

Charlotte

Work in Progress

With Morning

O, sun that dances on the wall
So come, as bid, at morning's call,
Thou hast banished gentle dark
With song so merry, light so stark,
And as your lustre grows you threaten
That peaceful soul now to awaken
And scatter sweetest dreams –
As sweet as summer seems.

Yet on sleep travels here unbroken
Slow in breaths and thoughts unspoken
As you play and fawn upon her hair
And set aglow with gold a skin so fair,
And rest beside her head, upon her pillow,
And whisper 'morning' as her curtains billow
Yet still she never wakes,
Still the daylight she forsakes.

Awakening

Oh quiet, softest sounds,
You broke the ecstasy of dreams,
Now my eyes are open to the gleams
In the quiet morning that surrounds.

Oh quiet, softest sounds
In the silence that abounds,
A whisper light upon the air,
A shadow passing here and there
That caused my heart to pound,
Oh quiet, softest sounds

You broke the ecstasy of dreams,
Drew me from the peaceful streams
That my silent slumber found me,
And all at once no more surround me
Now all that are above are wooden beams
You broke the ecstasy of dreams

Now my eyes are open to the gleams
Of subtle, drifting streams;
The dust motes dancing slow
And a hazy golden glow

Charlotte

Upon the rising steams;
Now my eyes are open to the gleams

In the quiet morning that surrounds
The open blinds reveal the grounds
Awash with green and gold,
Of a dawn so clear and cold
And filled with little sounds
In the quiet morning that surrounds.

Thunder

There was thunder in the distance,
A wind awoken in the air
But a quiet, still resistance
In the hollows, where the reeds stood
And bowed their heads in autumn sleep
Finding solace where they could
As winter made the woodlands weep.

The storm was drawing closer there,
A taste, of coming cold and rain
And something else upon the air,
That brushed across uncovered skin
Not cold, nor wind, nor watery drops
Nor anything it should have been
Now closer, until the silence stops.

Why Death Despises War

The drums of War awake with the dawn
And beat
To the steps of her soldiers
Who march,
Half dead,
So even before the battle
They fall
And rot,
In the wake of an army of ghosts –
Ghosts who yet walk.
Death follows behind
With the sick
To gather their bones.
He looks out ahead to the banners,
Blown in the wind
Aloft,
Then behind at the blood on the road:

Charlotte

As black in day
As it was beneath the moon.
He sighs,
And empty eyes regard the skies,
Already full with souls.

Nine and Thirty Black Birds

Nine and thirty black birds high up in a tree
In the cold, in the dark in groups of three,
When one turns to the king with the moon on his wing
And sings so sweetly of what he can see:

“Oh King upon high, oh King of the night
Who has triumphed this day on branch and in flight,
When sunrise is come and your kingdom undone
Then once again battle and vanquish the light.

“With followers many to fly by your side
And flock to the shadows at the whim of the tide
Lead us in spring with the feast that you bring,
Lead us in autumn so we never must hide.

“Unburden the weary who rest in your peace,
Grant them your kingdom their troubles to cease,
Bring them the night to shelter from light,
For as morning approaches, look to the East.”

And all in a chorus rose up with the song
And together, together they praised him for long
But the King in his nest turned his gaze to the West
And saw only stars and the light that they shone.

Of War

Whet your blades by the fire,
Incandescent this long night.

It is black, and almost quiet.
But whilst you sit, weary,
An idle mind might wander
To places, darker still,
Where it might then dwell:
Of this, be wary.

Instead, take up bread and wine

Charlotte

To succour your wounds.
Sleep, if you can,
Or talk in good humour to any man
Who yet remains at your side:
Be merry.

It is dark, and shadows fill
The troughs, rent across the earth,
So stirred incarnadine
Now black beneath the night.
Here you must wait, as each man,
Alone,
Immured in the horror
Of those still open eyes
Lying barely out of sight.

So whet your blades for tomorrow,
In the dying firelight.

Funeral Party

Since the main event,
Umbrellas shared and tissues lent,
I watch for a while and, as a group walks past
In single file, an atmosphere falls,
And leans against the walls of this pub –
An establishment kept very much alive
Only by the growing size of the cemetery
Next door.

As time and drinks pass
A gentle hum swells, the sum of shared
Memories that alcohol tells, and spills
Some secrets small to an audience all
Of those with so little in common,
And a growing sense that most have forgotten
The names of those on their table,
If ever once they were able.

Most have, at some point taken time
To smile, to shake hands, or to stop
And talk a while to the closest
And quietest here, who never shed a tear
And catch themselves wondering
Why everyone else is here.

