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# **My Star Predominant**

Raymond Knister

# MY STAR PREDOMINANT

MY STAR  
PREDOMINANT  
BY  
RAYMOND KNISTER

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## BOOK I

### *While We Are Laughing*

*Circumstances are like clouds continually gathering and bursting—While we are laughing, the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts and grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck.*

—Letter to GEORGE and GEORGIANA KEATS.





## CHAPTER I

There was no time for waiting on a day in May; not on London Bridge, John Keats was sure; not on the day when he was at last to meet Leigh Hunt. The youth looked at the sky, but his face was almost as bright. Oh to be in the fields walking toward Hunt's house! How the blandly sonorous words of Hunt's poetry had been chiming in his head, how many times he had thrilled with the disinterested benevolence of the social criticism in Hunt's paper, the *Examiner*! How malevolent and incomprehensible the world, to permit such a man to be sent to gaol! For the Prince Regent, a depraved wastrel not worthy to tie the shoes of peerless Libertas.

Yet this mad world was good. You had to put up with its ambiguities. Wasn't it just natural that a friend like Cowden Clarke, having set a day and assigned a meeting-place, should waste everyone's time through being late? And wasn't it just excruciating? Keats started walking up and down, his short body with its good shoulders buoyant upon his lean, athletic legs. His face seemed to have the habitude of turning toward the sky with the dauntless expression of a seaman. Beneath the wide spread of his brows his eyes looked out glowing and deep, as though this world of London had been a curtained picture: and his mouth was an eager smile. He shouldered the larger passers-by without knowing that he did so.

One or two glowered at him, for the frequenters of the Bridge were not tender; but the look on his face was so apart from any concern of theirs that they slouched on their ways, calling him a drunken toff. A woman passed now and then, but he did not glance up until a lady leaned forward in her carriage as he turned smartly at the end of his promenade to walk beside it. The coachman clucked, the four beautiful horses clumped, and the carriage rolled away with the inquisitive fair. It was as handsome a turn-out as any he had seen as a little boy at his father's livery, the "Swan and Hoop". Keats chuckled. "There may be another like me. She seemed sensibly affected." Or perhaps she thought him only some young buck preening himself. He stopped to pull at the points of his collar, which usually were turned down and loose after the manner of Lord Byron and Beau Brummel. With arms folded he looked upon the river.

His fellow students in St. Thomas's Hospital sometimes called him Lord Byron because of his collar and his abstractions. He wrote verses and made drawings of flowers in his notebook for anatomy, pausing to smile at the jokes Astley Cooper, with his West-country accent, used to enliven the lecture; and he grew a moustache. A promising one; but he had shaved it off because of this visit to Hunt. Hunt was all of thirty, and might not find such affectations becoming in a young sprig of a poet. Still, every man had the right to his own choice, and perhaps it was a mistake to shave off the moustache.

Hunt, after all, had solemnly sponsored this young fellow's verses by putting them into immortal print. That should have been enough for anyone! There it was; Keats saw with his mind's eye the double-columned page of the *Examiner*, with its chaste double line across the top, and close black paragraphs anent international duplicity and domestic injustice, to three-quarters' way down the right column, and then, TO SOLITUDE, the delightful irregularity of the lines of a sonnet, with bold capitals beneath it, J. K. Less than a month ago this unprecedented sight had gladdened his eyes, and now he thought about it and felt warm as he stood on London Bridge.

A dismal birth this poem had had, that carried him at one flight into his dreamed-of realm. How tired he had been those dreary November evenings, returning to his cold grate and shabby walls, with notes to learn, and another walk before him to supper at a chop-house. Without lighting the taper, he wrote: "O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell, Let it not be among the jumbled heap of murky buildings"; and he had gone on to picture fields, river and flowery slopes he had known on heavenly other afternoons.

Dissecting specimens, standing by at operations, returning to his lonely room to fill and learn his notebooks, he found these days dreary enough. Some of the sights of human pain and the torture human beings could inflict upon one another in the name of humanity would not leave him. Why should men waste away, why should women have cancers, and we be happy in spring over the expressing of our selfish melancholy in winter? Why, why?

“But, well, it was a goodish poem,” he mused sensibly, “or Mr. Hunt would not have printed it. And—if he has not been run over by a hackney coach, old Clarke shall give me fellowship with him and he shall inspire me to do some great—some three-master in place of that tiny shallop—albeit shipshape and well turned.” The great man, it seemed, had found potentialities in the offerings of verse Clarke had carried from Keats. He might find unguessed things in their author too. Surely they would take to one another. If they did not, Keats was sure, it would be some demerit in himself. “I’ll be gentle as a clergyman in a new vicarage, servile as a politician, but I’ll not offend that man,” the boy swore.

Hunt was as gentle as he was intrepid, incorruptible as free. Had he not suffered two years in prison for venturing to remonstrate against a contemporary’s abject servility to the vices of the Prince Regent? Keats knew the story of that imprisonment as he knew the siege of Troy; how Hunt’s cheerfulness had remained unshaken, though the gruesome noises of the prison chafed his nerves; how his old friends had rallied round him, and new ones had sought him out; how he had caused the ceiling of his cell to be painted in imitation of the sky. With his wife and children and his books and speculations he had been “as free as the sky-searching lark, and as elate”. So Keats had phrased it in a sonnet when, a year ago, Hunt had been set at liberty.

That day, with spring latent in the air, he had walked across the fields from Edmonton and Mr. Hammond’s surgery, to his old school at Enfield, and thence with Cowden Clarke on his way to greet Leigh Hunt’s release. At the last gate, where they parted, Keats pulled the sonnet from his pocket, and turned back to himself: only an apprentice lodged in a dreary surgeon’s dreary high-shouldered house in a suburb remote from the heart of things.

It had not been an easy time. Menial and tiresome duties, noisy days and lonely evenings wore him down. About the house and the shop and stable he would go, running errands, currying the horse, mixing medicines, pounding stuff with a pestle and mortar. He had to go with the doctor in the gig and hold the horse while Hammond treated the patients indoors. One day they had gone to his old school, and while he sat hunched in the cold one of the boys threw a snowball which hit him in the middle of

the back. He dared not leave the horse to chase the renegade. It had made his heart turn over to have that happen at his old school, but the boy was not one he had known. The other boys had dared Dick Horne to throw the snowball, Tom told him. John laughed, feeling it was not such a bad thing to have a reputation as a battler. . . . A monotonous time, with day following day sullenly, unchanging in aspect. The fellow indentured with him under Hammond was not bright and thought it foolish to spend the free hours studying and reading, much less scribbling verses. The arbour at the end of the Enfield garden, where he and Clarke read *Cymbeline*, had saved him. That and his brothers, and his grandmother and sister Fanny, near by in Church Street.

“Heigho, ‘Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year’s pleasant king’,” he quoted to himself. How enjoy oneself better than in walking amid the pleasantries of the sad king? Keats could almost smell the freshness of growth here in the heart of London. The Thames felt different. He was different, Apollo’s son, possibly. He was walking the hospitals, at any rate no longer an apprentice, but ready in a few weeks to try his final examination, and find himself an articulated surgeon, ready to carve and collect from anyone so desiring. . . . And then, he *would* be a poet, when he was his own man. He felt it within him. So did every man, perhaps—daunting thought. But surely, with summer coming, there would be joyous matter for better verses than “Solitude”. One could believe anything in this air and sunshine.

“It is time,” Keats told himself, turning about to watch the procession of people crossing the Bridge, “that Clarke was congealing from air to the largeness of a gnat and so to his proper self, else I may turn mine eye like Imogen and weep.”

His father would have been proud to know him associated with such a figure as Hunt. A sight of his father, young, gay, energetic, riding his fine horse to visit his boys at Enfield, returned to him. A little man, ruddy and restless, of firm principles and good business head. He must have been so, for he had been chief ostler and manager at the “Swan and Hoop” until he married the owner’s daughter.

“Yes,” muttered Keats, looking up from the bright ripples of the Thames, which made him dizzy by seeming to be still while the Bridge appeared

to float toward them, “yes, I might have been in Oxford now. And Mother might not have died.”

She had been nearly his whole life while she lived, his mother. “She said I looked like her.” She had fondled him and made much of him even when, less than a year after his father had died, she took another husband. Later she had become a dear stranger, and after leaving Rawlings she spent years in bed, and finally died of the consumption. It was all a business a boy did not get over, even when he became a man. Father on his splendid horse, Mother in her finery ready for a ball: only a few bright pictures stayed with him to be enjoyed without a pang. And for those he was richer than George and Tom, much richer than little Fanny.

Then, once more the black curtain behind which his father had disappeared. His mother’s death! They could not have felt it as he had. That terrible time deepened his whole life. If only he could have died with her! Fourteen, he was; alone in the schoolroom he tried to hide himself and his grief under the master’s desk. Early and late he read, until, alarmed, the masters tried to drive him out to play with the other boys. He took the school prizes too. A different boy now from the dirty-handed little scallywag ready to fight all comers on any pretext, to make victims and pets of goldfishes, minnows, mice, sticklebacks, all of the tribes of the bushes and the brooks.

He was not to forget the black curtain; while he was at Dr. Hammond’s, Grandmother died. His father, his mother. . . . But now the earlier, dumb, uncomprehending grief and loss was loaned a sense of the futility of a life that led to this nothingness. Bitter to see that people could know this end of all things and still treat one another in the ways they did. Edmonton and surgery were intolerable; the world paid no attention to his griefs, what should he say to its overweening authority? One day he raised his fist to strike Hammond; afterward, astonished at himself, he wept. Finding a bitter-sweet solace in Byron’s romances, he set about writing poems in earnest. And he had to see George and Tom more frequently. Fanny was living with the lumpish family of the guardian Grandmother had put over them, Mr. Abbey. Incredibly, strangely bitter was change.

Tom and George went to Abbey’s too, when the gentleman withdrew them from school. There was plenty of money, but Abbey was its custodian. It

would be grand if a fellow could write a book and make a fortune out of it as Lord Byron had done; then you could send your brothers to school. But they would all have their own money when Fanny became one-and-twenty; and, money or no, they would each become his own man at majority.

A pair of strapping fishwives came striding across the Bridge with woven baskets under their arms.

“See the little dandy! Not asleep, is he?”

“Not ‘im. Tight tidy little feller he is, too,” added the other Amazon, looking at Keats without troubling to conceal her admiration.

He abruptly turned his back, and looked again down the river with the long, long hedge of masts that bordered each bank, the glittering crowded way between. Such beings were strange to high poesy.

His heart quickened. What quaffings there had been and would be, what wanderings in the leafy mazes of Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*! “Fierce warres, and faithful loves, shall moralize my song.” Loves and wars woven upon a tapestry of summer delights of eye and ear, and not least the delight of rolling syllables. Could he ever love poetry as he had loved Mrs. Tighe’s *Psyche*? The quarto volume in his London lodgings had been a fairy in an old shoe, conjuring the country air, the age of the romaunt.

And all its banks inwreathed with flowery bands,  
Ambrosial fragrance shed in grateful dew:  
There young desire enchanted ever stands,  
Breathing delight and fragrance ever new.

“But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?” Keats quoted under his breath. How often, how deeply and freshly each time, he had been touched by the sad plight of Psyche, pursued by the Blatant Beast, and no sooner rescued by her knight than losing him. Then, tried in the Bower of Loose Delight, she saw the form of her lover transformed into that of a snake. As the enchanting tale wound along through bowers and halls and lutes and feasts of cates, Psyche was overcome (almost) by misfortunes. Her heart ached, and a drowsy dullness benumbed each torpid sense. She had tasted

an opiate of the bitter cup of disappointment. But, going to the casement at midnight, she listened to the voice of the nightbird, while magic was in the air and in the plaintive notes of Innocence. But after all, the real lover returned to her, and in the Temple of Love they were reunited. . . .

So well had Keats the story by heart that lines and phrases from it were constantly coming to him. Yet Mrs. Tighe was not for immortality, he and Clarke had agreed; she was not sealed of the tribe of Spenser, much less of Shakespeare. But how delicious, how cloying, how cool, or warm, as you wished, were her lines to muse upon while one lay half dreaming beneath the trees of a summer day, and watched the branches swaying and nodding against the dazzling blue which finally put you to sleep. The angel's faces of fair ladies made a sunshine in the shady place of one's dreams.

"So you're not content with running the gauntlet over London Bridge, you must stand it too," said a genial voice at Keats's elbow. A young man of twenty-eight or nine, spare and somewhat studious-looking, but animated, took his hand. He was taller than Keats but no match for his vigour.

"Well, Clarke! Well, my dainty Davie! But a gauntlet has a stall, or to be sure several stalls in it, has it not? And what is a stall for but to rest in! Ask any horse."

"Ah. You should know! I'm sorry if you have been resting longer than suited you. Shall we go?" They turned and swung into stride together.

"Any rest is too long for me," said Keats.

What a good fellow and sound scholar old Clarke was! There was a tinder in him which needed only the divine spark of poetry to fire it, then he had a glow of his own! It seemed a long time back that Clarke had appeared nothing more than the grown son of the headmaster at the Enfield school, while he had been Keats Major, or perhaps to the Clarkes little Johnnie, oldest of the Keats boys. Perhaps they would not have become friends if Clarke had not boxed brother Tom's ears. John smiled now to see himself charging upon the usher, who could have put him into his pocket. When Clarke saw the diminutive form in the attitude of a pugilist, he had begun to laugh, and that laugh was the beginning of their comradeship. As heir to the school and the headmastership, Clarke might have remained outside his



ken, for everyone hated a toady. But it was after Keats had left school and been apprenticed to Hammond that the real era of friendship had begun. In that arbour of the school garden they had talked of the majesty of the old bards, the sky-covering winsome human pity and joy of Shakespeare, the sweet luxury of Spenser, and that fair-fated sayer of true English words, young dead Chatterton. Through Clarke he had been confirmed in his sense of the greatest human glory, which put its possessor above the calumny, above the gratitude, and almost above the praise of men. To be a poet, Apollo's son!

The two found it natural to continue their walk in silence broken only occasionally by a word. Before long they were coming out of the city, Pall Mall left behind, and St. Giles-in-the-Fields past on their right. Clarke felt, rather than watched, with an elder brother's amusement, the heightened animation of Keats's expression, the kindling eye. Passers-by turned to look after the fair youth with the red-gold hair who seemed to be treading clouds.

"Wonderful, wonderful day!" Keats released a sigh.

"You'll be able to outwalk an old theatre addict like myself if you have many of these long tramps."

"Please God!" breathed Keats cryptically.

"You'll find Hunt just as genuine-hearted as you or I. He wishes to help everybody. And his judgment is as good as his heart."

"That is what one would expect from his writings," remarked Keats complacently. "Where are we to find the warmth of the affections and mutual regard, if not in a poet? . . . But it just seems too much of a luxury for me to enjoy."

"You don't know what you'll be doing yet, in years to come."

"Years to come! I am so absorbed in poetry now that I do not sleep nights. Tell me whether that is a good thing for a young surgeon?"

"Will you be able to muster enough interest to pass your examinations?"

“I heartily dislike the study of anatomy as a main occupation, and surgery I am sure I would like worse, where it means the suffering or death of a fellow-being. I dare say I may do. But don’t let us talk about it, my dear Clarke. These spring days I cannot keep my thoughts to it. The other day, during the lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray; and I was off with them to Oberon and fairyland. But yes, I shall pass my examinations.”

They had gone about four miles, and were coming to Hampstead Heath. All talk was abandoned, and their steps became light and accelerated. At last the very house stood before them in the Vale of Health. Keats saw through a mist of incredulous anticipation that it was square-built with a row of windows in the top story, and a door framed by Doric columns in the first. Flowers and shrubs. A woman sewing, with children about her knee, at a curtainless window.

A long face, olive-complexioned, with dark eyes and a billow of black hair, was at the door, laughing. Hunt, holding out a hand to each of them, seemed very tall. Keats knew that he himself was half sitting, half kneeling upon a low sofa, that Clarke faced a window, that Hunt was talking in a smooth, mellifluous voice, about poetry, about the poems of his Clarke had brought him, about a little club called the Elders, because its members finished its evenings with goblets of hot elder wine.

“Ah,” said Keats, “that is what the Ancients must have symbolized under the mystery of the Bearded Bacchus, ‘Brother of Bacchus, *elder* born’!”

Hunt and Clarke were talking of Shelley and Byron, and the tragedy they represented of the social and educational system. Chills ran up and down the spine of Keats. This was the “wronged Libertas” speaking in his own accents and person. This was the voice and authority behind the *Examiner* which Keats, the schoolboy, had read on winter afternoons years ago. And Hunt knew how to make him talk—about Spenser. Then a walk was proposed. Hunt went to tell his wife that they would return for tea.

“Well?” Clarke turned to him.

“Wonderful man!” whispered Keats. “Dazzling conversation; and so just in all his judgments.” He noted now that the study was rightly named, for it contained a medley of materials related to half the arts and sciences.

In a moment or two Hunt returned, leading a woman considerably younger than himself, with magnificent eyes, though she was not handsome; a housewifely body she seemed, and not too pleased at being called to greet her husband’s literary friends; though she begged them with polite warmth to return to tea at the conclusion of their walk.

Clarke went head, and left Keats to follow with the master down the broad and flower-bordered path. Keats sniffed the air like a young colt.

“I always feel as though I could take to wings when I get out of doors. The air must be my natural element.”

“An aerial character!” Hunt mused, half teasingly. “Yet you strike me as a solid young fellow, albeit a spirited.”

“Why, no,” said Keats in slight confusion. “I mean only that these weeks since spring seem to have made me aware of a liveliness in the air. I never come out of a house into the open without feeling like skipping and gambolling like a silly lamb.”

They arrived at open country, and, on climbing over a stile into a field, walked abreast with Clarke. The day was perfect, life matchless in its teeming possibilities, beauties, promises of enjoyment. The very existence of two such friends as Hunt and Clarke guaranteed it. He was thinking that the sky was brighter, the grass greener, the trees more gently majestic, flowers lovelier, than they ever had been before. It was a world of bliss, the poet’s heritage, and, it might be, his.

They walked on Hampstead Heath toward the Battery. Leafy lanes stretched before them, never ending. Keats was about to point out a bush of may flowers full of bees, when Clarke spoke:

“By Jove, you fellows must compose upon this.”

Keats hesitated. Hunt was waiting with Spartan deference of attention. “Compose! I feel the most sumptuous poem I have yet written arise in me. And the longest,” he added boldly.

