Poetry Series

Charlotte Ballard

- 302 poems -

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1.1 The Writing-it always comes: A Poet's Heart

Who knows what's is in
A poet's heart-it could be
Rainbows and candy apples
Ferris wheels or Topsy Turvys
Enough to make the head
Spin while the heart remains
Untouched.

Yet, mostly, it seems
That poet's dreams are harder
Things that bite and snatch
And dance a Saint Vitus
Even as it dies under a pen.

Don't peek, it's not
Nice. Let the poet
Speak. Let the poet
Dream, and mostly,
By request - Let
The poet scream.

Charlotte Ballard

1.2 A Two-minute Poem

While I wait for
Blue Berry Cobbler
To blend, and heat
Through,

I pretend that
I'm a poet -
Writing here.

Charlotte Ballard

1.2 Burger King Poet

Do you want a rhyme with that,
Or just a bit of rhythm?
Ye, we have meter,
It's not quite fresh,
But it's the best we can do.
The beat?
Oh, yes, it's quite well done
The cook insists it's so-
But I know the truth,
He does the best he can, but
I wouldn't eat it raw-
If'n it were me.

The manager says it's
Closing time, but
I'll let you sit a minute-

Can I get you a refill
On a poem or two?

Charlotte Ballard

1.3 Adventure

Exploring other
Poetry, so brief
In fullness, round
Clipped short, pulled
Back from completeness
Letting the spaces
Fill the lines in between
And suggesting more
Than the poet
Intended -
I hope
To write
Like that.

Charlotte Ballard

1.4 Born with Love

Chose a feeling,
Still slippery wet
From it's mother's womb,
Cradle it gently
And sing sweet lovelies
Until the words come.
Trembling ones
That toddle precariously about
At the edge of your consciousness.

Nurse with pen,
Diaper with paper.
A still, quiet heart to
Hear the silent coos
Of perfect phrase.

Wait too long
To nurture the child
The child, now grown,
Will stride off with giant steps
With only the faintest remembrance
Left cluttered about.

Charlotte Ballard

2.1 Life Experienced: A Brief Breath

Learning,
Intensely,
Digging
Deep
A hole
No, a circle
That comes around
And bites its
Own tale.

Charlotte Ballard

2.10 Blue

Blue as a newborn's eyes.
Blue as a mother with no money for milk.
Blue as the newspaper's boy's bell.
Blue as the type faded in the rain.
Blue as the politician who voted for taxes -
Blue as the taxpayer who voted him out again.
Blue as the buttons on my shirt.
Blue as windows menu scroll bar line.
Blue as centuries wrapped up in books
Blue as diamonds still in the ground.
Blue as a duck's plastic pond.
Blue as a sleepy cat's eyes.
Blue as each inch of my favorite shirt.
Blue as unripe beginnings.
Blue as plastic trash cans.
Blue as the horn that the boy blew.
Blue as uncaught rainwater.
Blue as a jacket wrapped around a stranger.
Blue as my granny's memories and her hair.
Blue for just now, and then, just because.

Charlotte Ballard

2.11 Blue Note

All black and white
With curves and lines
Scratched straight and
round, and curved just so
A man swallows the note
His bedfellow plays whose
Checkered shirt was lifted
by the lines and square.
Music on paper, no notes
But you know it's so
And on the side, the lowest
Side is a place of Triangular
Snacks pressed whole out
of cracked paste glue.

Charlotte Ballard

2.2 A Brief Encounter

A pause in the middle of the madness
Of books spread open with white pages
Like the white thighs of prostitutes
Laid back by the promise of fingers
Carefully placed with no
Corners bent or spine pressed
Too hard between sweating palms
Flicking past, holding down what
Isn't theirs, only -that's wrong
It does belong to them for that
One moment, shared by anyone
Who can flash the right card
Or lay the green cash down.

Charlotte Ballard

2.2 Brown Cow

Truth is a slippery thing
Twisted by lies, or
Looks, or an expression
That begs for the reader
To think of more, of
A different chocolate
Slip of grace....how
Now, brown cow?
Do you pine for shaded
Trees, and farmers who
Press with warm hands
In your private place?
I, too, wish for doctors
Who know that warm hands
Are better than cold speculums.
How now, brown cow?
Do they push your ovaries as
They press mine? Do they
Mention a golf game
And when was your last pap smear?
I don't look, even as I am helped up.
I hate the invasion of male
Hands in a spread female place
Slippery with careless gel and
Professional aplomb.
I take a long time to dress.

Charlotte Ballard

2.3 A Challenge

An easy one,
This,
A challenge
Given over
Coffee and sweet
Buns, bitten into
Easy,
Sure,
Sure,
Choose your life.
That's all,
Commit to it
As with no matter -
If you leap bonelessly
Into shockingly cold
Streams of nouns
Tickled by adjectives
Going upstream to breed.
Hold back, the writer
Dies by inches and
Minutes and not
By the editor's pen
Snapped across a page
Full of blood and tripe.
Kiss me, Kate
For -
I don't know how
Tall the cliff is
Or how
Long
I'll be gone.

Charlotte Ballard

2.4 A House in Lebanon

I wiped blood off a dead child's face
this morning,
Between 'Was that one egg or two? '
And 'Pass the butter, dear.

Bullet speckled walls
Bled gray, stucco dust
Onto a geography lesson
Forgotten on a green tiled floor, while
One lone tennis shoe,
Tipped sideways lingers by chalk outlines
Drawn by trembling cop fingers

Would you like
Another bagel, Honey?
Or just a refill on the coffee?

Toy soldiers
Scattered by a pitted
Face as the child now grown
Tries to stop the nightly torment of
Shadowy figures
Taunting from a
Broken whirl-around

One bullet does it.

Machine guns rattle like a woman in labor
Answered by a babe's shrieks
Fading quickly as I
Lean to start my car.

Charlotte Ballard

2.5 After the Gold Rush

My hands tingle
From a scant practice
To strengthen something
Broken, stretched out of place.
The keys, black and white
Bend obediently forward
Returning back
To original haunty spaces
Before the emperor's robe.
What makes me go to
Where the music curves
Up and tingles my
Eyes behind the paper?
I sneeze for want of something
Different.

Charlotte Ballard

2.6 Afterthought

The day after you die
Your belonging are parceled out
And your bills are marked deceased.
Your honey kisses another and
Your children hug their new
Mother. A few tears, if you're
Lucky, hover that
Hang softly and
Sparkle like fine crystal
Dusty and forgotten.

Charlotte Ballard

2.7 Because You helped to Become Well

Because you helped me to become well…
My days aren't spent watching other people's clouds,
My own breath comes up, swelling the breeze—
Lifting the Robin and the Blue Jay,
Rustling wings that replaced fear's greed.

Because you helped me to become well…
Cousin Pain doesn't visit like he used to-
Teaching me in dry, hot strokes to mind
How I lisped, bent and borrowed remembrance in a pill.

Because you helped me to become well…
Days, and Days, and Days peak up,
Opening hidden pathways, and revealing secret places
Where amber leaves crunch underfoot even as I grasp
For the spring's first flower—a peteled pink rose.

Because you helped me to become well…
My sins are no longer visiable in the cleft of a sofa's bottom
Or in a bed-too long tucked away with only bread and water.
The rabbit's house has become too small.

Because you helped me to become well.

Charlotte Ballard

2.9 Blind

Color is a medium
Splashing mouths and
Bottoms moving in front
Of a boxed off beat.
Steam blurs chipmunk
Hands that snap, quick
Quick, like that...
Where's the blue in that?
Or the red? Smashed in
Stretchy comic stuff.
Vibrations tap out
Code in elbows, knees where
Sweat creases black promises,
Spaghetti boils from under
The door.

Charlotte Ballard

3.1 Love comes: A Party

I threw a party
Once for a man
Who had snuck
Into my life,
And I took as
Lover so as
To finally get
Some sleep.
I planned for fifty,
That's what he
Said, that's how
Many people he
Knows as friends.
I sent invitations,
I went door to door.
I asked for RSVPs.
I received none.
Still I planned -
Pizzas and party
Space, and most of
A check spent -
That should have
Gone to the rent
Three days late.
No one came, even
The man came late -
With his brother and
Wife, and all thier little
Mice. I sent the pizza
Home with them, because
No one came,
And I was ashamed
That I had believed him.

Charlotte Ballard

3.2 A Promise Meant Nothing

From seventeen to thirty,
I played a game of lover's roulette-
Grabbing the gun of sexual desire
And pointing it at my heart,
Pretending that the heat in the
Cross of my legs meant that
Romance, and blessings,
And all that a ring would bear.
Trading kissing and clutching
For a spin of the gun.

Sometimes a spin brought
More heat but less fire,
And another spin- nothing
but a card bought for a buck
Forty-nine,
Crumbling in my hands,
While I nursed a baby in my belly.
I didn't know the rules, or
Rather, I pretended not to.
I couldn't keep them, anyway.
For they made no sense to
The fiction
Of kisses and groping
And tongues gone lying.
Only the babe stayed
Real, not dissolving in
The morning, leaving only
A wet smear, and sorrow.
Promises meant nothing.

Charlotte Ballard

3.2 Carbon Copy

I float most nights
Out of my body -
And into the wet-dreams
Of young nubile boys
Promising a moment of
Vision, if they
Just once follow me.

Charlotte Ballard

3.3 A Song Not Yet Finished

You loved me once among
Budding tea roses built
To be what I was not,
A tender, passing beauty
And as easy to dismiss as
A dandelion growing in
Amongst lilies and snapdragons.
You puff and my feelings float
Off to replant
Someplace where I am not.

Charlotte Ballard

3.4 Absence of Anything Special

Truth can be held in a bottle and brought out
For weddings and charities like some old
Piece of lace curtain from Aunt Edna's old
Box of dried parchment, pieces of a life of
A girl that disappeared into a
Doughy mass of flesh, rippled and dimpled
In soft plastic crush,
Who had lips once that pressed a young
Man's heart into his throat with
Just a promise of a kiss just there,
Or there, but never, oh my, never
There.
It's the same, I think. Like yesterday's
Lemonade, too flat to do anything
But pour it out, into a sink that
Needs scrubbing from the gallons
Of coffee poured out, left over, too,
From a wake given for Mr. Pasaseni
Or was it Mrs. Ughnot? I don't remember,
Only I see the lemonade swirl and mix
With the muddy reminders of something
That won't ever mix up again. It won't do,
It says. It simply won't do.
Whose love was it anyway?
That evaporated into TV guides
Tucked into pockets of lazy-boys tipped
Back by slippered old men who start snoring before
The first commercial is half past.
It wasn't mine. It couldn't be.
I would know-Wouldn't I?

Charlotte Ballard

3.5 Beautiful

What is the measure
Of Beauty
Within my hand?
Is it in my hair
Twined in trees
Or roses up in the air?
Is it my eyes
Sparkling wide
Like those in a
Stream coming down
From the stars inside?
Is it in my face
Lifted up to yours
Reflecting the love
You have for me
And me for you?

Charlotte Ballard

3.5 Bitter Tears

My bitter tears curse down my face
 To lap at the edges of my despair
I hold that which must be freed
And cannot capture that which is mine

Why does the forest pine for the maidens fair
That come and pick the merry blooms
That creep almost out of reach?
They long to hear the cries of the morning bird
Harking his tale of woe.

I need to hold the blossoms bright
That capture the morning dew.
I long to bring out to the light
Those misty day of old.

Bring me my children
Those that burst bright with song.
Bring me, Bring me my Children
Careful not to hurt their song.

There are not many more days for me
to put these verse down.
As my bitter tears course down my face.
To curse the fail-safe song.

Charlotte Ballard

3.6 Black eyes

Your black eyes speak death for me.
Each white tooth
That once chewed
The food that I
Had prepared-
Spaghetti, bacon,
And beans
Just so, just now
Want to tear a furrow
Into the hollow of my neck like
A werewolf on
A cold winter's night.
I see the blood
Already clotting
Into maroon jellied
Masses on your pure white hands.
I did nothing but
Love you and
Ask that you be the
Man that you
Conceived, one
Gray night back
While laying on
A jail cell cot.

Charlotte Ballard

4.1 Family means Expectations: A Country Christmas

In a hidden valley-
A covered bridge
Decorated with holiday lights
Glow white, green
And blushing red, all around
A wreath centered
Over mud-dirtied snow.
A promise of a homecoming
With snowmen, lit from within
And lights from every window.
Church - across the way-
Decorated as well, with
Lights in the belltower.
All this -I see,
As I walk home.

No, that's not the truth,
It's a picture of what I want
To be, in my frost-nipped
Home, promises of Santa
And of divine forgiveness
Welcoming all strangers
Home.

Charlotte Ballard

4.10 Battle

Billy Johnson, now grown three-
With fat fingers clutch and claw-
Choc'ate drips leave a convenient trail
For Nana Johnson to follow home.

Big Wheels churn up the dust
While ankles rev up the noise.
I shuttle back like a crab
To escape certain death or dust.

His eyes focused forward,
Chocolate clutched tight.
A neighbor's tabby cries in pain
Childish laughter almost the same.

Nana finds the roaming boy-
Cuddles and kisses
Bring the Tiger home
A sleepy head lies cradled

Revealing the angel within.
Tabby licks injured tail
And strikes hard at a leaping cricket
I take myself inside, knowing I've seen battle.

Charlotte Ballard

4.11 Betrayal by a Child

When a child counts one, two, three
Dragons toes used as a rule
Sleep lingers to be caught
Unaware by shrill brownies
Baked fresh out of box
Bought last year..
So the dance continues
Birthday blows, candles drip, fall
Surrendering to slick brim
Blowed by uneven lips
Folded back and tucked between
Fearsome gaps, that brought
Silver, and gold fancies
Clutched in a sweaty
Thought, tripped then trapped
By a bubble blown.
Nevermind, it's all gone
Both dream and song.

Charlotte Ballard

4.2 A Forgotten Child

I was a forgotten child
With nothing much -
In me.
To give.
No beauty -
No love.
No honesty, no truth.
No integrity. No life.
Nothing that was mine.

Except -
A current surged forward,
Forcing me to surrender
Everything to it,
Tearing away
All the cardboard pretenses -
Measured carefully and
Cut on the lines.
Spawning -
A new salvation
In the most unlikely of
Places-at the bottom
Of a poem forced in
3/4 quarter rhyme.

Charlotte Ballard

4.3 A Debt Poem

I hate debt
That creeps around-
Allowing others
To yank
As if they own
Body and soul full
Flesh-

The mind worries
As the body prays
Never enough -
The maw yawns deep.

Charlotte Ballard

4.4 A Hundred Pounds of Clay

A hundred pounds
Of clay went
Into the first wound
Fired by the jagged
Seams of polite society.
Thin excuses over thick
Slices of etiquette
Dictated by a dead queen
Who never asked me
To tea. I don't think.
I never checked my
Social calendar for
Curled up messages dipped
In coffee full of creamy
Crap-ful of nothing
Important, there I
Bleed. Dare I?
On the rug of more
Important things than
One dog's tears.
Two paws dig deep
To bury nothing much
Except my pride as
I dip my bone in
Again, and sip it
Dry. The ceramic
Breaks under a push
And prod of skinny
Feet and I tap my
Flesh to see if the seal
Holds.

Charlotte Ballard

4.5 A Line Touches Me

A line touches me
A deep scarlet one
Of race and family
Of clan and breed.
Unchosen, some say
A defining shape
Given around a curve
Of color, of pain,
Of a past not explored
Or known, by choice.

A lift of a chin, a soft
Turn that could be
A swirl of a dance -
That oldest one
That got Adam
In so much trouble.

Who gave me that
Brow, or the length
Of my calf, and the
Curve that invites
A male hand there?

Would I have lived her, in
The rough place between
Two molars? My tongue
Lifts and tilts a rumbling
Place hidden in clefs
And D minor notes
Phased in and out,
Like a dance, that
Other one, too.
Where is my place now -
When ancestor breathe
Their promise inside?
The dance completes
In my own daughter's smile.

Charlotte Ballard

4.7 A Mother's Day Poem

My mother keeps a poem
That I wrote when I was
More than a child, but
Not yet a Woman.

In it, I praised her motherly ways
And calm hand -
Claiming that she was
The delight of my life and
My central love -
I lied.

What I had wanted to say,
What I needed to say -
Was to scream out for protection-
For her to run with me
To the hills, and borrow in deep.

I did not tell the secrets, even
In the thick of the lies
Where even a good eraser
Would not have dug them out.
What I needed was for her
To love me
More

To love me enough
To save me from the holes
I sensed opening up in
The vodka misted ground
A fog raising up from the
Ground of lecherous stares
And saliva dripped from a
Mouth that wasn't mine or hers,
To save me from the monster
In the closet, that opens
The door, that opens my legs
That opens my mouth
Pushing the dirt away
Tamped in by taunting voices
And love withheld.

She didn't.
And I didn't.
And somehow,
I survived anyway.

Charlotte Ballard

4.8 A Shirt

A word occurs to me
When you twist like that
In the middle of explaining
How the perfume stain - not mine
Got rubbed against the shirt
Still scented with the Tide
I washed it in. The word is
Bleach.

Charlotte Ballard

4.9 Again

Again, I'm sitting here.
Again, you criticize me
Again, for a dream that
Again, isn't good enough yet
Again, you lie -
Again, the truth is that you're afraid
Again, that I'll leave you
Again, just when I'm letting you in.
Again, You don't want to die alone.
Again, as a daughter you were perfect -
Again, why can't I be the same?
Again, you feel you deserve it.
Again, for all the sacrifices you've made.
Again, my fault, I let you near me
Again.

