

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Charlotte Mew**

**- poems -**

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## **A Farewell**

Remember me and smile, as smiling too,  
I have remembered things that went their way--  
The dolls with which I grew too wise to play--  
Or over-wise--kissed, as children do,  
And so dismissed them; yes, even as yoy  
Have done with this poor piece of painted clay--  
Not wantonly, but wisely, shall we say?  
As one who, haply, tunes his heart anew.

Only I wish her eyes may not be blue,  
The eyes of a new angel. Ah! she may  
Miss something that I found,--perhaps the clue  
To those long silences of yours, which grew  
Into one word. And should she not be gay,  
Poor lady! Well, she too must have her day.

Charlotte Mew

## **A Quoi Bon Dire**

Seventeen years ago you said  
Something that sounded like Good-bye;  
And everybody thinks that you are dead,  
But I.

So I, as I grow stiff and cold  
To this and that say Good-bye too;  
And everybody sees that I am old  
But you.

And one fine morning in a sunny lane  
Some boy and girl will meet and kiss and swear  
That nobody can love their way again  
While over there  
You will have smiled, I shall have tossed your hair.

Charlotte Mew

## Absence

Sometimes I know the way  
You walk, up over the bay;  
It is a wind from that far sea  
That blows the fragrance of your hair to me.

Or in this garden when the breeze  
Touches my trees  
To stir their dreaming shadows on the grass  
I see you pass.

In sheltered beds, the heart of every rose  
Serenely sleeps to-night. As shut as those  
Your garded heart; as safe as they fomr the beat, beat  
Of hooves that tread dropped roses in the street.

Turn never again  
On these eyes blind with a wild rain  
Your eyes; they were stars to me.--  
There are things stars may not see.

But call, call, and though Christ stands  
Still with scarred hands  
Over my mouth, I must answer. So  
I will come--He shall let me go!

Charlotte Mew

## **From a Window**

Up here, with June, the sycamore throws  
Across the window a whispering screen;  
I shall miss the sycamore more I suppose,  
Than anything else on this earth that is out in green.  
But I mean to go through the door without fear,  
Not caring much what happens here  
When I'm away: --  
How green the screen is across the panes  
Or who goes laughing along the lanes  
With my old lover all the summer day.

Charlotte Mew

## **I Have Been Through The Gates**

His heart to me, was a place of palaces and pinnacles and shining towers;  
I saw it then as we see things in dreams,--I do not remember how long I slept;  
I remember the tress, and the high, white walls, and how the sun was always on the  
towers;  
The walls are standing to-day, and the gates; I have been through the gates, I have  
groped, I have crept  
Back, back. There is dust in the streets, and blood; they are empty; darkness is over  
them;  
His heart is a place with the lights gone out, forsaken by great winds and the heavenly  
rain, unclean and unswept,  
Like the heart of the holy city, old blind, beautiful Jerusalem;  
Over which Christ wept

Charlotte Mew

## **I So Liked Spring**

I so liked Spring last year  
Because you were here;-  
The thrushes too-  
Because it was these you so liked to hear-  
I so liked you.

This year's a different thing,-  
I'll not think of you.  
But I'll like the Spring because it is simply spring  
As the thrushes do.

Charlotte Mew

## **In The Fields**

Lord when I look at lovely things which pass,  
Under old trees the shadow of young leaves  
Dancing to please the wind along the grass,  
Or the gold stillness of the August sun on the August sheaves;  
Can I believe there is a heavenlier world than this?  
And if there is  
Will the heart of any everlasting thing  
Bring me these dreams that take my breath away?  
They come at evening with the home-flying rooks and the scent  
of hay,  
Over the fields. They come in spring.

Charlotte Mew

## Monsieur Qui Passe

A purple blot against the dead white door  
In my friend's rooms, bathed in their vile pink light,  
I had not noticed her before  
She snatched my eyes and threw them back to me:  
She did not speak till we came out into the night,  
Paused at this bench beside the kiosk on the quay.

