

# Charlotte

*by* Tim Young

I smoked too many cigarettes under the big blue sky. I left my extra pack back in my motel room with the unidentified odor. I wandered over to the slow café where the bored waitress bummed a cigarette and smoked it leaning against the archway. Inside the radio was tripping through a static haze not quite as interesting as my hangover.

I plopped into one of the empty stools. The cook, I could see, was in the kitchen strumming poorly on a red beat up guitar. She stopped and looked at me with eyes whispering something about a love she had never found.

Since thinking was still on the drunk side I ordered a beer. The waitress came in and poured it in to a plastic cup. I didn't say anything. I slurped it down in two enormous gulps. My belly rolled and the gas came up. With the second one I stepped outside to smoke. The waitress followed me. I caught myself staring at her hips and then the big blue carpet above.

I offered her another cigarette and lit it for her. She told me that was her mother in the kitchen. She said she could never finger the chords just right. She said she was a hopeless romantic. I thought about telling her how her mother had looked at me.

Half way through our cigarettes she told me her name was Charlotte. I told her mine. I told her how drunk I had managed to become last night after a few beers in the local dive and then half a bottle of Jack back in my room. She said she drank only wine. She said her mother was an alcoholic. I didn't comment.

The late afternoon sun infiltrated Charlotte's short reddish hair and brought mad red highlights to a fierce sparkle. She looked beautiful to my eyes and she looked sad.

The beer had perked my appetite, which until now had been visiting somewhere else. Charlotte told me after I had mentioned the word hunger that her mother made burgers to die for. I said I didn't know about the dying part but otherwise it sounded like a good idea.

As I ate I thought about asking Charlotte to my motel for some wine. Tomorrow morning I would be driving to Omaha about ten hours east. After I paid my check Charlotte's mother walked over to me and asked if I enjoyed the burger. I told her it nearly killed me. She laughed out loud and shook her head. I thought I noticed a little bald spot on top of her.

Charlotte met me at nine o'clock in my room. I opened the bottle of wine I had bought; and I had another just in case. We never did get naked in bed but her kisses, as the song says were sweeter than wine.

After a while we both fell asleep on the floor saying something about how it would be good for our backs. I couldn't wake her when it was time for me to leave. I left a few cigarettes on the table along with a note.