Charlotte Ballard

5.1 Nature in the middle: A Secret Place

A flash of purple, light and perfect
Flutters a welcome, cradling white
Curved around pink. Each blossom
Reflected back by silver liquid perfection
Spotted with green lily pads where
No frogs croak, and the lotus flowers
Await someone to sit on them.

Charlotte Ballard

5.2 Calla Lillies

Pure pinkness with
Undertones of
Purple bruises and
Red scuffing.
Softness swept
Curving lusciously-
Inviting with
An open middle
Offer prayers
Of forgiveness
And of new
Beginnings
But not of yours -
Tampered green
Straight lines
From a held out
Hand.
"Precious-"

Charlotte Ballard

5.2 Cat Ownership

Cat ownership is such a tricky thing
Who gets the couch when
Idol is on, and who must
Make due with a mouse
Caught between a border
Drawn from out to in, and under
To overhead. A belly rub is
Not approved unless one
Says the magic word: tuna.
A look, a rub, and then
You are owned by
More fur than your mother
Owned even before
The red paint splash down
Purposely. A touch marks
Who belongs to who, and
A whisper ruff is carried
Back and back and back
Until a heart can hold
No more.

Charlotte Ballard

5.2 Caught in the Rain

Caught in the rain,
Two pigeons play
Slender feet splash
The other, both flap
Giggling like small
Girls out in yellow
Slickers and red
Splash boots.

Charlotte Ballard

5.3 Black Cat

Black Cat guards the top of my computer
Smiles gently as eyes are closed
Rightfully placed
Bought at half price at a shelter
Crowded with cousins needing homes.
She celebrates her supremeness and her beauty
By knocking my drink into my keyboard.

Charlotte Ballard

6.3 A Soldier's Companion

A cup
That once held
Milk, cool-aide, orange juice.
Green plastic,
Wide mouth -
reclaimed, remade
For a different purpose -
A soldier's companion.
Pens shoved in rudely
First, full, spilling over
Pushed in again.
Then -
Scraps of a life well presented -
Of hair ties, nail clippers
Twine, a rabies tag
Cracking
Under the pressure -
Spilling my life's
Debris, chipped
Cracked-
Beloved.

Charlotte Ballard

6.4 Bay Window

Fan blowing.
Tall trees still.
A minute before it rains,
A humming bird at a
Red tinged feeder.
Black cat shaking
Excess water off.
Graceful steps flowing,
Untrained dancer of fur.
A leaf waving goodbye
To summer, and to fall -
An empty birdhouse brings
Art instead of form.
Geese splashing knee-deep
In blue children's tide-pool
Rumbled grey feathers,
Shaken to dry.
Clean house, almost -
Crumbs swept but
More are born
In sandwiches made -
Soup's on.
A dead frog in the middle
Of a clean mopped floor.
Husband brings chocolate
And kisses nestled in
Curved necks and laughing eyes.
Click of keys on the keyboard
As tight fingers tap an ancient
Rhythm out-
Touched with joy.

Charlotte Ballard

7.1 Social Commentary - more of it: A Prophet's Price

Terror means nothing more
Than a dip in stocks
When a board is bombed
No matter how much
Grass is grown
On the blood splattered
Dark maroon.

Just Dance, they say,
Just dance and drink the
Wine. No, wait. No wine
For us, if seventy-seven virgins
Wait. Limp, damp flesh
Too deeply grown for
Camels to ride.

Spirals circle,
Once and twice
And back again,
Waiting for the moment
To ripen into full flesh
Of a promise given by
A prophet gone tomorrow.
Whispering in wishes
And songs that were never
Meant to be sung
In a century never believed in.

Never prayed for,
Never hoped for.

And never meant to be
Twisted into bombs
Delivered in the trunk
of a beat-up van.

Charlotte Ballard

7.2 Aids

Just now, Michael spoke
Not from courage
Nor from hope.
"I'm dying, " he says
"I'm dying of a disease
That has no cure."
The people clap
For his bravery,
Like a bloodied hunter
Standing next to his corpse.
And his willingness
To share what
Ails him
But no one kisses
Him in the darkness
Nor brings him
Home to love.

Charlotte Ballard

7.2 Bubba Explains

Cancel my subscription
I never got what I wanted.
I paid my dues-Harvard, Yale
Well, maybe that ain't so. But
Still I did go somewhere-
I just can't remember where-
I'm not renewing, or
Extending my stay.
Not at the new low price
For a short time only
Not even for a
Half off sale.

Charlotte Ballard

7.2 Cancer is Better

Cancer is better than
Dying of Fire or in
Snow far away from
All those brave souls
That hide your name.
Keep the money fresh,
Honey, so I can monkey
Off and into all that glows.

Charlotte Ballard

7.2 Charlotte Cody Ballard

Care gently taken
Here for a moment
Are soft hands
Resting
Lightly
On my hair
Taken in substitute
Taken in pain -
Ever it has been

Clear eyes
Over every
Day but
Yesterday

But, she laughs over
All the old fears
Laying here and there
Lapped with
Anger and
Repressed
Dark dreams.

Charlotte Ballard

7.3 Aitutaki

The dream of escape
Is carved, usually
From the mist of
Ocean foam curved
in the hollow of a mullock=s
Shell, A deserted island
No taxes or rent, or
Even CDs push
Into an existence
Carved with the palm of
A hand roughed by
Climbing Coconut
Palms swaying in time
To the ocean current.
Heat relieved by a
Dip in green marred by
Slippery blue. Yet
I search for a tangle like
that in the middle of my
Heart...not chest, not really
maybe, it might be so.
I want the kind of peace
That comes on confined
Air-conditioned air swirled
By unseen blades of
Truth and Daring to be
More.

Charlotte Ballard

7.4 An Early Marriage

Mary Jane,
The great green whore,
Bride of death, waits
At the altar of compulsion.
While crake, the best man
Cradles the sweet smelling
Bouquet made of speed-balls and
Angel dust, faithfully wrapped
With a band of gold
Stolen with a promise.
An ambulance wail signals
The bridal march,
For a marriage bed
That will be consummated in
A grave not yet placed.

The matchmakers whisper
A sweet siren call-
A good, gentle bride
Wrapped in plastic and fire.

Dark corners and sweaty palms;
The bride price paid.
In shame,
He takes her home.

Charlotte Ballard

8.1 Crazyness is a State of Mind-An Argument

I heard an argument
In the day-room, yesterday.
I was to be the referee
To make it civilized and free.

Ted told me that Sam and him
Were trying to decide the
Best way to proceed.

About what, I asked.
Ted said-the best known way to kill
And, of course, the neatest way to clean
The scene of traces of blood and brain.

Oh, I said. O.K. by me.

Ted said-
Neatness is important-
No fuss, no muss, when
Poison is used. Only a funny grin
And it's done-you see.

Sammie pouted and pointed out
That poison ruins the texture of the meat
And makes it quite unfit to eat.

But blood stains the shirt and shoes
And won't come off the rug. And what
Do you do about the oatmeal brains,
Scattered around for luck?
Ted did reply to this.

What do you think, they asked me that day.

I pondered a bit and did considered
Most carefully everything that had been seen.
Finally, I gave my pronouncement-
You're both right, I answered with pride.
It doesn't matter how you kill
The women that prowl after your mind,
Only that you get as many,
As your pantry can provide.

Charlotte Ballard

9.1 Juvenile Poetry: An Adolescent Cries

I hear a strange rumbling
In me, as if ten freight cars
Were rolling by,
And something important
Was being decided
And I wasn't even invited
To sit at the table to
Speak in my own defense.
Like an underage minor
Forced to sit outside,
With my legs swinging,
The courtroom that will
Decide my fate,
I have no voice to speak.
Yet, I hear the screech
Of the Pullman cars
Being halted and the porter
calling 'Last Stop, all Out.
Last Stop.'

Charlotte Ballard

9.2 Blackest Day

Bleackest Day
Blackest days
Burning nights
A world turned crazy
A life gone bad.

Could it be better?
Could it be worse?

A knife flashes
A man lies dead
A life-long dream
Destroyed in a moment.
Sickness runs rampant
A child cries for milk
the sun, only a hazy memory
Terror a way of life.
Is there hope for us
In this world so small
Is there a chance
Even just one?

Charlotte Ballard

9.3 Boom A Rang Gift

I was sitting in my bathtub
Soaking late one night
I heard a rumble,
I heard my little dog bark

My bathtub did a cartwheel
My rubber ducky did a flip
The water all around me
Gave my neighbors quite a show

I knew I shouldn't have done it
It was my fault indeed
Giving my son a chemistry set
Now he's set off atomic bombs.

I wonder what my neighbors think
Every night at nine
When they see my bathtub
Catapulting through the sky

Charlotte Ballard

90.1 Religion-a broken choice: Between The Waves

From between the waves
Of blessing, and of wealth
Come a simple test of faith.
Is what you have enough
Or do you crave more
Of everything you've got.
Do you share, or do you hold?
Do you give, knowing
That there is more-
Or do you clutch
And watch it all
Fade away from spread fingers wide.

From between the waves
I hear a plead for
A gift of love
Of hope, of faith,
Little ones breathe
It out on shallow
Sleep, soft sighs
Capture the strongest hearts.
Leave me to my passion.
Leave me to my song-
Leave me to everything
That's gone wrong.
I don't want it anymore.

Charlotte Ballard

90.2 Selfishness

I take the last Dr. Pepper
Cold can in hand -
Blurring the brown liquid
Into something holy-
A formal catechism
Of sugar and starch formed
In the crevices of caffeine
And ice.
I invoke this, this blessing
Denied to lesser
Beings, my children
By birth.
I promise them -
A baptism of frosty
Aluminum, tasting
Of tin—just
Bless me father,
For I have sinned.

Charlotte Ballard

A Godless Poem

Do you hate me, God?
Are you peeved
Because I don't pray?
Where is my heart?
It isn't here-
Under the dust,
under the drawers
Where the spiders crawl-
Where the weevils play.
I want a heart that
Bounces like gray graffiti
Like broken glass
Smoked in a pipe.
Knickers belong
On kittens and
This poem belongs
To you.

Charlotte Ballard

Chasing Rabbits

The ashes where the
Ferns grow wet
Comes a perfumed child, bows untied, yet
Creeps, and leaps and carries a frog
Inside a coveroverall
Button up,
Here and here
Petey needs a carrot, and so does Doral
A pregnancy test shows a doubled stripped line
Churned beneath a frosted breath
A flash of white, of litmus, of lime
Greedy women yell 'push, push'
Slim lines refuse the lie.
A cry in the darkness, lights flash on.
A rabbit chase, a rabbit chase is on.

Charlotte Ballard

Chess Lent

Given up for Lent
Chess, that is-
Well, really, it
Was because
I couldn’t beat
To the rhythm of
The squall and squeal
Of a king tipped -
Resigned to a funny
Lisp, that never was
Checkmated, both
Bishops linger near-
Leaping knights
Praying for a
Barren queen’s
Womb.

Charlotte Ballard

Cleverness

Cleverness is knowing
When to say Hello
And when to run away
From the fear that hides
Inside of baked bread loafs
And sausage meat pies.

Charlotte Ballard

Clouds over Mount Chiquita

Gray ash spills
Down a damp ravine into
Water surrounded by numb
Green witnesses.
White powder sprinkled
Over tipped salutes
Keeps the survivors back.
The clouds blush rose
As they hold the rising
Sun-wife from her chill-
Stilled husband -
Blurred as a naughty wind
Shuffles the clues.

Charlotte Ballard

Confession of a Color Addict

They're coming!
Run for cover.
Crusading colors are on the rampage.
Here comes pitiful parading purple
DUCK!
Two big blobs
Are stuck on my knees
Rip-roaring Red is running wild
WATCH OUT!
Whew, I'm glad
That one missed me.
SPLAT!
A smidgen of guilty-green
Is gnawing at my ankle
Birdy Blue has flown
Through my first line defenses
And built a nest in my Belly button
Boring Black has kidnaped
My napping brain
I never knew when Oily Orange hit me.
If you ever go to the state hospital
And see someone covered with colors,
Wave,
For it's me.

Charlotte Ballard

Curiosity Killed the Cat

Curiosity killed the cat
Is a phrase that determines
A turn here, or there
Or behind me now.
A packaged sneakedly
Opened, before being
Wrapped back carefully. No
Secrets hidden here-
Blessed no, mothers
Too eager to speak out -

A gift that prods the
Struggling child in
Lessons whispered out.
Catch it here, or there
Or seek it under the
Mouse’s click.
Two preambles
forward, is enough
To do the trick.

Charlotte Ballard

Daily Poem Writing

A hand held out
To an old time foe
Of relative dimensions
It snaps back, bloodied
Held up, the wound gapes
And I am not surprised.
Only the pains does, quick,
Wet, deep, and solid inside
My heart, as babies are brought down
As wife, as son, as soil for the worms
To borrow through,
Repeats, a multitude of times
Each one whispering about
The blood that comes
That always comes
It is meant
I guess,
By God’s demise
Of promises given,
And honor kept back.
I wish for no other.

Charlotte Ballard

Dance in the Moonlight

A nymph-like figure
Glided in the glade.
Her long flowing tresses rippled gently in the wind.
'Follow me, my cautious lover, '
She whispered to me
'Dance in the moonlight
And sip the Ambrosia.
We'll travel to the stars and back
In the space of a hare's breath.
We'll hold tea for two
In the garden of the fairies.
The daffodils and marigolds
I will wind in your hair.
We'll sing a song of gladness
And the wind will speak your praises.'
She gestured once more
And then she was gone.

Charlotte Ballard

Dandelion Words

Billy brings me a dandelion, today,
Gone all wispy soft.
He grins with his little boy face-
Dirt necklaces dance up and down
As he giggles when I do blow soft
Words that wrap around his face, he
Brings up his hands and the last
Tatters drift high and fly away.

Charlotte Ballard

Dandelions

I woke up to dandelions falling on my face.
Empty piss-yellow promises,
Spread like thick jam
Over billows of white bread breasts.
I hold the knife and ask,
Roses and white wine, tonight-
Or just the usual short fare?

Charlotte Ballard

Deadness

Death arrived without
My knowing.
Clothes in twisted
Metal and shattered
Glass, he came
Silent and slow.

My fingers stiffened and
Dropped off
(at the third join)
Into a puddle-like mound of
Juicy bits, later
Thrown into a hungry hound.
But I unconcerned;
Having black nights, and
Cancerous,
Words grooved into
The six-foot sides
Of rich brown earth
Where fat earthworms wiggle and
Mold themselves
Into rings and things.

I counted tombstones
As a hobby
Until the pasty
Fog wafted in and
Clung ribbon-like
On the dead, faded flowers
And I could smell the scent of
Plastic flesh
Drifting up from a
Coffin that bore my name.

Later, I couldn't remember
If a private speech
Had been dribbled across my
Wooden couch and finally
Decided to query my neighbor
About the whole affair.

She stirred drunkenly
From the jellied blood
That had dripped off
A jauntily tipped tombstone
(Hers I think)
Into a dark hole
That had been recently dug.
Tiny maggots squirmed in protest
In the black cavity
Where her breath
Had once echoed. She spat out

A clot of earthen mud,
Splashing me as it landed.

'It was so sad, '
She giggled,
Gray strands from a matted braid
Twisted and flexed
In a sainted dance.
'Everybody wore their
Unhappy face and dribbled as
They walked.'
She rocked back
And slapped her patella with the
Edge of a three-fingered hand.
'Oh, ' I said while
Picking at a tangle nest of
Black rotted cord encircling
My wrist; scarcely noticing
When my own hand dropped off
Onto the rotted, molding remains of my skirt.
'Oh, ' I said again,
And wondered how long it would take
Until my body dissolved from the loving
Care of the Earthworms.

Charlotte Ballard

Desire

Tears, alone-
Unplanted,
Like a tulip bulb
Left over
In a summer garden.

Charlotte Ballard

Divining Rod

From the looming lair,
Carved from dank and dark caves,
With a jangle and a brazen blare,
Forth from the rosy wine and the arms of friends
Comes a fallen god with car keys as his guide.

Charlotte Ballard

Do Right, Mikey

I wanted it
The money, lots of
Sweet Money poured into my
Greedy, open palms
By pitiful, wounded people
Who need,
Who needed-
More than
  dope or smack
  coke, or speed
  downers, or uppers
  lazy jays or
  even the white lady
Can buy for them-
 only renting feelings for a season.

I wanted it.
 death by overdose,
 death by bullets
 shot by cops doin' their job,
 dealers, muggers
 junkies or thieves
Flying a little too high.

I wanted to
 pop a hit,
 do a rock
 jiggle a joint
 cop a buzz
 needle my arm.
I wanted it.
I still want it.

Charlotte Ballard

Do you love me?

Do you love me?
I start to ask you -
As you lay your head
On my lap and I
Caress your dark
Curling hair that
Tickles my leg
As you sleep.

Do you dream of me?
Behind folded lids that
Slowly flick
Back and forth like
A child's badminton game
Never catching, only
Returning.

Am I important to you?
I wonder when you're at
Work where the sweat will
Tickle down the back
I scratched the night
Before drawing curves
And lines puffed blood red
That fade as I watch.

You come home, and I am glad
Your voice calls out -
Touching and rebounding
Like dogs braying the hunt.
It doesn't cease until your
Hand traps mine
And your eyes tell me
That you're glad, too.

Charlotte Ballard

Does the Future Look Black?

Does the future look black?
Not at all, I am finally
Old enough to know
What it is that I want-

Young enough to go
Do it, and just mature
Enough to let my kids
Go.

