been so afraid to open it. For a few nights I'd clutch it to my heart unopened and fell asleep in my cell with tears streaming down my already scarred face. Scarred from the unceasingly cruel whips of the guards... they drove us like no animal ever should be.

"Hail Mary... full of grace... my baby done left me and the devil take my place..." was the song we sang as we slaved away that day.

The tall Louisiana grass became like shards of glass and the dry earth like the depths of some hellish pit. The thirst was relentless. Sometimes I'd wring out my old bandana and try and drink up my own sweat, hoping the cotton would sift out the salt. Along came the guards again... *"What do you think this here is boy? Some resort for yella necked bastards like you? Get back to work!"* And down came that whip while the others grinned while stroking their shotguns.

I stopped sleeping on my back real quick... the wounds would drip through my shirt and onto the mattress. I guess I was just scared to get some on that letter... that dear sweet sign of hope... the one shining beacon in the dead of an endless nightmarish slumber.

One night there was a mean storm lurking on the horizon creeping ever closer until the fist of the Devil himself came crashing down upon heaven and the lighting struck so hard it left the cell gates rattling and horrid creatures crawled out of every corner like an infestation of hellish insects. Hell hath no fury like a night on a Louisiana chain-gang.

The day after the fields were soaked for the first time I can remember. Swaddling my feet through the muck and mud... chains rattling with every step... clutching my letter deep in my breast pocket... still sealed... I'd hoped it would somehow heal this old heart of mine.

I opened it... and well... this is what it said:

"30 Juillet , 1931

Mon cher, mon tendre amour,

Words are not enough to express how much I miss you. I wish I was still by your side, able to fall asleep in your arms, to look into your eyes as I wake up only to vanish in your embrace.

I would give everything to make that my reality again, one more time, one last time.

But I'm so far from cette belle Amérique and as the trial has come to a close, I know that our dream of freedom promised by "le nouveau monde" will never be. Oh mon chéri, the pain I feel writing you this letter tells me how you'll feel reading it and this thought hurts me even more. It will probably take a month or so for this letter to get to you, and by then it won't be long before I leave this world.

Though it hurts to say this, this will be our final curtain call, do not cry for me mon coeur, ma vie... As my life comes to its end, I have no fear for I have been blessed with the greatest gift in this world. May you find the same peace I found knowing that we both have known "le grand amour", that we know the meaning of true love.

I am yours eternally, death won't take that away from us and one day perhaps we'll be reunited again in heaven. Darling, please remember...you are loved and forever shall be.

Je suis tienne à jamais... MAGGIE"

I put the letter back in my pocket. In the distance a train whistle blew, the birds sang their songs, the men on the chain-gang were hard at work, axes chopping in rhythm with the hollering sound of the most defeated blues sailing on the breeze. But these were no blues comparable to what I felt. Even the warmth of the summer sun in the Louisiana countryside could not melt the cold I felt encapsulating my worn old heart. The defeat I felt was of the most desolate shade of blue. I wanted to learn to sing the blues, and as God almighty is my witness, Papa Legba sure gave me some blues to sing about.

In a fit of rage I threw my axe towards one of the guards, nearly hitting him on the leg. I fell to my knees and all I could do was claw at the dirt below. The anguish, the unspeakable anguish... dear mother Mary please have mercy.

I let out a blood curdling scream and as I did the guards surrounded me. Next thing I knew I had the butt of a rifle slammed against my head and as the chains around my feet tore my ankles as I struggled to get away I slowly lost consciousness while the guards continued to pound away at my body... a body for which I cared none anymore. I wanted to die. I had lost all hope or perhaps abandoned it and had never in my life felt as alone as I did just then... knowing my Maggie, the love of my life... was no more.

I awoke in solitary confinement my bones aching at every joint, bruised up and bleeding profusely. I laid there for what seemed like an eternity, after a while I pulled the letter out of my pocket and clinging to it for dear life the tears streaming down my face stung the open wounds left there with courtesy of the prison guards.