God knows precisely what she said--  
I left to her the twisted skein,  
Though here and there I caught a thread,--  
Something, at first, about "the lamps along the Seine,  
And Paris, with that witching card of Spring  
Kept up her sleeve,--why you could see  
The trick done on these freezing winter nights!  
While half the kisses of the Quay--  
Youth, hope,-the whole enchanted string  
Of dreams hung on the Seine's long line of lights."

Then suddenly she stripped, the very skin  
Came off her soul,-a mere girl clings  
Longer to some last rag, however thin,  
When she has shown you-well-all sorts of things:  
"If it were daylight-oh! one keeps one's head--  
But fourteen years!--No one has ever guessed--  
The whole thing starts when one gets to bed--  
Death?-If the dead would tell us they had rest!  
But your eyes held it as I stood there by the door--  
One speaks to Christ-one tries to catch His garment's hem--  
One hardly says as much to Him--no more:  
It was not you, it was your eyes--I spoke to them."

She stopped like a shot bird that flutters still,  
And drops, and tries to run again, and swerves.  
The tale should end in some walled house upon a hill.  
My eyes, at least, won't play such havoc there,--  
Or hers--But she had hair!--blood dipped in gold;  
And there she left me throwing back the first odd stare.  
Some sort of beauty once, but turning yellow, getting old.  
Pouah! These women and their nerves!  
God! but the night *is* cold!

Charlotte Mew

## **My Heart is Lame**

My heart is lame with running after yours so fast  
Such a long way,  
Shall we walk slowly home, looking at all the things we passed  
Perhaps to-day?

Home down the quiet evening roads under the quiet skies,  
Not saying much,  
You for a moment giving me your eyes  
When you could bear my touch.

But not to-morrow. This has taken all my breath;  
Then, though you look the same,  
There may be something lovelier in Love's face in death  
As your heart sees it, running back the way we came;  
My heart is lame.

Charlotte Mew

## On the Road to the Sea

We passed each other, turned and stopped for half an hour, then went our way,  
I who make other women smile did not make you--  
But no man can move mountains in a day.  
So this hard thing is yet to do.

But first I want your life:--before I die I want to see  
The world that lies behind the strangeness of your eyes,  
There is nothing gay or green there for my gathering, it may be,  
Yet on brown fields there lies  
A haunting purple bloom: is there not something in grey skies  
And in grey sea?  
I want what world there is behind your eyes,  
I want your life and you will not give it me.

Now, if I look, I see you walking down the years,  
Young, and through August fields--a face, a thought, a swinging dream  
perched on a stile--;  
I would have liked (so vile we are!) to have taught you tears  
But most to have made you smile.  
To-day is not enough or yesterday: God sees it all--  
Your length on sunny lawns, the wakeful rainy nights--; tell me--;  
(how vain to ask), but it is not a question--just a call--;  
Show me then, only your notched inches climbing up the garden wall,  
I like you best when you are small.

Is this a stupid thing to say  
Not having spent with you one day?  
No matter; I shall never touch your hair  
Or hear the little tick behind your breast,  
Still it is there,  
And as a flying bird  
Brushes the branches where it may not rest  
I have brushed your hand and heard  
The child in you: I like that best  
So small, so dark, so sweet; and were you also then too grave and wise?  
Always I think. Then put your far off little hand in mine;--  
Oh! let it rest;  
I will not stare into the early world beyond the opening eyes,  
Or vex or scare what I love best.  
But I want your life before mine bleeds away--  
Here--not in heavenly hereafters--soon,--  
I want your smile this very afternoon,  
(The last of all my vices, pleasant people used to say,  
I wanted and I sometimes got--the Moon!)

You know, at dusk, the last bird's cry,  
And round the house the flap of the bat's low flight,  
Trees that go black against the sky  
And then--how soon the night!

No shadow of you on any bright road again,  
And at the darkening end of this--what voice? whose kiss? As if you'd say!

It is not I who have walked with you, it will not be I who take away  
Peace, peace, my little handful of the gleaner's grain  
From your reaped fields at the shut of day.

Peace! Would you not rather die  
Reeling,--with all the cannons at your ear?  
So, at least, would I,  
And I may not be here  
To-night, to-morrow morning or next year.  
Still I will let you keep your life a little while,  
See dear?  
I have made you smile.

