

THE DAWN CHORUS

THE CARNIVAL LEAVES TOWN

(1) Enter: The Carnival

Mothers, Fathers, Children, step on up and don't be shy!
No freaks of nature here, or tricks upon the naked eye,
No bird or beast performs against its will in dress-up clothes,
Only the finest athletes from each corner of the globe

Lest we forget the celebrated Antoinette;
1000 shows upon the wire and not a misplaced step,
A hundred feet above the ground; magnetic yet profound;
Listen for that circus sound; the carnival is in town!

(2) The Guilt!

We're grownups here so let's at least be honest, we're all looking for a way out - there must be something else. We're not getting any younger, but we still feel the same hunger that we had when we were seventeen.

And if I should ever go astray I'd give myself away within an instant - I swear to christ I would - but I feel like such a heartless fool for being so completely cruel, the mind it is a complex tool; I can't help it from straying to my old campus charm. Because there's a fraction of this vagabond that wants to just dissolve into her arms, and what's the harm in this fairy tale?

Since apparently fidelity's 'so last year' I guess we might as well just do as the Romans used to do. I'm sick of playing cosy, though, in foreign places that I go I'm making faces just to show I'm tired of the go-slow. And though I know it won't feel right, there's a portion of this lonely boy that wants to lie there naked at her side, through the night, and I'm not proud of it. So rip down all the posters from the fair. Let the carnival dissolve into thin air.

So here I go. I've just got to find something to compensate my lack of drugs and rock and roll. Heaven knows I'm not proud of it. And if I ever had the nerve I'd probably get what I deserve, and feel the doubt just rip through me. Now all roads lead south, that's where I'll be.

(3) Pacifists

This local legend of the scene came from a town not far from mine. Married his sweetheart at nineteen and never felt so satisfied. He raised three girls - as cute as hell - who blossomed into such a dream, each one the image of himself, so innocent and fancy free. And didn't his little heartstrings start to melt to see them all go by. To think that they'd soon find out how it felt to have loved and lost and lied.

He raised those pretty girls the best that he could do, on that he swore. But when all three had fled the nest, his wife was next on out the door. She said that she just had to walk away, as if impelled by force. And be it strong as lead or weak as clay, each love must run its course.

But us kids, we're all such cowards, we don't have the nerve, and when our hearts get torn we'll get what we deserve: sorrow and a tale to tell. I sure miss that man but, hey, I wish him well.

A close friend of mine, Sarah Marie, once spoke these words tight at my side: "so much creative energy, and yet you let life pass you by. Don't you want to find out how it feels to really be alive? Cast off those aspersions, take the wheel and actually drive".

We're all such pacifists, we do just as we're told, but we've one life to live, and now we're getting old. Let's disregard their scornful looks and run to new love as schoolboys run from books (and to think the slightest touch was all it took.)

(4) Heartbeat In 5/4

My Sarah, I'm in the mood for you. I need to hold you underneath this almost moon and make you realise there's more to life than your squalid room; the belt strap and the silver spoon will one day soon be gone before our eyes. You take and take and it never ends. I'm bending over backwards until my oldest friend gets back her former life.

I won't treat you like the man before; your heart's beating in 5/4 and I can't seem to make head nor tail of it.

Sarah, be strong. I know I'm like a broken record I go on and on and on. You must be getting sick of it. I'd suggest a long walk, but no-one ever really listens, they just wait for their chance to talk - we're such awful hypocrites.

So don't feel downhearted any more, your heart's beating in 5/4 and I need to keep a closer eye on it. And feed you these somewhat clichéd lines, my heart's beating in waltz time and I'm sticking to that rhythm until the end.

So here's what I worked out years ago in the hold of my 5-watt radio: that I'd stick to that bold, incessant beat, because if it keeps me on my toes at least it keeps me on my feet - just where I choose to be. Now this street can't keep a hold of me.

So boys let's ring out a major chord to greet that girl that I once adored. Just keep your heart strapped into 4/4 time and let your hand rest gently in mine. We'll keep a close eye on the b.p.m to celebrate my oldest of friends. Just keep your heart strapped to the 4/4 beat and let yourself get so wrapped up in me.

(5) Relatively Young And Quite In Love

While my Antoinette tours the towns with some glorified funfair, I stand on stage with these same five clowns and cry how things are so unfair. But that's just human nature I guess, to be so bloody ungrateful. I'm no angel I do confess. I've been hurtful and hateful.