I have learned that not
All poems are marvelous
(Like this one.)
But that doesn’t keep
Me from writing another.

I have enough solitude to
Gain myself, and enough
Friends twined in my spouse
To be not alone.

Right now, I have
No pain, except
What my heart brings
Me, and I don’t have
To listen to that,
Anyway.

I have enough.
And Enough
Is enough.

Charlotte Ballard

Dog's Noses

Why are dog’s noses cold?
I asked Mutt once,
In an e-mail passed
On a late-night haunt.

I don’t know why.
She said
Just they are sadistic bastards
Much like alcoholic fathers
Who put fingers where
They are not wanted.

Charlotte Ballard

Dove Blunder

Dove blunder together
Exchange wonder wing
Pull love day
Sparkle old boy

Charlotte Ballard

Dreaming

I sit in a classroom
So quiet and bare
Just for a moment
I sit there and stare.

I sit for a minute
Long after classes end
Dreaming of a time where
for myself I fend.

Maybe an astronaut
To swing upon a star.
A dancer, an actor
that to see, people come far.

A doctor so wise
That nobody dies
a trucker, a farmer
Or anybody that tries.

It really doesn't matter
What I finally chose.
I'm only in the first grade
and stand just three foot-two.

Charlotte Ballard

Duck Love

No one knows why
A person chooses this one
Over that one, or that one
Who never was known before
Suddenly is connected
Legally to strangers not
Even met on a bus –
Kind strangers, mostly
With lips curved back, and
Up, pressed down tight.
Never mind.
Emotions threaten to
Reveal exactly who did
What to whom, and who
It really matters to.
A flicker of an eye,
A press of a hand, and
Love becomes formalized
Into battle.

Charlotte Ballard

Dull

I am dull
Drab and achy
I am worthless
Piece of human flesh.
I exist to please
Only myself
And I failed
Even as if
I had Never tried.
I struggle through
Days without
Laughter or
Tears but
Fierce, cursing
Anger whips out
And cuts
The faces of my children
They stand there
Silent and
I am ashamed.

Charlotte Ballard

Dying

I don't want you to die,
That's what God said to me.

I am so bored and angered with my life
I am and I see no way that my life will
Get better anytime soon. Yet, I don't want
To die and I don't want to live-
I don't want to live-
The way it's been, I don't know
What I want and what I want - I can't reach
I want to do something, something good.

I want to be more than I am right now.
I don't even have an offering to give to God.
Yet it always seems that when I give
I get back 10 times what I gave- I wish
I could give, yet I know that is true, but it's hard
To release and it slips out of
My hands. Out of my tight, tight hands,
the harder I hold,
The more it goes.

Charlotte Ballard

Echoes

I watch as a slim
Young man, dressed in
Tweeds and patches on the
Elbows, squats down with a handful of
Pebbles and tosses them
One by one into a gray pond.
The ripples blend, wheel within wheel
By the others.
The sun blazes orange
Off his eyes when
He turns.
Trembling, I cannot
Speak.

Did I just see God?

Charlotte Ballard

Enclosure yeah (subject lines of spam strung together)

assimilation handiwork
merciful enigma
charisma
repentance lurid
prioritize comparatively
great-granddaughter
quill
debunk
papergirl
grasping banquet
silk mixture

Charlotte Ballard

Eton

Eton ate an apricot
Off the middle of my belly
Tickling noses with toes
And licking the jam away.

Charlotte Ballard

Fear

Fear

Fear is yellow like a robin’s belly.
Fear is the sound of leather shoes.
Fear grates its nails on the cheese shredder.
Fear laughs when dogs howl.
Fear makes a belly naked.
Fear creeps with slow duck feet.
Fear leaps like lightening in a storm.
Fear huddles like a toad in a barn.
Fear asks no questions except one.
Fear wants nothing except all.
Fear longs for ice-cream turned to cream.
Fear is ashes swarming in a belly.
Fear takes everything, leaving only popcorn in great balls.
Fear is the presence of dead roaches, turned right side up.
Fear is aspirin dusted to powder.
Fear is pain squeezed like play-dough.
Fear whispers a hundred truths wrapped like fries served cold.
Fear weeps when the light comes.

Charlotte Ballard

Feminine Wiles

Tulips are bold things
With curving lips
That invites
A grasping clutch-
Only to shy away.

Charlotte Ballard

Fifteen Little Poems about my life.

Lift my up skirt and let me see there,
A whisper in the dark,
No one’s there.
No one except eyes that see
Deep, dark, dangerous, bare.

Candy to bribe a child
–not mine. A year
Is enough to turn the
Babe into a little boy
That belongs to someone else.

Failure.

Tears.

Eyes that dry,
Just like my heart.

Roll over and hide
In sofa cushions
Kept hidden and deep.
Here, here, do the medicines come.

Tangled hair,
An angry sweep,
A broken oven.
A shattered cup.

Touch here. I say.
Touch here, I want to say.
Touch here, I don’t say.
Touch here, I never say.

Lettuce weighs more
Than thighs that break there
And there, and even there.
Pass me the sink.

I lie. To myself
To something unfinished
Here and here
And here, and there.
Especially here

Charlotte Ballard

Finding Purpose

I stopped writing when others
Didn’t notice how wonderful I was.
I suddenly think of a child who brags
And tries to prove how wonderful he is
And all I hear is
“love me love me love me
love me love me love me me me

Did I do that?
On a more sophisticated level?
Where the mushrooms grow?
Underneath the place I place my id
Before I go to sleep?

That’s a new thought
And now I’ve lost it
I need to write to be complete
I need to write to be whole
I need to write to feel joy
I need to write because
To not to was to die a little
To not remember who I am

So I quit, two years or more
I don’t remember except it was
A long cold time
When I searched for reason
And found that I was whole
That I had joy
Without writing
Without that scribble
And that I was loved
And loved and loved.

But I found no passion
Greater
No driver
Greater
No press
Greater
Than that of expressing
Thoughts on a white pressed place

So now I write
And hope that that
Little girl doesn’t need
To scream anymore,
Because I love
I love
I love
And it begins again.i

Charlotte Ballard

Firewatch

I am not the worse
Firewatch they
Have but
I get caught if I
Hold my head wrong
When the others preen
Around in their wrongness-
While I must obey even
The letter of the rules
Handed out on a day
Of excitement and promises
Of Beginning.

If I but copy a little of
What they do.
My hand gets slapped
And I fear for my job
I worry
Always and it is
My boggy man, too.
Fired, fire
Fired.

Charlotte Ballard

Forget me not

Forget me not-
Beauty of the night
For your flaming passions of
Fire and Air
Crystal and water
Drip through the crevices
Of my stony heart
Breaking it asunder
And releasing
Contrary emotions
Of love and hate -
Passion and desire.

I release the yellow
Pigeons to fly
To the Secret Island of Aslos
There your hand will bring
Down the dove, now transformed
From pigeons to that.
Oh, beauty, I sing
Songs about you
To anyone who'll listen
In hopes that one day
That it'll be repeated
To you, oh- how still
Your heart and hand lies
I hope the song
Will quicken
These and you will
Return for
Me.

Charlotte Ballard

Forgotten Popcorn

Just think of all the
Forgotten poems
Created in the space
Of one computer booting up.

The mind-speech races
To erase itself in white
Lines of static streams, much
Like the snow of popcorn
Crushed under theater seats.

Charlotte Ballard

Fragrance

I wrap the essences of you
Around me
Like a silken golden shawl,
Breathing deep of the
Lingering traces
Of love words
Interwoven in the weave.
Held once, twice and then
Tucked away
Into the hope-chest of
My heart.

Charlotte Ballard

Fully Rhyme

Lies Bedevil,
Truth is civil-
Parade nude
Buttocks rude.

Count to five
Before you dive
Or drive
Or divine
A curious vine –

Kept here
To Tear
An incurious soul
Prone to Toil
If remembered at all.

Charlotte Ballard

Furrows

Slimy, black bugs
Crawl under my skin.
Making curving furrows
That criss-cross over and under
But mostly under, I think.
It's hard to tell
When the scarlet blood
Wells up like virgin oil.

People, blind, walk on.
I want them to point and stare
At the smattering of
Drops that drip quietly
From the strange carving of
A rustic hand.

When the darkness comes,
I hear the black bugs munch
And munch and munch and munch
Those tiny bugs that scurry and hide
When I rip away the offending flesh
Hoping to find just one, just one
That munches on my bones
As I sleep.

The doctor tracks, made of creased
Criss-crossed tracks,
Make furrows, too, which hide
The enemy still deeper, yet
Even those give way,
Eventually.

And the people point and scream
While the children cry.
But I walk on,
Blind.

Charlotte Ballard

Garbage

Poetry is nonsense.
Yet I pass it around
As if it was the
Finest caviar
Being served to
Impatient guests
At an outdoor summer part.

My poetry is more like
Hamburger that has gone
Slightly bad
And only fit
To be slid into the
Garbage can
This time and the next.

Charlotte Ballard

Get up, Get up!

Get up,
And mind the babes
Toddering into
Adulthood.
Their little hands
Reach for hot-coal
Fires of lust
And pain—
Trebled so, poor
Teenaged soul.
Blink twice and
Their step is gone,
While you wash
Dishes and heat
The dinner on.
Get up, get up—
They need you now
One fall's enough
To start the next
Generation upon.

Charlotte Ballard

God Bless My Mittens

In the cold and in the rain
When it storms and
when he complains
When the sun is up, and
When the moon is down.
When my breath freezes
Before I get out the door
Or when the sweat runs
Down my face on a five mile jog.
God bless my mittens
Cozier than kittens
Warmer than fur
Slicker than the ice
Caked on diamonds
Of a chain-link fence.
God bless,
God bless,
God bless me and my mittens.

Charlotte Ballard

Grandma Paige

My grandmother
Soft like feather down
Pillows ripped open
In a pillow fight
By Matthew and me.
Her voice, serrated
Sharp by years of
Picking bo' weevels
Out of the flour before
Fixing up pancakes
Rips a wide gorge
In flesh and marrow,
While her black eyes
Wander from the T.V.
And back over the flesh,
Still bleeding, to find
If the maggots still
Squirm.

Charlotte Ballard

Grasshopper

A grasshopper-
On the white tile
One leg torn off,
Struggles forward-
Fluid traces his track.
He wants to Live
And doesn't seem to
Know that a leg
Gone means death
For this grasshopper.
No hope, yet,
He wills – it so.
The fluid trail grows
Longer, clearer
As the tiny body
Weakens –
And Stills.
I wish I were a
Grasshopper.

Charlotte Ballard

Green Eyes

'I like blue eyes best.'
This you said to me
After a night of loving
And being undressed.
'Oh, ' I said and then thought to me.

My eyes are the color of the ocean
Way out deep.
Where the dolphins dip and dive
In play before the sun sets.

My eyes are the color of the Ozark forest
After a summer rain, where a lone bird cries.

My eyes are the color of emeralds dug
Out of the ground by black Nubian workers
Their backs cut red.

'No offense to you, of course, ' You said.
'No, of course not, ' I said, 'None taken.'

Charlotte Ballard

Guests

Crowded out of my space,
I must make do at
Odd hours and stolen
Moments. Tricking my
Way into space and
Time,
        Oh, precious time –
Just to be more of me-
Than thine.

Charlotte Ballard

Hamburger Helper

Hamburger Helper
Comes tucked
Back, tasting like cardboard
Much like the box it comes in.
That’s the secret
Of the secret sauce.
Shred the box, improve
the texture, so the kids will
Eat it.
But not sideways turned
Husbands, who complain
Even as they lift a fork.

Charlotte Ballard

Hannah's Gate

Hannah felt the pain mostly
In her chest, tight and hard
As if a band had been tightened
Around the edges of all her
Desires and then twisted
Like tourniquet to stop
The hemorrhage of emotions out.

She needed nothing but a glass
Full of sharp edges and twisted
Triangles. Tap three times
And the door opens

No magic door exists,
Of course I do, she says
The bread flour is on my
Dress, and phil has gone
Her mother keeps snapping
Green beans into her lap bowl
Never mind child,
He was not the marrying kind

Hannah reached for the bowl
Her mother’s dark eyes gave
Up trying to tie it all up neat.
Never mind child. Never mind.

Charlotte Ballard

Happiness

Smiles of giggling children, chasing
Paw pats from fluffy Siamese kittens.
A red satin dress, draped just so, at
A dinner prepared, for after
Three turns of a bridge game going my way.
Snow falls behind a window frosted with ice,
With the Christmas tree lighted for the first time
And candy canes tipped in hot chocolate.
Sinners coming home—
And a promise of it all again tomorrow.

Charlotte Ballard

Holding onto Forever

My mother’s voice
Pours out like weakened
Wine in the middle of
Handing out vanilla
Cookies in cups that
Never match.

Little ones tip
My votive offering
To a future that
Won’t include me.

Charlotte Ballard

Holding onto Forever 2

Does a son know
That he holds his
Mother forever in
His brow?

Does the daughter
Sense her grandmother's
Hands grasping
Forever in her thumbs
And in the way her
Wrists play "alleweta"
On a keyboard
With a secret code
Tapped out in silence?

I know that my father's
Blood was on my thighs
As I sobbed in the corner
Of a room. Olympic
Yells traced scores
In my wet.

Charlotte Ballard

Homespun

I look down the shadows of days
And wish for a way to open the
lock of time so I could remake
my stitches, and see what else
Could be done.

I wish I could unravel the knots
In the yarn of my days, twisted
by jealous cats and wrong
Choices dipped in cinnamon and wine.
I can never wind it up in a neat
stein round twice and doubled up
Just so, say it so.

I don’t ever want to know
the answer, not now,
when my life has been knitted
Over, and the knots tucked under
The design perfect, unique
homespun, crafted by
The Creator, knitted with
Love.

Charlotte Ballard

Honor Bright

Honor is a pretty thing,
Bright and shined
Yet easily lost, not soon
Regained.

Don't leave it in the streets,
Don't leave in the crumpled sheets
Don't leave it in the batter of
A life gone wrong.

Honor protects, soothes
The pains that come
From not quite doing it right.
Rules hold it on, tighter, and tighter

Rip it off, and the hair of conscious comes
Off with it, and the cold of indifference
Trickles in through the cracks
Of morality, twisted twice

Charlotte Ballard

Hope

Is a Cat
Sitting on the desk
Creeping forward, slowly
Hoping that I won't notice
Or put out, that white paw
Connected to languid side
A rumbling gives the plan
Away. Chased towards the fall.

Charlotte Ballard

Hope (3)

A one-legged ghost
Begging
For both Cloth and hide
Of Youth and Pride
Tamped down
By Bridges
Bound for nowhere.
Where's the host?
In the smoke, of
Ages gone before
I even woke up.

A ring bares the mark.

Charlotte Ballard

How do I feel about her....

I wanted to be cool and laid back
A woman who's seen it all and
Nothing and Nobody can
Rattle my cage. No way, Hosea.
I wanted to be Perfect Host
Beautiful and witty, perfectly groomed
So she'd wishfully say, 'Gee, if a
Woman like that-There must be more-
I wanted her to envy me and wish
That she had not thrown you away
Like a used paper towel wadded closed.
I wanted to welcome her, secure in you,
And me, and in us that no
Longer included her. I wanted to take
Her place and then go further, stronger
Deeper, longer. I wanted to show her
How it is to Love someone and how
Comfortable it was between us. I wanted
To show her that I could do it right -
Like a real woman could, should, must, will-
Always not just sometimes, but always.

Yet, what I found was: I was afraid of her
Of what she could take away from me.
A beginning that was precious, a beginning -
I was afraid that could be crushed and broken.
I was afraid that she could steal my place beside
You, and move you in ways I could not. That she
Knew you better and deeper and longer and
Harder and wider and deeper and I could never
Heal or replace or substitute for it. That kindness and
Loving you wasn't enough. That she could weave a
Spell and make all the days I shared with you only
A hazy mist that floats away on red tided sea-
That I would become unimportant and invisible
And something that you would be ashamed that you
Ever allowed substance in your life. That from obligation
And old charisma and half-forgotten stirrings -
You'd feel it was your duty to pass me over and take
Care of this woman who once was your wife. And die
A little from it-

I had to walk away for I could not bear to watch
the us of us die.

Charlotte Ballard

How I Met Donna

Around January - a computer club member shows me how to log into the BBS. He has a gentle voice and hands. Likes cats and kids. I have one and he had the other.

Around February-we talk of love in brushed bits, and Donna brings herself in the middle trying to bribe him with sex and grandkids. I rush away, unable to fight. I don't know if I belong.

Around March- Donna snaps the napkin across his lap like she could snap herself back into his life. My chest tightens, and I know that this is a battle that I must win, even if it costs me my freedom.

Around April-Donna promises everything to her husband and to you, wanting you and him, leaving me with nothing. I pretend that this is normal, and laugh off the suggestion.

Around May - He tells me that Donna will be in his life, and to get used to it. I swear to myself that I will be nice to her, and break that promise when Donna calls me at my job and I have to hang up on her four times before she'll stop calling me. I am so angry I can't touch or be touched.

Around June- Donna offers free housecleaning, but no sex, if he'll claim her back in his life...but he refuses the known, and takes on another teenager not yet a teen.

Around July- Donna asks my husband to fix the lights on her travel trailor, coming 600 miles to ask him, and bringing her new fiancé along. My daughter whispers it to me under my bedroom door, and I hide in my neighbor's house until she's gone.

Around August- her emails are flirty and chatty, and she pretends that I am not there. My husband responds business like, what can I do for you ma'am. I'd be pleased if you didn't bother me at work, ma'am.