But, as the evening gloom yawns

Charlotte

And looms across the sky, further blackening
Suits within the room, a steady trail
Forms at the door, and stale air mixes
With the cold and more space becomes
Bare, I contemplate:

It was not a *bad* affair;
Well attended at least and as much of
A feast as expected of a long buffet
Made for generic browsing, without
Arousing any suspicions as to the age
Of the bread.

Once all of the party have left, the remains
To the chickens are fed, but across at the bar
Drinks flow and drunken songs mar the calm
Almost reached in their stead. Now
Midnight passes with the clinking of glasses –
So much for peace when you're dead.

This Poison

The pipes of the sewers are veins in the sand,
Each shallow beneath the dune.
As they reach the waves, the metal degrades
And the poison is vented too soon.

Trace back those veins to the heart of the beast,
Where the vessels are plated with lead.
It corroded each mind and turned them all blind,
And now the whole city is dead.

In the streets are the bones of the people deceased,
Whose corpses now rest where they stood.
They smile at the sky, so blue and so high –
If they could fly away, then they would.

But nothing remains, in their hearts or their brains,
Though little if ever there was.
So let the tides wash away this stench of decay,
And all that there was will be lost.

Scared of your shadow

You may think that you do not know me, but you do,
Though not quite in the way that I know you;

Charlotte

A tremor of cold upon your neck,
An image too fleeting for your gaze to check,
In the corner of a mirror hidden in gloom,
Buried in the corner of a darkened room.

A faint creaking from the floor above
Or a clamour loud, in great report below,
Gone, the moment that you try to know
My name, and turn to find your face reflected
In a fractured window pane,
Here in your home and wherever you may roam,
I know you, and you know the dark you own.

Storms

Spider webs between the rafters
Sway in rising currents,
Carrying an echoed laughter
Through the slates,
To mix with drifting ashes
And stain the belly of a cloud,
Already dark, but lit with thunder crashes
That shake the very ground,
And the laughter grows with every sound.

Dance for us

Bindings tight about her wrists
Cut lacerations deep as she resists
And join those there about her jaws
And the ruby lines between her claws
As she roars
In more than just apparent pain
And marks the ground with bloody stain.

A rope cuts off an indrawn breath
Yanked hard and sharp around her neck
To pull her to the sodden ground
Where again her limbs are bound
And not a sound
Escapes her weary body now
As she wonders how they could allow
A cub to suffer so.
They'll try tomorrow, though.

Charlotte

Where Death Lives

Strange city there,
That Death has made around him,
In some great cavern swept with Winter's breath
Beneath the brow of some great mountain,
And all around is nothing,
And with all the nothing that is there,
Death has not a care,
So sits between the souls,
As each recounts his woes,
And thinks them silent.

Dressed for the Winter

In the shadow of a tree,
Some glistening fragments left,
Sculpted to the outline
Where the sun has yet to press.

Some shelter in the furrows
Of deep and russet leaves,
Others lean across the distance
Between spider web and tree.

But all in time diminish
To a taste upon the air,
Of a night dressed for the winter,
And the coat it chose to wear.

Married in the Summer

They planned a summer wedding
In the winter of that year,
As the snow fell thick around them
With the dwindling Christmas cheer.

Her mother ran the project
Like a military campaign;
His father chose the venue;
Her mother chose again.

And once the summer flourished,

Charlotte

Then waned by late July,
At last they stood together;
White dress and red bowtie.

And turned towards each other
And made their solemn vows,
Then ran away together,
To escape their parent's rows.

Dear Death,

"Dear Death,
I understand that you are busy
And that every second counts,
But let me trouble you for longer:
I must settle some accounts.

Last year you took my father
When the illness took our town,
And then you took my sister
Still in her wedding gown.

And yesterday my mother
Lay sick upon her bed,
And as the sun did grace her,
In the morning she was dead.

So Death, I say, you've robbed me
And there's little I can do,
But for the money that each left me,
Sincerely,

I thank you."

Dancing by the Sea

Beneath a sloping, swaying tree
Through the days of summer long,
Together by the sea shore
In silence or in song,
Sits my love and me,
Dancing here with me.

But as long as summer seems
The days now wake for none,
And though my lover dreams

Charlotte

In winter she's undone,
But we rest still by the sea,
In my arms she sways with me.

No medicine I know
Could catch her fading breath,
To save my fading heart;
Unhook the line of death
And bring her back to me,
Bring her dancing back to me.

But if nothing else could be
But the tears upon her cheeks,
I would wipe them all away,
And give her what she seeks;
She can dance beside the sea,
Ever dancing back to me.

And beside a grave I see
The Marram grass is tall,
And as I sit I weave
Around my heart a wall,
As I look out to the sea
And see her dancing far from me.

She dances by the sea
And in my heart,
She dances here with me.

