

What's It Wednesday – “Frozen Charlotte”

The original text of “A Corpse Going to a Ball” written by Elizabeth Oakes Smith (Mrs. Seba Smith). Published December 28, 1843.

Young Charlotte lived by the mountain side,
A wild and lonely spot;
No dwelling there, for three miles round,
Except her father's cot;

And yet on many a winter's eve
Young swains were gather'd there,
For her father kept a social board,
And she was very fair.

Her father loved to see her dress'd
As prim as a city belle,
For she was all the child he had,
And he loved his daughter well.

'Tis New Year's eve—the sun is down—
Why looks her restless eye
So long from the frosty window forth,
As the merry sleighs go by?

At the village inn, fifteen miles off,
Is a merry ball to-night—
The piercing air is cold as death,
But her heart is warm and light;

And brightly beams her laughing eye,
As a well-known voice she hears;
And dashing up to the cottage door
Her Charley's sleigh appears.

“Now daughter dear,” her mother cried,
“This blanket round you fold,
"For 'tis a dreadful night abroad,
"You'll catch your death a-cold.”

“O nay, O nay,” fair Charlotte said,
And she laugh'd like a gipsy queen,
“To ride with blankets muffled up
"I never could be seen—

"My silken cloak is quite enough;
"You know 'tis lined throughout;
"And then I have a silken shawl
"To tie my neck about."

Her bonnet and her gloves are on,
She jumps into the sleigh;
And swift they ride by the mountain side,
And over the hills away.

There's life in the sound of the merry bells,
As over the hills they go;
But a creaking wail the runners make,
As they bite the frozen snow.

How long the bleak and lonely way!
How keen the wind does blow!
The stars did never shine so cold—
How creaks the frozen snow!

With muffled faces, silently,
Five cold, long miles they've pass'd,
And Charles, with these few frozen words,
The silence broke at last—

"Such night as this I never saw—
"The reins I scarce can hold;"
And Charlotte, shivering, faintly said,
"I am exceeding cold."
He crack'd his whip, and urged his steed
More swiftly than before,
And now five other dreary miles
In silence are pass'd o'er—

"How fast," said Charles the freezing ice
"Is gathering on my brow;"
But Charlotte said, with feebler lone.
"I'm growing warmer now."
And on they went through the frosty air
And the glittering, cold star-light;
And now at last the village inn
And the ball-room are in sight.

They reach the door, and Charles jumps out,
And holds his hand to her—

Why sits she like a monument,
That hath no power to stir

He call'd her once—he call'd her twice—
She answer'd not a word;
He ask'd her for her hand again,
But still she never stirr'd—

He took her hand in his—O God!
'Twas cold and hard as stone;
He tore the mantle from her face;
The cold stars on her shone—

Then quickly to the lighted hall
Her voiceless form he bore—
His Charlotte was a stiffen'd corpse,
And word spake never more!