A quietness came over him, for he had a doubt of his declaration, once it had been made. But in another moment, listening again, he was back in a present sense of the scene. A filbert hedge overtwined with wild brier enchanted him, and the chequered light and shade shifting beneath a tree. Though the air was warm, it was not enervating, and he felt as though they might walk on for ever. At the gate leading from the Battery into the last field before Caen Wood, however, they stopped and looked back. They must enjoy these scenes many times again, Hunt said.

Oh, Poesy! Nothing could be too grand in its sweep for thee, nothing too fine and gossamer-delicate. And as for the souls into which thy seed was dropped to burgeon into Soul again, such became the chosen ones of God's universe, to hand on to wondering men a beauty and a name greater than themselves. Over such beauties, earthly or sublime, lovers in far-off years would muse and catch a nobleness to match their love. What fate could be higher than the burden of such a gift, what joy completer than the forming of majestic thoughts and exquisite fancies? Perhaps now it would be his. At least he had touched the garments of Poesy, he had seen the hand that had created great poetry.

Talking rapturously, Keats accompanied Clarke back to the entrance of London Bridge. With a handshake they parted and agreed to enjoy the same walk and visit again. As he was crossing the Bridge, not only the people, but the spires lucently reflected in Thames were an abstraction; and he was pensive in the Borough: a beastly place, with its dirt, turnings and narrow ways. Here his hospital was situate, and here it was most convenient to live. At least he was not so badly off now, rooming with three other students in comfortable quarters, as he had been when alone in his miserable lodgings in Dean Street opposite a meeting with its wailful choir, of Sundays. Still, his loneliness there had not been an unmixed curse, he sometimes felt. Though he liked company, he liked time for reading and thought alone; but between the lecture-rooms in St. Thomas's Hospital, and the lively youth-filled rooms in the house in St. Thomas's Street, there was not much to choose in point of quiet contemplation. It would be hard to write another "Solitude".

Standing before the tallow-chandler's shop above which his home was, he sighed wearily at the accustomedness of it all, and climbed the stairs to his shared sitting-room. The tallow-chandler lived on the same story; Mrs. Mitchell, his wife, was landlady to the quartette of medical students. Beside the table in the middle of the room, with its piles of books and its whale-oil lamp, sat Henry Stephens in an armchair. On a straight chair near the door was Tom Keats, his hat upon his knees.

"Why, Tom! Did you come to see me?"

"Yes," returned Tom, springing up with an adoring look. "I—I did not know you would be out to-day."

He was a slender youth of sixteen, scarcely taller than John. His eyes were wide apart under high-arched brows, his nose and mouth were more irregular, but there was his brother's vividness about him.

Stephens looked up from his book, a merry-looking youth of lively glance. "I thought you were off on some excursion in search of poetical fancy," he said with tolerance.

"Fellows," said Keats, glowing, "where do you suppose I went? No, you can't guess in a fortnight. I went to see Leigh Hunt."

"Not Hunt of the *Examiner*, we have talked about?" asked Stephens.

"Oh, John!" said Tom. "You didn't!"

"The same. It was wonderful. The country is luscious these days. It seems almost impossible to breathe in these dirty streets when one thinks of the country. And Hunt is a marvellous mind. And I've got the inspiration for the most marvellous poem I've yet dreamt of or attempted."

"Grand!" said Stephens. "Let's hear it. I won't laugh at it, the way you laugh at my attempts."

Tom looked uncomfortable, and John admitted with a lowering of tone: "It's not written yet."

"Newmarsh doesn't seem to think much of poetry," said Tom diffidently.

"Was Newmarsh talking to you?" demanded John, turning to his brother.

“Newmarsh came and went out with Cooper and Mackereth,” explained Stephens hastily. “He’s a great tease, you know, It’s not that he doesn’t like poetry. He likes arguing better. I like to hear you fellows have a go about the poets of Greece and Rome. Not that I uphold his taste.”

“Newmarsh knows absolutely nothing about poetry, and never will. What did he say to you?”

Tom hesitated.

“He, oh, he asked me how I came to be apart from the other two wise men, and teased me about the regard George and I have for your talents. Of course, he thought he was being very waggish.”

Keats’s stature seemed to increase in contrast with his seated companions. His eyes blazed, and he brought his fist down upon the table. “Newmarsh said that to you! Let him come here and talk that way to me! I’ll throw him down the stairs! What kind of being superior to human ties does he consider he is, that he can make sport to the affections of brothers? He’ll never come to this house again with my consent.”

Stephens was taken aback at the vehemence of his manner and the iron determination in its intentness. Keats sat erectly upon a chair.

Tom had a strained, quiet look. “Are you very tired, John? Perhaps you would go out and have supper with me. I have some important news.”

John was on his feet again. “Poor lad, waiting for me, eh? Let’s go.”

Tom lifted his tall black hat from his knees, and the two took leave of Stephens and went downstairs.

“New hat?” asked John. “Good boy!”

The shadows beginning to gather among the buildings did not add to the attractiveness of the locality.

“Oh, John, where do we sup? I’ve got such a piece of news to tell!”

“Are you very hungry? Would you mind going much farther so as to get out of this drab old Borough before we stop at a chop-house?”

“Oh, I’m not hungry; not very. Whatever you think best is agreeable to me, for I do not know the city as you do. You’ll not believe it,” he had to add, “but Mr. Abbey has consented to advance me enough money to go abroad.”

Keats’s jaw dropped. “Abroad—Abbey? What—where?”

Tom was well pleased with the effect he had made. “He sees that the work indoors does not agree with me; and one day a doctor came to see Fanny and examined me, and he told Mr. Abbey that I would be better in France, at Lyons. He says it is a good, healthy place, being so far south of here. You wouldn’t come with me, would you, John? George must stop and work!”

“Speaking as a doctor, and diagnosing you impersonally, I would say that you showed signs of biosis, and bionergy.”

“What—what kind of ailment is that?”

“Signs of life, vim, and general haleness! Well, here we are!”

They entered a clean-looking chop-house, Tom laughed uncontrollably; sat down at a table, and ordered chops and tankards of ale. It was late, and the cloth and cruet were put on again.

“I say, it’s very good medicine, *ante cibum*. You should eat like a bullock. I never should have believed it of our sanctimonious friend.”

“Who? Oh, Mr. Abbey! He talked very kindly about a trip abroad building me up. Of course, Fanny is wild with envy.”

“Poor Fanny, if she has to live in that family until she is one and twenty.” Tom smiled faintly, and a look of pain came over his face as he listened to John’s tale of Abbey’s delinquencies as a brother-man. “Does he want you to come back to his house, or to work in his shop, afterward?”

“He didn’t say, that I remember.”

“No. Well, then, what do you say to living with me? Now mind you, if he wants you back, I can do nothing about it. But if he does not, I dare say he will be satisfied to have you live with me.”

“Oh, John, that’s just what *I*’ve been thinking too. Only I hated . . .” Tears glistened in the boy’s eyes. “I wish you could come to Lyons with me.”

“Don’t II” ejaculated Keats warmly. “Brother, it would do us both good. Whether it is the proximity of the hospital, or whether the Borough depresses my spirits, I do not know. But I have been feeling partial to a change of scene. At least I can enjoy yours. You mustn’t get homesick, but have a good time.”

“I won’t get homesick, not if I can help it. Do you think we might have a pudding now? I’ll pay my share; I have some money with me.”

Keats beckoned to the tall and saturnine waiter, who stood with arms folded as though to prevent the escape of a napkin that protruded between his wrists. He had been eyeing with composed disfavour their leisureliness. Tom looked about as though realizing his surroundings for the first time.

“I shall learn the ways of travelling when I am abroad.”

“You must come back a man of the world, Tom, and as brown and strong as an Indian. Those Italian *senoritas*, or *donnas*, are a winsome crowd, I hear,” he added, wagging his head. “But be sure and don’t get married!”

They were laughing together when the waiter came back. “Will you have something to drink?” he asked.

“Tom—would you like a glass of claret? Claret’s good stuff.”

With smiling tolerance, the waiter let the boy decide.

“Yes, I will. It is a good thing to celebrate a time like this.”

John started one of his rants, on claret, to which Tom listened admiringly. “Really ’tis so fine, to drink on summer evenings in an arbour—it fills one’s mouth with a gushing freshness—then goes down cool and feverless—then you do not feel it quarrelling with your liver—no, it is rather a peacemaker, and lies as quiet as it did in the grape. It is as fragrant as the queen bee, and the more ethereal part of it mounts into the brain walking like Aladdin about his own enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his step.”

But outside, away from the glittering cut-glass chandelier lamp whose light they missed, for all the corner oil-lamp atop a post, it was of Hunt that he talked again, until he bade Tom good-bye and watched him mount to an



outside seat on the coach to Walthamstow. Tom was flushed with the meal and the walk, but it was a mild evening.

“Don’t catch cold, now. And give my love to Fanny.”

Back in St. Thomas’s Street, Keats leaped up the stairs. Stephens was still at his *Materia Medica*. He depended upon Keats’s Latin scholarship; but this was only paying for the interest Stephens took in poetry. While the four young men got on amicably enough, Cooper and Mackereth seemed to find a good deal in common, which threw the other two together.

Heavy steps an hour later heralded George Cooper, a sharp-faced long-nosed fellow, namesake of their brilliant lecturer, Astley Cooper, and George Mackereth, a burly youth of benevolently enigmatic and taciturn cast. Keats looked up sharply until they had closed the door after them.

“You fellows missed a good show,” Cooper remarked with shrewd satisfaction. “Couple of wenches there Mackereth couldn’t keep his eyes off.”

“Might have been worse,” agreed the massy Mackereth.

Keats laid down his book. “Where is Newmarsh?”

“How should I know? He went to the theatre with us,” said Cooper, and the coldness of his tone seemed conspiratorial.

“Is it true that he insulted my brother in your presence?” Keats rose and stood before Cooper and the gaping, gigantic Mackereth.

“Well, you know Newmarsh; he has a good opinion of his abilities, but he doesn’t mean any harm.”

Keats was becoming more and more angry. “He has a very good opinion indeed of his abilities if he thinks he can bullyrag my brothers. If he comes here again we shall see whether he has any right to such a good opinion of himself.” His fists clenched and unclenched. Mackereth twisted on his feet, paralysed with astonishment. Cooper was disposed to argue the matter.

“Why, he is our friend as well as yours, and if we choose to see him—”

“Friend!” shrilled Keats. Then he spoke as coolly as Cooper. “No one will dispute your rights in your own rooms. For that reason I intend to move and to take rooms with my brother Tom.”

As if a thunderclap had burst in the room, it was silent. Finally Stephens cleared his throat and peered at his friend from beyond the lamp.

“Oh, come now, Keats, you mustn’t let a thing like that break up the house. We get on very well together, I think, and any little tiff we have now and then will blow over if we don’t mind it.”

Cooper was muttering to himself. “No cause to let the bile like that. Newmarsh is nothing to me, but if I choose to go out with him I will.”

Mackereth rose and stuck out a hand like a shoulder of beef. “Come, Keats, shake hands and forget about it. We’re more for you than for Newmarsh.”

Keats stared at him. “I’m not angry at you fellows. Newmarsh insulted the regard and relation between brothers, which to me is sacred.”

“Why, it’s absurd,” said Cooper, “changing lodgings before the end of the term. Astley Cooper himself told me as his dresser to keep an eye on you. He takes an interest in fellows he thinks are keen—whether they appreciate it—”

Keats had half suspected this. “Many thanks to Mr. Astley Cooper. I hope he survives my move. But in any case, *capiat bolus!*”

“Your place at the window will miss you,” said Mackereth clumsily, joking. “I was saying as we came up, likely little Keats would be at his post in the window, dreaming about Shakespeare. Better change your mind, old fellow.”

“I don’t change my mind,” said Keats. “But we’ve had good times, and I shall be sorry to leave.”

## CHAPTER II

Keats sat by the window in his new quarters in a house in the Poultry, and tried to write the poem which had come to him on that first walk with Hunt. He was not yet quite sure what it was about. "I stood tiptoe upon a little hill," he began; and the feeling of elation which had overwhelmed him was not to be slaked by many lines of light and shapely, dewy and dulcet images. The fresh woodland would serve him as a sort of springboard from which to dive into deeper delight and meaning. Why, the ripples of a stream and its cresses gave to one another benefits like good men in their sincerities. And what was love but a golden-winged butterfly nestling a rose, convulsed as though it smarted from over-pleasure?

But before he came to the quintessential, he would pause and "pluck a posy Of luxuries bright, milky, soft and rosy", as his pen said. Each one made a poem of feeling for him: a bush of may flowers with bees upon them, lush laburnum with long grass about its roots, shaded violets and moss, a filbert hedge overtwinning with wild brier, clumps of woodbine, and sweet peas on tiptoe for a flight: a medley of differing flavours. Why not put them all in, let them call up the most vivid hours of pleasure? Alas, the walks and talks with his beloved poet and master, the loiterings long ago over the rail of a footbridge spanning the little brook in the fields about Edmonton, were not to be evoked so simply. Or when they were evoked, the poem seemed to have vanished. What was to follow? It was a thundering big job actually to complete a long poem. He had not been able to compass it yet. You couldn't finish a poem unless it had been finished inside you; and of course a great poem did not get finished inside you in a hurry. Perhaps never; and the accomplishment of writers was to give a semblance of organic completion to what they knew could have none.

Let us see how Hunt finished the *Story of Rimini*; or how this lordly fellow Shelley finished *Alastor*. Keats's hand reached out for the "Rimini" volume, then stayed. It was no good. Because you had the answer was no reason that you could do the sum. He sighed. It was easier to think about Hunt and to relive those walks.

That very morning he had been out to Hampstead. That very morning they had stood at the top of the rising ground and surveyed again the delights of the countryside, still jewelled with dewdrops. The perfect stillness in everything from the new-washed clouds to the trembling leaves gave the impression of a world holding its breath before the mirror of its own loveliness. It was the same moment as that when with Clarke they had stood at the gate, and yet not the same. Again Keats had told Hunt of the poem stirring within him, though it was still unborn. The world was again the most perfect world conceivable, in which everything was more beautiful and more poignantly gustful than it ever had been before; yet it was different, with more than the difference between afternoon and morning. But that was what the poem was to be made of—the hitherto unapproached and matchless beauty of the world.

Hunt was the one man for such a walk, such a vision. Everything in the world on which Leigh Hunt troubled to bestow his attention was perfect in its kind and delightful. Everyone was motivated by the most charitable intentions—even sometimes when their ideas disagreed with his—at worst by stupidity. And of all the delightful world the environs of Hampstead Heights and Caen Wood were the most enchanting; his friends were the most disinterested and truest. He quoted lines in poems which Clarke had brought him from Keats months before. His wisdom was so complete that he was above all jealousy and malevolence. You felt that what he wanted was to see you become a great poet—greater than himself if you found it in yourself to be so. The long, dark, and beaming face stood before Keats as he tried to write.

This poem, though, of the culmination of delights—it would have to wait until another day before he could rival Mrs. Tighe or Spenser! . . . *Prothalamium*, or *Spousall Verse*! What he was trying to celebrate, then, was the nuptials between his soul and Nature's. . . . Nature, bride and mother of all her creatures' hearts.

He jumped to his feet, satisfied, despite his humiliation. Now he would take a walk. A knock sounded upon his door. He strode to open it. A long-faced, thin youth with dry, straggling hair peered around the door as though to see that Keats was alone, then entered.

“Aha! Rinaldo the Bold! Just in time for a promenade the famed Britomartis!”

“I’m afraid you have thrown us over for more exalted acquaintances.”

George Felton Mathews was the first-met fellow of his own age who wrote verses; and John had written to him an *Epistle* of near a hundred lines, comparing themselves to Beaumont and Fletcher, and at the same time tracing his descent, Ovid-inspired, from a flowret through a goldfish to a black swan, “kissing his daily food from Naiad’s pearly hands”. But latterly Mathews seemed a tepidly nervous fellow who enjoyed pathos and shed tears over passages of Spenser, which caused Keats to adopt a brusque and callous manner in things that lay nearest his heart.

“You know, I was thinking of Ann—and Charlotte, a few minutes ago, when I happened to remember how we used to enjoy reading Mrs. Tighe together.”

“And the time they gave you that curious shell, and the copy of verses you made for Ann!” Mathews exclaimed sentimentally. “They often talk of it.”

Keats proposed a walk, but Mathews said that he felt languid and thoughtful; he wanted to talk of poetry. And now his friend had actually had a poem printed! “Don’t you feel a kind of overweening pride?”

“Why, yes, I do. Do you blame me?” Keats smiled. “Sit down, Mathews.”

“I won’t stay. I see you are in one of your sceptical and republican moods. . . . The truth of the matter is, I have not been much inspired of late, and I thought seeing you . . . You know we have so much in common, even if we do not agree in some opinions.”

“Good old Mathews!” said Keats, clapping him on the shoulder. But soon they were talking of democracy and the French revolution, the very notion of which threw Mathews into a fright. In the midst of the argument a knock was repeated, and a hatless red head and a pair of blue eyes, gibing rather than laughing, appeared. “Come in, Wells.”

A freckled, snub-nosed youth came toward the table, incongruously bearing a bunch of roses, which with a sheepish air he handed to Keats, curtsying and scraping.

“Lovely!” Keats sniffed rapturously. “Luscious! What made you think to bring them to me, Wells?”

“I don’t know . . .” muttered Wells, staring at Mathews. “I knew you liked them.”

Keats remembered that he had been angry at Wells for badgering Tom when Tom was not feeling well. “Thanks, thanks for the roses, Charlie. You knew that Tom had gone to Lyons, did you not?”

“Yes, they told me at your old rooms. Pretty lucky for old Tom, getting away like this on a lark, playing sick, too. He’s a young customer.”

Introduced, the spindly, fair fellow and the firm-set little redhead shook hands. Keats saw that they made perfect foils for each other. They realized it themselves; and, being young, had almost nothing to say to each other. Finally both felt that they had to leave, and were about to do so together, hastened by the postman’s whistle, which called Keats down to the street to pay for a letter. It was a note from George, at Abbey’s shop in Pancras Lane, asking his brother to come to the Wylies’ that evening. They were having a bit of a party, with Haslam and Severn, and Tom, who had returned from Lyons that day. John forgot his poem and his walk and applied himself to his studies. The examinations were little more than two weeks off. After supper he proceeded, carefully dressed, toward the Wylie house.

Georgiana Wylie received him at the door with unaffected enthusiasm. The only daughter of the widow of an officer of Marines, she had accepted at fifteen a part of good sense and responsibility; yet the cheery good health indicated by her stocky figure and rosy colour was far from anything which might have tended toward the prim or the stolid.

“Oh, John, George said you might be coming, but I scarcely believed him. George is here,” she assured him, with pleasure in the news, before he had left the hall.