Exhausted and broken in spirit and body I felt myself lose consciousness again... and as I closed my eyes, hoping I would never wake again... all I had left to say was "Maggie... my dearest girl... I will never let you go."

Chapter 11: Never Let Go

Maggie sat awake in her cell. The verdict was in... guilty on all counts. Guilty of murder, the thought raced through her head in a never ending loop.

This was it... today was the day. Was it all worth it? Yes, she thought to herself. Every second of it. To love someone with such intensity, with such determination, that could never be extinguished. Her dying wish, she continued the thought, would only be to hold him one last time. If only...

"I'll never let you go my love" she whispered to herself, out loud.

She could hear the metal door down the end of the hall opening, two set of footsteps neared. Some seconds later, which felt like an eternity in Dante's inferno, a prison guard and priest stood by the entrance of her cell. She knew all too well what was to come next.

"Would you like to be read your last rights..." the priest asked in French, in a reassuring tone. A false reassurance... but this was justice, and justice was due.

"No, thank you..." Maggie replied. "I have found God in the love I have shared... I have found salvation in his touch... I have found Eden in his arms... I have felt the touch of love and I have killed for it I need not be saved by you."

"Then it is time" the guard spoke.

They came in together and there she stood as the guard shackled her hands and feet. Alone at the end of the road to absolution, and madly in love.

The walk down the hall was the longest of her life. Each step felt like an eternity, and with every breath she spoke his name... *Amadeo*. With every tear she shed she whispered those three immortal words... *I love you*.

At the end of the road fear has no bearing over me... she thought to herself. *I am for him and for him alone, and I will die for him.*

As that last door at the end of the corridor opened all she could see was a bright white light. She had chosen her last words carefully... "I will never let you go" she had decided.

And it is with those words that she stepped into the light of a new day. The day that would be her last.

The firing squad stood ready outside, she assumed, but all she could see was his face and as she took that final step, reality mattered nothing anymore.

1937

Present Day...

Chapter 12: Lipstick & Cigarette Butts

There's something about this city. It's got every cliché and every nuance you expect to find in every storybook. Perfect for a dreamer like myself, exactly the kinda town where you could wind up falling so damned hard flat on your face hopelessly in love with a gal that your head'll still be reeling ten years later.

"Ain't no chaingang could shackle down a fool in love, dollface..." a whisper lost in silence dissolving quietly into the dreary wind which weighs down heavily on my shoulders, leaving me walking around slightly hunched over... "told you I'd be back for you didn't I?"

My boot heels go down clank stomp clickety clacking along the old dirty Parisian streets. A few wet lipstick stained cigarette butts later, left wading in the grooves between the cobblestones leading away from Père Lachaise Cemetery, and I notice I'm steppin' in rhythm to that pittery patting of the rain coming down just cold enough to feel heavy but light enough to be leaving Paris in a murky haze... almost like something serious was about to go down. Just like a dozen bullets through a soft cotton dress.

"Ten years to the day Maggie...", and the dreary nameless wind which bore the burden of my whisper now has a name... and she was everything to me.

Behind every brick wall that wasn't there the last time I came around this way there lies buried the dreams we shared. Behind every corner graced with new found lovers enthralled in passion there lie remnants of the time we too found our salvation. From every window the music of nostalgic romance pours out onto the street: a forgotten love song, a crying widow, a suicidal ex-husband, and his blissful moaning wife a few streets over in the arms of a better lover.

And I? I'm the forgotten one that time passed by. Every memory here was left to greet me gracefully as if to tell me... reminding me with a voice which used to be oh so familiar, that golden hued whisper, that serenely chaotic feminine howl of a laugh, those gentle caresses encased in every word she spoke to me in French... her voice, my Maggie's: "I've been waiting for you mon loup..." and I close my eyes coming to my senses wishing she were here to exalt me to the furthest reaches of Olympian grandeur with the simplest kiss. "It still hurts sometimes... loving you..." I answer my delusion with a guileless honest truth.

Nobody seems to recognize me and I guess that's a good thing, though secretly I'm kind of insulted.