I've barely any street cred at all, no reputation I'm risking. We'll bang our heads against this brick wall until somebody starts listening. Because there's no local scene to be seen. No local sound to belong to. We're all stuck somewhere in-between the devil and a dead back-room.

But I'm tired of this band; this sound; this scene. I think back to friends we lost at seventeen, and their memory doesn't half make me proud of being relatively young and quite in love.

'Cos failure's not the worst thing in life, in fact it's character building. It's nice to have this outlet sometimes, to keep my anger concealed in. Because without these songs I'd get too pissed off to carry on or continue. I'd never lay a hand on my love, but I can see why some men do.

Because it's easier to blame something, someone, than it is to just accept that things turned out wrong. So if I had faith I'd thank something above for being relatively young and quite in love.

From when I lay my head to when I wake I'm always running through the same mistakes. Aren't these shackles of routine so hard to break? I've no manifesto, no plan. I'm as cynical as the next man, but I'm trying to stay hopeful when I can.

So we'll dance upon the ashes of this day. Then we'll celebrate new life when morning breaks and never again be so ungrateful of being relatively young and quite in love.

(6) Carnavalesque

Keep your arms wrapped tight around my wandering heart. Never let me go, let me not depart. I'm trying to keep a tight grip on what I can change and what I can't. Because I'd kiss every inch of your tired bones if it'd help to keep this guilt locked down in my soul. It's hard to tell the difference between what I can and can't control.

But if I seem quite distant it's just because sometimes I feel a ghost of the man I was. And sure I fantasise, some dark nights, of going behind your back, but when I say 'I love you', I mean just that.

If you could see my sordid, adulterous dreams, you'd realise my conscience, it's not so clean. They're a million light-years apart - what I say and what I mean. So keep your arms wrapped tight around by wandering heart, never let me go, let me not depart. I'm trying to keep a tight grip on what I can change and what I can't.

And though it's only human to feel this way, I struggle with such titanic guilt each day. Sure I cheat and lie in my mind, but I'll keep it at that, when I say "I love you", that's concrete fact.

(7) Schumann

I can still taste the silver spoon from my spoilt youth, if I tell the truth. Watching you in the music room, on the piano stool, from the swimming pool. You didn't understand at the time. I was seventeen, you were only nine. But I knew it was meant to be and I'd wait for you if you'd wait for me.

When we grew up I have to say I was nervous you wouldn't feel the same, but I gave you my finest score and in years to come there'd be hundreds more. But all that time my demons were on my mind. My darling bride, my angel, just hold me tight.

I thought once that I had your hand it'd be easier, but I hadn't planned. Still those voices they came to me, like some sinister backward symphony. It was my music that made my name, but in concert halls I felt just the same. I left my masterpiece on the shelf - I could barely even compose myself.

And all that time, my troubles were hard to hide. My darling bride, my lieblich, just hold me tight, through the deafening night. 'Cos I'd trade all my talent for some peace of mind, I swear to you, Clara, it's true. Oh, they say that I'm insane, but darling they're blind. If I'm crazy, I'm crazy for you.

But all that time, you stood there right by my side. My darling bride, my angel, just hold me tight.

(8) Green Unpleasant Land

I've been searching for the perfect point of this tale to begin, but since we're marching towards our deaths there's little point in questioning. No antique poetry or prose sums up this feeling in my bones. But since I'm English I suppose I should just bite my lip and go.

You see, I've been harbouring these resentments - cultivated overnight. But when she smiles like that my angst falls flat. I lose the will to fight. My self-righteousness and pride get bottled up, pushed deep inside. She's like an angel in my eyes. I'm just this parasite.

But, oh, when she speaks of such things I could die where I stand on this green, unpleasant land. Just place those coins on my eyes. Hold me now and then say goodnight.

The afterlife's just too convenient. Surely science can't be wrong? I'm scared to death of death so all that's left is to live before we're gone. But even that tired old cliché will make no difference either way. When we lay stoic in our graves there'll be no false parade.

But, oh, when she speaks of such things I could just cease to be. One last breath then drift to sleep. Just place those coins on my eyes. Hold me now and then say goodnight.

(9) Carnival Sound

How time has flown. Oh how much we've all grown since our innocent days back then. Oh the smell of the fair, I could breathe it like air and be high for a whole weekend.