George rose, a tall, muscular, moustached young fellow, and shook hands with his brother. Though younger than John, George Keats was more mature in ways and attitudes. Most obviously he was less high-strung than John, though not insensitive, a brisk and businesslike fellow. Two boys sat

on the sofa demurely, exchanging glances at the spectacle of Georgie and her beau.

“Hello, Henry-Charles! But where’s Tom?” John exclaimed. “Didn’t he come? I know he arrived safely from the coast of Barbary, but where is he?”

“Just in the back parlour,” said George with a wave of the hand. “Mamma is showing him her goldfish.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Wylie came into the room, followed by Tom Keats, a trifle browner over his flush, and a trifle less thin.

“Mrs. Wylie, good evening to you! Tom, you are fine. If Lyons improved you so much so quickly, why didn’t you stay away?”

“I would have—I liked it. But I got homesick.”

They all laughed.

The chairs seemed to have ranged themselves about the hearth, in reminiscence of winter. Georgiana sat at one end, her back to the wall. George was next to her, and it wasn’t long before they were communicating in a code of their own—glance, smile, or brief word, and were only intermittently a part of the group. John, next to Mrs. Wylie, regarded them with pleased interest. It was less than a year since the enterprising George had introduced these friends—as he had the Mathews family—but John had become warmly attached to them. Mrs. Wylie reproached him for not coming there since the winter, when he had written a Valentine poem which George had given to Georgiana. He told her of his work, but he dilated upon the new acquaintance with Hunt, and the others were soon questioning him about that marvellous man; though George inquired whether he ate, as well as talked and walked.

The knocker at the front door sounded amid emulation of one of John’s puns. Mrs. Wylie did not wait for her maidservant, but rose at once. After due time for greetings and laying aside of hats, two male young voices materialized as a tall youth of awkward bearing, with a face aquiline yet somehow soft and womanish: Severn, the miniature-painter; and another tall one, with a hard stiffness and toughness of fibre about him, a long-

jawed, homely, but dependable aspect: young William Haslam, like George, a budding tea-merchant.

The room was soon buzzing with talk and laughter. Keats was in his element rallying the sober, shrewd Haslam, and delivering puns and far-gathered quotations to the delightful admiration of Severn. A game of whist was arranged. George and Georgiana obviously wished to remain clear of it, and for this reason John insisted that they should join the game, with Haslam and Tom.

Mrs. Wylie was busy getting the table cleared and setting candles in convenient places. "It's fortunate that none of us take whist seriously," she remarked. "Because I am afraid Mr. Keats upsets the canons of the game completely with his advice and innuendoes."

John did not heed their animadversions, and conferred with each player, delighting to get George in trouble or to help Tom and Haslam. He was referee to the game, he said. "Never fear, I smoke a good many things. I see who is attempting to cheat, though I say nothing."

Mrs. Wylie would not allow the young men to go home without sampling, as they had done before, her cookery and the stock of her cellar. Then the ceremony of leave-taking was protracted beyond the departure of Haslam and Severn because George wished to arrange another meeting with Georgiana.

He consented to visit his brother's new quarters, however, and as they walked along they got talking of Abbey, and Tom wanted to know just where they stood in regard to money. John undertook to explain. Their grandfather had left them each one thousand pounds. Their mother had left an amount to be divided among them, how large he did not know. And finally, Grandmother had left them a small annual income. But the thousand pounds apiece from Grandfather could not be touched until Fanny was one-and-twenty.

"And what about Father? Didn't he leave us something too?"



“Well, you see, he left the ‘Swan and Hoop’ to Mother, and when she married again Rawlings got it. So our hands are tied, and we are dependent upon Abbey’s generosity to get what’s our own.”

“Now, John, it’s not quite so bad as that,” remonstrated George.

“What? Why is it not?”

“Abbey wouldn’t see us starve.”

“Of course he would not. That would make too much trouble for himself. He would merely give us as much inconvenience as he could. He wants, of course, to have credit for managing the estate well. I don’t say he would steal, but his vision is a poor light and a mean one.” In the semi-darkness of the June night John’s profile could be seen turning impatiently.

“He is all for business,” said George; and the fact that George pictured himself as a business man kept John from retorting.

“But what about the Chancery suit and Mrs. Midgely John? We used to talk a lot about Captain Midgely John being nearly shot at the Battle of Camperdown.”

“Yes,” laughed George, “there was not a boy in school who did not know about our sailor uncle Jennings.”

“When Grandfather Jennings made his will, it did not dispose of all his property. The relations agreed that this sum left over should be arbitrated by the Court of Chancery. So Mother brought a suit against Grandmother and Uncle Midgely John. And of course they are all three dead, and the case is not settled yet. Mrs. Midgely John is prosecuting it.”

“I can hardly believe that Mother would sue Grandmother and Uncle.”

“It was all in a friendly spirit. Mother only wanted what was right, and it seemed best to have the Court decide. You must not think that Mother would try to obtain what was not hers.”

“No, of course not,” said Tom in confusion.

“Here’s our new home, Tom!” Keats suddenly swerved and darted up a flight of stairs through a door beside a shop. While the others stumbled

after him, he unlocked the door and lit a candle with which he came to the threshold to welcome them.

“You have the same fondness for living over shops,” grumbled George.

“Better to be over shops than in ’em.” They all stood in a little sitting-room containing two easy chairs and two straight ones, a desk and a couple of shelves of books. “You should see it in daylight. My windows do not stare blankly at the other windows on the opposite side of the street. I can look down Cheapside, and, though you can’t expect that to be a royal thoroughfare with its name, it is no bad view.”

“Just this and the bedroom?” asked George.

“Yes, the bedroom is small too, but they seem like a palace after rooming with three other fellows and all their possessions. Cosy, eh, Tom?”

“It’s perfect, John. I shall be leaving Abbey’s to-morrow. Or may I stay here to-night, if you don’t mind?”

The brothers burst into a laugh at the summary emancipation.

“Aha! You shall share whatever I have. We shall do famously. It was near the examinations to move, of course. Less than a month until my destiny is decided. Shall I be a surgeon, or shall I not?”

“You might pass your examinations whether or not, if you don’t mind,” proffered George.

“Oh, he’ll pass,” said Tom. “But, then, there’s poetry. You’re not casting all that aside when you become a surgeon, are you, John?”

John gave him a look.

“Whether or not I am to be a poet is on the lap of the gods. Mr. Hunt holds out the richest prospects on that score. Of course, I do not want to be ruled by his enthusiasm. But I’ll write. So generous a man, you see, likes to find others akin to himself, and he may be deceived.”

“Now, John, you mustn’t be so modest as that,” said George. “The man must know what he is doing, or he wouldn’t have been editor of the paper

so long. He has doubtless read a great number of poems in his day and not even printed them.”

“Well,” said John, permitting himself a smile, “he is a most delightful fellow, and he says he wants to see everything I write. It is enough to make a poet of the dullest clod on ’Change, I think, to be near such a man as Hunt. It is not only the sympathy he shows. My own dear brothers show me a sympathy and love nothing could replace—yes, you do. . . .”

They talked heart-warmingly. John got up to pace the room.

“Indeed, no man knows,” he cried, “unless after he is dead, what is to be the fate of his name and the work he did on earth. But his good fortune may be to sound a stern alarm to the patriot, to startle senates and princes from their easy slumbers, and inspire thoughts in the sage.”

“I think,” said Tom, “that I shall pray every night that you may be as great a poet as you want. It is worth praying for, if you could be a great poet,” he added in a naïve, moved voice.

A fire of admiration and loyalty burned too in the breast of George, and he said, assuming gruffness: “You will. No doubt about it, you will be a great poet, John.”

“Sometimes I am sure that if I could smother the mad ambition I’d be happier myself, and better liked by others. Still, the attempt is forced upon me. A great deal can be learnt, knowledge and even wisdom; but no, the great thing, the one thing that cannot be replaced, *that* can’t be learnt, I am afraid. But still, one can try. One can try,” he repeated, stretching his arms above his head.

But that mad ambition was not lessened while they talked and confided in one another, and the hour grew later. Their hopes and experiences were shared, and they could not foresee a time when this would not be so. True brothers they had always been. At school any one of them would fight for the others. The two younger would see that John was undisturbed those winter evenings at supper in the schoolroom, when he would put a big book, or the *Examiner*, between himself and the table. Even then, George had bulked bigger than his elder; while Tom was weakly, and amiable

unless roused to loyalty. They had put up with his tempers, but sometimes George had made him furious by taking advantage of size and weight to get him down and hold him until he cooled off and began to laugh. But they never had any doubt that he was right in most things, never got over the thrill and astonishment of his poetry, real as any printed. They talked so late that George stayed the night too. Keats collected some old greatcoats and made the best of the carpet. With hilarity and horseplay they settled for the night. At last John broke the news that after taking the examination he was going to Margate. Tom would be left alone in the lodgings; which prospect seemed almost as pleasant to him as the trip and holiday with his brother would have been.

At last the rooms were still. The moon's light fell upon the floor where John lay, and seemed to ponder tenderly his upcast eye. Through spangled clouds she came into the blue again with gradual swim, blanching the plains, silvering the rivers and the trees of this wondrous world. Maker of sweet poets, lovely moon, meek Cynthia, queen of the wide air, give words of honey to tell but one wonder of thy bridal night . . . closer of eyes to lovely dreams. . . .



## CHAPTER III

The first day of the Margate excursion had been draught after draught of intoxication. He had taken an early coach, and seen mile after mile of England sweeping past under the white morning sky, the sun kissing away the dew; the splendour of the midsummer day, matched by the portentous majesty of the sea, with its mysterious, pervasive voice. And when in the dusk, after all this, Cynthia had peeped through her silken curtains of cloud, scantily as a bride, he had to write a sonnet to George about it. But next day the reaction had come, with half-wilful forgetfulness.

He lay on a bed of grass and flowers atop a cliff above the sea, and thought he had begun a new life. No lectures, no wading through dreary, dreary books which seemed to make the brain ache and to become a muddle in the last few days before the examination. All that was over, life seemed clean and free, with boundless hours made all for poetry. He could write poems to over-span anything yet achieved. And he was firmly set into a niche, lower and quite immovable, if he chose to occupy it. He was ready to practise his profession of surgeon.

The final months of his studies now seemed something of a joke, including the grinning certainty of some of his acquaintances that he would fail. They were dumbfounded, but he had not. Perhaps he had been lucky all the way through. Hammond of Edmonton had not cavilled about giving his testimonial, in spite of that fist-shaking episode; the Court of Examiners of the Society of Apothecaries had admitted him duly to examination, and Brande, the examiner, had been a good head. It was too bad that fellows who really wanted and needed to practise might have failed. They would have more to talk about when they learned what Stephens and a few others already suspected, that he never would practise.

Upon what afternoon walk with Hunt, or what hour of high speculation with Clarke, or reading what deathless, glittering line of Shakespeare he had so resolved, he could not have said. He would be a poet or nothing, come weal, come woe. Abbey would say—what could Abbey say? Keats felt uneasily that Abbey was not unprepared for some weird action on his part, that Abbey considered him, privately, a fool. But on the other hand,

what could Abbey say with any effectiveness? His erstwhile ward would be of age, and at liberty to put into execution any course of action which should not be an imposition upon the rights of others or a treason against the Crown. Again, Keats had long ached for the opportunity to impart to Abbey a few home truths regarding the relative value in the sight of gods and wondering men, of merchants, money-changers, and the divine poet whose works descended to later ages as a chief heritage of his race. He was free, now.

Free. That was the paramount consideration after all. Keats thought, looking seemingly at the sky, the grass, the oats field, and the waves far out and below him. It was enough to make you roll on the grass with twofold ease. What was to be created lay between himself and the eternal spirit of poesy, the principle of rightness in all things. A new world had opened itself to his delighted eyes at Margate, and of this the sea made half. The very streets and shops, much more the citizens, from the smug to the smugglers, were redolent of the sea; which itself meant more even than ostensible beauties of rocks, ships, caves; it spoke to him with an eternal voice which compelled him to think of eternity, past and future, and Man perched upon a pinnacle in the midst.

For all this, he could not, it seemed, write a proper poem, and was reduced to rhymed epistles, to George and to Cowden Clarke, telling of these beauties he saw. As day followed day it seemed less and less likely that he would write the important poem—perhaps ever. At first it pleased while it saddened him to know that he was dependent upon creation for happiness. Then he became uneasy, restless, depressed, almost desperate at his failure of inspiration. It was a skirmish with the blue devils so well known to his boyhood, when some obscure woe would damp the glow of his spirit, and the deaths of his mother and grandmother made it apparent that this world was one continual round of gloomy catastrophe, past and only too certainly to come.

He was glad enough after a month to get back to London and his lodgings and Tom. They went here and there, little caring how the days passed, and it was a better holiday than he had believed possible. One day they attended a bear-baiting. Two young Cockneys elbowed past them to the

ring-side. The elder was instructing the other, pointing out men of wealth and sporting gentlemen by name and nickname, and strutting within the border of the ring. The keeper, waxing purple in the face from the effort to keep the throng out of the ring, finally laid about him with fists and elbows. "My eye, Bill Soames give me such a lick!" exclaimed the Cockney with gratification. The brothers burst out laughing.

"What a slang gent," murmured Tom.

Next morning John went to see Hunt. Hunt had seen those long poems, had pronounced them superb; and putting misgivings aside, Keats took great joy of them, and worked over them raptly all the afternoon. And that evening he went to see Clarke. His high spirits effervesced in impersonation of the bear-baiting. Arms and legs bent and swung stiffly, he looked like Bruin on his hind legs. He swung about, dabbed his forepaws out, mocking the growls of the bear and the excited yappings of the dogs which had not yet engaged him, then the snap of teeth, the grunting "agh!" of one getting squeezed. Keats' wide mouth drew back in a snarl, his teeth looking evil. Clarke's gentle mystified seriousness changed to laughter: "Are you thinking of taking up the sporting profession?"

"My eye! Arsk me someick I knows. I tykes up whatever's a pying gyme! . . . But not the profession of surgeon. The other day, for instance, I was called suddenly to open a man's temporal artery. I did it, too—with the utmost nicety. But my mind was farther than Oberon. It was only a miracle."

But Clarke had a treasure to show him—Chapman's *Homer*. Alsager, who conducted the money-market department of *The Times*, had lent it him.

"Good Latona mea!" swore Keats.

A sumptuous volume lay outspread beneath the lamp. The great folio had been printed two hundred years ago, in 1616. On the title-page Keats saw not only this but an engraved, massively architectural design. He turned the broad leaves, and there were the black-printed solemn long lines like church-music. He read aloud:



“But when out of his ample breast he gave his great voice passe,  
And words that flew about our eares, like drifts of winter’s snow;  
None thenceforth, might contend with him; though naught admir’d  
for show.”

“The spontaneous breath of great poetry!” he exclaimed rapture. “Nothing else but the spontaneous breath!”

“Let us turn, as I was doing, to some of the famousest passages.”

Keats watched him, and a sense swept over him of the old story that had charmed the lonely tribes two thousand years earlier, when the minstrel sang them the ten-years war for Troy and Helen of the peerlessly devastating face. The story’s beauty was robust, primitive, as though from coarse dyes and hand-woven cloth; and if it missed the simplicity of grace in the slender fluted Ionian column, it had the power and the creative majesty of the early gods. This was the Homer he had surmised from the reverent admiration of men who had read him in the Greek. He knew in his heart that the jingles of Pope’s version could be the spirit of not that rich tale and its inevitably symbolic action. Now he could relive it in the words of old Chapman, an Elizabethan of Shakespeare’s time. Listening, he became almost breathless with excitement, rose and walked about the room, his head thrown back, eyes glowing.

“Now a great wind sweeps across my spirit,” he declared. “Much have I travelled in the realms of gold; but this bard’s is the greatest realm of all.” Abruptly he hushed again to listen to Clarke’s reading of the passage where Ulysses is cast up on the shore of Phaecia. For this he had no words, only a delighted ineffable stare. Softly he repeated: “The sea had soakt his heart through.”

One passage suggested another until they could recall no more, and started at the beginning and read silently. When next they thought of time the morning had become light. “Poor Tom will be fretting about me.”

In the street a cold October wind blew over bare houses, bare flagstones, bare trees. The sky had a faint tinge of white. Keats walked rapidly. “A

new planet has swung into my ken,” he muttered. A pair of the watch met him with their staves and lanterns. “No, my friends, I am not drunk, nor a whore-master,” he felt like telling them. Every step was exultation. Farther on, a lamplighter was extinguishing the lamps on the posts. Out of an ancient beamed inn came a rowdy group of young fellows. They were living, but he had life.

Tom was in bed and did not hear him enter. Sitting down at the table, his hat and coat still on, he drew a piece of paper and a quill from among the books. His fingers seemed to move as much automatically as purposefully, and he half felt that he might do nothing, instead of writing the greatest poem he ever had attempted. He shivered slightly, and felt the cold and the oddness of the hour and his posture, then he was flooded once more with a sense of the new world which had become his.

Just as he was finishing, Tom crept shivering, half dressed and rubbing his eyes, out of the bedroom. Keats rose and kissed his cheek.

“My dear brother,” he said in calm exaltation. “I have just written an immortal poem. I think I have done it at last.” Tom took the paper eagerly and silently to the window. Keats wandered about the room, half fearing.

“Wonderful, John. Simply gorgeous.”

Keats clapped his feet together and, standing erect before his brother, read the sonnet aloud, giving every vowel its proper weight. A thrill of exultation was in the line, “Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold,” and a thrill of awe in the sonorous evocation of eternal stillness in the skies against which the merely human silence of Cortez and his men sounded like the clap of doom—the doom of the Unknown, whose curse is half lost when men know there is an Unknown. Like a half-remembered dream this came to the two boys as they read.

“But where have you been all night?”

“Where have I been? Straddling Parnassus, Tom. With my soul, not galligaskins, needless to say.” He sat down to make a copy for Clarke, and carried it down to the street. It was still early, but a reliable-looking boy

appeared, willing to run to Clarke at Clerkenwell for twopence. To make assurance double sure, Keats gave him a tester.

Going upstairs again, he felt a curious lightness about himself which was not like faintness or tipsiness and yet reminded him of both. His sleeplessness was asserting itself. Slowly he took off his hat and cloak, telling his brother to go out and bring them something for beer against his waking up.

“John, do you know what day this is?”

They both brightened. He was twenty-one. A man.

George brought him that night a knitted bookmark Fanny had made. Abbey had forbidden her to go out at night, even with him. The brothers talked quietly and gaily until midnight, regaling themselves with a bottle or two of claret.