A Journey

A journey ends with the parting of a river,
From a mountain stream where ice is set
To the banks in a frozen shiver

Across hidden stones we travellers forget,
As our passing shakes them from their beds
From a mountain stream where ice is set

To a shoreline strewn with silver threads
Of other tracks and other paths undone,
As our passing shakes them from their beds

And washes them away with rising sun
That sets aglow the hills to tell a tale,
Of other tracks and other paths undone,

Of snow and frost and other things as pale,

Charlotte

And a waning moon above the mountain clings
That sets aglow the hills to tell a tale

Of many weary steps and now it sings:
A journey ends with the parting of a river,
And a waning moon above the mountain clings
To the banks in a frozen shiver.

Following Smoke

Brothers pass beneath a bridge
Under the stones which form the ridge,
Stepping through waters, clear and fair,
Breathing a smoke that's on the air.

Every hoof is caked with clay,
Building in layers, day by day,
Walking a road that's wide and bare,
They follow the smoke that's on the air.

Steep are the hillsides left and right,
Shrouded by mists and out of sight,
On through the gully, on they wear,
Breathing the smoke that's on the air.

Ahead on the road are fallen trees,
Blackened and cracked, they burnt with ease;
Stopping at last the riders stare,
Tasting the smoke that's on the air.

Over their heads and over their hearts
Clouds grow heavy, clouds grow dark,
Filling their eyes that gaze out there,
Breathing the smoke that's on the air.

Around them the ground is dark with ash,
Cackling flames so bright and brash,
Licking white stones once bold and fair,
Feeding the smoke that's on the air.

The first bows his head to hide his tears,
That burn in the light of realised fears,
Why did I go and leave them there?
Breathing the smoke that's on the air.

The second screams a broken cry;
And kicks at the smouldering ground nearby,
They told him once life wasn't fair,

Charlotte

Cursing the smoke that's on the air.

The third alone walks further in
To gaze around at what had been,
Seeing the ghosts in vapours there,
Breathing the smoke that's on the air.

Onto his knees in pain he falls,
Under a blackened roof he crawls,
Of everything else now unaware,
Lost in the smoke that's on the air.

Cradled against the cooling stone
With glossy eyes he sees his home
Offering up a wordless prayer,
Breathing the smoke that's on the air.

Hands on his shoulders help him stand
Leading him from the ruined land,
Back to his waiting, snorting mare,
Still tasting the smoke that's on the air.

Into the sunset riding fast
The travellers three long shadows cast
A red in their eyes just newly there,
The fire of smoke soon on the air.

In the dark of the night the travellers swear
To remember the smoke that filled the air.

A Lonely Call

Only the whisper of a down-turned sigh
Spreads ripples 'cross a half-frozen stream
As it fell from the mouth of a greying sky

In the winter, when the waters were high
And, on occasion, in the sunlight could gleam,
Only the whisper of a down-turned sigh

Graced the air, and dared to defy
A silence so cold it silenced the scream,
As it fell from the mouth of a greying sky

And froze it to crystals and clouds passing by,
So it rose in eddies as swirling steam,

Charlotte

Only the whisper of a down-turned sigh

On the wind, that in the dark did cry
And the sound of it carried downstream,
As it fell from the mouth of a greying sky

And stirring the water for any reply,
But all, through that winter, did dream;
Only the whisper of a down-turned sigh
As it fell from the mouth of a greying sky.

Not Quite Night

Not quite giving in to night
The sky is lit with fading light
And clouds in crimson split the sky
And murmurations passing by
Dance with the evening in delight,
Not quite giving in to night.

Not quite giving in to night
A flame above the hills ignites
And throws down shadows stretching long
That amplify the evening song
That birds and all the rest recite,
Not quite giving in to night.

Not quite giving in to night
Sun and horizon reunite
And silver stars wait in the wings
Still cloaked by light that filters in,
Resting on the edge of sight,
Not quite giving in to night.

And as the sun at last sets down
The trees are set with pale crown
So still they hold a little light,
Not quite giving in to night.

Something in the Dark

Something awake, something moves in the dark,
The dark of a night where the moon doesn't show
So show only shadows, that pass without mark,

Charlotte

And mark how they change what you thought you did know
Now know nothing at all, but the feel of the bark,
The bark of a tree, whose branches are low,

So low to the ground that the roots are entwined,
Together they bind the leaves and the soil,
Rich soil that the leaves of the past left behind

And behind in the night, something shimmers like oil,
An oil that traces your footsteps in kind,
The kind of movement that tightens the coil

That coils in the gut to weigh down tonight
But tonight it is darker, now more than ever,
And never so much have you wished for the light.

