

They're selling postcards of the hanging;
They're painting the passports brown.
The beauty parlor is filled with sailors;
The circus is in town.
Here comes the blind commissioner; 5
They've got him in a trance.
One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker;
The other is in his pants.
And the riot squad they're restless;
They need somewhere to go 10
As Lady and I look out tonight
From Desolation Row.

Cinderella, she seems so easy;
"It takes one to know one," she smiles
And puts her hands in her back pockets 15
Bette Davis style.
And in comes Romeo, he's moaning,
"You belong to me, I believe."
And someone says, "You're in the wrong place my friend;
You better leave." 20
And the only sound that's left
After the ambulances go
Is Cinderella sweeping up
On Desolation Row.

Now the moon is almost hidden; 25

The stars are beginning to hide.

The fortune-telling lady

Has even taken all her things inside.

All except for Cain and Abel

And the hunchback of Notre Dame, 30

Everybody is making love

Or else expecting rain.

And the Good Samaritan, he's dressing

He's getting ready for the show;

He's going to the carnival tonight 35

On Desolation Row.

Now Ophelia, she's 'neath the window;

For her I feel so afraid.

On her twenty-second birthday

She already is an old maid. 40

To her, death is quite romantic.

She wears an iron vest.

Her profession's her religion;

Her sin is her lifelessness.

And though her eyes are fixed upon 45

Noah's great rainbow,

She spends her time peeking

Into Desolation Row.

Einstein, disguised as Robin Hood
With his memories in a trunk 50
Passed this way an hour ago
With his friend, a jealous monk.
He looked so immaculately frightful
As he bummed a cigarette.
Then he went off sniffing drainpipes 55
And reciting the alphabet.
Now you would not think to look at him,
But he was famous long ago
For playing the electric violin
On Desolation Row. 60

Dr. Filth, he keeps his world
Inside of a leather cup,
But all his sexless patients
They're trying to blow it up.
Now his nurse, some local loser – 65
She's in charge of the cyanide hole
And she also keeps the cards that read
“Have Mercy on His Soul” –
They all play on pennywhistles;
You can hear them blow 70
If you lean your head out far enough
From Desolation Row.

Across the street they've nailed the curtains;

They're getting ready for the feast.

The Phantom of the Opera 75

A perfect image of a priest.

They're spoon-feeding Casanova

To get him to feel more assured;

Then they'll kill him with self-confidence

After poisoning him with words. 80

And the Phantom's shouting to skinny girls

"Get outta here if you don't know

Casanova is just being punished for going

To Desolation Row."

Now at midnight all the agents 85

And the superhuman crew

Come out and round up everyone

That knows more than they do.

Then they bring them to the factory

Where the heart-attack machine 90

Is strapped across their shoulders,

And then the kerosene

Is brought down from the castles

By insurance men who go

Check to see that nobody is escaping 95

To Desolation Row.

Praise be to Nero's Neptune.
The Titanic sails at dawn.
And everybody's shouting
"Which side are you on?" 100

And Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot
Fighting in the captain's tower
While calypso singers laugh at them
And fishermen hold flowers
Between the windows of the sea 105
Where lovely mermaids flow
And nobody has to think too much
About Desolation Row.

Yes, I received your letter yesterday
(About the time the doorknob broke) 110
When you asked how I was doing.
Was that some kind of joke?

All these people that you mention
Yes, I know them; they're quite lame.
I had to rearrange their faces 115

And give them all another name.
Right now I can't read too good.
Don't send me no more letters, no;
Not unless you mail them
From Desolation Row. 120