

Desolation Row

Words and music Bob Dylan

Album: No direction home (2005), and in live versions on Unplugged (1995)

Dropped C tuning (C-A-d-g-b-e')

Capo 4th fret

C Csus4 C
 They're selling postcards of the hanging
 F C
 They're painting the passports brown
 G
 The beauty parlor is filled with sailors
 F C
 The circus is in town
 C
 Here comes the blind commissioner
 F C
 They've got him in a trance
 G
 One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker
 F C
 The other is in his pants
 F
 And the riot squad they're restless
 C F
 They need somewhere to go
 C G
 As Lady and I look out tonight
 F C
 From Desolation Row

 Cinderella, she seems so easy
 "It takes one to know one," she smiles
 And puts her hands in her back pockets
 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"
 And the only sound that's left
 After the ambulances go
 Is Cinderella sweeping up
 On Desolation Row

 Now the moon is almost hidden
 The stars are beginning to hide
 The fortunetelling lady
 Has even taken all her things inside
 All except for Cain and Abel
 And the hunchback of Notre Dame
 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
 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
 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
Noah's great rainbow
She spends her time peeking
Into Desolation Row

Einstein, disguised as Robin Hood
With his memories in a trunk
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
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

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
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 penny whistles
You can hear them blow
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
A perfect image of a priest
They're spoonfeeding Casanova
To get him to feel more assured
Then they'll kill him with self-confidence
After poisoning him with words
And the Phantom's shouting to skinny girls
"Get Outa Here If You Don't Know
Casanova is just being punished for going
To Desolation Row"

Now at midnight all the agents
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
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
To Desolation Row

Praise be to Nero's Neptune
The Titanic sails at dawn
And everybody's shouting
"Which Side Are You On?"
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

Where lovely mermaids flow
 And nobody has to think too much
 About Desolation Row

Yes, I received your letter yesterday
 (About the time the door knob broke)
 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
 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

Live 1966 version

Dropped D tuning (D-A-d-g-b-e')

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
 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
 As Lady and I look out tonight
 From Desolation Row

Unplugged version

3-3-2 division of the bar.

They're selling postcards of the hanging
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 One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker
 The other is in his pants
 And the riot squad they're restless

D G
They need somewhere to go
 D A
As Lady and I look out tonight
 G D
From Desolation Row