The Taste of Heat

The taste of heat is in the summer air;
Of dust and grit now that the rocks are bare,
And dew is scarce beneath a sinking sun
And sinking still, the shadows start to run
To pool in gentle hollows here and there.

The sun and moon make such a graceful pair;
A golden wash and silver slither fair,
Which pass but brief and with the dark pass on
The taste of heat.

Upon the sand a sound like evening prayer;
Not quite a voice but still a whisper there,
A sound so old it never has begun,
With light or dark or less, a sound undone
And through the night, the scented winds still bare
The taste of heat.

Starlight on the shore

To see the starlight on the shore,
I dream of such things now,
And nothing I would ask for more
If only dreams could show me how
To find a sight as bright and fair,
To find what I am looking for
The blessed sight would greet me there
To see the starlight on the shore.

To see the starlight on the shore

Charlotte

Now that my eyes are cloaked in dark,
But feel the sand and nothing more
Would be a punishment to stark
For a soul still shadowed by a sin,
The oath I broke, the words I swore,
Now swear regret what could have been
To see the starlight on the shore.

To see the starlight on the shore
Just once would serve my purpose,
But ah, I know I'd long for more;
Each desire would resurface,
And every sight would then haunt me
So better not to do this chore,
And let my longings idle be,
To see the starlight on the shore.

My words are pale, even to me
Their sneering tones I now abhor,
I know that whilst I live, I breathe,
To see the starlight on the shore.

Perspectives on a Hanging Man

Silence the cries of the condemned man
Who begs the crowd with his eyes,
And strains against chains, if you can,
Silence the cries

And bind him tighter, though he tries
To loosen the rope with bloodied hands
That pulls taut to welcome his demise.

Many people watch the hanging man;
How he swings freely as he dies,
Fast enough for a short attention span
To silence the cries.

~

Round up, round up! The show is here,
You lucky folk will see it clear
May I tempt you with some fruit to throw?
Free, if you hit the man below.

Attention now, it soon begins,
Right madam, see how he swings!

Charlotte

But soon he stops, with bare a squeak,
Be back again for more next week!

~

He lied.
His hands are tied,
She can't see his eyes
For the sun,
And the crowd,
How his head is bowed.
She shouldn't have come.

She almost cried,
But he lied.

~

He shouldn't have looked, he knew,
For now he knew they were there
And nothing could erase the stare
From the man in the stand,
Or the girl with the golden hair
By her mother's side,
With her blue eyes wide.

A short drop.

What Follows

In open fields of glistening sun
Where flowers bloom and grasses sway,
The many wild roe deer run
Through clearest rivers shimmering,
But darkening clouds not far away
Cast lines of mist where rain's begun
And now the sky grows ever grey
To shadow sunlight glimmering.

Beside the valley left and right
Dark mountains rise in sharpened peaks
Through hanging cloud and out of sight
To ice-capped heights there shivering,
And all around the thunder speaks
To bellow out its raging might
So all below some shelter seek

Charlotte

To out-wait the storm there quivering.

Asylum found in caverns great
Carved deep into the mountain stone
Where many frightened faces wait
In deepest darkness beckoning,
And all below are most alone
In black surrounds that won't abate
So, silent as the winds bemoan,
They sense the time of reckoning.

On through the winds and lashing rain
The hundreds close their eyes in prayer
For sun to fill the sky again
And accept their humble offering,
But as the hours linger their
They fear that they have wished in vain
And only dreams can solace bear
Of spring, and sunsets softening.

Dark eyes open to a clearing dawn
Of stillness and of quiet things
That wake survivors in the morn
To the sighs of a wind relenting,
But though the lark in sunlight sings
The glow displays a valley torn;
Devastation that the west wind brings
Now carries cries lamenting.

And as the clouds draw more away
A silence falls and settles here
Though still the swathes of grasses sway
To whispers they are listening,
On water, ripples disappear
As calm keeps darker things at bay
And wood-smoked scents drift ever near,
Again, the land is glistening.

The Dying

The dying was slow;
A lifetime it took to complete,
Slow, and always as sweet
Until the dying began to show

After many years passed,
Atop a hill lit pale each dawn;
In the evening shadow drawn,

Charlotte

The dying chose its time at last

In a night-time of light
From a waning gibbous on high
With silence in the sky,
So the dying could be out of sight

And before the sun rose,
The dying had been ended there,
So now the hill was bare,
And another life the dying chose.

Hadley

A breath in,
A breath out,

As the trade winds stir
And give motion to the silence;

As a heavy warmth is lifted
And cold sweeps the waves,
Plucking heat from their crests.

Aloft, an anvil shadow casts
In the path of a storm
Over creaking masts,

And the weather is descending;

A breath in,
A breath out,

The silence is broken.