Around September - She claims that I've stolen what's mine, and that I must be deleting all her letters, for why else would he delay sending that sweet reply?

Around October - He wonders how he stayed with the fights, and the kids, and how one set fires, and one who can't read. My child becomes our child finially. Even with the surprises that always come when the money is the most tight. Even when she wants to color our life with purple lies that swallow the sky. Even then. Especially then.

Around November - Donna predicts that we will not last a year. I laugh 16 years later, when I remember this dire auger for his future. A year would not have been enough to learn the depth of his heart.

Around December-Donna buys our old satellite system with unkept promises. My husband says he knew she wouldn't. 'People who owe money never come around.' I laugh at his wisdom and I am glad that I stayed.

Charlotte Ballard

Hunger

I have found that
There are more things
To hunger for
Than quiche and
Dr. Pepper...
I dip a finger into
Shakespeare, and
Emily Dickinson,
While savoring the
Smells from
e.e. cumming's short
Cooked rhyme -
Donne, and Keats
Tantalize and tease-
Until the next meal
Is spread full
Before me.

Charlotte Ballard

Husband

I look at another woman's husband
And wonder where mine is
the one that God promised
Or was it just that I wanted him to promise -
I have to remember that
He will indeed supply
All my needs
But only a few
of my wants.
Like a good parent should.

Charlotte Ballard

I Forgot

I forgot myself,
For a moment-
To save a bit of money-
I held my hand back, unwillingly,
To keep from committing
A crime, thieving,
White collar style.

Nobody got hurt.
Ours are money style.
Let me keep mine-
While I steal a bit
Of your future
Potential.

Nobody got hurt,
Seems to solve the world
Expectations
Of Martha Steward
And Nixon as well.
In hindsight, only,
Does the thief recall
The sense of hastiness
And getting ready to fall.

Charlotte Ballard

I had a Chance

I had a chance
To be more
But because
No one else
Walked that
Way, neither
Did I.

I had a chance
To be special
But since I
Saw noone else
Being special.
I stopped, too.

I had a chance
To become
More than I
Ever thought
Possible
In a moment's
Breath
I turned away.

Do I still have
That chance?
I hope -
I hope
That the day
Hasn't finished
Before I become
The dawn.

Charlotte Ballard

I Looked at a Man

I looked at a man
He was my father
Tall and wise and
His voice spoke doom
On us smaller folk
Who did not snap
And bow, and curtsey
When done.

He looked at me
Like with a lover's
Heart, no, more like
A prostitute's john...
Only with the term
Extended, and for his
Eyes only was his
Money spent.

I woke up with
His eyes on me
Not knowing what
Curve was offending
Or by what rights
I was giving by being
Born female in my father's
House.

So I obliterated curves
And prayed for the
Rain to fall.

It did not fall. The rain
Did not come except in
My tears hidden behind
Borrowed books, and
Tempered wine. I ran
From the sorrow and
Swallowed buried rocks
Like zeus and his new
Born children, but
Mine were never
Brought back up again.
Staying lumped up
In my belly, that didn't
Belong to me. never did -
He claimed with his
Eyes on me. I saw a lust
For mine own blood on
His hand and on his head
And I ran, pretending
That a bee has stung
The bottom of my hand.

I look at a man
He is my father
I no longer claim him
He is mine no longer.

Emptiness is my father
The wideness of the sky.
The rush of the wind
Raking back my skirts
The autumn dew not
Dried from the grass
The ocean, rolling, and
Rolling, becomes my
Marriage bed.

I look at a man
He is not my father
He is nothing important
Nothing to be had.
I turn my face from
Him to look back to
My beloved, and my
Life,

Now I hear
Faint echoes
Of the fire and the
Brand. Echoes
Fade away, and
Leave nothing behind.
Just like his hand.
Just like his clan.

Charlotte Ballard

I Miss the Love We Had

I miss the love we had-
Twisted sheets in the middle
Of both of us
Twined limbs until I forgot
Which part was
Me and which was
You. We hurried to reach
An understanding
Finish, and to
Let the nightbird
Steal our song.

Charlotte Ballard

I Never Had a Mother

I never had a mother
Who read “Hello Moon”
Fifty-seven times before
Tossing it behind the refrigerator

I never had a mother
Who brushed my hair
Before each day’s battle
Against primary foes.

I never had a mother
Who hugged me before
I slept and dreamed of
Gold that only I could acquire.

I did have a mother
Who cooked up soup
To last the three days
Before payday came.

I did have a mother
That roared like a lion
And took me to see
The doctor more times
Than she ought.

I did have a mother-
A piece, a part
As much as she could
Borrow against a
Promise made –
That her children
Would never be
Raised by a stranger.
I barely knew her.

Charlotte Ballard

I Sit In a Classroom

I sit in a classroom
So quiet and bare
Just for a moment
I sit there and stare.

I sit for a minute
Long after classes end
Dreaming of a time where
for myself I fend.

Maybe an astronaut
To swing upon a star.
A dancer, an actor
that to see, people come far.

A doctor so wise
That nobody dies
a trucker, a farmer
Or anybody that tries.

It really doesn't matter
What I finally chose.
I'm only in the first grade
And stand just three foot-two.

Charlotte Ballard

I Speak Of Death

I speak of death in four lettered tones
Up against the window
Covered up with vine
Lies a rusty heart, abandoned, unwound.
Hushed daybreaks, no longer day
Coffins pushed uphill by reluctant suitors
Dressed in mandatory black.
The pauper's son remembers a joke.
He whispers it to the one in front.
The world dips, to the left and then back over
Hunched shoulders as softened shoes skate over
Clots of brown dirt, unburdened and unbound
Lines of no color converge
In a narrow angle, to leap there
With careful step, bowed head
No prayers for the sinful,
Not even for the dead.

Charlotte Ballard

I Wonder about the Sunrise

I wonder about the sunrise-
Will it ever stop?
Will it pitch and yawn and
Boast - of bigger places,
Of harder places, of places
Of iridescent light tucked
Into lunch boxes and little
Girl smiles.

Will it hide in the crevices
Of Tinkerbox toys? Of windup
Dolls and carrots eaten raw.
Will it tip a little to the left as it swirls
Past dawn, fracturing into
Shards of sugar spun fun?

I lick my fingers free of sparkles
Thrown out by an errant spray
Of Sunbeams and yogurt.
Lift here, open other there,
Nothing is left but cardboard
Boxes, full of faded photographs
And unsigned hearts.

Charlotte Ballard

If I Had Had a Plan

If I had had a plan
for my life,
Would I have ended up
here?

I thought I knew what
Direction I wanted to go
And I worked it hard
But caved in before
I finished.
Now -
I bless the hesitation
Mistake that made
Me peek
At a different life
Long enough to know-
That it’s not for me.
Isn’t that a gift?
Not to go down a path
That clearly’s wrong?
But can’t see it so-
Because parents, friends,
complete strangers
Blessed by pride say
“She’s going to be a doctor”
“How wonderful! ”
“How special.”

And respected.

And all I wanted, really
was respect -
To heal the
Hurt of so much
Naked disrespect.

The real answer turned
out to be,
I had to clothe myself with
respect
From inside of me.

Charlotte Ballard

In a Bathroom Stall

The sight of tears
Drags along with
A club foot,
A deformed child
That nobody wants.

Charlotte Ballard

In My House

In my house - a single mother sits
Iming her day away, joggling
A naked Baby on her knees.
He screeches, and pushes his
Hands together, as if in prayer.
A crystal dropp falls fast
From mouth to bare chest.
His small feet kick together
As if he were a mighty hunter
Grabbing for a prize not even
His mother can see.
The center of my heart.

Charlotte Ballard

In the Day-room

My clay holds captive
Pirate ships
Roaming the linoleum
Capturing tiny treasures
Dribbled from the
Old men's noses.

Teeny-tiny pirates
Dressed in earthen finery
Scamper down
Lumpish ladders waving
A cockeyed skull and crossbones
As their feet get stuck
In the lace-like pattern in the tile
On the floor.
They must tuck and pull
To get themselves free
And to roll the sticky treasure
Back to the sagging lumpish ship.

When I right the sinking sail
Tiny-tiny men curse me
In a teeny-tiny voices
Volatile curses that
Make my hand sticky with sweat
So I crush them under my heel
To start over again.

In my clay are tigers
Don't you think?
I can hear them roar.

Charlotte Ballard

Innocence

The innocence is gone-
It has fled from them
And me.
It has vanished,
Never to return.
In this lifetime

Oh, to have such innocence again.
To be able to have the heart to love
Peanut butter and milkshakes
Puppy dogs and training wheels.

It is gone from us,
Those who have it, cherish it,
It goes quickly and quietly
And most never know that it is gone,
Until it's too late.

Charlotte Ballard

Inside Me

Inside Me,
Inside You,
Same? Or Different?
That even the
Doctors could tell?
Are bones the
Way to find out?
Or to find in?
Does a fluroscope
Teach a baby how
To walk? Or bring
In the paper when
It’s raining. Just because.

Inside Me,
Inside You.
Same? Or Different?
I like red,
You like blue.
I see colors of rainbows
And you like Izzy
And black, and more.
I eat potatoes and
You sing of garlic
Strung with tomato
Sauce.

Inside Me,
Inside you.
I put out my hand
And you put yours
In it, and
Locked together,
Who can tell, which
Is you, and which is
Mine. I say the same,
Even as you say different.

Charlotte Ballard

Insomnia

Night wanders in
And coils around my leg-
Meowing up at me, to
Scratch it's back-
And search for fleas
My eye twitches as I
Pluck the night and
Fling it into the first
Burst of dawn.

Charlotte Ballard

Inspiration

They say muses
Are allotted to writers,
Poets, and such.
Mine must be
New at this
And a lush
Besides.

Charlotte Ballard

Intoxicating Wine

Being in your presence
Is like intoxicating wine.
Remembered, replayed, touched
The distance is divided
And I wish that I could
Move closer, bring tighter
The two that once were one
For a moment, a young moment.

I don't touch,
You don't hide
Our eyes breathe the distance
No closer, two bands of gold
Divide.
Just a touch, a longing I must
Hide. A promise given
Honor provides.

Charlotte Ballard

Invocation to Survival

What pretty miss
Turned up her lashes
At dolphins and dragons
And cavity dry searches?

A pound of butter is
Better than a bullet
Fried in fat-
        Whose fat?
Your fat or that
Pretty fat lass who
Knocked your knees
As she wiggled past
To prance and preen
To jiggle and spleen
In front of a twenty
Foot screen. No need.
None. Don’t ask
The task is done
A button undone
A whore unwon
Forgiven in confession
That takes twenty minutes
For the priest to list out
Each penance, each fast
Each prayer to the last
Undone in ribbons, undone
In fine clothes. Come home
Little pony, come home
A step towards freedom
Two more to bring on –
It’s won, sung, done.

Charlotte Ballard

Invocation to the Muse

Muse, don’t pass me by
When you dropp lyrics or
Songs or a glint of an
Idea. If you’re in a rush
I’ll wait until dinner
But not one minute later.
It’s easy, you see...to me, to thee, to we?
Is that the best you can do?
Forget it.

Charlotte Ballard

It's too Late

It’s too late
To change my mind
I will be what
I decided long ago
That I’d walk this path
Of life, love, and
Happiness
Only, I think I
Chose wrongly
and got on a path
That keeps forcing
Me to tap into that
Force that is in
me, do I?
Will I?
Can I?
Does it even matter
When time will
Wipe my slate
Clean and demand
A recount before I’m
Done. Really done.
A hundred years gone,
And I will have disappeared
Like a puff of smoke
Off of a fat man cigar.

Charlotte Ballard

I've always been Second

I have always been second.
In the hearts of those who
Loved me, professed so,
Know so.
My heart like a mended vase,
Each slight and rejection
Loosening the glue there. Then,
Turning at the sound of the glass
Shattering, they loved me first
Even as my heart emptied, incapable
Of loving back.

Charlotte Ballard

Jelly Babies

I love jelly babies
Prepared with fat
Sage and garlic
Just right for a snack.

Won't you join me?
I've got plates for two,
Peas and carrots,
Quite a feast of food.

Jelly babies
Make the best dishes
Enough for me
And a bit for the fishes.

Jelly Babies bubble
Up with gas,
Each found in a bucket
Thrown from a lab.

I gather the babes
And murmur a thanks to their moms
For letting me feast
Of the fruit of the womb.

Charlotte Ballard

Jewelry

Lost days
Cannot be reclaimed
Like an abandoned piece of
Jewelry left carelessly
About on a restaurant sink.
Once gone,
It leaves only bent prongs of what might
Have been, a diamond lost-
In the dust
Crusted under a bed.

Charlotte Ballard

Judas' Kiss

They say I'm crazy,
(Those foolish, stupid doctors)
But I'm not. It's
Him, the other one
Who lives in this room with me.
He's the one who cries and wails
And hides from me.
But I know he's here,
I have seen the bright drops
Of crimson blood dripping from the glass
He broke. Glass, still warm,
From that crazed man's touch.

His cries wake me and
I find the tatters of his flesh
Hanging from the leather restraining straps
He gnawed through
And then draped on me as I slept.

Again.

They mock me
        As I wrap myself up
Into two tight, tiny balls.
Laughing as they
Tell me twice or three times
That I live in a one man cell
No one can reach me there.

But he's here
Hiding from me.
And I wait-
Trembling in fear.

Charlotte Ballard

Just Sounds

Animals amble minimally present
Never seems enough -
Bubbles squish up between
Toes that need a trim quick.
Sunday shoes pressed for best
Muds makes all the cats the same.
Season fewer then men
Tell lies across my best napkin
Folded neat, here, not there
First, then last.
Tumble past, and
Dry up quick.

Charlotte Ballard

Just Sounds

Animals amble minimally present
Never seems enough -
Bubbles squish up between
Toes that need a trim quick.
Sunday shoes pressed for best
Muds makes all the cats the same.
Season fewer then men
Tell lies across my best napkin
Folded neat, here, not there
First, then last.
Tumble past, and
Dry up quick.

Charlotte Ballard

Katy Begs

As I ran a knuckle across
My pappa’s unshaved chin
Dark, peppery, rasping
Out a praise, dim and faint
Calling soldiers to arm
“Quick, men, Quick –“
A clutching fades
And I tumble into
Darkness.

Charlotte Ballard

'Kiss me, you fool! '

When a warm hearted Boy
Breathes fresh love pass
Glinting eyes harvest
Sparkling jewels promised
Beneath frozen lashes
Promised, promised again
To wake with a wish.
“Kiss me, you fool! ”
A TV Show blasts
Spoiling the mood -
Cut from glossy playboy
Harvest of flesh and bone
Curved and hip, hair
Tucked close and secret
Flesh exposed.
“Kiss me, you fool! ”
A demand that can’t
Be filled even by the
Lustiest lover, but he
Shakes the stem, anyway.
Shuddering as he goes.

Charlotte Ballard

Lady Waits

Lady waits
With curled tail
Wrapped around
A curled backbone

She waits
For her world
To begin, to fold
Apart, for a green Saturn
To return

Lady waits
It’s enough
For her, The Universe
Starts and starts
At the edge of a gate
That she cannot open.

Charlotte Ballard

Lament of a would be Mother

I am at the mercy
Of another’s biology
Either here, or there
It blends into something
Gray and dull,
Dripping with saltwater
The place curves
West then east
Down into an empty
Hole, full of whispers
And promises that
Don’t mean much
Here in the wilderness.

Charlotte Ballard

Last Night home

I was stripped of my baggage
As I fled from your fury.
Your hand lifted up to strike
My devotion to you-
Born out of deep
Love and affection
(Or so the commercial goes)
Was the first to go.
Next my private love notes
Whispered and gathered
Quietly like pansies growing
Wild in a field were
Ripped up and thrown
Carelessly aside.
Each one nurtured in the
Dark of night when the
Fluids of our bodies had
Mingled and had not yet
Dried on my thigh.
A tender smile that
Would creep up as I
Remembered your image,
Long past our
Ritual phone calls to speak of
The weather and what
Sally was doing, this or that,
Opened up into a silver scream
That ruptured into blood silence
And poured down around my throat
Where your strong hands were
Locked around.
Eons later, being released
My baggage gone,
I still flee.

Charlotte Ballard

Laura

A Gift
Birth in accidentB
Or so they say.
Fully created, blessed
Born, a jewel plucked
From the crown
Of God.

Charlotte Ballard

Leaving

Leaving is like taffy melting on the sidewalk-
Sticky, sweet, evenly bitterly so-
Long strings of attachments stretch out
Never quite breaking, never quite over
Then it is gone, and all that remains
Is a dark afterimage of everything that was
To be faded by time, wind and small
Blue-jeaned-bottomed boys who
Carry tad-poles in the left front
Pocket, disappearing in a smear.

Charlotte Ballard

Lessons in Elocution

The wind tore back her hair from her face, while leaving the tears still in place. She stares at me, pleading in her fingertips, lifted halfway between me and heaven, and still I don’t speak. One step backward, and she falls, the wind pushing up her pink tulle dress, the one she wore the night our son died. The cliff hides the rest of my life from me.

(This is only a writing exercise.)

Charlotte Ballard

Lessons Tell Me the Truth

Lessons tell me the truth
About facts, tales and certain
Things we just don't talk about.
What's the truth? Is it the
Gray spotted thing
Crouched by the lemon scented
End-table, dragging a dangling
Feast of prime and rhyme and
Giggles none too neat.
I think it has a cool beat,
If you listen, this close,
Right here, I mean.

