

Murderers Row

(The Angel of The Tombs)

Written: May-June 2025. Completed June 29, 2025

Background: The Tombs was the colloquial name for a prison built in 1838 in lower Manhattan in a section called Five Points. Officially called The Halls of Justice, The Tombs replaced the Colonial-era Bridewell Prison, originally built in 1735, using material from the original structure. It was built in an Egyptian-Revival architectural style as a mastaba, inspired by a picture of an Egyptian tomb.

The prison was known for its corruption and for housing numerous murderers such as John Colt and William Sharkey, both of which were involved in escape attempts. For that it also had the nickname "Murderers Row". A fire destroyed part of the building on November 18, 1842, the same day that John Colt was to be married then hanged. Colt allegedly committed suicide during the fire, something that was disputed as a cover for his escape.

John Colt was related to the famous Colt gun family, although he didn't use a gun in his murder, but a hatchet. He killed a man named Sam Adams (not the famous one) in a dispute over book printing for \$1.35.

Rebecca Salome Foster, a prison relief worker and missionary, became known as "the Tombs Angel" for her efforts to advocate on behalf of the many poor people held in squalid conditions at the Tombs.

The Tombs was demolished in 2023 to build a replacement jail. They erected a statue of Foster there.

I wonder if they'll again call it The Tombs.

This song was supposed be a folk story modeled after something like The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald. It doesn't come close to those heights, but so what. It was a good idea and a good story.

Arr.	Key	Time	Tuning	Tempo	Style	Capo
1	A	4/4	Standard	110	Folk	2

Arrangement	1
Intro	Am Fmaj7 C G6 x2
Verse	Am Fmaj7 C G6
Pre-chorus	F C Dm E G
Chorus	Am Fmaj7 C G
Bridge	Dm E G D Am C Dm E

Chords Used in this Song

Am	Fmaj7	C	G6	F	Dm	E

G	D

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Verse

Am **Fmaj7**
The Angel guarded The Tombs that stood for nearly 200 years
C **G6**

In the swamps and slums of Five Points where many bad men would disappear

Am **Fmaj7**
The Tombs replaced Bridewell Prison back in 1838
C **G6**

An Egyptian style mastaba became the new home for Tombs inmates

Pre-chorus

F
The Angel walked The Tombs each night
C
She had nowhere else to go
Dm
To deliver her redemption
E **G**
She'd take a long walk down...

Chorus

Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row
Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row
Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row
Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row

(The Murder-September 17, 1841)

Verse

Am **Fmaj7**
John Colt pulled out a hatchet and struck Sam Adams in the head
C **G6**

Over a dispute for \$1.35 he killed that man cold dead

Am **Fmaj7**
He salted and mailed the body to New Orleans in a crate
C **G6**

To load on the ship Kalamazoo where its disposal would await

Bridge

Dm

A witness had seen Colt clean up

E

Through the keyhole in the door

G

It led police to Louisiana

D

Where the ship was still in port

Am

They smelled Adams' rotting body

C

In the ship's cargo hold

Dm

They ID'd him from a leg scar

E

On his finger a ring of gold

Pre-chorus

F

The Angel walked The Tombs each night

C

She had nowhere else to go

Dm

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G

She'd take a long walk down...

Chorus

Am Fmaj7 C G

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Am Fmaj7 C G

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Am Fmaj7 C G

Murderers Row

(The Arrest - September 23, 1841)

(The Trial - January 13-23, 1842)

Verse

Am **Fmaj7**
6 days after the murder Colt was arrested and later tried
C **G6**
The jury found him guilty and the judge sentenced him to die
Am **Fmaj7**
Rumor was Caroline Henshaw carried Colt's child in her womb
C **G6**
So the morning of his hanging they let them marry at The Tombs

(The Hanging and Jailbreak - November 14, 1842)

Bridge

Dm
Fire broke out at the wedding
E
The Tombs filled up with smoke
G
Lost in the ensuing chaos
D
John Colt would go for broke
Am
As inmates and guards scattered
C
John and Caroline split apart
Dm
Later they found "Colt" in his cell dead
E
From a stab wound to the heart

They said it was self-inflicted but...

Verse

Am **Fmaj7**
Legend it was a planned jail break, that Colt stabbed another man in the chest
C **G6**
Let the body burn to ashes while he slipped out in a dress
Am **Fmaj7**
No one knows what really happened, police watched Caroline for years
C **G6**
But John Colt never surfaced, he never once re-appeared

Pre-chorus

F
The Angel walked The Tombs each night
C
She had nowhere else to go
Dm
To deliver her redemption
E G
She'd take a long walk down...

Chorus

Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row
Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row
Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row
Am Fmaj7 C G
Murderers Row

Epilogue Verse

(November 22nd, 1872)

William Sharkey shot Robert Dunn over a gambling debt he'd assumed
The jury convicted him of murder and the judge sent him to The Tombs
Two women came to visit, and each one was given an exit pass
Two women left together but when a third tried to pass...

Bridge

The guards realized what happened
Sharkey had escaped in the first two
He had dressed up as a woman
And slipped out of The Tombs

He was only 26 years old
Fled to Cuba and changed his name
His whereabouts were never known
But a Tombs legend he remains

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(The Murder-September 17, 1841)

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Over a dispute for \$1.35 he killed that man cold dead
He salted and mailed the body to New Orleans in a crate
To load on the ship Kalamazoo where its disposal would await

Bridge

A witness had seen Colt clean up through the keyhole in the door
It led police to Louisiana where the ship was still in port
They smelled Adams' rotting body in the ship's cargo hold
They ID'd him from a leg scar and on his finger a ring of gold

Pre-chorus

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(The Hanging and Jailbreak - November 14, 1842)

Bridge

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John Colt would go for broke

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John and Caroline split apart
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<p>Verse: Am Fmaj7 C G6 Pre-chorus: F C Dm E G</p>	<p>Chorus: Am Fmaj7 C G Bridge: Dm E G D Am C Dm E</p>
<p>Verse The Angel guarded The Tombs That stood for nearly 200 years In the swamps and slums of Five Points Where many bad men would disappear The Tombs replaced Bridewell Prison Back in 1838 An Egyptian style mastaba Became the new home for Tombs inmates</p>	<p>Verse 6 days after the murder Colt was arrested and later tried The jury found him guilty The judge sentenced him to die Rumor was Caroline Henshaw Carried Colt's child in her womb So the morning of his hanging They let them marry at The Tombs</p>
<p>Pre-chorus The Angel walked The Tombs each night She had nowhere else to go To deliver her redemption She'd take a long walk down...</p>	<p>Bridge Fire broke out at the wedding The Tombs filled up with smoke Lost in the ensuing chaos John Colt would go for broke</p> <p>As inmates and guards scattered John and Caroline split apart Later they found "Colt" in his cell dead From a stab wound to the heart They said it was self-inflicted but...</p>
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<p>Bridge A witness had seen Colt clean up Through the keyhole in the door It led police to Louisiana Shere the ship was still in port They smelled Adams' rotting body In the ship's cargo hold They ID'd him from a leg scar and On his finger a ring of gold</p>	<p>Pre-chorus The Angel walked The Tombs each night She had nowhere else to go To deliver her redemption She'd take a long walk down...</p> <p>Chorus</p>
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<p>Chorus</p>	