Another evening less than a week afterward, George burst into his brothers’ lodgings breathless and brusque.

“I’ll never return to that place,” he declared, “never.”

The other two stared at him uncomprehendingly. Tom was leaning over a table, his head half sideways upon his hand. John was sitting in the middle of the room, his left foot upon his right knee, a book upon his lap, while his right hand clasped his small-boned left ankle.

It was Hodgkinson, Abbey’s partner, who had gone out of his way to put upon George and finally insulted him to his face. John leaped to his feet, upsetting the precious Chapman Clarke had loaned him.

“I am one-and-twenty,” he exclaimed, “whether you are or not, and I shall very soon tell Abbey a few quite unpalatable truths. I’ll go to-night.”

The brothers would have dissuaded him, but he had to tell Abbey his decision in regard to surgery.

“Oh, John, by the bye, Abbey has been wangling a practice for you at Tottenham.”

John stopped, stared. If a practice had been obtained for him at Tottenham, would he be compelled to accept it? No, impossible. But it might look like throwing away a future. That would seem to put Abbey in the right.

"I don't care. I shan't practise if I am given a practice outright. Why, Hammond is near Tottenham. I should have to compete with him."

George laughed bitterly. "Abbey has a grudge against Hammond, too."

"Oh, John, won't you take it?" Tom asked. "Grandmother lived so near, many of the people would know of you, and you would do well."

"I am not a surgeon," said Keats, "and that is settled." He had found a fresh cravat and kerchief, his hat and cloak, and was ready to depart, a spruce and spirited-looking little fellow.

An exaltation upheld him while he walked briskly along to the stage. But as he sat on the top deck of the coach and bowled through the streets, a sort of compunctious melancholy came over him. Life seemed to be strife and bitterness. Abbey, for example, was a needlessly complete ass! Mother had never liked him. And the way he had talked about people being above themselves and keeping fine riding-horses and playing the man of consequence! John blushed to think that he had not resented forcibly the slur against his father, though he was not fifteen at the time. Certainly Abbey knew better than to cast mud at the Keatses now. John's hands clenched and his breathing grew slow and deep. Why shouldn't his father keep a good riding-horse for his own use? Hadn't he owned the livery stable with a stock of fine horses? What business of Abbey's was it? . . . Heaven knew he wished nothing concerning him was business of Abbey's; but nearly everything, it seemed was.

At length he came to Walthamstow, its old, noble country residences of Pepys's time, and Abbey's house; he brought the knocker down resoundingly. The maidservant told him Fanny would come in a few minutes.

She waved gaily but silently from the stairs opposite the parlour door. Fanny Keats was a fair girl with grey eyes, well grown for her thirteen years, with that large and careless growth common in children who later

will scarcely increase in stature. Somehow she reminded John of himself. When he had kissed her, he said playfully:

“So this is the time young ladies go to rest nowadays, is it? ’Twas different when I were young!”

“Oh, you poor old man!” exclaimed Fanny. “Don’t you know the fashions change? Nowadays young ladies go to bed early so that they can go to school in the morning.”

“I’m glad I got here as soon as I did. George came and told us something that made me want to come and see Mr. Abbey.”

“Oh, George was terribly angry. I would not be surprised if he never came back. He told Abbey he wouldn’t.”

“Why whisper?” asked Keats fiercely. “Do you think Abbey is eavesdropping? How does he treat you, Fanny?”

“Why, Mr. Abbey doesn’t trouble much about me,” she told him in the same low tone. “I think he’s funny. You know the kind of people who think they are good-natured? He is like that. I have to smile inside.” She giggled. John nodded, smiling. Fanny was a charming girl.

“And Mrs. Abbey? Yes, she’s good to me. You couldn’t tell, most of the time, that I wasn’t one of the family. And yet *I* know it.”

“Good. You try to be as happy as you can, don’t you? Tom has been wondering whether you could get away some time for a frolic. It is too dull and cold now for picnics, but we can read, and draw, and make toffee.”

“Next summer I’ll be fourteen and can go on picnics.”

“You’ll be a young lady then. I want my sister to be a perfect lady in all her ways, you know,” he said in a kind of playful earnestness.

“And you will be a poet, like that Mr. Hunt who owns the Paper?”

“I have written some fine ones since that one was printed. Some day I shall come over and read them to you.”

“It will be splendid if you become a poet and write books of poems for me to read!”

“It will indeed,” said Keats warmly. “I wouldn’t want a better audience. But, Fanny, it is past your bedtime, and I have not seen Mr. Abbey.”

“Very well. Give my love to Tom and George. Be sure!” They kissed. “And, John, don’t be downcast. I am quite happy, I am, really.”

“Yes, Fanny. Good night.” Tears stood in Keats’s eyes as he watched his sister go upstairs. They waved at each other silently as she passed along the balustrade.

The maidservant appeared and told him that Mr. Abbey wished to see him.

A large, stout, pasty-faced man sat beside a table in the back parlour smoking a long pipe and reading an evening newspaper. He wore white cotton stockings and breeches and half-boots, as he had for years since they had gone out of fashion, and he was the only man on the Exchange or the streets in such garb. Vile torpor of mind, Keats thought it. Mrs. Abbey, a tall, lean lady with a kind of amiably saturnine dark face, sat opposite him, sewing.

“Well, John, my boy?” said Abbey.

“How do you do, Mrs. Abbey?” Mrs. Abbey inclined her head, seeming to keep her eyes upon her sewing.

“How has Tom been keeping under your care?” she asked.

“He is not strong, but he seems the better for his foreign voyage.”

“Mrs. Abbey, my dear,” said Abbey, “don’t you think the children might want your attention now.” She rose and left the room.

“Is it true,” asked Keats, “that your partner accused my brother George of attempting to defraud you?”

“Why, I— No. Why, sir, George tells me he is angry at Hodgkinson, but what have I to do with that? Hodgkinson is my partner, and George has been a satisfactory clerk. I would not willingly dissolve with the one nor dismiss the other. But if one of them or both choose to leave my service, what can I say?”

“Then I shall see him myself, and find out whether my brother is to be insulted with impunity.”

“Why, there was no insult,” said Abbey, drawing at his pipe. “Mr. Hodgkinson could not find some papers, and, I presume in a manner of joking, he accused George of putting them away. But George took umbrage. I suspect there has been bad blood between the two, but I have no complaint to make of either of them,” he added, with an infuriating chuckle.

“Let that be as it may,” John said coolly, “I trust some satisfaction will be possible, whether you uphold him or not.”

“I uphold him!” said Abbey, as though in indignant surprise.

“Oh, I made a mistake. So you do not uphold George? Very well. We know where we stand: my brothers and I *versus* Hodgkinson. But another matter, concerning my own future—I do not intend to practise as a surgeon.”

Abbey put his feet on the floor, and almost dropped the pipe from his mouth. “Not intend to be a surgeon! Why, what do you mean to be?”

“I mean to rely upon my ability as a poet.”

“John, you are either mad or a fool, to talk in so absurd a manner.”

“My mind is made up,” said the young man very quietly. “As you know, I am one-and-twenty. You also know there are certain moneys due me which will keep me sustained until the productions of my pen bring me more.”

“I am not sure that there is much until your sister comes of age. I think you will find yourself in the workhouse in time.” Abbey’s cheeks had become purple, with fine veins running in them. “Perhaps you do not know, sir, that I have been about securing an opening for you in Tottenham—a good practice among people to whom your family is known. And this is the way, sir, you accept it. This is the way you reward the efforts I have made in your behalf!”

“For any services you have given me or my family beyond what your bond calls for, I thank you, sir. And now, seeing nothing more to say, I will bid you good evening.”

“There will be a speedy termination to all this.”

“Good evening, sir.”





## CHAPTER IV

The night, as Keats walked away from Abbey's house, was such as he had known many times that autumn in walking home from Hunt's fireside, when along the road through the fields keen, fitful gusts rifled the sere and half-leafless bushes. The dark, as now, was a pleasant setting to memories of magic communion; the bleak air cooled his forehead, while the stars which seemed to shrink away into the chill sky reminded him only of the awesome and glowing constellations of poesy. He had a sonnet composed by the time he reached home and almost forgot to tell his brothers of the momentous interview. They would look about for more spacious lodgings, and George would seek employment.

Next day John went to Guy's and St. Thomas's and secured his books and student apparatus. Since returning from Margate he had attended lectures sporadically; but now all that was past. Good-bye to the grimy old Borough, with its dingy buildings, and its poor, like crawling beetles. On a sudden, though, the grimy old Borough was somehow the dear old Borough. Some time when he was happy enough he would revisit the places which had seen him a lonely, discontented, boisterous and melancholy student. Even the squalid and imperative toil of caring for the eternal sick had touched his heart. Why, that must be poetry!

He lifted his head and shifted his armful of books. What should he do with this windfall? Of course—put new lines into "I Stood Tip-toe". He'd finish that poem yet! The catalogue of blisses could not omit health, most disregarded of accepted boons. The very weather, bright and clear or for change rainy and arduous, brought pleasure to men of health. But Lady Nature's bounty had to be of the purest ray to cheer the languid sick. How often he had watched until a sense crept over him of the blind instinctive life their bodies led while their brains drowsed or leaped into delirium. How many times he had watched the faces of friends who came to visit their sick, full of foreboding or joyous expectation. One old man, come to take away his son; the son, standing with the eager look of life about him once more; and the father, nearly foolish with delight, kissed him, felt his

arms and chest, stared him up and down and parted the forehead's tangled hair.

Stephens hove in sight, bound for a lecture.

"Why, it's little Keats! Where are you going with all the books?"

"I am quitting the hospital; I have decided not to practise, Stephens."

"Of course, you're going to be a poet! Have you had any more printed in the *Examiner*? And is he going to print one of mine?"

"No," said Keats, smiling. "It was an oversight. But he is not acquainted with you personally."

"That's it," Stephens laughed. "But it cannot be helped. I'd rather be a successful surgeon than an unsuccessful poet."

"So would I," said Keats. "Good-bye."

Stephens had been shuffling away, and walking backward as he bade adieu. Unabashed by this coolness, he demanded a verse for his notebook. Keats sat on a stone step and wrote while they both laughed.

Give me women, wine and snuff  
Until I cry out, "Hold, enough!"  
You may do so sans objection  
Till the day of resurrection;  
For bless my beard they aye shall be  
My beloved Trinity.

Five minutes after reaching his lodgings he was blithely trudging off to the Vale of Health. His brothers had left him a note saying they had gone for a walk. It was a joke to serve them in the same way.

Hunt pulled him into the doorway by both hands. He had been working on the paper in town all morning, and was in exactly the mood for a good talk. Presently Mrs. Hunt and Holman, the oldest boy, came into the room; they were going out to make some purchases. Jennie could be called if they needed her.

The new sonnet, Hunt declared, was magnificent; he was proud that their friendship had been so transmuted. So was the chapman sonnet, but for the vagueness of the phrase, “realms of gold”. It was no mere flattery, he was sure, to say that Keats would be with Chapman and Spenser before he died.

“No sacrilege, no sacrilege!” cried Keats.

“The world shall know it too,” went on Hunt. “Make no mistake about that. True merit is far too rare for it to go unnoted. The world follows the sham-antique ballads of Scott, and even the fires of passion in Byron, with a kind of stupid wonder. But let someone arise possessing the true creational magic and it will fall at his feet. . . .”

“Is it possible that you are over-confident of the world’s discernment?” asked Keats. “It does not seem to have crowned Wordsworth or Coleridge with haste. They are old men now. And Southey, as you have said, has degenerated into a mere hack for the *Edinburgh*.”

“It is true they are old, and their best poetry was written many years ago. When these men were young and ardent, their song was full of the day-spring, and they lent their minds and pens to the noblest aspirations for mankind. But the outcome of the Revolution disappointed them, and they joined the stupidest court pander or dragoon sergeant in upholding the Monarchy against the rights of man. I consider, as I would not dare to say so plainly in print, that these men have lost themselves their souls for their pains. But the poetry they made when those souls were in the ascendancy cannot die.”

Keats listened, glowing, to these opinions; they could not have appeared more true if the heavens had opened and shown them inscribed upon tablets of brass.

“I do not know,” he declared, trembling, “whether I would care to live a long time. If the poet seeks beauty, he should pray for early death.”

“It is an awesome thing what life can make of a man, whether or not he lends himself to its forces,” said Hunt thoughtfully. Of Scott and Coleridge and Wordsworth and Burns they talked. And then Hunt had an astounding

proposal. He had spoken to his publishers, Messrs. Ollier, about Keats. It might be well for Keats to call and talk to them about a book of poems.

Wasn't this just the disinterested friendship one could have expected of no one else but Libertas? Keats's voice trembled when he thanked him. As for enemies (Hunt had been saying that his "Feast of the Poets" had treated Scott cavalierly, and that the pack of them would get in a circle and hold him at bay one day), as for enemies, "My right arm beside you!"

"Amen!"

Mrs. Hunt, whose return they had not noticed, announced that dinner had been served. The meal was bountiful but plain. Hunt was usually a frugal eater, as part of the regimen in which his long hours of work were varied by walks. The children were young cormorants; but their father appeared to think that discipline at their age was a matter outside the consumption of food. He smiled genially as he filled young Holman's plate with a third helping. Mrs. Hunt, on the other hand, seemed now to have leisure to regulate their exuberance, though most of the day she gave them the run of the house. During the lull she spoke to the young poet amiably:

"You were not here, were you, Mr. Keats, during Mr. Haydon's visit? He was with us two weeks and just left for his studio again yesterday."

"No. I have heard so much of him, too. He is working on a painting of 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem', isn't he?"

"It seemed remarkable to me that he could stay away from it a fortnight."

"His eyes, my dear," murmured Hunt. "He had been applying himself so incessantly that his sight threatened to fail him. In fact, if I remember correctly, he was blind for a short time in his youth."

"What a remarkable man!" exclaimed Keats. "Truly it seems that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man. A blind painter would be more wonderful than a blind and deaf Milton."

"We had some memorable discussions while he was here. He is impetuous, I grant you, but well founded in his tastes. He is ready to argue every question—and we did, except religion and Bonaparte. We resolved never to talk of these. Of course, a man of his originality could not get on without a

certain ready pugnacity. You know what a battle he has had to get the nation to accept the idea of buying the Elgin Marbles.”

“Posterity as well as ourselves will owe him a debt for that,” Keats agreed. He knew the story well. The collection of Grecian statues, full forms and magnificent fragments, which Lord Elgin had brought from their native resting-place and guarded almost inaccessible to the public and to student artists, had come to seem to Haydon almost his own discovery. Never before, possibly, and certainly never since, had such ideal forms been created by human art. No person could have any true notion of the reality of the sublime harmony native to art without long study of these marvels. Having contrived to get permission view them, to measure, compare, make endless drawings from every side, he was untiring in his efforts to make the Marbles available to every other artist and member of the public. He wrote pamphlets, waited upon Members and Ministers of the House of Commons, brought all kinds of trouble and enmity upon himself; but at last the Government bought the Marbles. He was enshrined in the hearts of all young-minded men who interested themselves in the new poetry and the social ideas of the *Examiner*, if not in Haydon’s painting itself.

“By the way,” Hunt was saying, “Haydon wants to have the privilege of meeting you, Keats.”

“Wh—what? Me? But there is only one way in which he could have heard my name,” Keats continued more calmly.

It was Clarke as much as himself, Hunt intimated, to whom he owed this. So Clarke and Hunt had been praising him to Haydon! What vistas of friendship would open! The studio of a great painter, the secrets of another art! Almost with surprise Keats found himself alone with his host in Hunt’s den. A bottle of wine was brought to them.

“This room seems as old to me and as dear as though it were mine. Think of the times we have talked and read or sat and thought or looked out at the moonlight or listened to the doubly enjoyed rain twinkling on the lattice.”

“Doubly enjoyed rain! Splendid, my dear fellow. I’ll warrant you improvise your poems as you run.”

“As I walk—to and from the chop-house.”

“Think how many etherealized young ladies—”

“Readers of the *Story of Rimini*?” interposed Keats.

“Such ladies—think how they would regard us two poets if they knew how we enjoyed a good meal and a bottle of port.”

“I would assure them that the ambrosial tippie they sip must have such bush. And no ignoble source, either,” Keats declared, looking into his glass. Hunt glanced with appreciative enjoyment at the ruddy-featured young man.

“I shall call you Junkets,” he now announced, “in honour of all Yorkshiremen.” He stood up before the fireplace, stretched his long form at which Keats looked almost incredulously, and remarked, feeling that his young friend might not relish such levity: “I say, Keats, I feel most damnably foolish. And that being so, why shouldn’t we act foolishly? Do you see the laurel sprigs in your vase? Let us crown ourselves with them after the fashion of the elder bards.”

“Foolish! Inspired!” Keats rose, and they were soon busily fashioning themselves laurel wreaths.

“It would be sacrilege to *try on* our crowns, would it not?” asked Keats, “and yet they must fit.”

“And yet they must fit,” agreed Hunt. “Your head is smaller than mine, I see. So are those of Byron and Shelley. I cannot get their hats over my portentous front.”

They eyed one another’s heads carefully, made a few last twists in the sprigs, and then ceremoniously crowned each other.

“I dub thee Bard,” said Hunt.

“I dub thee Master,” rejoined Keats. He looked quite as much awed as joking, Hunt thought, and they were silent until he poured another drink apiece.

“This must truly be ambrosia now!”

“It is a free and airy feel,” said Hunt thoughtfully. “You know we must compose upon this.”

“With all my heart!”

The knocker of the front door sounded upon the instant, and Hunt cocked his head towards the hall. Visitors were entering. “They’re ladies,” he decided. “Are they come to see me ... as well as my wife? It is the Reynolds girls. Let us go out to them.” He sighed as he reached for his laurel crown. “It seems this must go.” The strange voices sounded pleasantly.

“You may take off *your* crown,” exclaimed Keats feverishly. “But mine shall be doffed for no human being.”

“Bravo!” Hunt pressed his arm. “Come, let us see these ladies.”

The Misses Reynolds proved to be three, Jane, Mariane, and Charlotte, who was just a girl and stayed in the background. The older girls were interested, but not curious and wondering, at learning that he was a poet. They had a brother who was a poet, they said. He had had two or three books of poems published—little things—and he was younger than they were. Keats almost had to smile at this, which seemed too candid. A woman older than himself might have every charm and accomplishment, and it might even be forgotten that she was older; but loverlike thoughts of her, he was sure, were impossible. These young ladies were perhaps as much as two-and-twenty or older. They were perfect of their kind, correct, yet sympathetic; animated, yet not hoydenish. They would be as good listeners, Keats thought, as the sisters of George Felton Mathews had been, but they would understand things better, and even give their own share. Before he knew, he was bantering them and being bantered in turn like a brother, capping rhymes and matching puns.