Sleep would help
To find the beat, not
On what is fit to eat or dine
Or cast in brine. Yet, if I sleep,
Now, I won't wake until
Late next night, if at all
Wrapped up in ribbon and cake
With fake tresses dipped in
Chocolate, asphalt
And Kentucky fried chicken
Let me wake and count
The whispers cupped
In sweaty palms, promised
One summer, too long ago
To be real.

Charlotte Ballard

Let's Eat

Control your muse
Like a long-legged goose
Wrap one hand here,
Center-point, then
Back here, where
The leg’s joint
Joins the rest –
Two kisses for Molly
And one for Ted.
Here’s a red handkerchief,
And a bag for its head.
A pound of butter,
Garlic for the tale,
Then all’s home for Dinner.
Good golly,
Let’s eat.

Charlotte Ballard

Life is Never What Pleases

The eye, the ear, the hand
Beneath the dress. Imagination
Paints smooth flesh, caressing
Tones, gentle curves.

Naked flesh has dips and valleys
Strange lumps that straddle
Dark hair spouting where
None need apply. Dimples
Not on cheeks, or not on them kind.

Yet, I'd rather touch a real
Man, with smelly pits and
Unwashed groin, than pant over
Some air-brushed image
That some anorexic chick
Found erotic –This week.

Stuff my mouth full of living
Curves and arms and mangled
Bits of messy grit of preferences
Not like mine, not a bit.
Alive, I can be got with child
Let's see the Brit do that who
Danced with Tarzan's girl.

Charlotte Ballard

Little Sister (for Susie)

Little Warrior
With long hair flying back
Spear in hand,
Barefoot in the waves
She fights, and screams
In rage, silently
She knows all the secret
Places that tumble
In the tide.
Her spear whips and
Flies true.
The moon rises
As she dances
With laughter
Spilling out.
My Warrior sister
Protects as she hides.

Charlotte Ballard

Loneliness

The space between two people
Standing on a beach
One step from joining hands
Looking away
Pretending that it doesn’t
Matter –
When it does.
An unspoken word,
Prayed under a breath
Dabbed like ink
Sprayed by a wandering
Soul. Pretend, yes
Do. And then Go away.
Alone.

Charlotte Ballard

Los Angeles

A gray crowed bus
Delivered me to your door,
You must not
  Have been expecting me.

For I saw-
  Neat, little lumps of dirty glitter
  Rolling off of small town eyes,
  Crack-men puffing,
  Bars of steel bent on
  Fake diamond ware

   Cars pushing, nose to butt,
   Strangers, intimately twine
   And twine again -
   A rendezvous unplanned.

  Your fine lace was
   Left carelessly about
   Under damp bridges
   And culverts
   Shivering to keep warm.

Faint remembrances-
Hollywood, sweet cascading stars,
While a camera rolls.

A grayer bus pulled out,
As I tugged my knees
To my chest to keep the tears
From spilling out and spoiling
The faded luster from my mind.

Charlotte Ballard

Love

Love is a spiteful thing
The best is at first
The last is the worst
Lovers who once share a bed
Now share a child
Twice yearly moving instead.
The man curses the day
That he decided to pursue her.
The woman regrets all that
She thinks she gave up.
Long nails shred hope
Promises, love kisses
And poetry no more.

Charlotte Ballard

Love 2

Love
As calm as a pond
Not crowded with
Ducks that
Quack and wade,
Nibbling at grubs
That aren't under
The mud.

Love
Softer than the
Down on a wide
Cupped breast
White, Whiter than
the snow that falls
On Christmas eve
After the children
Fall asleep.

Love
As forever as the
Promise given by God
And sealed with a rainbow
So many eons ago.

This is my love for you.

Charlotte Ballard

Love in a Stranger’s Face

Spirals spin rings,
Deepening passages
Created in one breath
Or two.
Precious gold spun-
Tracing a path
Going on forever.
On an eye lash curl
Sapphire amber merge
Soft, secret, joins
A step, – Forever ends.

Charlotte Ballard

Love of my Life

have had many
Loves of my life.
Some dark, one light
And some I don’t remember.

Each I loved
And thought I’d never
Love another, I
Was wrong.

Each brought me pain
Of separation, of a sense
Of not being Enough, yet
In each, a gift, unasked for.

Love unfinished, undivided
Unseparated, unwanted.
An honest end is better than
A false beginning.

Charlotte Ballard

Loving my Husband

Loving my husband

I promised to love
Honor, and
Cherish the
Face of a man.
Doubt crunched into
Rice
When the sweet rain came
As night hunger curled
Deeper than a plundering
Curve. Secrets were
Promised me by a black book
Crumbled into ashes
By age, and lies given
When I wasn’t old enough
To blink,
Disappearing into the darkness-
Only blue clouds spoke.
My breath disappears into a
Promised circle, magical and
Deep like a kiss
Blown into glass.

Charlotte Ballard

Luck

Luck

Luck
Lucky
Fluke
Constant Attendance
Asking Lady Luck
Lucky
Devine
Promises made, kissed
Promised, pleaded.
Black witch-
Rolls Again.

Charlotte Ballard

Mealtime Discoveries

They feed us worms
For breakfast
Big, fat squirming ones
That wiggle, and twist
Into tasteful shapes
Smothered in butter sauce
Made from the watery milk
From the breasts
Of long dead babes.
They think we don't know
That they grind up
Those no longer with us.
And shape them into
Lumpy hills of gristly fat.
I found a watch
In my soup that Old Man Greer
Wore the day he died.
It was still ticking even as I
Slurped it down me.

Then they pretend
That the ice-tea really
Doesn't hide a sweet
Almond taste of cyanide capsules
Under the slice of lemon
Craved from rotten fruit
That has laid molding
On a shelf for six months or so.

They think they fool us.
  but I know,
    I know.

Charlotte Ballard

Migrane Blues

The promise of
Pain begins in a
Flash of silver-light
Buried in the center
Of my sight. The light
Dances, flashes, sparkles
And grows
Into a crescent bloom
Spreading out, in
Ripples of more
Silvered sparks
Erasing vision as
The music of pain
Hollows out, a pause-
Never long enough-
The pain beats,
Seventy or
More. Tender,
Drawn, curved
In the hallow of
My temple. I retreat
Into the quiet,
Darkness.
The pain follows -
Hesitating,
The beat falters
Til slumber wipes it
Away.

Charlotte Ballard

Mocking Grin

Seated at my Uncle's funeral fire
Are family close, all well attired
In the middle of them like a well fed hen
Is he who took aim, and recompense
A virgin's vow, a promise given.

My face burns as his chin mocks mine
Three lies told, only one is closed.
Husband bare, he stripped me-
Of the future promise given by another.
Leaving me to deal with the fruit within
Without bother from any other hand.
A father extracts a lie,
A promise, a plead of things that are not -
It doesn't matter, now, the blood cleanses all.

I sit up taller, holding a new husband's vow
In my closed palm-
Promises that never faltered.

He mocks me
His eyes dance with the secret he holds.
The virgin's lie is finally over.

Charlotte Ballard

Mommy Blues

Lone child splashes
In a kiddie pool
Green and red.
I hunger to join
Her, in a pocka-dot
Bikini with my tummy
Sticking out, letting
My fingers and
Toes go fish-belly
White. Instead,
I take a bite
From my peanut butter and
Banana sandwich and tell
Her that crocodiles eat
Children that stray out
Too far.

Charlotte Ballard

Monkey in a Tree

The branches of
An unnamed tree
Twist black against
A gray teal sky.
A clump of
Parasite mistletoe
Screech with the
Jumping of an
Of an airborne monkey
Vanishing even
As I look again
Finding only forgotten
Kisses and unremembered
Fun.

Charlotte Ballard

Moon Magic

Gray silver
Dime, dusted and
Ground fine by the
Shifting footprints
Of Neil and Strong.

Charlotte Ballard

Morning Lies

The morning, not yet done-
Yet you skate away on the
Frozen breath that blows out
Between chipmunk cheeks.
I warm my hands on your lies,
While they freeze
My hindmost parts.

More likely, you left in the dark
With a mouth still quick
And hungry and weasel-thin
You slide into the night like
You slide into me, the same darkness
Where the ice-wind wakes your skin and
Makes you run.

Charlotte Ballard

Morning Meadow

Sunlight floods the meadow,
Spilling golden milk over
Fresh woken daisies -
Blessed by the soft
Ave of a christening wind,
Trees bow, left and
Right again, reaching
Skyward for another
Serving.

Charlotte Ballard

Mountain

My love for you is like
A new mountain pushed
Up by pressures hidden
Deep in my roots, held down
By obligations and truths
Of never mind, and how do you
Do it. The wind brushes
Everything away but the
Essence of who I am
When I am with you.

Charlotte Ballard

Mousetrap

Books
Clogging my pores
Catnaps squeezes mustard
Into triangle shapes just
In time for Jeopardy
Or Ryan's hope, I'm
Not sure which.

Bring me the mousetrap,
Settle in for tea.
I'll rustle up some scones
For me, we and thee.
Justify the margins,
Edged with scraps of
Buttered crumbs and marmalade
Not enough for three.
Don't leave,
Not yet.
The bacon's barely
Done. I like to coddle
Eggs, just so. In burnt brown
Promises, like that
You made long ago.

Charlotte Ballard

Mr. Freedom

Little rhythms in my life
Echo back and forth
Like toy soldiers in a line
And pushed down again
By a ten-year old
Child with sticky
Fingers and a pet
Toad nearby.

'Time for bed
Little soldier.'
'No mission accomplished today
Captain.'
'Oh, well,
Try again tomorrow
Sargent,
Try again tomorrow.'

Charlotte Ballard

Mr. Goodbar

Dying is like candy
Displayed on a grocer's shelf
Bright neon colors and
Odd, fascinating favors.

But living is harder,
Coming in one flavor-
Black licorice whips
That sours even as
You eat it.

Charlotte Ballard

Muses

Creative pauses
Sup for their dinner.
Each lily-livered monster
Craves alabaster flesh
That crinkles as they eat it.

Charlotte Ballard

My Child Choose Christianity Tonight

My child chose Christianity tonight
Even though she knows not the demands-
Or responsibilities that weights.
Such a blank check given to God
In return for his love to her.

I'd have rather she had waited a while,
So I could have taught her just
What the love Christianity has given me
And exactly what the cost it bears.

Christianity has given me
A whole new set of things to worry about-
Whether I'm praying enough or too much
'Let's not be like the heathens around us.'
Ten Commencements, Golden rule
Trust him without question. His will is
Best. Reincarnation, a trick or a lie?
The devil before us or is it behind?
New age, morality code, -this is right, no
Gray allowed.

Yet I know, it is not God who has failed.
But I, with my imperfect heart,
Loving in an imperfect way a
Perfect Father who desires and
Trains me for a perfect path
I never fit in. Never quite belonging, but
In this family, I've been adopted and
that is never wrong.

Charlotte Ballard

My Face

What does my face mean?
Dripping away as it does?
A line turned down, or up
Or sideways yet. Here's a
Bump, and a curve, hooked
Just so, and then a button
Where my mouth should
Go–

The color has bleached
Gray and shell white
Like the inside of my
Skull, tempered down
In the sand. Pick me
Up, and hold me to
Your ear, and there
Hear, a tidbit of
Poetry, nonsense, I
Fear –

Turn it over, and
Mamma comes
Wheezing out an
Asthmatic chest.
Never mind, I don't
Care – I want to say
That, instead but
The words comes
Out the same
Mamm—

Little pieces of seaweed
And alabaster clam
Swirl in a nine-point
Salad, let me give you
A bit of mine. No?
Does it bore you? This
Face of mine? The
Waves shove forth – A
Bit of jam, a leg of lamb.
Neat as a pin, neat
as a plan–

My face scrubbed clean
By scrambling clams
Gossiping over the
Price of Gas or was
It how Clorax gets
White things so
Sparkling fresh
Unlike me –

Never mind,
I’ve got a new one
Here, buried under
A rock, for times
Like these, uncreased
Unsteamed, all lines
Straight, and I disappear
Between-

Charlotte Ballard

My Head Aches

My head aches in all the
Tiny crevices, pushed together
Pressured like when I dine with
My mother who tells me to
Force my will on others like
She forces her will on me.
I turn my face from her so
She cannot see the lie that
Wants to be born there,
Instead I practice oblong words
That slip on icy corners
Hiding the fear that I
Will be formed as flesh
From flesh and heart
From ash

My head aches
From medicines given
To correct another body
Imperfection war against
War against war against
All that I'm suppose to be
Against what I aim to be
Against what I want to be
Against what
I am.

My head aches
As I taste the metal
Foam that forms on the
Words that placates
My mother from one
Curve to the next
Hidden place, and I
Remember, I hope, I
Think I remember,
Where all the land mines
Are, and nobody tells
The truth, a forgotten
Stepsister that twists
Like an untied knot
Formed in the palm of my
Hand.

Charlotte Ballard

My Life Starts Today

My life starts today –
With a bite from a
Granny Smith apple.
Like juice dribbling down my
Chin, so will the truth
Cascade out of my mouth -
Hidden so long,
To keep from ruining
Other people’s shirts. I swear
An oath that I will be unafraid
Snip out the seeds where they
May do the most harm -
The truth. Nothing but the truth.
So swear I.
Today.

Charlotte Ballard

My Lying Fault

That a child mixed a broken breed
Purposely denied her own fault
In it. I did not cry wolf out to My
Lagging defenders, nor know that
Touch, only his'n, wrong, and I became
Wrong to prove it right, his'n and mine.
 I had no proof but my life - The
Destruction wide, but now closed
Mostly over, but I dare not tread upon it.
The covering is thin,
Threaded with cracks
Of family Love, and promises given
No love redeems me, only
Tears spilt over patterns repeating
Over, and over, into and over
A child waits for redemption
By the gutter walk to it.

Charlotte Ballard

My Only Song

Man of Sorrow
Man of Pain
You took it all
Without any gain.
You loved us all
With gentle eyes
Man of Sorrow
Man of Pain

39 plus one
Lashes great fall on your back
A crown of thorns
Pressed down around your head
The blood runs down
and yet you cry
'So many lost;
So many die.'

Man of Sorrow
Man of Pain
Leave it now-
And cry again
Man of sorrow
Man of pain
Your troubled heart
Feels my pain.

Lifted up to die
Bitter gall served fresh
As wine
Yet you'd do it again
For one lost sheep
That beats in the air.

Man of sorrow
Man of pain
When is it enough?
So much grief
You swallow up
Yet you bore it
And demand me live-
Man of sorrow
I humbled myself down.

All glory to you
Man of sorrow
All thrones belong to you
Man of pain
You gave me life and
Even more
I have nothing
But myself to give -

Yet I keep taking it back
Man of Sorrow
Man of Pain.

Charlotte Ballard

My Way, Your Way

I might dream of rocket ships and summer skies
While you talk of boys and dates.
I am different from you.
Endlessly, I search for one forgotten thing.
You care nothing for waht I do.

You are strong and powerful
I am meek and mild.
My way is to search for buried treasure that
You have already found.

Your way is to jump right in.
Mine- to wait and watch for just the right time.

Dreaming of gold and treasures
You search caves and hillls.
I search the cavern of my mind
For a jewel of rare price
My way is not your way
You follow the wind, whispering through the trees.
I follow the longing of my heart.
We are different; this is true.
But together,
We are stronger than we could ever be apart.

Charlotte Ballard

Mystic Pose

Fish float
With angel hair
Green, crisp, sudden gold.
Fins comb the tangles
Out, displaying the
Utmost calm
Even as the bowl gets dumped
And the siamese howls.

Charlotte Ballard

Nana

Special friend
Drawn by a babe's
First dimpling smile
Shelter from the
Dark Night, a summer storm
The galing wind,
Confidante of small
Whispers cupped from
Peanut butter smeared
Fingers. Listener
Of secrets and of
Jesus Loves Me
And Hail Mary
Full of Grace
Recited and pledged
From wiggling
Groups of pig-tailed
Girls and of
Scabbed kneed boys
Her touch as soft
As the fur from
A newborn kitten
Eyes not yet open
Never once
Hurting more

Charlotte Ballard

New Year Memorial

Just up
New Year’s Day
Isn’t it?
I can’t remember
In the muddleness
Of just waken up
And of the afternoon
Light, shifted soft
And mellow, and yellow
Buff like leftover
Christmas candy
Melted by the holiday
Heat. A rough movie
Track carves a
Trail in the fluffiness
Of mind, never
Mind old man,
The world keeps
Turning, with our
Praise or without it.

Charlotte Ballard

Nightbird Song

I miss the love we had-
Twisted sheets in the middle
Of both of us
Twined limbs until I forgot
Which part was
Me and which was
You. We hurried to reach
An understanding
Finish, and to
Let the nightbird
Steal our song.

Charlotte Ballard

No Answer

He doesn't answer,
Nor do I know his heart
Will he betray me
Himself or hold my pledge
My gift, close to him...
Letting it comfort him?

I don't know
Except that I act
Like a woman in love
With a man not my husband
Tho' I be pleased with the
one I've got.

I don't mean to cross the line
I don't mean to be unkind.
I don't mean to be to be to be
An unfaithful wife.
In my heart,
    but not in my body
I am.

Charlotte Ballard

No snow

No snow broke the spring's interruption-
No fields white like a virgin's wedding sheet
Or sparkles like diamonds glittering over
A clean expanse cleared of brush, bramble
And all the flowers grown.

No flakes fluttered, dancing in unsung
Rills, of four in hand, and doe se doe.
Only Ice, the wicked cousin, kissed the trees
And made them break no longer friend, no longer foe.
A march wind brushes the oak tree's hair in
Long silver trails, giggling as it goes.