Charlotte Mew

## Sea Love

Tide be runnin' the great world over:  
'Twas only last June month I mind that we  
Was thinkin' the toss and the call in the breast of the lover  
So everlastin' as the sea.

Heer's the same little fishes that sputter an swim,  
Wi' the moon's old glim on the grey, wet sand;  
An' him no more to me mor me to him  
Than the wind goin' over my hand.

Charlotte Mew

## The Cenotaph

Not yet will those measureless fields be green again  
Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed;  
There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain,  
Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we may tread.  
But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths from the thrust of an inward sword  
have more slowly bled,  
We shall build the Cenotaph: Victory, winged, with Peace, winged too, at the column's  
head.  
And over the stairway, at the foot—oh! here, leave desolate, passionate hands to  
spread  
Violets, roses, and laurel, with the small, sweet, tinkling country things  
Speaking so wistfully of other Springs,  
From the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born and bred.  
In splendid sleep, with a thousand brothers  
To lovers—to mothers  
Here, too, lies he:  
Under the purple, the green, the red,  
It is all young life: it must break some women's hearts to see  
Such a brave, gay coverlet to such a bed!  
Only, when all is done and said,  
God is not mocked and neither are the dead  
For this will stand in our Marketplace—  
Who'll sell, who'll buy  
(Will you or I  
Lie each to each with the better grace)?  
While looking into every busy whore's and huckster's face  
As they drive their bargains, is the Face  
Of God: and some young, piteous, murdered face.

Charlotte Mew

## The Changeling

Toll no bell for me, dear Father dear Mother,  
Waste no sighs;  
There are my sisters, there is my little brother  
Who plays in the place called Paradise,  
Your children all, your children for ever;  
But I, so wild,  
Your disgrace, with the queer brown face, was never,  
Never, I know, but half your child!

In the garden at play, all day, last summer,  
Far and away I heard  
The sweet "tweet-tweet" of a strange new-comer,  
The dearest, clearest call of a bird.  
It lived down there in the deep green hollow,  
My own old home, and the fairies say  
The word of a bird is a thing to follow,  
So I was away a night and a day.

One evening, too, by the nursery fire,  
We snuggled close and sat roudn so still,  
When suddenly as the wind blew higher,  
Something scratched on the window-sill,  
A pinched brown face peered in--I shivered;  
No one listened or seemed to see;  
The arms of it waved and the wings of it quivered,  
Whoo--I knew it had come for me!  
Some are as bad as bad can be!  
All night long they danced in the rain,  
Round and round in a dripping chain,  
Threw their caps at the window-pane,  
Tried to make me scream and shout  
And fling the bedclothes all about:  
I meant to stay in bed that night,  
And if only you had left a light  
They would never have got me out!

Sometimes I wouldn't speak, you see,  
Or answer when you spoke to me,  
Because in the long, still dusks of Spring  
You can hear the whole world whispering;  
The shy green grasses making love,  
The feathers grow on the dear grey dove,  
The tiny heart of the redstart beat,  
The patter of the squirrel's feet,  
The pebbles pushing in the silver streams,  
The rushes talking in their dreams,  
The swish-swish of the bat's black wings,  
The wild-wood bluebell's sweet ting-tings,  
Humming and hammering at your ear,  
Everything there is to hear  
In the heart of hidden things.  
But not in the midst of the nursery riot,

That's why I wanted to be quiet,  
Couldn't do my sums, or sing,  
Or settle down to anything.  
And when, for that, I was sent upstairs  
I did kneel down to say my prayers;  
But the King who sits on your high church steeple  
Has nothing to do with us fairy people!

'Times I pleased you, dear Father, dear Mother,  
Learned all my lessons and liked to play,  
And dearly I loved the little pale brother  
Whom some other bird must have called away.  
Why did they bring me here to make me  
Not quite bad and not quite good,  
Why, unless They're wicked, do They want, in spite,  
to take me  
Back to Their wet, wild wood?  
Now, every nothing I shall see the windows shining,  
The gold lamp's glow, and the fire's red gleam,  
While the best of us are twining twigs and the rest of us  
are whining  
In the hollow by the stream.  
Black and chill are Their nights on the wold;  
And They live so long and They feel no pain:  
I shall grow up, but never grow old,  
I shall always, always be very cold,  
I shall never come back again!

