

## John Doe No. 24

Mary Chapin Carpenter

I was standing on the sidewalk in 1945  
In Jacksonville, Illinois  
When asked what my name was there came no reply  
They said I was a deaf and sightless half wit boy

But Louis was my name, though I could not say it  
I was born and raised in New Orleans  
My spirit was wild, so I let the river take it  
On a barge and a prayer upstream

Well, they searched for a mother  
And they searched for a father  
And they searched till they searched no more  
The doctors put to rest their scientific tests  
And they named me 'John Doe No. 24'

And they all shook their heads in pity  
For a world so silent and dark  
Well, there's no doubt that life's a mystery  
But so too is the human heart

And it was my heart's own perfume  
When the crepe jasmine bloomed on Rue Morgue Avenue  
Though I couldn't hear the bells  
Of the streetcars coming by toeing the track I knew

And if I were an old man returning  
With my satchel and porkpie hat  
I'd hit every jazz joint on Bourbon  
And I'd hit everyone on Basin after that

The years kept passing as they passed me around  
From one state ward to another  
Like I was an orphan shoe from the lost and found  
Always missing the other

And they gave me a harp last Christmas  
And all the nurses took a dance  
But lately I've been growing listless  
I've been dreaming again of the past

I'm wandering down to the banks  
Of the great Big Muddy where the shotgun houses stand  
I am seven years old and I feel my dad  
Reach out for my hand

While I drew breath no one missed me  
So they won't on the day that I cease  
Put a sprig of crepe jasmine with me  
To remind me of New Orleans

I was standing on the sidewalk in 1945  
In Jacksonville, Illinois