Frog lovers kiss after a noisy courtship
And I must be satisfied, and
Wait again for next year.

Charlotte Ballard

Nobody had to tell me

Nobody had to tell me
Never to invite my friends home
Never raise my voice
Don’t turn on the lights
Don’t talk when the TV’s on
Don’t touch the Vodka bottle in the cabinet
Don’t talk about –

The house
The home
Or the man that tore one
from the other.

Nobody had to tell me
Not to ask for money
for school
for trips
for clothes that fit
Not even for a book
Thrown out by the man
Who threw out everything.

Nobody had to tell me
That guns that click
May also click at me.

Charlotte Ballard

Nonsense Wordse

What does one put on a page
When one has nothing to say-
Nor anything to write
Worth the time to save
Or to be.

Does one,
Should one
Just fill
A page,
Full of nonsense words
To satisfy some inner quota or agenda
That really matters not at all?

I fill this page, (I think)
To make sure
That there is a record
Of sorts
Of who I was
To someone who will not care
That I, too
Had loves, pains
Laughter and a child
Bore out
Of me

But then what matter
Is just one page
In a whole sea
Of pages,
Just because I wrote on it?

Charlotte Ballard

Norodom Sihanouk

I met a prince
And watched him age
Thru photographs made
At each turning year.
His black eyes turn from
Humor to pain to
A watchfulness that
A young man never
Had. He dreamed of
Music and of dance -
Took vows of silence
To hide his longing for
Another path, yet not taken.
A king now, he still holds
Truth in the curve of his
Hand and in the line of his
Brow.

Charlotte Ballard

Oak Tree

The silent breath of the creator
Moves above my soul
Whispering my name.
Frozen passion catches
Bright glimpses of emerald
Where robins and jays
Compete for embrace
By the arms stretching forth
Humbly seeking
Transparent substance
poured out
Bountifully, joyfully
Twined.

A Rude hand
Catches its heart
With the grind of a saw-toothed blade
And the floor beneath
A truant child
Groans.

Charlotte Ballard

Ode to Pizza

You delight the nose with evocative
Promise of stringy cheese, pepperoni
And tomato sauce warm. Each piece
Contested over, grabbed, hungered over

Until sated, the hungry hordes retreat
To sofas soft and stretch out feet first.
Til' Breakfast time, tomorrow.

Charlotte Ballard

On being (Almost) Poor

No social worker
Weeps violet tears
As a cop bashes in
My door, looking for
Dope and drugs or a
Flea-bitten child
Crying for milk
Sitting cock-eyed
In a puddle of piss
And tears.
No special plays
For welfare money
Or donations by
Kind-hearted avoiders
Of the whole situation.
'If I just don't have to
Touch them...'
One of the stacks of
Final notice and Urgent
Stamped threats
Of sure destruction
Tumble and spill
Over the carpet, precisely
Kept by pinching fingers-
Thin, boney things.
One purple bruise darkens
Around the child's right eye,
A doll cradled,
Left alone, once more.

Charlotte Ballard

One Livid Leopard

A leopard, black, sleek
Creeps on by my monitor’s desk.
His fangs are long cream colored
Points of grabbing death,
Not for me I hope, but to eat those
That would contest those light
Blue-gray eyes. The right to
Roar, the right to bite, the
Right to be himself in
The middle of all the bytes
And bits, and polar cables, too.
Serial ports tangle in his tail
And the USB cable confuses
Him with the digital mouse attached -
Is is lunch? Or merely a snack?
That goes on and on and on?
It creeps and crouches, and
Doesn’t wait to disappear-
As I want to.

Charlotte Ballard

Open Your House

When you open your house
To lovers or kin,
Dust off your patience,
Double up on clean towels.
Scrub down bathrooms
And morals, forget about
Privacy or programs –
Or legends of peace
And quiet from baby
Or the police.
No shouting allowed,
Only whisper instead-
When you say cheese -
Your mouth will squeak
As the smiles evaporate in
Dinners that are late,
Often quite ruined as you
Pretend
That you can-
Be the lover of kin
Or the kin of lovers –
The bed remains undone.
And the lover unfed.

Charlotte Ballard

Parental duties

Ducks waddle in
An unhurried line
From nest to pond
Only squatting once
To hurry Junior along.

Charlotte Ballard

Partnership

A flicker of a promise
Sealed in gold and fire
Mixed with Tango lines
And deep gorges flushed
Timeless in the middle
Of a hush, spoken in silver
Bells, wrapped thus, and thus
And, oh my, there.
She makes it shine.
Do you see it?
Touch it once and
It disappears like
Spun sugar in a
Child's hand.

Charlotte Ballard

Party Interrupted

Urgent,
Sleep,
Gift given-
None taken-
Birthday gone-
Slumbered through it.

Charlotte Ballard

Peace

All that’s needed for Peace
Is an agreement, a gentleman’s
If you prefer–
Two hands held out, shake once
Then twice for the camera pops
Then pats on the back, by
Fellows who don’t speak
Together, except in the
voices of pretty maids
Standing behind,
Struggling to finish
Graduate school.
The girls, I mean,
Not the camera men,
Nor the men up front -
With Bright white teeth
Jagged, and sharp,

One Agreement.
To shake hands,
Instead of commanding
A salute.
Twenty-one for the
survivors.

Charlotte Ballard

Perfect Greek

Perfect Greek
Like the Ancients taught
Bubbles out of my
Simple curious
Baker of moons,
Singer of Trebles,
Ringer of Trouble.
Curvaceous back arches
As I lean down
To translate a twitch
Of a tail into
Latin spoken here.

Charlotte Ballard

Perfection

Why do I look at people that are
Missing apart of themselves and shutter?
They have the same soul components as I -
Except that an accident has occurred
That destroyed the perfect mirror of their God
Reflecting bodies.
Who's lacking the most? They
With their damaged mirror of life
Or me?
Who shutters as they pass?
Because it is I who is blind
To the beauty that lies beneath
It is I who's deaf to the
Sweetness of their heart.
It is I
Who lacks a vital part of my soul
(Compassion, mercy and eyes that see)
When I shutter
At those that pass
That lack a normal
Outward reflection
Of what we call perfection.□

Charlotte Ballard

Peyto Lake

A curve of blue
Like a fat bellied man
With his hands outstretch
Directing the choir praising
The mountains with green gruff
Grown long -
The pines stand in attendance
Waiting for the rain to fall.

Charlotte Ballard

Playing Cards

I don't have much
That I can claim-
Just an old brush
With half the bristles gone,
A toothbrush, a clean shirt or two.
One jar of soap given, I think
As a present
Two Christmases ago
By some women's group
That brought fruity punch-
Not the beer we'd asked for.

I could all fit it
In a child's shoe box, this big,
I'd guess and, oh yes,
My playing cards
A blue rider deck
With a few edges bent back.
I stuck my cards
Down deep in my pants when Charley
Wouldn't stop. He pleaded softly
With fish-cold eyes and quivering lip.
Relenting, I let him
Play, stupid fool
Bent the deck again.

Best friends, they are
The cards I mean,
They talk to me at night.
Mostly the Red Queen of Hearts begs
Me please, keep the Black King spades
Away from my petticoats, he
Rapes me nightly,
Under the cover of the Red Ten Heart.
Her children weep
And I can't stand their wails.
So I took the Black King Spade
And burned him good-
One night just as he had
Lifted her skirts and peeked beneath.
He wiggled and screamed before
He vanished in the blacken smoke.

Charlie and me
Still play Hearts and Spades
With one card short.
But Charlie doesn't seem
To mind. But still I yell
As he bends the edges
To keep his place, I suspect,
But the cards groan as I retrieve the
Deck and the wailing

Has begun again.

Charlotte Ballard

Poetry Is Nothing

Poetry is nothing
But words strung together.
Maybe it’ll mean something
To someone, if not to me.
The sounds underneath-
Say when to stop-
But who can stop
When poetry is nothing,
But a breath on a page.

Charlotte Ballard

Porcelain Crab

Shifting grapes, wave
Through budding, rounded
Together, perfect
Translucent crab
Reaches for a speck
Of gold in the midst
Of all that purple.

Charlotte Ballard

Praying with Angel Hands

The wind blows cold outside
Yet it is warm inside
Inside me as well
I cannot let the wind creep
Unchallenged into my middle
Full of promises, all denied
Full of hope, all contained
Listening to the waves of echoing laugher
About what might be, what may be, what could
Be.

Just Be.
Be.
I am.
Quiet.
My hands touch soft
In front of a closed off
Face. My wings open
And the angels lift me home.

Charlotte Ballard

President Bush’s Dream

Almost heaven, almost hell–
Peace pushed back against the pell.
Summer makes for covered bars
Tender bellies, and crushed root tars.

Speak only silence-
Pray only fact -
The pope is held down.
Unwilling to answer, unable to frown.

Kiss the baby, hold up a flag
Never mind history, it’s time to play tag.
Metal jacketed heros not old enough
To shave, spits out homage to twisted rags.

Regret marred with blood
That never wipes away –
Triggered by anger, and fright that
That home of the brave, and the land of the free

Might only be a whisper, of an ideal
In a muddied man’s hand.

Charlotte Ballard

Princess El

Princess El, once your favorite,
Lays sprawled with head turned away,
Glassy eyes wait for your coming.
Sweet dreams, Princess El.

Your life, so grown-up now.
No need for the baby doll that
Endured it all.
Crimped Hair, that you
Asked me to do, after we
Tried and failed to get
Out the gum spoiled in the sun.

Her complexion marred by ink pens
Drawn by fingers too tired to find
Another place where mama wouldn't yell
Clothed in the very same outfit that
I brought you home in.
Princess El, the same size as you, just a
Bit bigger, her toes reach all the way,
That you took 3 months to fill.

Let me kiss her fingers once, just as I
Once kissed yours. Let me nuzzle her
Belly, raspberry kiss, as I once did
Yours. You, too grown to care.

Sleep well, Princess El, My daughter
Will find that even a grown-up has need of a little
Comfort too.

Charlotte Ballard

Promises in Ginger

Whispers of a secret
Hinted by the scent of
A Granny Smith
Apple chewed into
Quarters, no bigger
Than my thumb.

I plead for the key
That unlocks that crisp
Perfection of cinnamon,
Crisped sugar
Sprinkled on top

Vanilla promises to make
Me wish that long legs
Came on bottles trucked
In from Mexico, on brown
Backed workers, wearing
Faded denim shirts soaked
In Sweat.

It’s a promise that
Doesn’t keep
Me warm at night
Or frost off a car
Turned north.
Only the sparkle
Of Heaven turned eyes
Mean anything to me
Or ruin what should have
Been, could have been.
I dream of toasters
Knitted in soft pastels,
Let me find you a couple of
Promises that fit in a shoebox
Shoved under your bed,
Forgotten until the funeral.

Charlotte Ballard

Ramblings From A Demented Mind

I hear you lying to me,
It's an echo in my ear,
Of promises made once broken
Shattered beyond repair

Daisies come up often
In fields tended by maids
Let's clasp our hands,
and turn around
To promises in the shade.
Striding

A cat, long and lean, tiptoes
its way from
Can to can, looking for a tidbit.

Charlotte Ballard

Red

Blood spurting from a cut vein –
Christmas velvet
A blush of a virgin bride
A sunburn after a day in the sun
Dr. Pepper cans
A stripe on a beaten prisoner back
Checkbook cover
Roses just opening
Toe-nail manicure
Salsa dancer's lips
First menstrual blood
Teddy Bear shirt
Candy bags
Fire Engine Trucks
A coal burned down
Blown up again
A child's balloon
A kiss still encased
In plastic lips.
Hearts and Diamonds
Flipped in passing.
Words shouted in print
My last memory of you.
☐Write a poem about trying to get along with a differcult person.

My mother weeps tin tears
As she taps on the telephone wire
Sending code, demanding directions
Each private and impossible to decipher.

I could decode the random taps,
Or write paid on Christmas cards
On over priced gifts, grabbed from
Frumpy housewives still in footies.

I could be the soft fur rug under
Each step begged and tangled
In green clinging vines that
Reach up gentle, only to rip flesh
Every time she speaks.

Both born out of one desire, mine
To flee, and hers to grip, and I'm
Not sure yet who will win this undeclared
Battle, except that my footsteps echo there.
☐A price to be paid

There's a price to be paid
For singing in the rain
For dancing in the shadows
For grabbing the brass ring.

There’s a price to be paid
For the curve of a baby’s cheek
For the scent of roses spent
For the song of birds in winter

There’s a price to be paid
To take a step forward
To lead a horse to water
To take the great leap

Each price bound up in tripilicate
Typed out on the gray paper of
Watery days, stamped three times
Return to Sender, No postage due.

Charlotte Ballard

Remember

Remember how it felt
To cry over a lost pet?
More precious
Than gold were
Those bright eyes
Now dimmed or gone.

Remember how it felt
To sit close to someone
New, who might like
You back, you think
You hope – maybe, maybe so.
And then he didn’t-
Going out with your
Best friend Sue.

Remember what it was like
To go into the ocean for the
First time?
Cold rolling waves
Knocking you down,
Laughing as it does.

That is what it was like
When you walked away
From me.

Charlotte Ballard

Richard Allan Ballard

Rich tones
In Crisp
C Sharp
Heard
And felt
Right there
Deep

All the way
Long fissures
Letting hot steam
And pressure go
Now, temporarily

Before it erupts, tearing
All before it away-
Late tears come
Lastly, mostly,
All in his heart
Ready to begin, climbing
Down in the dark.

Charlotte Ballard

Roller Coaster Ride

Love is like a roller coaster ride
I've heard it told before
And perhaps, of course,
I'll hear it once again.

Yet, anticipation of a slope-
Slow, steady, ever slipping
Almost never, and the eyes
Open wide to see the
Naked space spread.
Then a rush, hot, breathy
A scream, from those in
Front, who can truly see.
Then around, and around
Both love and the cart
Go aground, and then
Weak kneed – all get off to
"Let's do it again."

Charlotte Ballard

Rooftop Sighs

Rooftop Sighs breathe
Out applewine hopes,
Drunk out of
Zigzag speech
Popped into jagged
Smiles inked on
By sisters of clothed sin,
Mended in the middle
With whispered prayers into
Crossed and tucked hands.
Hope runs down the
Side.

Charlotte Ballard

Rooster's Duty

Morning's light
Rooster crows.
Front yard spread,
Needs mowing, he says,
Tapping on the window pane.
Maiden goose honks echoed
By twin goose loud
Yet persistent, resistant
To Shouts:
'Shut up, ' again.
Rooster crows jubilant
Preen and cry loud
Crow Rooster crow!
Keep awake.
Duty calls.

Charlotte Ballard

Row of Pansies

Black surround by soft
Purple curving
Green strokes
Connecting Ground
To Earth.
Let us pray.

Charlotte Ballard

Sacred Spirit

Chanted by Ancient Spirit
Ancestors clustered round-
Unknown words breathed
Into the rhythm of the beat
Of a gentle drum
Echoed round with a
Singing flute bird song.
My feet
Want to go there.

Charlotte Ballard

Sadistic Lover

My cat demands closeness
That I'd rather not give,
Sadistic lover -
He stalks me like a shriven
Mouse, laying on my vacant
Flesh-claiming rights
With sharp claws kneading
unprotected flesh.
Blood stripes earned
In sudden affectionate leaps.

He looks at
Me with yellow slat eyes

I move, he follows
He adores, I dread.
He watches my every
Breath, and I wonder
If adoration
From a 10 pound
Tom is worth
The unfleshed kiss.

Charlotte Ballard

Sage

Sage, an ordinary tabby,
Climbs into the empty
Dr. Pepper carton,
Head first -
My grown daughter and I
Laugh as he wiggles in.

Adopted at birth,
But not by me-
The thread pulls her
Close enough for me
To see steel in
Tongue, eyebrow,
And nose.
Her Rubenesque
Body spills out
From her shirt, and
I want to touch that
Flesh given up as an
Unmarried teenager.
Not knowing that
I'd always hunger to feel
That flesh, brown-
That laughing, dancing voice
With eyes that keep time.
I dare not -

And we both laugh
As Sage squeezes
All of his body in-
Leaving only his
Tail behind.

Charlotte Ballard

Sane

Seeking,
  I found it.
Longing
  I was satisfied
Empty,
  I was filled.

New ways, new hopes
  Friends, Family, country men
books, music, sports
  Fill me
My head spins
  From top to toe.

I move, I seek, I dream,
  Am I worse than the others?
Am I no better?

Crying, I fall into a deep pit.
Falling endlessly.

My toes in the grass,
  My head in the clouds.
Feeling pain that has no cause.
Seeing colors that have never been seen.
Tasting flavor where there is no food.

Drinking in the colors, the light.

Free me,
  Free me,
I am lost,
  Alone
  by myself
  Alone.

Charlotte Ballard

Saturday Night Ritual

Spangled beauties lean
Sideways on the bar,
Toasting to their own destruction,
While curs hidden in wolf clothing
Shuttled back and forth
Sniffing for easiest prey.
Little girls wade out between groping
Hands that reach out
Between waves of noxious
Music flooding out to be
Swallowed up by the hungry
Swaying fish.

Charlotte Ballard

Separate Beginnings

Everything separates-
Child from parent,
Husband from wife,
Ore from a mine,
Cream from milk,
Butter from cream,
Breath from my lungs.

A churning, changing, complex
Spin, apart, then back again.
The child has children,
Two hearts pair up in a damp Paris street
The earth pushes up the ground –
Too slow for us to see.
Another cow is lead into a stall,
And I inhale the precious essences
Of you, again.