This course was facilitated, as Keats felt when she returned, by the absence of Mrs. Hunt, who had been called away to put the children to bed. Hunt was disposed to keep things on the same level, but she made her matronly effect felt in Jane and Mariane through the solidarity of sex, confiding:



“You know, it seems strange; Hunt will have it that we are not to teach the children prayers; but how am I to put them to sleep at night? Putting them to bed and not hearing their prayers seems like a contradiction.”

“I’m sure it must,” murmured Mariane and Jane. It was certain that they were not unaccustomed to freethinking talk and ideas, but you could not have told from their manner how far their liberation went.

Hunt was talking to Charlotte.

“Won’t you sit down to the music? Mariane, my dear, we’re forgetting that Charlotte is quite a talented musician and we must hear her perform. As for her sister whose name begins with an M, she must not look so mischievous.” Hunt smiled roguishly as though at a joke he shared with Mariane, for he had noted the start she gave when he addressed his wife by name.

“Yes, do play, Charlotte dear,” said Mrs. Hunt, rising to superintend matters.

Keats forgot to regret the lost converse with his master. It even came to pass that he accompanied the Reynolds girls home to Lamb’s Conduit Street in Little Britain. By this time they were fast friends, and when they urgently invited him to their home, he promised to accept. They had told him so much about their brother, another John, that he promised himself one more friend.



## CHAPTER V

Next day there was a note from Clarke, who was become a very Bohemian. He proposed a night on which he and Keats should go to see Haydon and his gallery of immortal creations. Keats would be, he promised, as punctual as the bee to the clover. He wrote a sonnet in Haydon's honour, only to hear that Haydon would not be able to receive them, for he had to go to "Timon of Athens" at Drury Lane. Unreasonable man! But Clarke gave him Ollier's address; Keats jumped up and put Hunt's hint to the test.

The Olliers proved to be pleasant enough fellows, with a high regard for the judgment of Leigh Hunt. They thought it likely that if Keats should produce a number of poems sufficient for a book, and as good as those Hunt had printed and shown them, such a book should be published by them, and should do well. Keats walked home in sober exaltation. It would be done. Somehow he would complete his long attempts, and write another long poem in full—just to show his mettle, he told himself excitedly. Impossible lines and phrases and unrelated conceptions which scarcely approached words, harmonies and sense delights like half-recovered memories, ran through his brain, fevered him. He should begin this poem at once, that evening, if he could find a subject.

"Oh, John!" exclaimed Tom, jumping up from the sofa in their sitting-room. "George has found out the most splendid lodgings for us!"

"Where is it, young one?"

"In Cheapside, over a passage they call Bird-in-Hand Court, leading to the Queen's Arms Tavern."

"Bird-in-Hand Court," repeated Keats thoughtfully. "Are you or George smitten with some fair barmaid in the Queen's Arms?"

"No," said Tom. "Don't laugh. George spent a good deal of time, I can tell you, hunting lodgings for us."

"While I was Hunting too, I suppose. Where is George now?"

"Bargaining with the landlady."

“Is he indeed! There seems to be no need for me to go. George should have been the head of this family, instead of me.”

“Are you the head of the family?” asked Tom.

John picked up a cushion and threw it at him.

The walk around the corner from the Poultry to Cheapside was short, but they found that George had signed away their liberty. However, the two bedrooms and the sitting-room with plenty of easy chairs and an open hearth suited them. It would be grand, Tom told them on the way home, to have the new place in time for his birthday. It was a bargain, George struck in, and had they noticed how the old lady looked when he told her of other places?

“It will be a fine place for me to correct my book for the press.”

The other two pounced upon John. “What? Oh, didn’t I tell you? Messrs. Ollier are to put out a volume of mine next spring.”

Then the staid Cockney passers-by were given entertainment in spontaneity. At length they came to the old lodgings, with arms wound over one another’s shoulders, and without being run down by the traffic.

The books and luggage of the brothers did not give them much trouble in the moving; they managed to pile them and their own persons into a cab. In a few days they felt that they had been at 76 Cheapside a great while, though they still savoured the new sights and sounds, the half-genteel, half-sporting proximity of the Queen’s Arms, and hearsay of grimmer days, when Defoe had been manacled and made a spectacle in that street.

Tom went to see Fanny the morning of his birthday. George had obtained a situation in a counting-house in Clerkenwell, near Clarke, and was not at home. Evening found the three brothers together in the glow of their fireplace, drowsy from the good supper and the activities of the day. How shrunken seemed the world, with its mean concerns, while the great heart of London throbbed distantly like a sunken bell. Keats glanced at his brothers, whose eyes seemed to rest in a poetic, a visionary sleep upon the glow of the embers. Would that their lives could be thus tranquil throughout! Where would they be in five years—ten? George would make his way as a man

among men, good, burly fellow. But what of delicate Tom? If his health never improved, he might lack means of subsistence. But he would never want so long as his brothers lived.

John sprang up: the fire was low and he picked up the scuttle and spread fresh coals over it. Before sitting down he brought paper and quill and ink. It should be a sonnet for Tom's birthday. No, it should be "To My Brothers". They, reading and drowsing, beyond a smile of recognition scarcely noted his occupation. By and by they cracked nuts and drank wine and quaffed the sonnet as John read it, retasting at second hand the quietness of "this world's true joys", in midst of the pangs of bereavements, and change, loneliness, precarious chance.

This was Monday night. Yet, though the brothers were more to one another than the rest of the world could be, life had to take fresh tributaries. It was fine to see and hear men whose talents stood to the fore in their time and made the judicious of England proud. And it was exciting, the young man thought, as he hurried on Tuesday night to meet Clarke.

The studio at 41 Great Marlborough Street opened from the first floor. "This is fashion," whispered Keats almost without knowing what he said, while they waited after knocking. The November night air seemed to have given him a chill, and his teeth clicked.

Rapid and firmly planted steps approached the door, and a thickset large-headed figure stood before them; then Haydon drew them both inside. With a few brisk passes their cloaks were doffed and disposed of by the painter. He was not so tall as his way of carrying himself suggested. He was not more than thirty, but his large forehead was becoming bare. The eyes were large and glowing, the nose long but delicate-looking when seen in profile, the chin well formed, decided. But all the time he talked.

"I suppose you are surprised to find me such an emaciated wreck as I am. Intense application, I may say frenzied application, has come near to ruining my eyesight, and I fear has actually ruined my health. I spent a fortnight as a respite with Leigh Hunt, where I heard such glowing accounts of you that I am sure we are bound to be friends. Of course, what militates against my health most, however, is my own lack of care. I admit it freely.

I forget to take meals in the excess of my zeal when I am painting. One cannot neglect meals and sleep persistently and expect to retain his health. But then often-times I have had very little in my pocket to buy meals with." Haydon laughed, but Keats looked at him incredulously, scarcely believing that a man of his age and reputation would be suffered to want.

"Well, sir," said Clarke respectfully, impartially, "you have come through a great deal and accomplished things of which England must be proud."

"John Bull is no fool about art, let me tell you," said Haydon warmly. "I have always consoled myself with that reflection in my battling with the Academy. When they and the connoisseurs influence the opinion of the nobility and royalty, then I know that I have one stay, and I wait until the days when the general public is admitted to my exhibitions, and then listen to honest John; and before a really majestic picture he is really tumultuous in his applause. The great heart of the public can always be counted upon."

Haydon was a splendid talker indeed, though some of his phrases sounded as though he had said them a few times before. But quite as striking was the studio itself and its furnishings, when one could spare eyes for them. Here was "Christ's Entry Into Jerusalem", the famous half-finished canvas upon which Haydon had been working for years. Raised upon its vast easel, it seemed yards high and rods long. And all about stood and hung more-than-life-size dashing sketches of heads, heroic studies of muscles, arms and calves, crayon and charcoal drawings of torsos taken from the Elgin Marbles.

Though a vast chandelier hung in the middle of the ceiling, its cut-glass facets diffusing light from a whale-oil lamp, Haydon picked up a smaller lamp, and began a circuit of the walls, expatiating all the time. They came to some casts. "These are as pure a bit of luck as ever fell to the lot of an artist. One day last winter when I had returned discouraged and unrecovered in health from a holiday I got leave to mould. I rushed away for a plasterer. As I went along Princes Street, two of them, Italians, were working inside a shop. I seized them, said, 'Get some sacks of plaster and a cart, and follow me—I'll put money in your pocket.' As we went down to Burlington House, I warned them we might be stopped without notice, for I knew people would claim I was injuring Lord Elgin's property. They

took fire with Italian quickness, and set to with a will. We got the whole of Theseus, Illissus, Neptune's breast, and hosts of fragments, and every day artists came and gaped unutterable things. By the time Lord Elgin was stirred up we had the cream of the collection, and every one home."

"It would be enough to recover your health," said Keats.

"It was, it was. Never was such fun. My eyes got better from the excitement."

Clarke laughed. "I should have thought it ruinous."

"Now these drawings of head and arms and instep," said Keats, "must belong to this figure, do they not?"

Haydon was delighted. "To be sure they do. The model is my man Sammon, a gigantic Grenadier, a priceless fellow, factotum as well as model. But you are the first, Keats, who has ventured to identify a figure by its separate parts. Our little interchange has been enough to show me that you have great things in you. I must tell you that Leigh Hunt showed me two of your sonnets, that have the true heroic fire. Leigh and I hit it off finely—"

"He is splendid!" broke in Keats, "so ardent and sincere!"

"And the most delightful company," concurred Haydon warmly. "Not deep in knowledge moral, metaphysical, or classical, yet intense in feeling and with an intellect for ever on the alert. I have known him for a long time. When my 'Dentatus' was completed he called it a bit of old embodied lightning, in the face of the Academicians. . . . There was a picture of fiery fury! He was with me when I took it down to the Academy, and he kept torturing me the whole way: full of fun, you understand. 'Wouldn't it be a delicious thing now for a lamplighter to come around the corner and put the end of his ladder right into Dentatus' eye? Or suppose we meet a couple of dray-horses playing tricks with a barrel of beer, knocking your men down and trampling your poor Dentatus to a mummy!' He made me so nervous with his villainous torture that in my anxiety to see all clear I tripped up a corner man and as near as possible sent 'Dentatus' into the gutter."

They all laughed, but, coming next to the huge canvas, stood before it in silence. “Of course you cannot get a perfect view here. The room is not large enough, even if it were day-lit. And of course my Christ being washed out of the centre leaves the painting practically dead matter. This is the fourth time I have washed Him out, unsatisfied.”

Clarke murmured that he saw what was meant. It was a truly grandiose scheme, Keats thought. “You have an opportunity here to show all the divisions and vagaries of human character, in the faces and figures that surround the Lord as He rides into the picture.”

“That’s it! That’s it! By the Lord Harry, you’ve struck it when hundreds of connoisseurs have missed. Keats, you are a man after my own heart. It is a whole history of Christendom I am putting into this painting, not one historical moment. It is that conception that makes me a great artist,” went on Haydon, not listening. “I was not more than twenty years old when it reached me, and I fell down and thanked my Creator for such insight. The glory and good that historical painting can work for mankind is infinite. But you, Keats, you are one who will look to one horizon, not like an apprentice who showed me a painting he had done. I praised him for its colouring, ‘But,’ I said, ‘you have drawn your picture looking at two or three horizons.’”

Keats blushed as he thanked him, and was encouraged when they sat down once more to talk freely himself. Haydon, in truth, was one of the giants of the age, with Hunt and Wordsworth; and so Keats expressed himself in a sonnet he sent to Haydon next morning. And Haydon at once replied that he was sending the sonnet to Wordsworth—breath-taking thought. No man could match Haydon’s earnestness and intensity. It surpassed even Hunt.

And these were breath-taking days. On the first Sunday in December Hunt’s paper came out with the first words that had ever been printed about John Keats. An article, *Young Poets*. His at-long-last-enchanted eye devoured the words:

“The last of these young aspirants whom we have met with is we believe the youngest of them all, and just of age. His name is JOHN KEATS. He has not yet published anything except in a newspaper, but a set of his



manuscripts was handed to us the other day, and fairly surprised us with the truth of their ambition, and ardent grappling with Nature.” Then followed a little niggling about the Chapman’s Homer sonnet. But its conclusion, Hunt claimed, was “equally powerful and quiet”. Those words ran in his mind: powerful and quiet.

But, wonder upon wonders, that same evening he was to attend a party at Hunt’s house to which Lamb and Hazlitt were expected to lend their presences. He found two guests before him. One was introduced as Cornelius Webb, a fair, stocky, awkward-bodied youth who irritated him on sight. Hunt kept Webb occupied, allowing Keats to measure lances with the other, John Hamilton Reynolds—a slender fellow whose body seemed to crumple up when he was sitting down, so that you forgot he was tall. His animated, clever, plain-featured face told a good deal about him.

“It was your sonnet to Haydon that made me determined to make your acquaintance. Magnificent: ‘Great spirits now on earth are sojourning.’ Haydon ran around to me the morning you sent it, and told me about meeting you the night before. I myself dashed off a second sonnet to please him.”

“Yes, an inspiring man,” insisted Keats loyally.

“Titanic!” agreed Reynolds warmly. “His struggles are enough to stir the pulses of a . . .”

“Of a crone.”

“Of a critic,” laughed Reynolds. “I’ll tell you: you are going to have something to do with that gentry before you are much older. You saw Hunt’s article about us in to-day’s *Examiner*?”

“A fine defiance! Whatever the old school, with its Southey and Samuel Rogers and its rule-of-thumb dotards say, there is work for us to do.” Keats was enjoying mightily this first talk with Reynolds, brisk and, though a little stiff, not strange. Here was a young fellow of his own age, who knew exactly what you were talking about, who was trying to do the same things as oneself, and who could give one’s own ideas an enchanting simplicity and a captivating difference. It made him want to laugh. He knew they

could talk for days, agreeing while they disagreed, and disagreeing while they agreed. At last he had found one of his peers. Reynolds' three little books did not matter. Fine fellow as Reynolds was, he was willing to give him that much start in the race.

Reynolds had not known that Lamb was coming, but seemed to be acquainted with him. "Lamb is an odd stick, a mind that sinks shafts in odd places to bring up strange ores. I suppose the greatest service he has done this generation is in his *Specimens from the English Dramatic Poets*."

Lamb, Keats further learned, gave a queer appearance, with his stuttering and stammering; but they were because he thought of too many things at once; and they made more effective the astonishing brevities he brought forth. "I suppose no man's odd when you understand his principle. But he'll make you ill of laughing when he's a bit so-so; but when he's sober, none wiser."

Cornelius Webb approached them. Hunt had just left the room to have the right wine brought up.

"You fellows are having a merry time! Talking of poetry, I suppose?"

"Why, yes," returned Keats. "And critics."

"Wordsworth and Byron are a theme I never tire on," said Webb with a simper on his heavy features. "And are your ideas of poetry the same as Leigh Hunt's?" he asked Keats.

Keats looked at him, and a glitter came into his eye, though his face remained placid. "I can't satisfy myself that poetry belongs to any one mind. It seems to be a creation of Nature in men willing to look to Nature instead of fashion."

"All things are subject to fashion," muttered Webb.

"But you never let me see any of your verses, Webb," interposed Reynolds.

"For me, I can't say that I have altogether decided to be a poet," announced Webb smartly. "I am too busy with duties for various journals."

Voices were heard outside, and Hunt came in, looking burly and long-legged alongside one of the oddest-looking little men Keats had seen in

London. His feet and legs were so small in their gaiters and buckled slippers that his square-shouldered body with its large head seemed to float insubstantially upon the dusk of the room below tables.

“Mr. Lamb, gentlemen,” said Hunt, and introduced them severally.

“I am charmed. Ch-armed, Hunt,” Lamb added, “with your literary dove-cote. It ss-seems that I am being given a sight of the future.”

“Indeed,” said Hunt genially, “a great deal may be expected from men as young as these, and showing equal promise.”

“Not equal promise, I’ll be bound,” said Lamb quickly, looking shrewdly at Keats. Hunt and he briskly crossed rapiers for a few minutes.

But that head, Keats saw when Lamb sat down, was magnificent if somewhat heavily formed. From a full-face view, his countenance was rather massive and rectangular, but the profile showed a nose almost hawk-like; while the eyes gave an effect of benevolent cynicism which might change into a merry hardness or a baffled shyness at the bidding of the other expressive features.

“I will have the laugh of Hazlitt, perhaps. He once told me very elaborate directions to come here, and then he said, ‘I will come myself if I c-c-can find the way.’”

“A true critic in that,” laughed Hunt.

“We must not let them impose such opinions of critics as that, Mr. Lamb,” said Cornelius Webb.

“Hunt,” said Lamb, “you must know my intention to-night. I shall undo my teeth and ‘suffer wet damnation to run through ‘em’ if you will do the like with your bottles.”

“Yes, gentlemen, we may be compelled to drink to Hazlitt and not with him, if he much longer delays his coming. But London is grown unto such a prodigious town that it is a great and awesome distance from every place to every other place.”

“Not to forget back again,” said Keats. Lamb twinkled at him, and pulled an engraved snuff-box from his tail-pocket.

“Who talks against London?” demanded an imperious voice. Hazlitt had come in unannounced, a lean figure slouching over the back of a chair, his steel-coloured eyes roving over them from beneath straggling black hair. Hunt hastened to usher him to the hearth. Lamb shifted upon his chair, and turned his head without turning his eyes, in a way which made the young fellow feel that he considered a choice, boon spirit had arrived—or a foeman worthy of his steel.

“You have saved us, Hazlitt—saved us—from an indecorum, which Milton says is the worst thing. We should have had to drink without you if you had not been here!”

“I’ll take your word for that. But don’t say a word against my London. Has she not starved with heroic thoroughness every genius these British Islands have produced? But what I was thinking of as I came up to-night was that, no matter how far I walked in Birmingham or Liverpool, I could not find company as I find it here. There, the weight given every man’s opinion is decided by the number of his acres of land or of his votes. In London a man’s social qualities and human behaviour are the measure, and lacking them he is likely to find his money as much a drawback as his boorishness.”

Lamb sneezed his snuff boisterously, and his words skipped forth like hail-pellets. “Now I know why I am so popularly received! But my *receipts* are more popular still.”

“None of your bad puns, Lamb,” said Hunt. “You are keeping me from introducing our young friends to Mr. Hazlitt.”

