

Young Charlotte

As sung by
Winifred Bundy
07-23-1946 Madison, WI

Young Char-lotte lived by the moun-tain side in a lone and drear-y spot.
No ^{oth-er} a-ther dwell-ing ing for miles a-round ex-cept her fath-er's cot,
And yet on man-y a win-ter's eve, young swains would ga-ther there,
For her fath-er kept a so-cial board, and she was ver-y fair.

Verse 1.

Young Charlotte lived by the mountainside in a lone and dreary spot.
No other dwelling for miles around, except her father's cot,
And yet, on many a winter's eve young swains would gather there,
For her father kept a social board, and she was very fair.

Verse 2.

One New Year's Eve, as the sun went down, far looked her wistful eye
Out from the frosty window-pane, as merry sleighs dashed by.
At the village, fifteen miles away, was there a ball that night,
And though the air was piercing cold, her heart was warm and bright.

Verse 3.

How brightly beamed her laughing eye, as a well-known voice was heard,
And dashing to the cottage door, her lover's sleigh appeared.
"Oh daughter dear," her mother cried, "This blanket 'round you hold,
For 'tis a dreadful night abroad, you'll catch your death of cold."

Verse 4.

"Oh nay, oh nay," young Charlotte cried, and laughed like a gypsy queen.
"To ride in blankets muffled up, I never would be seen.
My silken coat is quite enough, you know it's lined throughout,
And here I have a silken scarf to wind my neck about."

Verse 5.

Her bonnet and her gloves were on; she jumped into the sleigh.
Swift sped they down the mountain-side, and o'er the hills away.
With muffled beats, then silently, five lengths at last were passed,
When Charles, with few and shiv'ring words, the silence broke at last.

Verse 6.

“Such a dreadful night I never saw, my rein I scarce can hold.”
Young Charlotte faintly then replied, “I am exceeding cold.”
He cracked his whip, he urged his steed; five other dreary miles
In silence passed as on they dashed, with nothing that beguiles.

Verse 7.

Spoke Charles, “How fast the freezing ice is gath'ring on my brow.”
And Charlotte still more faintly said, “I'm growing warmer now.”
So on they rode, through frosty air and glitt'ring cold starlight,
Until at last the village lamps and ballroom came in sight.

Verse 8.

They reached the door, and Charles sprang out, and held his hand to her.
“Why sit you like a monument that hath no power to stir?”
He called her once, he called her twice; she answered not a word.
He asked her for her hand again, and yet she never stirred.

Verse 9.

He took her hand in his. 'Twas cold and hard as any stone.
He tore the mantle from her face; the cold stars o'er it shone.
Then quickly to the lighted hall, her lifeless form he bore.
Young Charlotte's eyes had closed for aye; her voice was heard no more.

Verse 10.

And there he sat down by her side, while bitter tears did flow,
And cried, “My own, my charming bride, you never more shall know.”
He twined his arms around her neck; he kissed her marble brow.
His thoughts flew back to where she said, “I'm growing warmer now.”

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 219, and HST

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by Winifred Bundy, age 62, Madison, 1946.

This ballad relates the story of beautiful young Charlotte, who paid for her false pride by freezing to death. The authorship has been traditionally attributed to William Lorenzo Carter, a blind singer of Benson, Vermont. When his father adopted the Mormon faith, the younger Carter traveled with him to Utah, planting, according to tradition, the song Young Charlotte along the course of the journey.

To Phillips Barry is due the credit for intensive study of the origin of the ballad. He includes it in his "Maine Woods Songster" with the comment "Words by Seba Smith 1843; first printed under the title 'A Corpse Going to a Ball,' in The Rover, II, 225; The incident, on which this ballad is based, was known to the author only from an item in the religious column of The New York Observer, February 8, 1840, entitled A Corpse Going to a Ball. A certain Miss --- was said to have been frozen to death while riding with 'her partner for the evening,' to a ball on the bitterly cold eve of January 1, 1840. The recovery of the original text of Young Charlotte, shorter by four ballad quatrains than the vulgate traditional text, forces a reevaluation of the part played by the traditionally reputed author, William L. Carter of Benson, Vermont." Collectors have found the song widely current both in the United States and Canada. In 1948, Mrs. Daniel Goggin of Peoria, Ill., sang me a portion of the song as she remembered it in her childhood in ---- county, Illinois.

Miss Bundy learned the song from her mother, Olive Morgan Bundy, who came from Canada when she was fourteen. However, Miss Bundy was quite certain that her mother learned the song after she came to Wisconsin.

Editor's notes:

Flanders et al write that though the name and place of this event are not known, tradition says it took place around Downer's Tavern in Weathersfield, Vermont. People would travel fifteen miles from Mount Holly to attend their balls; however, those may not have started until 1843, three years after the *New York Observer's* article about the death of the young woman (Flanders 114). Linscott writes that this song "is the second native American ballad to be discovered," claiming **Young Johnny** as the first (Linscott 305).

Alternate titles/related songs: "The Frozen Girl," "Fair Charlotte," "Young Charlottie."

Sources:

Flanders, Helen Hartness, Elizabeth Flanders Ballard, George Brown, and Phillips Barry, collectors, transcribers, and editors. *The New Green Mountain Songster: Traditional Folk Songs of Vermont*. New Haven: Yale University Press; London: H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1939. last tune given ("Eastern or woods tune") is most similar to HST version

Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, collectors and editors. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c1939.

Linscott, Eloise Hubbard, collector and editor. *Folk Songs of Old New England*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1939.

Lomax, John A., collector. *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. 1916. New edition with additions. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1922. "Young Charlottie"

Newman, Katharine D. *Never Without a Song: The Years and Songs of Jennie Devlin, 1865-1952*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

Rickaby, Franz, collector and editor. *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-boy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926. "Fair Charlotte"

Sandburg, Carl. *American Songbag*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927. "The Frozen girl" lyrics are nearly the same; the tune is similar, though "The frozen girl" is in 6/8 while Young Charlotte is 4/4.

K.G.