Charlotte Ballard

September Kiss

I have a memory of a Time
Before I was born
Drawn in by tide or moon
Or something rawer, deeper
Than space between the here
And then and maybe then as
Well. A purer place -
My hands want to say.
A place where I remember being
Loved even before I could
Sing or dance the harpsichord
Devine. Devil in the details,
Lover in my spine,
Harsh the wine comes down.
My hands melt into the
Keyboard as I remember a
September kiss.

Charlotte Ballard

She Said Yes

She said yes
To the man with
The soft brown eyes
Who had whispered
Her name even as he
Groaned with passion
Moving above her.

She said yes
To the house
Picked out by another
Her mother by law,
Her father by marriage
Still, it was a house
To be owned together.

She said yes
When the doctor told
Her to push, and she
Did push until the squalling
Child hushed pink on her
Belly.

She said yes
To the years that came
With children grown
And 'let me have the car,
Please', and 'can I have
A twenty, too? '

She said yes
When the leaves fell
On the grave of her Husband,
Knowing only his
Shell laid there, that he
With the brown eyes that
Lay soft, were not closed there
But had gone, gone before.

She said yes
When her heart skipped
A beat before stopping
altogether -

And she said yes, when
The brown eyed man
Held out his hand to her
To bring her to heaven.

Charlotte Ballard

Shy Patty Cakes

Shy patty cakes
Makes a baby
Mean. They clap,
They slap, and
They throw it all away.
Just in time,
For Tommy and me

Charlotte Ballard

Silence Answers the Wind

The trees wave hello as
The wind pushes over
My skin. No words
Raise in my hands -
Colored brown or
Green or no color at all-
Caresses my head,
My fingers spread wide
Without snatching smooth
Silk running in my hands.
Blossoms clear in
My forehead when random
Kisses flare. My mouth
Swallows it all.

Charlotte Ballard

Silent Vigil

Young woman sits by a bedside
Hidden deep in a hospital's bowel.
A body, torn, ruptured, cut, and sewn
Rumples the covers as plastic string decorates
A bare arm exposed.

Tears' silence as the moon's rising
Drip, and puddle on one foot pushed
Forward, touching a yellow bag of brine.
Kisses cold flesh once, twice
The green faerie dancer
Flutters no more.

Charlotte Ballard

Silliness

Silliness brings silk for
The spinning, of purple
Plashes of iridescent
Scent, of bosoms heaving
Of Jackson leaving, needles
Crushed under a vacant
Heel. Told you so.
Told you so.

Charlotte Ballard

Silly Me

Silly me. I dance
At the keyboard
Of my own success
Needing nothing
But a faint hope,
And a gifted plea
I'll win,
Just hope it's
Before I'm dying.

Charlotte Ballard

Six Minutes

Six minutes until the turn of the clock.
Five minutes until I must get up.
Four minutes to muse and delight myself.
Three minutes to ponder the nature of self-
Two minutes to groan that it's not enough.
One minute to let the poem sort itself.
Six minutes is for one poem full enough.

Charlotte Ballard

Slant Rhyme

Little Rhythms shift
And drifting,
In perfect half circles -
Rotating crystals
Shaming flakes of crunching
Pride. Practicing
Tango steps
In side-long bets.

Charlotte Ballard

Sleigh Ride

Jingle-Jangle
That's how poems flow.
Abbreviated prose
With just a hint of
Emotion to warm
Your hands,
Leaving your
Nose cold.

Charlotte Ballard

Sonya

Sonya was the nurse
That used to come
to tell us-
Dinner's done
Put up your plates-

One gentle nudge to send
Old Chip
Scurrying on his way.
Pretty pills
Dropped from her
Open hand
Like rainbows almost
After a Summer rain
White floating hair
Like an angel
She was.
Simple jokes
Gently told
Like tiny stones of wisdom
Oft repeated-
By her and us
Again, and again.

A dark day came
Our angel flew away
New Jersey, someplace
Not here.
The tiny stones dropped
from gnarled hands.
Anger words, sad words
Spilled and flowed on the ward
Drawing the doc, (who only came
on Sundays) .
We tried to tell him:
The rainbows had
dissipated into the
tears. But it only brought
Shots, and pills and all the
Fun was lost.

Charlotte Ballard

Spending hte Night at Linda's House

The orange slick of blood
Sounded fat and warm
As it trickled down soft
Spreading wide in a
Brazen cheer.

The sound of gunfire slipped
Under the door like a mouse
Flipped over and pushed
Squalling, shivering green
Fear flecks into my food.

Charlotte Ballard

Spoken in Dates

Spoken in dates –
A riddle given and
Answered by a stoic
Man, jealous of quiet
Time spent
Caressing a cat
Curled round her
Mistress’s chair.
Amanda Pleases,
And Thank-yous
But not enough
To fill the blank
Place between them.

Charlotte Ballard

Spring

When Dandelions spout golden hats
  Savory and thyme first peek out,
And bull-frogs croak a lover's song
  To delight and entertain
A swollen belly lady eager to spawn.
The blue jays, then, on every tree
  Muddies the air with a ratchet song.
And then dive-bombs a silky hair menace
Never retreat-the babes are safe once more.

Charlotte Ballard

Spring Flowers

Spring flower showers-
Flagrance silver-
May mist rainbow sparkle
Butterfly sailing,
Exuberant ground daffodil
Garden frog revives.

Charlotte Ballard

Standard Laid Bare

Raindrops drip down a bare
Baseboard, hidden by a
Book dropped by a stranger
Dressed in my husband's
Shirt.

The wind barks up, knocking
A wedge free from a house
Not stolen from the bank,
Yet. I don't live here
In the hours ripped up,
Ground up by hot water
Scrubbed over the kitchen
Floor.

A car door slams outside,
A loud thundering sound
Rippling through the
Ceiling, crashing a window
Forgotten in last night's rounds
Of putting wedding rings
On, and last night's stale breath
Dusted on a bare shoulder, scrubbed
Off by a midnight whisper.

Sweet, he says, sweet,
Even as the sweat comes
Between barren thighs
Trembling, finishing
And a pillow falls knocking
The book aside.

Charlotte Ballard

Staying here

Sometimes,
When I least expect it -
I expect, I expect -
A desire comes to flee
Like a demon is on
my
heels,
        bottom,
                and every toe
Burns
with unspilled poetry words
Curved back like uncut
Flowers drifted out.
Yet,
        no one here taunts,
        or curses
        or pretends to trip
        no childish grin or tongue lashed out
No sharp criticism
Like sharp cheese shoved
Up a nostril and won't come
Down again.
Nothing bad,
        nothing bad,
        nothing bad, ...
Curls around my finger,
Wanting me to cut
Who wants another?

Charlotte Ballard

Steel Gray Sky

Crumbled, crushed
Heaven's mud
Rain cradled, rocked by
Maids with flashing eyes -
Voices deep, rumbled
Incoherently, too distant
Like old men bent ov'
A chess game drawn
A king tipped
No kites fly.

Charlotte Ballard

Strait Jackets

Quite comfortable,
After awhile.
Snuggling deep,
Letting go of
Warm thoughts that
Trickle down my leg
Like dirty urine,
Welcoming the white confines.

Only the screams hurt.

Charlotte Ballard

Stubborn Teachers

(inspired by Stubborn Students)

Locked doors
Closed windows
(each stanza like this)
S
  t
    u

      b
        born Teachers

S
   t
     u
       b
         born Students

Cries in pain
Heads against wall
Gnashing teeth
Stomping feet
Book are open
Minds are closed
Stubborn Teachers
Stubborn Students.

Pushing harder
With each day
One step forward
Two steps back
Spitballs flying
Airplanes sailing
Stubborn Teachers,
Stubborn Students
One thing wrong
And off you go
Toe the line
Things will be fine

Minds wander
A fuzzy way
A teacher speaks
A student sleeps
Stubborn Teachers,
Stubborn Students.

Charlotte Ballard

Study

Deep mahogany desk
Rifled with pockets
Tucked with cheesiness
And cheers, silent and complete,
Wondering if the past repeats
Or renews a dead thing.
A hint drips
Like heated stew between
Pointed stares and hushed
Ears, lacquered clean by
Pirouetting cats and kittens
Covered in cream.
I jog in place, slipping,
Down a manicured slide
Waiting for the Choctaw
End.

Charlotte Ballard

Stupid

I am stupid,
Dumb, crazy
To think I'm
Something special-
Because I inhabit
This body and have
Such strange urgings
And protesting
To create patterns
Of words that
Sways back and
Forth-repeating
Patterns-and
Echoing slightly
Enough to know
That I spoke.
Yuck.

Charlotte Ballard

Summer Afternoon 2

Not spent with feet up, and lazy
Wind beckoning to come
Play the game...
Floors need tending,
Dishes need washing
While clothes languish in
The dryer- almost two days now.
The baby's crying,
Loud, insistent, face
With tears and snot, and
Mouth open wide
What's for dinner, dear
Mom, where's my top?

Only, only, when the completion
Of each job, the top found
Dinner completed, baby hushed
With bottle heated.
Does the wife of ten years training
Sit outside, letting the breeze knock off
Bits of corn silk, and of green bean anchors
Her hands tired, drift down
Her eyes lift up, hoping for a storm
To sooth the heat -there
Every morn.
Her work done, she rests-
Only a moment there.

Charlotte Ballard

Summer reruns

Rumm of the lawnmower
As Daddy combs the grass
Up straight. Lemonade
In tall cold glasses
Sweating gold drops.
Leaves emerald bright.
Kids rolling down
Steep, dipping hills,
Mom's hollering-
Supper's on.

Dear God,
Dim the light.

Charlotte Ballard

Sunday Church

Arkansas Morning-
Emerald green shine,
Tadpoles squashed by
Wiggling shirt-tail pulled bottoms.
Flocks of silver sheep
Creep and flow and push
Closer and together.
Flat-bottomed books, flecked
With dust, marked by an Amen
And a Glory Hallelujah
Tip and thump noisily
To be shushed by wide
Eyed stares.
Let us all pray together.

Charlotte Ballard

Swan Song

I watched a girl,
Pretty and slim
With black lace on-
Sniff up a quarter gram
Ounce of dusty white powder.
Poison laced but instead
Of dying privately
With dignified grace.
She dived into a pool
Of metal and glass
Twinkling merrily
As if it was Christmas
Which it was.
I had wished that I was
Her, all pretty and slim
With breasts that perked up
All the men's interest,
Small, round
Over a curving belly-
Like a pink plastic
Kewpie doll
That anyone could win.

Charlotte Ballard

Table Mountain

A mountain-
Flat on top
As if sliced through
For a giant’s lunch
The left-over pieces
Tumbled side-ways.

The ocean sprays
Rolling green grace -
As white clouds scrub clean
Stray sunbeams before
Guests arrive.

Charlotte Ballard

Tampering with Justice

Tampering with Justice
Is a fair-hair sport
Given to Muses, divinely
Inspired by Rockefeller
And Franklin Mint.

Justice is not for pro bono
Clients, that weasel a spot
On the docket using
The taxpayer's pocket.

Justice blind?
Oh, no, she sees in
Green, and blood, and wine.

Tempered with hot-bellied
Cops, who strain to hold it back
The tide of human waste or is it more
Like a boiling pot no one bothered to wash?
Useless to try –
Until a jaded eye says enough –
And the hand comes out of a
Piss-born pocket.

Charlotte Ballard

Tangled Hair

Tangled hair
Wrapped in her fist
Sharpness brushed
Tiny shrapnel over my scalp.
Separating me from
What used to be me.
I hope for a knot
To pause the destruction

Charlotte Ballard

Tapping Rose Bushes

A gentle Rose Bush
Resides under my window.
The wind pushes through
Like a lover brushing
Stray strands back.

The roses turn like
Shy virgins, whispering
Soft sighs, their hearts
Beat against my window.

Charlotte Ballard

Taps

Taps are being played
In the middle of me
To say good-bye
To that part that
No longer believes
In fairy-tales, or
Pumpkin pie wishes
Skipping rope, or
Skating past Billy Bob
With my tongue out so
Or that blood on T.V.
Is real, and the actors
Never get up again.
That no fairy godmother
Is going to do these
Dishes, or those clothes
In a sack, in one magical
Pass of her wand.
I want to believe in Santa
Claus, of a man who
Gifts me with treats and
Spill. I want to believe
In a world without war
Or one that children
Don’t die of hunger
While adults feed them
Selves nearby in a gift
Of North Korea.

Taps are being played
In a space deep inside.
Oh, how I don’t want
To return
To that place where
No lie hides.

Charlotte Ballard

Temper Your Muse

Temper your muse
If you care to produce
Any real line of prose
Or heavenly verse -

Verses packed, side by side,
In long glass tubes
Filled with formaldehyde
And cotton gauze packed tight.

It sets it, you know,
That yellow-brown gunk
From promises sweet to
Stiff man cures.

My promises are nothing
But ashes and smoke-
Even the alcohol turns
Brown, drunk down twice.

Lay down my friend,
To finger my robe.
I'll open a jar and
Let you inhale them first.

Charlotte Ballard

Ten More Like This One

I remind myself
That I am alive now
By choice, at choice
In choice.
A purple moment, embraced
By cross-tied buttons
Faded knit, and
Hamsters worn
As mittens.

I long for something more
A place where the noise
Is silent and
Tastes like fine
Crystal Wine marked
By a label too faded to be
Read.

My flesh is thin, there,
Where my brow lies
Over the bone. Common
So common. I whisper
For a promise, A keepsake from a time
That wasn't broken and tangled
With the regrets of this one.

A promise I did not keep
For myself, by choice,
In choice, in myself.

Charlotte Ballard

Tenderness

Reach deep, young one
To find love hidden
In the Cocomo places.
Littered like plastic
Combs bent into cruel
Shapes that children
Leave in other kids'
Souls. Love, a one-size-
Fits-most word, hungers
For a private slot raised
Between summer radishes and
Books held before blossoming
Cheats. Milk-fed, candy sweet,
Apples blushed pink. Palm-sized.
My palm. His palm
Practices a calming ritual
In a bathroom scrubbed
Clean with Lysol and
Rose-bloomed soap.
The pages bleed
Black ink even
As he burns.

Charlotte Ballard

Texas Poetry

I like to write plain poetry.
Poetry that comes right up
And speaks its mind.
Howydo it says,
Wearing a black hat with the
Rim bent just so and
A borrowed hand-me-down suit
With a tie-tied 4 in hand.
No translation necessary,
No need to apply inside.

Charlotte Ballard

The Bible

I wonder sometimes
If God hears me when I pray-
Long rambling things
That wind around and
Never really get to
The whole point of the
Reason, I started to pray
In the first place.
I want to say, I need some
Help and I want it now,
But you can't curse
Or demand, or argue
Your point with the creator
of your being in the first place.

Charlotte Ballard

The Cat

He lingers near the edge with spotted paws;
Near the ceiling, standing tall,
He surveys the land beneath, ruler over all.

Rumbling growls with a whirl and tread,
The lingering scent of meat long dead.
The king, uncrowned, becomes well fed.

Charlotte Ballard

The Child in Me

The child in me
Wonders if I'll
Keep my promise
Given to her, through
Tears and heavy words
Crushing my heart.
Today it isn't raining,
Do we go to the park?
Do we talk about the
Blues and the dreams
And of blankets pushed
Down in the middle of
An afternoon?
Will I let her come out?
Will I breathe her pain
Out? Easing the grief
That her childhood
Will never end, her
Blankets never pulled up,
Tucked under a chin –
By a loving parent
Even by my twin?
I forgave to forget
So I forgot what it
Was that I forgot
And in the middle of it
A promise of wholeness
And never having to
Listen to the steps
Creaking as he comes up.

Child, dear child,
Come out from your
Hiding– that was
Only a nightmare
Brought on by too
Many lemonade sundaes
And the missing
Of your mother's heart.

Charlotte Ballard

The Dead of Night

New Orleans
Bodies lie unburied.
The smell like
A day dead chicken
Laying sprawled as
A meal for maggots
And feral dogs.

At night, the rain falls
On open eyes that
Quickly fill and spill
Both ichor and fluid
Dark, streaked with red.
No babies cry
In the dead of night

Small voices hushed
So they won't frighten
The strangers crouched
There on belonging scattered
For a bottle of water
And a meal pressed
Flat between flakes
Of steel. Buses
Take all the
Ache away.
Mostly.

Charlotte Ballard

The First Night

A small spring of
Clear sparkling joy
Has erupted silently
In the place of
Long dead leaves
Stored so carefully.
So long ago.
Words of no sound
Ripple from the outer edges
Lapping and rolling
Into nothingness
As more push out to
Take their place.

Small pearls of crystal
Drip from my fingers,
As I bring up a double handful
And giggle noisily
Like a child.

Charlotte Ballard

The Man I Could Have Married

Had he and I but met
Before a wife he had acquired
We would have danced, and dined
And talked for many an hour.

But he stood with his wife's
Back by his side
We stared at each other
And then called each a liar.

She looked at me, and then at him.
Touched him once, a mark
I suppose to remind me that
I remained just a foe.

I smiled to show I minded not at all.
That she was married to the man
That should have been mine all along.
Tis only that I met him late, too late, I suppose.

Another time, another place, or so
The poets go, he would have looked at me
That way, as he held my hand. He would have
Spoke those words, and never let me go.

Charlotte Ballard

The Maple Dances

Tangled branches of
Shadowy hair
Wrinkle crisp lines
In the September air.

Black robins bobbing,
Dig out
From summer coarsen throats
A solitary song.

Charlotte Ballard

The Night Rider

Watch for the one that comes in the night
Unbidden and unknown-
Spring up on barren ground,
He rides a charging steed.

