The Ballad of Charlotte Dymond

It was a Sunday evening
And in the April rain
That Charlotte went from our house
And never came home again.

Her shawl of diamond redcloth,
She wore a yellow gown,
She carried the green gauze handkerchief
She bought in Bodmin town.

About her throat her necklace
And in her purse her pay:
The four silver shillings
She had at Lady Day.

In her purse four shillings
And in her purse her pride
As she walked out one evening
Her lover at her side.

Out beyond the marshes
Where the cattle stand,
With her crippled lover
Limping at her hand.

Charlotte walked with Matthew
Through the Sunday mist,
Never saw the razor
Waiting at his wrist.

Charlotte she was gentle
But they found her in the flood
Her Sunday beads among the reeds
Beaming with her blood.

Matthew, where is Charlotte,
And wherefore has she flown?
For you walked out together
And now are come alone.

Why do you not answer,
Stand silent as a tree,
Your Sunday worsted stockings
All muddied to the knee?

Why do you mend your breast-pleat
With a rusty needle’s thread
And fall with fears and silent tears
Upon your single bed?

Why do you sit so sadly
Your face the colour of clay
And with a green gauze handkerchief
Wipe the sour sweat away?

Has she gone to Blisland
To seek an easier place,
And is that why your eye won’t dry
And blinds your bleaching face?

Take me home! cried Charlotte,
‘I lie here in the pit!
A red rock rests upon my breasts
And my naked neck is split!’
Her skin was soft as sable,
Her eyes were wide as day,
Her hair was blacker than the bog
That licked her life away;

Her cheeks were made out of honey,
Her throat was made of flame
Where all around the razor
Had written its red name.

As Matthew turned at Plymouth
About the tilting Hoe,
The cold and cunning constable
Up to him did go:

‘I’ve come to take you, Matthew,
Unto the magistrate’s door.
Come quiet now, you pretty poor boy,
And you must know what for.’

‘She is as pure,’ cried Matthew,
‘As is the early dew,
Her only stain it is the pain
That round her neck I drew!

‘She is as guiltless as the day
She sprang forth from her mother.
The only sin upon her skin
Is that she loved another.’

They took him off to Bodmin,
They pulled the prison bell,
They sent him smartly up to heaven
And dropped him down to hell.

All through the granite kingdom
And on its travelling airs
Ask which of these two lovers
The most deserves your prayers.

And your steel heart search, Stranger,
That you may pause and pray
For lovers who come not to bed
Upon their wedding day,

But lie upon the moorland
Where stands the sacred snow
Above the breathing river,
And the salt sea-winds go.

Charles Causley