A window rattled open by an arrogant gust of wind and a Frenchman scoffs and turns around facing me glaring with a smirk as if to share a common condescension and say "...ow rude uh?"

zies angry wiend”, unaware of my strand of reality. Unaware that he is unaware. Unaware of that old yellow poster tugging at the sun bleached scotch tape begging to get away. Begging to get away... just for a day... just for a day.

I lean in closer to read it while it bellows in the breeze, still stuck to that dirty window. “They must’ve put it up after we got away huh Maggie baby? You look good in that photograph darling girl...” I whisper silently with nothing but honesty, “prettiest gal on a wanted poster I ever did see.”

I try and touch her face in the old photograph but the paper crumbles beneath my fingers and the glass is far too cold to the touch to break me back into my brittle memory.

“I miss you mon coeur... I miss you so much...” the wind remains silent this time and I don’t blame her, after all, what is there left to say.

Club 30’s, closed until further notice, October 4th 1927, a poster on the moldy wet wooden door reads.

I guess they never made it into the 30’s. The old sign above the door looks outdated and is crawling with dust bunnies. A slight gust of that wind and it almost looks as if the thing has come to life.

I lean in and caress the old rusted brass doorknob, so carefully designed in perfect art-deco perfection. The minute details supposedly representing some greater truth, all important to the delusional artist awaiting his salvation from a life of persecution.

I rattle that doorknob just like time, that infernal wretched monstrosity that eventually makes everything feel so distant, I rattle it like time’s rattled my memory.

“I thought I’d swing by to say goodbye...”

The door hinges on its rusty old chain, warning me not to enter. A slight shove and it easily gives way, some wood chips crumble off and push up a gust of dust off of the floor as they land and hit the un-trodden bar room entryway. This mean ol’ dust, these demons, they’re far too old to resist change.

Chapter 13: Finale

The door creaked as I opened it... cobwebs breaking apart almost as the shackles which had bound me for ten excruciating years. I found myself in an abyss of fervently decaying dreams. Dreams which now fed the lunacy of fame. At every corner there was a face staring back at me, a face I could no longer recognize, a face I saw in the mirror at the dawn of every morning, and a name which wore down on me like an old dusty mantle of a long forgotten king... meaningless. My own name, *Amadeo Leonardus Gauthier*, the hero of these dreams... became a mirage as troubled to me as the dust which bore down on memories once golden.

I set out on this journey intent on being the hero of my own dreams, praying I might one day be a part of yours. Let me have sinned so that you might find salvation in this tale as I too now wear the mask Papa Legba has given me reason to wear. An ornate Venetian mask crafted to hide the scars of my sins and the mutilation of my incarceration. A mask to symbolize the internment of my soul, shackled away behind the regrets I now live with. Afraid to show my true skin to the hordes of those that now follow my every move and hang upon my every word as I sing my songs of passion and remorse.

A moment from now I am to take to the stage and be fate's divine puppet again... I will sing my songs... I will tell my tale... and in those brief shards of time I will sing for you and you alone.

I can almost see her footsteps still etched in the dust, the ghost of her long flowing dress strikes against my wrist... a whisper on the wind speaks of love... and yet I find myself alone. Alone in a relic of forgiveness... but this soul... this old soul of mine... it does not merit forgiveness any longer.

A few streets down they are chanting my name. The marquee of the old theater where I am to perform reads with boasting letters... "*Amadeo L. Gauthier's Une Chanson d'Amour*", as a twinkling fire in the dead of night set ablaze to gather the tribe. But I am not one to be followed and I beg you, turn away... though I know that you too will fall under this guise.

All I can do for you at the end of this tale is sing ... my reader... my lover... my devout paramour... for you and you alone. After all... it is all I have left to give. Let me atone for my sins and give you my last fleeting breath in song. Let me die in your arms... let me fall under your worshiping gaze... let me falter in your reverence so that you too might see that I am but human.

These songs are now for you and you alone. Let me be free of these last shackles, I don't really care to be reminded, because every moment from here on forward is a moment that she - my

Maggie - will never have.

Let me sing for you now and tell you a tale which has long slipped from nightmarish fact into deific fiction.

I will never let you go.