“I have met them before,” Hazlitt nodded at Reynolds and Webb. “Except Mr. Keats; and I know him through his fine sonnet in Hunt’s rag!” He sat down beside Keats, who was nearly dumb with delight. “Yes, your sonnet could scarcely be finer. I am myself such a Homer enthusiast that I’m very particular. But this touched the spot with me. Ah, Homer! Poetry bright as the day, strong as a river!”

“To thank you,” said Keats in a low tone, while the others talked, “would be to mistake your disinterested care for such things. But I must say that from the depths of taste of the author of the ‘Essay on the Principles of Human Action’, praise is to be valued at its highest!”

“What! You have read that forgotten address to Fame! Sometimes I forget that I have written it myself. That thin quarto, though, cost me seven or eight years of labour.”

“William!” called Hunt. “You would make us weep over our early follies and love’s labours lost!” Keats felt for some reason an implied criticism of himself. Hazlitt continued a monologue which gradually diverted the attention of the others.

“Ah, we weary scribes,” he groaned. “The best of us, and that means the best wits, lead a harassing, precarious life—like the handsomest faces ‘upon the town’. In the end come to no good. Who wouldn’t be one of those ‘warm’ men in the City! Look at Sir William. Calipash and calipee are written in his face: he rolls about his unwieldy bulk in a sea of turtle-soup. How many haunches of venison does he carry on his back! He is larded with jobs and contracts; he is stuffed and swelled out with layers of banknotes and invitations to dinner. Nature and fortune are not so much at variance as to differ about such fellows as he. To enjoy the good the gods provide is to deserve it.”

“A large habit of body and a flashy habit of dress cover—” Hunt began.

“D-don’t say a wolf in Lamb’s clothing,” stuttered Lamb.

“No,” said Hazlitt, “what I would have been before all else is not one of those rotund fellows, easily as they slip through life, but a painter. No one not a painter could understand that. In writing you have to contend with the world: in painting you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task and are happy. You never tire, because you set down not what is stale to you, but what you have just discovered. There is a continual creation out of nothing going on. But God did not intend me to be a painter. I did my part, and failed.”

“You c-create out of nothing,” said Lamb, “and you come as near creating nothing as creation can get to.”

“That is right,” agreed Hunt. “What pleasure does a painting give posterity beyond a few moments of gratified curiosity? You see a portrait of some worthy man or woman, say Mrs. Richardson looking as if she had just been

chucked under the chin. What of it? You can see dozens of women like Mrs. Richardson, or men like Mr. Richardson, for all his Clarissas, any time you walk through St. James's Park—even on the debtors' benches. The pleasures of poetry are of a different order."

"For my p-part," said Lamb, "I would prefer to be Beaumont and Fletcher, if their spirits would consent to reside within this frame."

"Oh, if we speak of persons we would have been," said Hunt airily, "I would have been nobody but Johnson, the great uncouth. Picture him, as you easily can," he turned to Keats, "handing ladies into their carriage—Madame de Boufflers, mother of the Chevalier—his own wig and raiment as astounding as his manner was courtly; or snubbing some o'erweening big-wig; or taking Goldsmith's *Vicar* out under his arm to sell it to a bookseller and rescue Goldsmith from the clutches of his landlady."

"I shall follow Mr. Lamb's example," Webb said, a smile overspreading his face. "But my chosen two spirits would be Wordsworth and my Lord Byron."

"Why not?" murmured Lamb.

"A wise choice, Byron," said Hazlitt. "He towers above his fellows by all the height of the peerage. His name so accompanied becomes the mouth well, because the reader in being familiar with the poet's works seems to claim acquaintance with the Lord. Far better this than the ragged regiment of genius."

"Gentlemen, we are neglecting our wine, and I my office of host. Permit me." Hunt rose, smiling with amusement and sympathy at Keats, who saw that he was purposely letting his guests take the conversation away with them.

"Oh, Hunt," said Lamb, "you will have us all singing catches, if this keeps up. *I* shall sing the gentlemen a catch by and by; I should say this, for I doubt they would take my hint and request it."

Hazlitt eyed his glass and said: "You will have us talking not of whom we would have been, but what women we would have been *with*."

Hunt whistled.

“Ogni donna cangiar di colore;  
Ogni donna mi fa palpitar.”

“*Ogni donna* who is no bluestocking,” Hazlitt amended. “I think I am safe in passing this on to our young friends. Courting a literary woman or being courted by one is to bring coals to Newcastle. I would rather that a woman did not know that I was an author. I like myself for myself, and if she is to love me under any consideration, it is not too much to ask her to do the same. But as for your flower-girls, chamber-maids, milkmaids—”

“Wh-what? Not all maids?” interjected Lamb.

“Of such as these I could give you a fine collection. Fresh, rosy-cheeked creatures! So long as they do not know you are an author. Then whatever you say is queer and has a double meaning, and you are an odd fellow, and you would be better to sue at my lady’s boudoir.”

Hunt said, “Methinks, unless I have lost the thread of the discussion, the question is parallel with that of whom one should have been: what woman in history or literature should one have consorted with?”

“Imogen, in *Cymbeline*,” said Keats.

“For my part,” Hazlitt rejoined, “I have always had a weakness for the beauties of the court of Charles II.”

“A winsome fellow, that Count Grammont,” cried Lamb, “Historian of the gay and gallant. Do you mind, William, Killigrew’s country cousin?”

“Do I? And how he was resolutely refused by Miss Westminster—one of the Maids of Honour,” he explained. “When Killigrew heard that she had unexpectedly—to him at least—been brought to bed of a child, he fell on his knees and thanked God that she might now take compassion on his suit.”

“And Jacob Hill’s prowess, and Miss Stuart’s garters!” They shook their heads in despair of giving the others any inkling of the delicious humour of these episodes, and drank deep anew.

“But the killingest passage,” went on Lamb, “was the Chevalier Hamilton’s assignation with Lady Chesterfield, when she kept him shivering all night in an old outhouse.”

The little blind god with the bow was a fellow of broad mischief, nor, Hunt opined, were the pangs always sublime that he inflicted. He mentioned Ariosto and Pulci, and the immortal Boccace; while Webb informed the company that the Greeks did pretty well in that sort, as in Petronius. The evening, Reynolds murmured, was coming to its shank end. Apropos of this, perhaps, Lamb addressed Webb.

“Thirty years ago I was a jester to a morning paper, and a fashion of flesh, or rather pink, coloured hose for the ladies came up. Conceits upon this subject I found sovereign, and always eagerly lapped up.”

Hazlitt burst into a great roar, and the company joined him, rising to break up by unspoken consent. Webb’s ears were tinted like the ladies’ hose.

“Junkets, you have been silent all evening. What have you in dispraise or blame of the gods?” Hunt turned to Keats.

Keats filled his lungs. “I can feel in only one way after such converse. If you had asked me whom I had rather have been, I’d have said ‘Shakespeare’!”

“We’ll not accept the compliment,” muttered Lamb. “N-not unless you show us the ghost of Hamlet’s father!”

Hunt and Keats went to the door to see them off. “What a whoreson night,” said Hazlitt, stepping outside briskly. Lamb, his steps more uncertain than his tongue, clutched the arm of the iron-framed critic. Webb and Reynolds soon passed them and went ahead.

“I’m glad I agreed to stay the night with you,” Keats said, when they came back from the door and rubbed the cold from their hands. “It is late.” He grinned and yawned youthfully. “They’re great fun. But Lamb cannot stand stupid people.”

“No, that is his great fault. With unsympathetic people he becomes queerer and queerer until they wonder whether they or he are mad. . . . I shall get



some bedding without disturbing the family if possible, and put you up on the couch, here among the memorials of our talks.”

“Thank you.” Keats sank into a chair and looked at the dying embers; at the empty chairs. Those two men had such a genius for appreciation and definition, for almost creating the characters of great poets, that they were placed above the rank of any poets save the greatest. Warmth swelled his heart. When he had bidden Hunt good-night, undressed, and lain down upon the couch, his mind was thronged with the presences and voices of this and other evenings. The room was a wonderful room in his life. “Small as an old mansion’s closet,” as Hunt had said, it was alive. Here were books and portfolios and prints at which they had looked together, while the summer rain, fragrant as now the winter’s rain was chill, drenched the windows. Here were statuettes of the masters of song, and prints from Nicholas Poussin and Stothard that showed trains of nymphs, and marble columns, two fair girls bending over a toddling child, more nymphs soothing Diana’s timorous limbs—a free and airy world into which his spirit flew every time his glance was raised. But the room was alive with other spirits now. Somehow, not for themselves or what they said, they symbolized poetry. They made him resolve to give the utmost fibre of his being for poetry and count death itself a luxury. He had gained, surely for the first time, a glimpse of the vast idea of poetry swinging onward before him, and it was time that he gave forth his vision and his creed. Oh for ten years, ten years in one night, in which to overwhelm oneself in the realms of Flora and Pan, steeping the senses in beauty, beauty of sight and smell of growing fruit, of white-handed nymphs in shady places, kisses wooed from averted mouths, as on and on and on you fare into that fadeless land!

He roused from his doze.

Sternier than this was the life of poetry, once this lucent and luscious beauty had penetrated the soul; mighty workings, toil in awed solitude, utmost searchings for the dark mysteries of the human soul, maddest leapings from mountain crags into the blue. . . . The blue ocean dim, with its isles, must be explored more humbly, more fearlessly. He should rise and begin his poem; he should sleep; sleep too was lovely luxury, maker of poets, like the moon.

He lay and looked upon the firelit room, and lived his ten years. Nothing troubled him but happiness, and he lay there awake until morning.



## CHAPTER VI

Keats sank back patiently and waited for the plaster to set about his features. Haydon's friendship had swept on from height to height like billows. He insisted that this young friend was to be an immortal genius, praised himself for his own discernment, and would have given Keats no peace, if the young man had not been eager, before making a plaster cast of his face. Reynolds was present in the studio, and they had been making a lark of the occasion. Haydon told how his friend Wilkie had lain like a Knight Templar on a monument and they had quizzed his helplessness. It was a conspiracy of Devonshire men—the Reynolds family hailed from Devon as Haydon did—against a Cockney, Keats declared, as he watched the artist cutting a piece of linen cloth to moisten and press down over his hair. Then he was still, reflecting that even if the plaster could render his hair, it could not do justice to the reddish-auburn colouring. But perhaps this pale cast, grey as with time, would be a symbol of immortality after all.

This ardent, tempestuous Haydon, grand fellow! But he was so strong in his prejudices that you felt it useless to argue. Now, for instance, he was telling Reynolds of a wilderness of weaknesses in Hazlitt, who, he said, had sat down and moralized on the impossibility of Art being revived in England “—not because people had no talent, not because there was no subject-matter, or no patronage, but because he did not take the trouble which Titian took, and was too lazy to try”. What could one say to that? At least one would not laugh at it, as Reynolds was doing. Haydon even seemed inclined against Leigh Hunt, strange as it seemed, for Cowden Clarke had said that he had heard Haydon glauze Hunt with adulation. It was a nothing, perhaps, less than nothing; but when the artist had first spoken of taking the cast, there was talk of Hunt, and Haydon had described Hunt's features in unflattering terms: Oriental eyes, thick, curving, sensual lips, weak chin. Ah, well, if one's friends were not one another's friends, what could one do? They professed to be, there was the rub. But he would speak out against any active disparagement of Hunt.

But these were happy weeks. New friends galore! Each time he went to Hunt's somebody new was there. Every evening, almost every afternoon,

was, or could be, occupied by friends. Clarke, Haslam, Severn, Reynolds. The Wylies were constantly reminding him through George of their standing invitation. The fellows of medical schooldays seemed to have dropped away, except that Stephens came to one of the “concerts” the brothers held in their lodgings, and found himself very much at home. So did Wells, Tom’s schoolfellow. They all imitated musical instruments, pausing duly to wet their whistles; or some of the older fellows might sit about a game of vingt-et-un. Everyone was spirited and gay, ready to take and give a joke. If somebody bit into a wax fruit which had been soberly offered him, or seemed to enjoy a sweet which was filled with physic, he was likely to laugh as loudly as the perpetrator, knowing that he would even the score with a better bam. Some of these new friends were of the kind you could think of hanging to throughout life. There was James Rice, Reynolds’s friend, an odd fellow, but so much of a piece, and taking himself so casually, that you forgot that. No one could appear less lively, in repose; and no one could be better fun. He was always ill, but always coming on his feet again like a cat. Never was a fellow with more liking for his joke; and the riper the joke, so long as it was a joke, the better. His favourite reading was broad Elizabethan and Restoration comedies, and his marvellously apt and unapt quotations brought many a guffaw from the friends. Nor were his original jokes behind his recollected ones. . . . Oh, it was glorious to be one of such a crew of fine fellows, to spar with them, matching wits, to be accepted as a good fellow oneself—“little Keats”—but also as something more, a genius, praised, respected by older men, the choicest spirits of England. Soon the book would be out, people would know what he had to say for himself; by and by, if his strength grew, he would be numbered among the British Poets. A smaller band than the ignorant educated knew; but that was no matter: even they would see the ascendancy of the new men. His blood boiled with impatience. Not a day could be spared from the great task. His hand stirred.

“Scene in the room where Milton had meditated,” Reynolds was chuckling.

“A scene indeed, sir,” Haydon rejoined. He had been telling of the christening of Hazlitt’s boy—with no parson, and a heartless lack of victuals for the feast. “The wit of these people could not reconcile me to the

violation of all the decencies of life. I only recovered on returning home.” (Yet Keats had heard him say he lunched heartily before going.) “I placed a candle on the floor and regarded the imposing look of my picture, and retired to bed filled with thought.”

“A good thing to retire filled with,” Keats thought, and howled with mirth inwardly, his cheeks hurting under the plaster. He waved his foot at Reynolds.

Life was the killingest! London was the most enchanting! You walked about the crowded streets in daylight, watching the people, sniffing stale tarts at the pastrycooks’ doors in dusty tins, watching office lads in large hats and white trousers peeping under the bonnets of milliners’ and stay-makers’ apprentices, costermongers on their beats in the suburbs, cabs and hackney coachmen on the stand, polishing their vehicles, old women in shawls cheapening a ham in a shop. And at night after the lamplighters had been around with their ladders, and the streets had a mysterious gloom, and the nine-o’clock beer was brought out of the ordinary on a tray, with a lantern in front; and the servant girl pousetting shamelessly with the officer of the watch outside the hedge. He went to Drury Lane Theatre with Clarke, still devoted to the shilling gallery and Mrs. Siddons as when he had walked to them from Edmonton. Vociferous chairmen passed them, crying, “By your leave”, if the vehicle was carried backward—empty. And after the play, there was still time to wander a little in queer streets, mindful of the time when one would not wish to do so, when one would fee a link-boy gladly to go ahead with his light, even not so far abroad as Hampstead. Then the queer night-cellars with little swaths of light across the pavement and into the road, and the roaring of a gambling fight, or some wretch quarrelling with his rib. Life, life!

But it was curious how the friends seemed to recede, to melt away, at the approach of Christmas. Most of them seemed to have friends and holiday enjoyments in which he was not considered. It was the dullness of the Sunday, chill, raw and foggy, which made him think of such things, he thought. He could not sink into a quietude to match Nature’s. The night before, he had talked and planned Christmas with his brothers. They were, George was determined, to go to the Wylies’. By a kind of perversity such

demonstrations of warmheartedness now seemed gallingly futile. Tom and George looked at each other and grinned, seeing John in one of his blue spells, while he felt that he gave no sign, his eyes on the book in his lap, his left ankle in his hard right palm.

Suddenly a clangour of bells broke out, near and far, resounding dull and hollow through the cold mist. Keats sat there, and his beloved quietude became more precious than a jewelled amulet taken from him by vandals. Resentment filled him at thought of the stout burghers and their beflounced wives and children with shaking cheeks, wending to chapel: streets full of hypocrites convinced of the ugliness of life! He drew his chair up to the table, sharpened his quill, dipped it into the ink, and restored himself to good humour. Christmas Day found him in high spirits. Wasn't this tacitly a betrothal party? Keats's heart warmed and his eye glistened as he looked at his tall, powerful brother, and the short, spirited Georgiana, school-girlish in dress, with blue eyes and merry, turned-up nose. "Nymph of the downward smile and sidelong glance", she was in that day's sonnet, and she seemed to have many and unconscious moods, trances of sober thought and labyrinths of sweet utterance. He saw, he thought, the budding of Woman in her, while with her brothers and mother they ate and drank and joked and sang. And as he lay in bed that night he thought of her as a new, inestimably precious sister, remembering the dainty bend of her eyebrows like feathers from a rook fallen on a bed of snow.

He could not sleep; the visions of the day returned to him as many times before, twisting themselves into new significances. But now they did not lead to emulation of good fellows, to ambition, and once more to poetry. The apparition of Georgiana Wylie made him alive to all the thoughts of girls, of love, he had ever experienced. He had tried to be honest with himself. Love, he now saw, was impossible for him, with his small stature; what girl would look at him twice when there were more manlike fellows on every street-corner? It might well do for a poem, "Had I a man's fair form, then might my sighs Be echoed swiftly through that ivory shell Thine ear." As a boy he had thought of the happiness given knights when they were permitted to succour ladies. And when he wrote of such he lived the moment, he did not preach upon it; with his Calidore he felt a moisture

on his cheek when the lady bent over him from her palfrey, and dared not look up to know whether it was tears of languishment or evening dew pearled upon her tresses: like Calidore he “blessed with lips that trembled and with glistening eye all the soft luxury that nestled in his arms”. Among the delights of the new world that had opened to him last spring he had prayed that nothing should call him from the birds and streams and grass, nothing less sweet than the rustle of a maiden’s gown fanning away the dandelion’s down; or the light music of her nimble toes patting against the sorrel as she goes. He pictured how she would start and blush in her innocence of thought, thus to be surprised; he begged to be allowed to lead her across the brook, watching her lips and downward look, to touch her wrist and listen one moment to her breathing. Pleasant enough, all this, for a boy waiting for love, not certain that it could not be. But then there were girls . . . flippant, vain, inconstant—with a vengeance—not dressed in lovely modesty; yet somehow elating, so that his spirit danced about them. His fellow-students had known many such. But for him? In Georgiana’s eye he saw the blue of the sea and the sky, transfigured, alive with fate.

He went to see Fanny during the Christmas holidays; poor girl, her little life went on from day to day, unschooled by kindness. To see the old year out he went with Clarke to Hunt’s. A cricket was chirruping somewhere about the hearth and, recalling their summer walks about Caen Wood and Hampstead Heights, Hunt proposed a competition in writing sonnets on the grasshopper and the cricket. Haydon insisted that he call every day if possible. Always there were additions, changes to be made in the *Poems* which were to be published any day now. On the thirty-first he woke to the slipping away of January, and before the month had departed into limbo, wrote a sonnet about an unseasonable thaw. It did not suit him, but it eased the chafing to have done something. Poetry was the first of his needs.