Charlotte Mew

## The Farmer's Bride

Three summers since I chose a maid,  
Too young maybe-but more's to do  
At harvest-time that a bide and woo.  
When us was wed she turned afraid  
Of love and me and all things human;  
Like the shut of winter's day  
Her smile went out, and `twadn't a woman-  
More like a little frightened fay.  
One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

"Out 'mong the sheep, her be," they said,  
Should properly have been abed;  
But sureenough she wadn't there  
Lying awake with her wide brown stare.  
So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down  
We chased her, flying like a hare  
Before out lanterns. To Church-Town  
All in a shiver and a scare  
We caught her, fetched her home at last  
And turned the key upon her, fast.

She does the work about the hosue  
As well as most, but like a mouse:  
Happy enough to cheat and play  
With birds and rabbits and such as they,  
So long as men-folk keep away  
"Not near, not near!" her eyes beseech  
When one of us comes within reach.  
The woman say that beasts in stall  
Look round like children at her call.  
I've hardly heard her speak at all.  
Shy as a leveret, swift as he,  
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,  
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,  
To her wild self. But what to me?

The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,  
The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,  
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,  
A magpie's spotted feathers lie  
An the black earth spread white with rime,  
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.  
What's Christmas-time without there be  
Some other in the house than we!

She sleeps up in the attic there  
Alone, poor maid. `Tis but a stair  
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,  
The soft young down of her, the brown,  
The brown of her-her eyes, her hair, her hair!

Charlotte Mew

## **The Peddler**

Lend me, a little while, the key  
That locks your heavy heart, and I'll give you back--  
Rarer than books and ribbons and beads bright to see,  
This little Key of Dreams out of my pack.

The road, the road, beyond men's bolted doors,  
There shall I walk and you go free of me,  
For yours lies North across the moors,  
And mine lies South. To what seas?

How if we stopped and let our solemn selves go by,  
While my gay ghost caught and kissed yours, as ghosts don't do,  
And by the wayside, this forgotten you and I  
Sat, and were twenty-two?  
Give me the key that locks your tired eyes,  
And I will lend you this one from my pack,  
Brighter than colored beads and painted books that make men wise:  
Take it. No, give it back!

Charlotte Mew

## The Trees Are Down

*and he cried with a loud voice: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees* - Revelation

They are cutting down the great plane-trees at the end of the gardens.  
For days there has been the grate of the saw, the swish of the branches as they fall,  
The crash of the trunks, the rustle of trodden leaves,  
With the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoa', the loud common talk,  
the loud common laughs of the men, above it all.

I remember one evening of a long past Spring  
Turning in at a gate, getting out of a cart, and finding  
a large dead rat in the mud of the drive.  
I remember thinking: alive or dead, a rat was a  
god-forsaken thing,  
But at least, in May, that even a rat should be alive.

The week's work here is as good as done. There is just  
one bough  
On the roped bole, in the fine grey rain,  
Green and high  
And lonely against the sky.  
(Down now! -)  
And but for that,  
If an old dead rat  
Did once, for a moment, unmake the Spring, I might never  
have thought of him again.

It is not for a moment the Spring is unmade to-day;  
These were great trees, it was in them from root to stem:  
When the men with the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoas' have carted  
the whole of the whispering loveliness away  
Half the Spring, for me, will have gone with them.

It is going now, and my heart has been struck with the  
hearts of the planes;  
Half my life it has beat with these, in the sun, in the rains,  
In the March wind, the May breeze,  
In the great gales that came over to them across the roofs from the great seas.  
There was only a quiet rain when they were dying;  
They must have heard the sparrows flying,  
And the small creeping creatures in the earth where they were lying -  
But I, all day, I heard an angel crying:  
'Hurt not the trees.'

Charlotte Mew