See I couldn't get enough of that carnival sound. The way the whole neighbourhood strolled into town to that fifty foot dome. That bright canvas roof in a ghost of a thought of a dream of our long since passed youth.

So we move, change our clothes, change our views, but the village won't ever change. Every year the same tent, the same drab non-event. The same high wire stands centre stage.

Now I'm sick to the teeth of that carnival sound. So I finish my drink and I put my book down. And I never look back to that inbred charade. How closely it mirrors mistakes we've all made.

But we're still young enough to be foolishly kind. Run into the sunset. No thought on our mind. Save the desperate hope for some innocent love. We're cynical men, but we pray that it might be enough.

So we rip from the walls old handbills from billboards - the town's alternate history. And between close-knit lanes an old poster remains of a bittersweet memory.

Now I can't stand the thought of that carnival sound. The way that old Antoinette still pulls a crowd. While I'm breaking my back just to stay in the black. But we're young enough yet to take a different tack.

And not do as we're asked or even as we're told. Thrive on each breath as our bodies grow old. And not dwell for too long on that carnival sound, as our children watch us gracefully become dirt in the ground.

(10) The Happiest Home In These Hills

We're a funny breed, my straight faced girl and me. We couldn't be less alike. When we walked hand in hand it just never looked right. I first took her hand when our world was the playpen. Now she's in a cold cell. But wherever she goes to you know I wish her well.

Because society can't stomach depression without a cause. Or a councillor's daughter determined to break laws. But it's not as clean cut as you'd think you might know. Without genuine love this girl sank like a stone. And they still dare to call it: 'The Happiest Home in These Hills.'

Time it was ticking too fast for her insatiable heart. She needed somewhere new to run. And under grim, spot lit street light she felt like a someone. Meanwhile, Daddy was breaking his back, working for the contract that would make the town right. While his first-born was giving her body to the night.

`Cos she just had to know how a perfect love feels. So she went with that arsehole and just to get the pills. But she downed both at once with the vodka she stole. And she came with her friends, but she's leaving alone to the room that she shares in the happiest home in these hills.

And now she stands so still, in blinding bathroom light, after three hours awake, holding her pillow tight. Dreaming of better boys who'd look for so much more than the quick thrill she gives them just to get her score. But it's way too late now. There's so little time left. So she brings the razor down and screams beneath her breath. Then hits the floor so faint. And swears never again, because there's no joy in it. It's just a different pain.

But she'll grow up and she'll make it alone. Either that or she'll have an exquisite headstone, far away, for pride's sake, from the happiest home in these hills.

(11) Raised On High Wires

My darling, you're in so much more harm than you know. Raised on high wires, so far away, for scraps of bread and little pay. I rue the day I ever let you go.

But I'll keep on hanging round until the carnival leaves town. The ring master tethers his horse; the dancing bear lays down its paws. And all across the land the silence pours.

Now there'll be no more twisted melodies of fairground attractions all merged on the breeze. No more backward symphonies. My Antoinette's gone and it frightens the life from me.

It was on the 8th of May that she upped and went away. Now autumn's gone, the snow has set. I haven't heard a word back yet. My calendar stands static on that day.

Now I'm haunted by memories of losing my old friend to that same trapeze. I can't keep my mind at ease. My Antoinette's gone and I'm terrified all because she's shivering cold and all alone. Raised high up in some canvas dome. I should just take my baby home. Oh, but winter set faster than ever I could have known. My darling, you're in so much more harm than you know.

(12) The Carnival Leaves Town

Antoinette moves so slow, on her highwire at the end of the show. How I long to get back the way things were before fame came and got the best of her. No more lights, no more shows. Just the girl I used to know. Sitting and laughing about the things she'd seen. I bet these days she wouldn't even notice me.

But that's just fine. I should've known she'd change her mind. Darling we've all grown. And I'll apologise for the times I've slowed you down when the carnival leaves town.

Fresh morning air where the crowds once sat and stared at your body - all framed in blinding light, rising up, like an angel in the night. But there's one thing that stays with me: your body's perfect symmetry. And I'll be waiting the day she finally hits the ground and the carnival leaves town. When the carnival leaves town.

Because every time I hear the audience cheer I can't remember such fear. In my head that tightrope snaps. I act the victim of unspeakable crime when in reality I'm just jealous - I need you back. So I await the day you make up your mind to leave the circus behind, but you're so headstrong, so proud. Now everybody help my boys out to sing: "you'll be my everything when the carnival leaves town."