On his side lies a guiltless sword,
Of flashing gold and tarnished fire.
Its bite is deep; its bite is cold
Onward Durendal, on.

Springing on a prancing steed
Enticing victims to their fall.
His fighting arm, mighty still,
Swings high to conquer all.

His face is black
With deeds of old.
Ready to fight and ready to fall
Losing never, he wanders on.

Beware of the fire
That burns in his heart
Beware of the dangers
That it means to be called.

His home is in the Lions's den,
Fearlessly walking the path of death.
His glaring eyes plant the seeds of sorrow;
His is the night ride, the bringer of death.

Beware of a stranger that comes in the night.
Beware for it could be he.

Charlotte Ballard

The Old Pro

Rainy nights, mostly,
On sore-infested streets
Where the screaming wind
Steals your pride away
While sticky hands
Trace a curly-cue
On one exposed breast
Displayed on a platform
Of easy words that
Dribble and drop
Like foul-tastin' honey
Spoiled by too many
'Chili dog with onions, please.'
Quarter buck fifty
For a quickie
Done for luck
Faded lipstick dreams
Cradle a crown of glory
While a housewife weeps
Coffee-stained tears.

Charlotte Ballard

The Road of Life

While walking along the road of life
Let one dream stand out.
It can hold you up
When living has got you down.

Let it be as tall as a mountain
Or as short as a summer rain.
Let it stand proudly by itself
Or be held in your hand.

A brazen thing that calls to itself
Or one that slips by unnoticed.
Fleeting as a dawn's early rays
Or as lasting as a road that stretches
From here to there.

Let it be proud and stand for you
For a man is known by his dreams.

Charlotte Ballard

The Same

Day after day,
The same.
The same coffee,
The same prayer,
The same kiss,
The same cough.

The same routine
The same promise
The same twist of hair.

The same soldier
The same crash of tears
Barking, loud, the crack
Promises the same.

Charlotte Ballard

The Telephone Book

Oh, Marvin Towers
Jermiah Jones, as well as
Tammy Braumstead
Sammy, Jimmy, and of course,
Marvin all of the Grant family -
How I love to look at your names
Each one a story, each one a song
Tell me, o' 555-1734
Does it hurt when someone calls?
Do you scramble over bookcases
and cats, and husbands and spouses
long?
Tell me a tale, personal line, kid's line
Fax line, and computer modem line
Close off an ear or eye
Tender caress when a lover calls
Oh, phone call holder of promises
Yellow pages blush.

Charlotte Ballard

The Truth

I will tell myself the truth
Even if those around me
Deny it.

I will tell myself the truth
Even if a friendship’s
Lost by it.

I will seek the truth
Even if it tells me
Something terrible
With it.

I will speak the truth
Even if I'm no longer
Invited in.

At the end, The all I have
Is the truth.

Charlotte Ballard

There Are No Secrets Here

There are no secrets here,
That’s what was said to me
In the darkness, in the pathway
In the hidden places along the way.

There are no secrets here,
My body pulls away
From a pirated touch, from
A man who says he’s my father.

There are no secrets here-
When I wake up shaking in
The night and then my husband
Has to hold me until I’m still.

There are no secrets here.
Just pain, just a silent knowing
That no words could express
Anyway. To him or them.

There are no secrets here.
I am poisoned like a well
Full of dead creatures
Thrown down by marauders
There is nothing left to pull up.

There are no secrets here
Hidden deep, I know where
I keep them, I just don’t look
For there are no secrets here.

Charlotte Ballard

Timid is the Poet

Timid is the poet
Who only scans a line-
Tripled spaced, collated
Outside the gentle breeze.

Double turn,
Each in its place -
Spill a little laughter,
Wipe a little face.

Dream in turn
Swatches of blue
Velvet rope -
Walking on red.

Tremble before speaking
To make the words squeak
Poetry is not for cowards
But for brigands and thieves.

Charlotte Ballard

To Emily Dickinson

Emily, your words breathe fire.
From simple words to grand designs-
Heaven drops, sweet nectar.
I propose a promise
To wear your words there
In a secret crevice
Where the Holly springs.

Weakly worn, slovenly tied.
I hold out my tattered offering
To fill the tired places
In both you and I.
Who knows, perhaps,
I'll meet you there
At that place where
Poets retire.

Charlotte Ballard

To Richard

When I say
I love you.
You ask me
Why-
I smile and make
A Joke but
Inside, inside deep.
I know
It's because you
Touch each kitten born
Too soon with gentleness
Like that of a May breeze
Painting the leaves silver-black
It's because you remember
My words tumbling
Over each other like waves over
Lichen covered rocks, endlessly.
And then do what I had
Only casually mentioned.
It's because you try so
Hard to do what's
Right-like a Warrior
Prince guarding a Rear Retreat.
Of course, you say.
Of course, you say again,
Shrugging your shoulders.
I love you still.

Charlotte Ballard

Too Much Fur

Kitten sleeping -
Four other cats.
Too much fur -
Fur coat
Never owned
Okay, never wanted
Too much money
Precious life
Kitten

Charlotte Ballard

Top Thought

Top Thought says
To take the Money and run–
Like the rich folks say
Before they twitch their
Thin line mouths down...
Darling – Money is so
Vulgar, except when you
Have none. Turn your
Face, it shines, the green
Gold, it does.

Tempered with bristled ends
That can stag you at a run-
The Green Back buys
A row of broccoli or
Strawberries turned
Just so – in front of a husband
Asleep on the sofa before
The news even closes.

Charlotte Ballard

Trees

Orange lips lick up
The rough moon 'scaped surface
Aged fairies, forty or more
Scamper out screaming
And waving at smoking
Parts of anatomy, I'd
Rather not name.
I pray softly that the
Firemen would not come
And stand sternly by
As I pour more
Gasoline on the still
Growling fire.

Charlotte Ballard

Trouble

All the things
That once troubled
Me, as a child,
A spite, and on
To teenage-hood
Were the very
Things that twisted
Round, and taught
Me more important
Things than to flinch
When a “name” is flung.

Trust Myself, the
Deepest one, caught
Between the small
Fists throw fast
By a bully no more
Than ten.

Unique Is Better
Than Sameness
Taught by taunting
Rhymes that smothered
my self -worth.

Do or die,
Stand or disappear
Expand or shrivel -

Trusted by God
And me, that it
Would force
A greater gift
Than that
Of an
Untroubled
Childhood.

Charlotte Ballard

Trouble Lies Yonder

Trouble lies yonder
I dare not go and see
To whom the blow is struck
For it could turn out to be me.

Dally here a while,
In the folds of my gown
While you close your eyes
So blue, I'll sing for thee.

Let me whisper a love song
In rhythm with the birds
To catch the unbroken
Breath, hitched to a song.

Trouble lies yonder
Don't go and see
For whom the blow is struck
Might end up being thee.

Charlotte Ballard

Troubled Sleep

If in that Syrian grave, You rest
Unknowing of how the hate you tried
to kill, lingers on and hungers yet
Then rest well, and never wake.

but if that stone moved, and to
Heaven you ascended, and you remember
the bloody nails and the handprints embedded.
Then look below and seek to save us.

Charlotte Ballard

Tweeze The Poor Bruise

Tweeze the poor bruise
Shaped like a horse fed
Milk and reason in the days
Before it became a bride
Cringing in the mulch and daub
Red Rock
'Let us all pray together.'

Charlotte Ballard

Two Cats Warm

A cat, tabby and tomcat charming
Reclines watchfully on the left
On a desk that once was my daughters but nows
Hides my books and holds
My fan, and frames the window
Black cat crowds me back in my chair
Curving C that never minds
The taby after a spit and spat
In the middle is Artificial Means
By Christine Lavin tapped out
On Second Monitor waits
And the taby washes himself
As I begin my Sensitive New Age Guys
As one taby foot rests on the arm of my chair
Yellow eyes
Pink tongue
Content, now that Black Cat left
And jumps back, shifting back to the top of my
Novel to be
Printer

Forgiveness.

Charlotte Ballard

Two Watchers

I saw a leaf fall today
Burnt orange oak
Drifting down alone -
All its fellows
Gone the week before
When that bad ice
Storm, hit, you
Remember, don't you?

I'm the only one who
Saw the leaf, only
God and me. Did it
Really exist or was
It a blot of mustard
Or a bit of underdone
Potato landing
Silent, with one
Solitary watcher
Thinking of one hand
Clapping, or of the sound
Of a leave falling outside
Of the window I'm looking
Out of.

If I say nothing -
What of the others?

Charlotte Ballard

U.S.A. Today

It's not my practice
To preach
(As you know)
But I must address
This matter-
Directly at once.

I'm god
(like in OH-MY-God.)
But Mr. God will do.

I used to be Napoleon,
Before it got taken
By that strange old
Guy that sleeps in 3-B.

So now, I'm God.
Really, don't laugh.
I make it rain and snow and
Hail. You know,
All that postman stuff.

The flowers pray to me.
I can hear their tiny voices
Crying out for justice
Against those who
Pulverize their teeny-tiny
Children under a
Finite heel.
I can't sleep
For their wailing
Never ceases. So I
Decree that all flowers must
Cease at once
Their weeping for their children

God must sleep.
Without voices
That wail and weep
And cause
Frightful dreams
That devour me
An inch at a time.
For I'm god -
Don't you see?

Charlotte Ballard

Untitled

My hand-print here I'm leaving
Not much that I am pleasing
I deliver my hope on a
One legged horse and tremble
As I be teasing.

Charlotte Ballard

Untitled number 2

Leavings on life's dinner plate
Is what I find
As I take a sip
Leaving it far behind.

A rotted old shoe
Filled with brine and brack
Several gray ties
Tied squarely in the back.

Nonsense words and meaningless
Dances, I sway now and then
My hair swings out
It tangles as I weave it.
Cluttered not at all
Along I sing my song
Great John, are you there
Weeping in ashes?

Charlotte Ballard

View of a Life

Adoption of a son
Flash of an excited skirt dress
Hurried on
Death brought on
By angry Telephone lines
And hushed undertones, ,
G-dd-nits and tense
Muscles, neck shoulder
And more spirit on.
A gap between the two
A picnic in a wheelchair
Pushed by a man who
Married for fur covered parts
Ignored but not forgotten.
The strong man
Now bent like an old man
A child monster bigger
Than most.
Mystery man, secret man,
Nothing to offer
Nothing to trade
Except a forbidden embrace,
So forgotten, in the dust
On a shelf, where the
Knick-nacks fall.
Nothing but a gap, between
Breaths, and forgotten by the
Fall.

Charlotte Ballard

Viking Cruel

The winter comes
With sharp cutting
Winds, measuring
Pain in puffs of
Warming hands
Cupped, prayerfully,
Bluing each whispered
Wish - hampered only
By immortality

Charlotte Ballard

W.P.

I am paralyzed with fear
To write, to not
Have an excuse not to write.

It's been so long-
And I could always claim that
I did not have the tools
that I had grown
Accustomed to,
(A lie.)
I have the money now, to get
What I need to start
And I tuck it aside and
Explain that
I may need it for a rainy
Day. (It sure is bright today!)

It's wise - I suppose -
For if I got the w.p.
Then I would have to be a poet -
Whether I could stand it or not.

Charlotte Ballard

Waiting

Waiting –
The days long
And nameless
Twisting under my
Hands like a feral
Cat. It’s claws
Rake my arms
Demanding release.
The sting reminds
Me that I must hold on
Even as teeth bite
Down, drawing blood.

Charlotte Ballard

Wandering Lead

Wandering lead
Fills my belly
Shot out of a loaded
Pistol armed with
White ivory and
A pink slipping
Tongue.

No blood dribbles out of
The transparent
Wound but the hole is deep
And long.
No sheriff with Flea-bitten courage
Is enough to fill it full again.

Charlotte Ballard

Washing Dishes

Washing dishes is like
Waiting for roses to bloom.
Roses blooming never wait
For washed dishes.
Washing clothes is like
Trees flowering in spring.

Charlotte Ballard

Watching My Girlfriend Cry

Tears taste
Like flat beer-
Running down a rotten keg,
That nobody bothered to
Remove from a worm eaten wharf.
Thank God, it wasn't me.

Charlotte Ballard

Weather Vane

Traditional tin,
Chipped red paint
On one wing.
Turning this way-
That way-
Mocking the crises
Of barnyard cousins.

Charlotte Ballard

What am I Good At?

A question given as
An assignment -
In a poetry instruction book,
What am I good at? Write
A poem about that.

I am good at nothing -
Except this.
This writing thing.
I cannot cook delicious meals
Or trim a sailor suit for a child.
No boss has ever made me
Employee of the month,
Nor have I known the joys
Of promotion.

No instrument sings under nimble fingers.
No yard blooms in blues and golds.
I never have been given an award
(except for this)
That told me how excellent I was,
How totally brilliant.
Teachers don’t hold me up as example.
Parents don’t point me out to their children
As I walk past.

The newspaper doesn’t know my name.
Or print my image in dark news print.
There are no trophies, no brass engraved plate
No Days in My Honor - no keys to the city.
Even the easiest jobs as clerk, hamburger maker
Chicken frier, cashier
Never went beyond that.

So what am I good at?
This, only this.

Charlotte Ballard

What are the twenty most beautiful things in the world?

A young woman who is trim, yet virtuous.
The eye of a duck that’s looking at you.
Still water beside a beach
Roses that haven’t begun to open.
My daughter’s face.
The shine on snow
The shine on a diamond
A chocolate offering from my husband
Clouds in different shades
A lace wedding dress
Glass mobiles
A red cardinal in my wild apple tree.
The sight of a cold can of Dr. Pepper when I crave it.
The splash of a dropp of water.
A chocolate cake that I can eat.
Rice that’s cooked perfectly
Tomatoes ready to be picked on the vine.
Twenty minutes to study before an exam
A new book by Stephen King
A blessing given by the pope.

Charlotte Ballard

What I Don't Know

What I don't know:
How to beat a dog senseless
How to stab a man to death
How to eat my weight in worms
How to pray over a dying child
How to keep time to the moon's change in clime
How to be a man between a woman's legs
How to create time at the end of an exam
How to pick corn or cotton with my hands bleeding
How to keep a job for more years than I am alive
How to laugh when I don't mean it
How to flirt so you'll know it
How to mend a fence or dig a ditch
How to keep a child from calling my name
How to bend when the wind blows
How to bake bread from flour and yeast all through it
How to curse in Latin
How to play the guitar or sing in pitch
How to feed a man so his heart stays fed or
How to write a poem that doesn't wander…

Charlotte Ballard

When Does the Window Clear?

When does the window clear-
After the rain, after all hope
Leaves?

Does it take time, the space
Of two deep breaths or
Of nine dark years?

A turn, here, again, and once
More. The glass, silvered
by the rain, trembles, and sheds
Each drop. Repeated until
All is forgotten, remembered
Only by the gray streaks
Traced in sharp lines.

Charlotte Ballard

When I Was A Child

When I was a child
I thought I wanted to
Be a Warrior Princess
Like Zena and other
Unnamed Amazons
I practiced being noble
And kind, under the worst
circumstances, giving
bread to the hungry
letting wisdom drip
from my fingers like honeyed
wine, As I got older
I noticed that nobody else did
This,
I have become like
Everyone around me
Yet this is as true as the first was.
Which is better?

Charlotte Ballard

White Stones

Wading knee deep
In a sparkling stream
Full of crawdads and smooth
White stones. I wonder
If heaven is nearby

Charlotte Ballard

Who Do You Love

Amber Waves of Grain
Who do you love?

Bright mountains, purple skies
Who do you need?

Eagles flying, curved swoops
Who do you love?

Is it the song of freedom?
Is it the price of blood lying in a street?
Does the moon command?
Dipping once its crescents full?

Does the red stain spread beneath
Children's shoes?
Tell me...I want to know.

The past is already gone
I don't want to fight anymore
Not even as a promise given.
I don't want to hurt anymore
Over pictures of torn flesh,
Of babies crying, dead beasts dumped

Let's not fight anymore
Let's let go, let it go
Let the boys go home B
Let the mothers tears stop

Amber Waves of Grain
Who do you love?

Charlotte Ballard

Winter

Crunch of ice, muddied by passing cars
Cats step careful, marking a passage
With four corner paw.
Sparrows scratch a line grown long
Black speckled seed spread by a blue
Vein hand. Trees, naked and cold,
sheared closed.
After moms twitter to button up, please.

Soft white sleep, echoed by the black
Blanket deep, a path wore down
To the bare bottom ground.
By a screeching wind, with red mitten
Children building forts in the snow.

Charlotte Ballard

Worry

Worry that beginnings
Don't catch the old
Beginnings that were
All that I was
Returned Right side up
Upside down
Fretting begins
And ends with
A 3 quarter line.

Charlotte Ballard

Writer in Training

I work the books
As if knowing the
Words could somehow
Translate into
Cut checks and
Applause from
Tight-lipped critics –
To Fame that lasts
More than 15 minutes
More.

Charlotte Ballard

You Come Too

You Come Too

I'm going to write a poem now, a little thing-
Not much to it. A line, a verse, a meter
To while the hours away, to make a rhyme perhaps
I won't be gone long,
-You come too.

I'm going to write a story now, long or short
I know not, but my character speaks in cockney,
Southern, English brogue, a female male
A youngster who's very old.
I won't be gone long,
-You come too.

Charlotte Ballard

Youngest Pleas

Gold light slanting across
Winter bare trees.
All kitties inside
Curled together
Nose to tail, leaving
only the youngest
To plead.

Charlotte Ballard