But Reynolds was the first of friends, it seemed. The girls were delightful, and evenings in their home charming with the dignity of Mrs. Reynolds; witty and socially graceful, she was an intimate in Lamb’s circle. Mr. Reynolds, John’s father, was writing-master in Christ’s Hospital, Lamb’s and Coleridge’s and Hunt’s old school: he recounted legends of them which still haunted the walls and common rooms. It all made Keats think of



what his home would have been if his parents had lived. John Reynolds, however, did not seem to care much for domestic joys; he liked to have Keats to himself as a boon companion, away from his family.

They played the man about town. What curiosities there were they had to see: Richer the Juggler, the champion fives player, boxing bouts, art galleries, and plays. Reynolds in his easy way got them behind the scenes; they became occupied with a very youthful actress, Miss Macauley, who, rumour said, had written some kind of book while with Macready's company at Newcastle. She was a pretty, if not very witty, creature, though so spoiled by popular attention that they made no attempt to become intimate, and soon left the train. They felt themselves no match in the entertainment of actresses for older men with money, and told themselves they had no desire to be.

Where they did feel themselves more or less on a footing with the bloods and the sports was at the Fives Courts, and at Jack Randall's place in Chancery Lane. There they would hie many a night when the street lamps were lit, to watch the sparring in the heavy, leather-smelling, tobacco-smelling air of the vast shed-like building. The famous Pierce Egan would be there, and they could pass quips with him or with Captain Barclay, who had trained Tom Cribb. Both the courts and Randall's had a ring on a raised platform, where the dead-game sports could get up and spar. Keats and Reynolds were not content merely to look on. Soon they would strip and enjoy a mill themselves. Reynolds was slight and wiry, but the advantage he had in height was overcome by Keats's stubbornness and fierce vigour, the power in his broad shoulders. It was not long before they became so expert that people like the Davis brothers did not mind having a go with one or the other. But Rice, when he went, could never be induced to put on the gloves. Rice seemed to be the crony Keats had displaced in Reynolds's companionship, but did not seem to make anything of that; he had shown an instant liking for Keats, and came along or went his own way with the same whimsical calm, as wise as he was waggish.

One night Hunt gave warning that he was going to give a dinner-party of ceremonial cast. Haydon would be there, of course, and Horace Smith, and Shelley and his present wife. They got talking of Shelley. For a fellow

three years older than Keats, not four-and-twenty, he had been through a deal of experience; and he was the son of a baronet. He had gone to Ireland after being expelled from the University and marrying his first wife; there he had composed and printed a tract addressed to the Irish People, in attempted mitigation of their wrongs. He seemed to produce such pamphlets as a conjurer pulled rabbits from a hat; for he gave the impression that he spent his days talking and enjoying Nature. But they caused him a good deal of inconvenience. There was a "Proposal for an Association of Philanthropists," and "The Vindication of a Natural Diet" (he was a vegetarian) and the "Necessity of Atheism". Ostracism and badgering were his rewards; and even to get his manifestoes circulated he had continually to pay new printers and cajole new publishers. "In short," said Hunt, "no man gives warmer wishes or more sincere effort to the betterment of his fellowman than Shelley; and few can have had so little gratitude for their efforts."

"Perhaps he should not try to change his fellows," suggested Keats.

"It's quite possible that he goes too far in his efforts," agreed Hunt. "But his sense of the ideal in conduct and social matters is so high and so intense! I tell you there is no more generous fellow living, Keats! And his true greatness is shown in his simplicity and boyishness, his childlike playfulness. He came down to see me, after a warm correspondence following my article on the three young poets."

"Yes," said Keats dryly. "Men are children still, but they might to their own advantage sometimes curb their childish behaviours." It was the first time Hunt's own youthful impulsiveness had jarred upon himself in memory.

"He is, he is a man in every sense," cried Hunt. "A generous, noble soul. Why, have I never told you? My trial and my expenses at Horsemonger's Lane were very heavy, with the paper still running and my family to keep: I got into debt, and I have not yet got out of it. Well, Shelley offered, when he was down here before Christmas, to pay it all off. What do you think of that? And long before, he offered to pay my fine, so that I need not have suffered imprisonment, but for my principles, which forbade taking such assistance. He would share with anyone he truly esteems, who chanced to want."

“I suppose he is a talented poet, eh?”

Hunt, for a rarity, looked offended. Who were these young poets to sneer at one another and thereby at his protectorate? “Without depreciation of other geniuses, yes. You know, *perhaps*, his superb high thought in the ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’ which we printed in the *Examiner* not long ago?”

“Yes, superb in its way.” Hunt’s pure goodness of heart and zeal for the recognition of anything he admired dictated his profuse and somewhat injudicious expressions of admiration. It occurred to Keats that even to people outside of Hunt’s enemies, his unbridled enthusiasm might do damage to whatever cause he espoused. At the risk of offence he had to try to explain his objections to Shelley’s poem: “Superb. And high thought, too, I grant you. I would not cavil at the execution or even the matter. There are beautiful lines of luxury. But the principle of the thing does not seem to me true. It is not Shakespeare’s or even Milton’s, who said that poetry should be simple, sensuous, passionate—”

“Why, John Keats, how can you say that Shelley’s poem is not all of those things?”

“I am talking about the principle, not to detract . . . . In order to express intellectual beauty you have to bring up pictures and delights of sensuous beauty. To write a hymn to intellectual beauty is a kind of contradiction.”

“Of course,” Hunt parried, recovering, “you don’t mean there is no other kind of beauty but sensuous beauty.”

“I’m not sure that I don’t,” declared Keats. “How can you apprehend beauty save by the senses? Moral beauty is apprehended by the natural rightness in a man.”

“Be that as it may, Shelley is one of the new men, and there is none better. Shall you come to the dinner?” Half an hour ago the question would have been farcically supererogatory.

“Of course I shall be glad to meet any friends of my beloved master, *Libertas*.” Keats spoke with Hunt’s own lightness, but his master was scarcely mollified, and they parted more coolly than ever before. As he thought it over, it appeared a shame; but then, was Hunt always to have

the sovereignty? That idea of Hunt's that one should act with the abandon of a child, when you had sounded it, was right, in a way. Wordsworth too had vindicated the emotions, which had long been denied their virtues in a world of formalism and fine and coarse manners. The instinctive man was the right man. But even old Wordsworth had let his mind rule him so long that his long face should have scared his own simple Lucy Grey.

On the evening of the dinner, an air of rosy harmony greeted Keats. One other guest had arrived, a man who seemed tall and old, not forty, but getting on towards it. Hunt introduced Horace Smith, a well-known figure from the time five years back when his and his brother's inimitable parodies *Rejected Addresses* had appeared. They were men about town combining Bohemian lightness with sound taste and character. The three were chaffing about the Muse and the Golden Calf (Smith spent his days on the Stock Exchange) and agreeing that even a social philosopher had to eat, when, as though the words had been a cue, Godwin's daughter and Percy Bysshe Shelley, her husband, were announced.

A slim, girlishly willowy figure was Shelley's, and tall, Keats saw. His voice was high and sweet, almost too piercing to be pleasant. Mary Shelley, daughter of the famous Mary Wollstonecraft, had a long, regular face, less handsome, he thought, than the portrait of her feminist mother. But Shelley's wife herself must have attainments associated with travel and intercourse with gifted men. He looked at her with instinctive respect and his accustomed shyness, but he had no chance to withdraw into himself and at the same time remain a spectator. Shelley turned from his friends Hunt and Horace Smith and spoke eagerly:

"One of the pleasures to which I have been looking forward, almost ever since my return to England, has been this opportunity of meeting Mr. Keats. You will surely call and see me while we are in London. I must be given an opportunity of reading more of your poetry."

"Why, yes. Of course, I had rather show my stuff in permanent form, between boards."

"Ah, my friend, it is not always so permanent, is it, Smith? My books have had the most curious mischances; out of print or withdrawn, or what not.

It's just as well, for I am ill-satisfied with a great deal of the work. If I were asked to advise a young poet from my own experience, I would say not to publish a book for a long time."

There was nothing to be said to this! Horace Smith, who had been talking to Mary Shelley, made some perfunctory remark, and with the appearance of Mrs. Hunt and her younger sister, Miss Kent, who contributed to the paper, the conversation became general until they went into the dining-room and dinner was served. They had started the entrée when Haydon came in and took his place opposite Shelley. The latter had been toying with food and exhaling words with gusto. "It is only in contemplation of a life and objects unmeasured and infinite that the being can be joyous and tranquil and self-possessed. The sky—the sea," he was saying in his gentle manner and high-pitched voice. "As for that detestable religion, the Christian, it has been the source of the most self-centred delusions, making the prime object of man the saving of his own puny individual soul."

Haydon, who had come in slightly flustered by haste and his tardiness, glanced around the table in dumbfounded consternation. "Was Mr. Shelley belittling the Christian religion?" He glanced with condescension at the broccoli Shelley was cutting on his plate in place of the meat on his own. Hunt interposed smoothly.

"It is a matter which will not bear arguing. Nothing should be done to tamper with the faith of simple souls who depend upon it."

Haydon gave him a look fitted for an enemy, or worse, a faithless friend. "Sir," he addressed Shelley, "you have been upon the Continent of late, have you not? The revolution taught a good few of the advanced intellects of the day just where theory and the practicality of government come to a parting of the ways," he continued with a guarded lack of animation which seemed to parody Shelley's perfectly simple courtesy. Hunt and Smith exchanged glances, and Mrs. Hunt simpered at the other ladies.

"To make an excuse for the oppressors of mankind because one's opponents chance to be defeated in their aspirations is not the sort of thing a man of your insight would do voluntarily, I am certain."

“But was not Bonaparte an oppressor of mankind? And I think I have heard that he represented the forces of revolution.”

“But how long?” asked Keats.

“Yes; misrepresented ’em would be better,” said Horace Smith.

“Bonaparte,” said Shelley, “was simply another tyrant. An unambitious slave. The fact that he misled the people by means of the very aspiration to freedom casts no reflection upon that aspiration.”

Dinner was nearly over; dessert had come and the servant gone. Hunt was enjoying the wordy battle, even seemed to egg each side on. “But after all, who knows? In another age, Napoleon may be regarded by the credulous as a major prophet, like Moses or Mr. Paul.” He smiled blandly.

“Let us,” exclaimed Haydon, swallowing hastily, “let us go on without appellations of that kind. I detest them.”

“Oh, the question irritates you.”

“And always will when so conducted. I am like Johnson; I will not suffer so awful a question as the truth or falsehood of Christianity to be treated like a new farce, and if you persist I will go.”

“But really, Mr. Haydon, as reasonable men, we will have to admit that many errors are current on these very matters. For example, it is plain to the most ordinary intelligence that the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations are inconsistent.” Shelley advanced this proposition as though hopeful that it would be agreed with.

“Inconsistent they are not,” shouted Haydon. “The Ten Commandments have been the foundation of all the codes of law on earth.”

Shelley and Hunt gave Shakespeare as an instance, but Haydon outquoted them, and Hunt actually seemed to become blindly partisan.

“No doubt, Haydon, you derive a great deal of comfort from the Scriptures. You are *inspired*, are you not, Haydon, when you undertake a picture of Christ? Is that why you have to rub it out half a dozen times?”

“I thank God I am at least as truly inspired as any flighty aesthete by some old ‘tale of love and languishment’, to give it no worse name.”

“Gentlemen,” said Keats, “it must be remembered there are ladies present, and that the tone of your discussion is becoming warmer than need be.” He had been giving strained attention. How could such men speak so?

“I would not be such a borrower as you, Haydon, for the world.”

“My borrowings have been from the purest and most primitive sources.”

The ladies had been carrying on a conversation of their own from the time the men had become embroiled, but the high words could not be ignored, and Mrs. Hunt was proposing that they move into the sitting-room. Haydon followed them at once, but the other men lingered, Hunt and Smith remarking upon his ferocity. Shelley was pressing Keats to share his plans for the summer. He intended to go down to Great Marlow, in Bucks. It was convenient, and on the Thames, with fine opportunities for boating. He was to write a long poem, “Laon and Cythna”, and he hoped that Keats had a long poem in mind too, so that, in the manner of the bards of old, they might spur one another on as rivals.

“That would be more valuable to me than to you, I fear,” remarked Keats. “I’ll confess I have a poem of some scope in mind. It is to be a kind of recreation of the Endymion tale. ‘An ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own’, it is possible; and yet I may be very uneasy in the composition of it, and no good companion. Still, I may take up establishment in the country during the summer.”

“It is a splendid idea. I hope you will be near us.” Shelley was meanwhile taking a hint. As he walked away from the house, Keats thought he saw through the motives of this too-friendly man. “He wants the satisfaction of helping me as he has helped all his other friends. Not this time, me young lordling!”

But when Reynolds expressed willingness to call upon Shelley with him he agreed. Shelley received them rather coolly, seeming to feel that the two as fast friends were leagued against him in silent criticism. Or could it be that he did not like Reynolds, or (impossible!) was jealous of him? Perhaps

it was because Reynolds kept telling him of the fine letter he had received from Wordsworth on presentation of the *Naiad*, and even mentioned the fine letter Byron had sent him on receipt of his first book, *Safie, An Eastern Tale*. It was very kind of those two gentlemen, Shelley told him.

Shelley's notion, the two friends agreed, of Keats's not publishing a book now, was absurd. The very next week, the Keats brothers held a party in honour of its coming-out. After supper with Clarke, wine and chestnuts, for roasting on the hearth, and cards were brought forth. Charles Ollier, a plump little man with the face of an epicure, said, "So I'm the first to come. I give myself more credit for being 'the first and onlie begetter' of your volume, my dear Keats." Then Reynolds of the merry presence, and dry, wise James Rice; Severn and staunch Haslam came together, and last, Leigh Hunt and Horace Smith bestowing a mature grace *comme il faut* upon the occasion. Laughter and wit filled the accustomed room, and the aroma of snuff and cigars and liqueurs. When in the midst of the gaiety a messenger appeared at the door bearing the last proof-sheet of the book, with the request that any dedicatory matter to be added be sent back with them, and when Keats withdrew from the conversation which still buzzed around him, and wrote a sonnet to Leigh Hunt which he had held ready in his mind for this need, and when Charles Ollier, to whom the sonnet was delivered as the publisher, read it aloud, it was felt that the evening had reached its culmination. Keats listened to the reading with a full heart. The sonnet was good, and it bore the image and impress of the master—who had first encouraged him, first printed him and cherished his gift. All that he had done Keats would have rendered unto him again and more, at that moment, as much out of love as gratitude. Whatever success the book might have would be owing to Hunt's championship. Of course, the Tory critics might slash it, but let them: there would be merry battle, which might do good.

He bade his guests farewell with warm pressures of their hands, and the brothers talked long afterward in the scene of their triumph, rejoicing triply in it and in this certainty to which the family could hold: its name was from that moment not outside the thoughts of worthy men.



But next morning he paced the room uneasily. Oh that summer would come! He was tired from the fierce burning of ambition, which had become like a wasting disease. His days seemed melting and lost, and his nights a more feverish living of his days mingled with the future. He could and should produce something of which the age would be proud, and which would reveal his sense of the spirit in all things. But how short the time was! How fast he was living! His blood boiled with impatience. Even the midnight confidences stole from him. He looked at his hand upon the table, the hand that had all to do, and that was loose-skinned and swollen in the veins. "It is the hand of a man of fifty." Tom and George looked at each other with misgiving.

"You should go away by yourself if you want to do a great poem," George remarked sensibly. "Away to the country somewhere."

John was silent; he would not admit that these marvellous friends hindered. That afternoon was to be a great one: Haydon was to go with him to see the Elgin Marbles. To be sure Haydon lectured him and rehearsed the dinner-party scene with gusto, telling how he had felt exactly like a stag at bay, determined to gore without mercy. He warned Keats of the dangers of loose talk and loose morals in such company. It would be well to get away from the coteries of well-meaning but smaller men, and meditate the poem.

But as they approached the British Museum they fell silent. It was significant of Haydon's victory that already the Marbles were lodged there for posterity. Now a young acolyte was being conducted to them by the hero himself. In the room, men of the solid-citizen and artistic types clustered about vast white torsos on platforms, one with feet, arms and head broken off, reclining half-turned; another sitting, complete save for the feet. The majesty of these forms and their perfections dwarfed the men with their clothes and heads that still suggested the perukes of the previous century; it stunned the senses. Keats went from one to another; all that he had dreamed of antiquity took form in his imagination; what a destiny it would be to create a poem of the ancient world which would recall such majesties as these! But Haydon began to talk. Many of the men there knew him; some looked curiously at him, others grimly and even bitterly. Aside he mentioned gleefully that two enemies who had opposed the purchase

of the Marbles were present, that they would not relish his catching them there. Again he pointed out the painter Benjamin West, sitting with Joseph Planta, the principal librarian of the Museum. Such fellows liked to assume an official air and pretend that he, Haydon, was a mere member of the public; but well they knew who had done this. They might approach him, but he would have nothing to say to them on his own initiative. He kept on talking, explaining, expatiating, comparing; and at last when they came out on the street he seemed worried and demanded bluntly the opinion of Keats.

“They are far beyond anything that can be said of them, or of any reproduction that can be made of them.”

This, curiously, Haydon at once took as applying to himself. They parted more coldly than ever before, without mention of another meeting. Keats felt a chill as he climbed the stairs to his lodgings. This should be the best sonnet he ever had tried. But Haydon had confused him so. It would not go, he saw when he opened the door and saw Tom with a package he was aching to open: a dozen copies of *Poems by John Keats*. Then glee there was! Tom and John seized hands and whirled until they were breathless, and chairs and table began to rock and crash; then they gazed again upon the book, that slim beauty in the drab boards, cool as a larch tree, with a label on the back proclaiming to the world that these were “Keats’s Poems. Price 6s.” They seized hands again, and George came in and beheld the marvel, and they all whirled about until there came shouts from below. Then each took up a different copy—his. And inside on the title page was a profile of Shakespeare, with the motto above it from Spenser. Suddenly Tom gave a screech. “Look, look here!” One of the books was different from the rest, though how could that be? Keats leaped to his side, and read a hand-written sonnet; Charles Ollier must have composed it himself.

“Aren’t it—aren’t it—aren’t it grand,” breathed Tom to George. George nodded while they listened to John intoning the tribute.

“I think that settles it,” he added. “We may take it that Ollier counts the book a success. You must know how rare it is for a publisher to burst into song about his authors.”

“I’d like to show it to Abbey,” said George.

Haydon’s reply to the two “noble sonnets”, one on the Elgin Marbles, one to himself, was a curious entertainment. He added, “You filled me with fury for an hour, and with admiration for ever.” Everyone Keats knew treated him finely; if not quite perfectly, that was mere seeming, because his nerves were worn from the long, wonderful winter. Reynolds wrote a sonnet to him, better than Ollier’s, though it wouldn’t do to say so, and hurt Ollier. A few days later Haydon swore him to secrecy and intimated that when he sat by his fire he had been visited by the mighty dead, whereupon he had knelt and prayed to be made “worthy to accompany those immortal beings in their immortal glories”. And he sent a book, Goldsmith’s *History of Greece*. Keats gazed upon it wistfully, then listlessly.

“It looks interesting,” said George. “What’s the matter, John? Don’t you like it?”

John shook himself. “I don’t know. Nothing, I presume.”

But he added aloud, “O for ten years, that I may overwhelm myself in poesy; so I may do the deed that my own soul has to itself decreed.”

“Don’t fret; you’ll have your ten years—in time!”

In the days that followed, dissatisfaction deepened—and satisfaction should be possible in life. Everyone he knew praised the book, true; but scarcely anyone was buying it, Ollier told him. What could that portend? Were all these friends of his, experienced authors too, some of them, mistaken about his gifts? There was something mysterious about it. After a sleepless night he went to see Reynolds. Reynolds had written and got published at once a review in the *Champion*, for which Keats must thank him.

“It’s fine, it’s the finest thing, by God, as Hazlitt would say. But I hope I have not deceived you into false prophecy—”

“My dear Keats, everyone who has seen the book says—”

“I know. I am glad of your review. There are some acquaintances of mine who will scratch their beards, and although I hope I have some charity, I wish their nails may be long.” His weariness suddenly asserted itself in a laboured diaphragm. What was the good of this chaffering? Reynolds

laughed, and, fearing that he might think it some of their circle, Keats hastened to add, "My guardian, Mr. Abbey, for one."

Reynolds was finding his own prospects confused. Could he hope to make a living by the pen? But before they got into discussion, Mrs. Reynolds brought in a guest, Benjamin Bailey, a rather florid young man in spectacles, who beamed with pleasure when he saw Keats. The latter could scarcely keep face at being recognized so promptly—by his size.

"Jack here has told me so much about you that I was delighted when I saw your book. There's genius, sir. I felt I had to make your acquaintance when I ran up to town."

"And the Reynolds household every one seems glad of the run up, however occasioned," said Reynolds with a waggish nod.

"I am taking orders, you know," Bailey hurried on; "keeping at Oxford."

The three young men concluded that if the book was not leaving the shelves it was the fault of no one but the publisher. Therefore a new publisher should answer: Taylor & Hessey, who published Hazlitt, and had done well with Reynolds's *Naiad* last year. Bailey, too, knew Taylor, and at a party that week Keats made his acquaintance: a dry, sandy man of scholarly habit: he had written some kind of book himself, on the identity of Junius. And at the same party were Charles Wentworth Dilke, a friendly fellow who edited reprints of Elizabethan dramatists, with a charming unaffected Mrs. Dilke, and John Scott, who edited the *Champion*; and others young-minded and of literary acquirement.

Hunt was being neglected, Keats thought, once more taking the ever-delightful walk out to Hampstead; and wondered whether he had been overborne by Hayden's gustiness. Hunt had gone on printing poems: the Elgin Marble sonnets and one about Chaucer, all in March. Too late for the book, they could be used in a later one if he liked them then. The apparition of *Libertas* in Millfield Lane between Hampstead and Highgate startled Keats from his desultory musing. Two noble lords owned the grounds on either side, but the trees and sloping meadows could be as well enjoyed by two poets. Keats presented a duly inscribed volume, in addition to the plain one Ollier had sent for review in the *Examiner*.

“So you are going away, Junkets?” said Hunt with a calm which was almost sadness. Keats started. “Oh, it is nothing to deny. Probably Haydon is right about that. A new countryside may cause you to look into your mind and bring something new out of it.”

“My brothers are willing to sacrifice the loss of my company to the ultimate good—”

“But what of our old evenings joco-serio-musico-pictorio, Junkets? I shall miss you sorely. When do you begin your *villeggiatura*?”

“Soon, soon—I am sorry to say.” But candour came to him. “I expect to enjoy myself, however, and do something worthy with what powers I possess.”

They parted friendly, without going into Hunt’s house. The next thing was to bid Fanny good-bye, and see Abbey regarding money. Poor Fanny! Her life was so removed from his that he scarcely knew impetus enough to write her a letter. He would like her to be living in the same house with her brothers—with her parents, too, for that matter, which seemed equally possible.

But Abbey was a different kettle of fish. Abbey greeted him blandly, and agreed after some discussion to give him enough to make his journey—and that would be the last, for a considerable time. As Keats was leaving, he said:

“Well, John, I have read your book, which I looked at because it was your writing, otherwise I should not have troubled my head about any such thing.

“Indeed.”

“I will tell you my opinion of it,” went on Abbey, “whether you care or not. Your book reminds me of the Quaker’s horse which was hard to catch, and good for nothing when caught. So your book is hard to understand and good for nothing when it is understood.” Abbey paused to laugh heartily. “Good-bye, and good luck!” he shouted after his ward.

To think that the volume inscribed to Fanny should have fallen into the hands of such a barbarian! The more quickly a man could get out of a city that held such ruffians as Abbey, the better.

## BOOK II

### *Something Real in the World*

*Tom has spit a leetle blood this afternoon, and that is rather a damper—but I know—the truth is there is something real in the world.*

Letter to JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS.





## CHAPTER I

Monday night at the middle of April 1817, the Keats brothers with divers portmanteaux and a package of books and pictures were waiting in the courtyard of the Bull and Crown Inn, Holbourn. A coach of the Lymington and Poole Mail was due to leave at half-past seven for Southampton. It stood, elephantine, horseless, its pole in the air, until three pairs of horses came prancing and curvetting out of the stable on the opposite side of the court, and ostlers began to hitch. Porters came out of the “Bull and Crown”, carrying portmanteaux which they hoisted into and upon the coach. A great beam extended overhead from one gallery to the other across the courtyard. The voices of the ostlers and porters sounded clear and echoing in the mild April air. The brothers were cheerful; only John was restless. Tom and George had sacrificed to the vast unborn poem, and would not even let John help in their moving to Hampstead. Other passengers straggled out of the inn tap-room, and John climbed aloft and grinned down at his brothers. The horn blew, the whip cracked, the head span of horses ambled and galloped jumpily, pulling the load up on the soberly trotting pole pair; the coach careened in a curve out of the courtyard and into the street. John waved back. “Don’t forget to write!” screamed Tom after him.

Keats’s heart leaped. Into a new world! Into two new worlds—the Isle of Wight, and the forest and sea and moon of his poem. Meanwhile he would enjoy the journey; coaching and horses had fascinated him since his father’s day. He had taken a seat on the box, expecting to hear many a lively quip from the much-travelled coachman; but this proved a morose fellow of ponderous bulk who glanced across his nose at his diminutive passenger. Well, there was enough in the teeming streets of London to fill the eye, and call up the lives of everyone he had known. By the time they were out of London it was nearly dark.

The road and roadside were plain as in daylight, but farther views were obscured. Sometimes there were hedges, dusty already from the spring traffic. Sometimes ponds; sometimes houses and clustered barns. Then more hedge trees, then a little wood with silver birches, “white as a lily and small as a wand”. So Shakespeare put it. Haydon and he conned

Shakespeare together in Haydon's studio with a fullness of comprehension and delight beyond the Spenser reading with Mathews and Clarke and Hunt. And Haydon had been the one to make it clear that the great poem could not get itself written in the midst of the racketing and routs and card-parties and drinking-parties in town. For great works, self-dedication was necessary. And solitude. With a shiver Keats drew himself together in imagination for the titan's struggle ahead. *Endymion*, *Endymion*, beloved of the moon! Haydon should have something to lose himself in, something in the measure of his own huge canvases.

The lanterns on the coach came into their own as darkness thickened. Long heath broom furze swept by, and every half-mile or so a stile or a hurdle. Park palings enclosed a grand estate, with lights in the windows of its house reflected in some pond or fountain basin; fountain surely, because there was a nymph, a graceful enough shape, on tiptoe for flight, but all of stone! Lopped trees and an orchard next, and a cow never missing a chew upon her cud as she swung her head with the passing coach. The careening swiftness enlivened his blood, and when they stopped and put the horses out, he could hardly wait for the jokes of the coachmen and ostlers to be done, the cloths pulled off the fresh horses, and the whip cracked and the horn sounded. All clear ahead! The village people they passed paid no more attention than the ruminant donkey that held his head over a hedge. Here was some William gingerly seeing his sisters over the heath and its stiles. Some John waiting for his mistress with a lantern before a house. Village again: barber's pole; doctor's shop, apothecary's pestle-and-mortar sign. Endless the road into the night, and endless the life opening up on all sides. At the third stage, becoming chilled, he went inside.

Closing his eyes, he coned every head in Haydon's giant painting, and wondered whether the set would miss him at Haydon's Wednesday receptions—the lively set, teasing Haydon about a Betty over the way at whose windows Haydon pretended to spy. Then Reynolds; and Tom and George: how would they do in their new quarters, and would George be able to get on with that fellow Wilkinson, who wanted capital to take George into partnership? George was a good business man. If only a sum of money could have been made from the *Poems*; but *Endymion* was to come,

at any rate. No—his works would never be of the sort to make their author rich, but if—but if . . . Every thought led to poetry, every thought, practical, disinterested, sublime. Sixteen hours a day if it were possible, until the passion had worn off and some portion of the poem had heaved itself up from the void. What if he should die—throat cut, run over, drowned? “A magnificent fragment,” some pundit of after days would enunciate, “comparable to the Elgin Marbles.” He checked the thrill that ran over him. That could not be. No attention was being paid this book.

With a start Keats looked up. Dawn had come, lovely and bright. Over his left shoulder he could see the sun rising. Fresh country was lit up about him: a stretch of open downland had brought the sun upon him so miraculously. They gave way to thickly wooded areas, groves and dells, sunken side-roads unlike the stone roads of Roman times, but worn the height of a man into the soil since those days. For miles and miles the old downland asserted itself in immense quantities of blooming furze on either side of the highway. The people beginning to stir about the landscape had had no such night as his, but merely slept through the dark in the common, animal-like way.

At last came Southampton, and a chance to take up the life of a walking creature again. His luggage was taken down and installed in the inn by a porter, and like a seasoned traveller John went within for breakfast. Waiting, he became lonely, and went to the hall and unpacked his Shakespeare, which he read even as he ate. He had only to turn from page to page to find passages of richness, scored with his own pencil. An hour or so passed and the world was more itself. People were stirring about the inn and passing at the street windows.

Strolling forth, he inquired the way to Southampton Water of an old man with a bundle, who looked at him as though wondering whether he knew he was already in Southampton town. But the Water proved to be at a premium, for the tide was out. From the wharf you could see the shores of each side of the inlet, opening upon the Isle of Wight. At a kind of waiting-room he inquired when the boat went.

“At three o’clock,” said the man at the wicket.

“And so shall I.” Keats drew out money to pay his passage. “I suppose the Water out here will have mended its manners by three?”

“Why, there will be high tide in the afternoon.”

“Until then I must Wight.”

He put in the time eating a chop for lunch and writing at length to his brothers of his prosperous journey. He sat, head on arm, in the inn parlour, adding flourishes to the address: “Mr. G. Keats, No. 1 Well Walk, Hampstead, Middx.”, and picturing them, realizing that perhaps their care and idolization had spoiled him for solitary endeavour, until it was time to embark. Once on the water, it came to him with full force that he was to be on an island, away, almost, from England. There could not be a better place for his undertaking. Yes, he had walked among students and those who knew him as a god. It was better to stand alone and support one’s self-respect among strangers. He crossed the deck towards the prow of the boat endeavouring to look up the Spithead to the Channel. A brown-faced man in leggings watched him. In a short while they docked at Cowes—a not too prepossessing village, even if it were the place where the Prince Regent held his regatta. A coach was standing by, to take you five miles inland to Newport. The brown fellow of the boat got in, and on the way Keats ventured to question him about some of the sights. A great building with stone walls about it was, he said, the House of Industry as they called it.

“As they call it!” repeated Keats with bitter emphasis.

“I hear tell it is a good many buildings in one. There is a pesthouse, and one for smallpox, and they have their own gaol with cells, and a chapel and burial ground. I suppose you might call it a hospital in the first place, sir, but as they have not the conveniences they have in London, they put them all together, and mighty handy it is to have them so.”

“No doubt it goes any hospital one better for scenes of agony.”

“What? Now just up the road a bit here we have our barracks.”

The country was beautiful; one could do one’s best to enjoy it in spite of these reminders of disease, death and man’s inhumanity to man. At length

he had to burst out, when they came opposite the barracks: “Why, why must they put such a nest of debauchery in so beautiful a place?”

“You’re right, sir,” said the other, looking at him as though surprised. “The people are spoiled, ‘tis true. But it is natural in the government to wish to train the soldiers in a safe place. I have heard tell of recruits escaping from other barracks by swimming rivers and that like, and then hiding in London. But they do not escape from this one. Leastways, none that I’ve heard on.”

Keats shook his head, thinking of the hapless youths, lured there by drink and the king’s shilling, if not actually shanghaied against their wills. “I dare say this place, too, needs its hospital.”

When they alighted at Newport, the stranger said, “I go into the country, where I have a sheep farm. Perhaps if you are out that way you will come to see me,” and he told where he lived.

Not an hour could be lost from *Endymion*. He rose early next morning and set about the day purposefully. He must have some settled place of abode. To Shanklin he hied, hearing confirmed Haydon’s opinion that it was one of the beauty spots of the island. The way seemed pied with primroses, so that he thought it should be called Primrose Island. It was possible to forget the barracks, for all men were not blind to the evil. On the window of the room he had slept in someone had cut an inscription: “O! Isle spoilt by the Military!”

Always about him as he walked was the feel of the sea. A passage from *King Lear* rang in his ears all day. The blind man was led to the verge:

How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!  
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles: half-way down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!  
. . . The murmuring surge  
That on unnumbered idle pebbles chafes  
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,  
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong.

Apart from busy eyes and feet, his mind was like to be repeating, "One that gathers samphire, dreadful trade! . . . and the deficient sight topple down headlong", until the lines became a portent and a monition throughout the day, portion of the enchantment of Shanklin, with its sloping woods and meadows divided by a lazily winding road; its quaint, tiny and ancient buildings. These gentle plains made up to the Chine—a cleft in the face of the Island perhaps three hundred feet deep, which added majesty to the soft prettiness. The narrow part of the Chine was filled with trees and bushes, and it lay bare in the wider part, except for primroses growing to the very verge of the sea on one side, and fishermen's huts on the other, perched between green hedges like balustrades down the slope to the sands. A little waterfall, white cliff, blue sea, St. Catherine's Hill, a little church. But Shanklin, after all, was not convenient, and there was no place to lodge save an inn whose tariff was too high and whose environs too noisy. Shanklin, then, was for walks; and he betook himself to Carisbrooke, where was a view of that Continent which had been important to Britons before Caesar came from it, a view of the whole northern point of the island, with a vast field of water between; and a castle ruin; and a house with a room which commanded all these things. He trudged off to Newport for his portmanteau and bundle, which he carried back himself.

Next morning he leaped for his square of window and gazed again at his scene. It presented new aspects which the ruin of the castle had dominated yesterday. There were lanes, delightful wood-alleys, copses, brooks

winding—"quick freshes", Caliban called them. Dressed, washed and combed, he sprang from the room like an arrow from a bow. But in the passage, he had to stop and whistle. A head of Shakespeare, the best portrait he had seen, confronted him. In dead silence he looked at it. At breakfast he spoke of it; George had seen such a picture in Paris; he was certain this was the same. Mrs. Cook offered to change it for one already in his room. Which was duly done, while he unpacked his own pictures: a head by Haydon (he proudly told Mrs. Cook he was a friend of the artist), a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots, and one of Milton with his daughters. These he hung in a row above the stand on which he placed his books. There was a French ambassador above them, but that worthy soon gave way to Shakespeare. Keats sat down in his new home considering he had done a good deed. A good morning's work? Surely the morning was not yet spent? He sat quietly several minutes, and a feeling of helplessness came over him. This poem would be as easy as engaging a whale with your bare hands. He was helpless—it would be impossible even to decide not to attempt it. "Truly enough," he sighed, "I am 'one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade'. The cliffs tower above me, and there's nothing for it but to clamber up. Ah, that's it!" he exclaimed, bringing his fist down on the table. And he began a sonnet upon the sea, which gave him an hour's delightful oblivion, as the sea itself would give those with eyeballs vexed and tired, or fed too much with cloying melody.

A wild wind had risen outside and ruffled the trees and grass and shook his window sulkily. He would have given a good deal to have been able to slip around a square and see Haydon or Reynolds. To Reynolds he wrote. They would have to keep together. There would be letters, until Reynolds came to Wight as he had promised; and why shouldn't they compare readings of Shakespeare as before? Why shouldn't he propose to him and his brothers to write letters which would reach Carisbrooke on the twenty-third, Shakespeare's birthday? That would be hatching an omen of one's own!

But when he had finished the letter he had doubts of his too-kind friends. The world's treatment of his book—was not that the proper test? In pretending him Shakespeare they had made him a pet-lamb in a sentimental

farce. Perhaps half maliciously. At least, he would not show his face in town until he had finished this poem.

Poetry, he thought, as he rambled about the castle ruins, must save him from a world out of joint, from loneliness and a vexed spirit; these came from not writing the poetry he had in him. But ah! how write, he, who had taken Poesy for a light woman of easy virtue? If she would but forget, he could, remembering that she must be won by vigils and faithfulness. Let him but write. “Now this is a delightful spot, where Reynolds and I shall read our verses to one another. I don’t expect to see a ruin to surpass it.” The trench was overgrown with smoothest turf, the walls with ivy. And the keep, he learned, was a bower of ivy inside, colonized by jackdaws, descendants of old cawers who had peeped through the bars at Charles the First when he was imprisoned here.

Next morning the wind brought a dismal rain which kept him indoors all day. He began by adding a couple of sheets to a second letter-counterpane to Reynolds. Decidedly this loneliness was a problem. You could not start a poem of that scope and chaotic magnificence without a plan? What if it turned out like *Calidore* and *I Stood Tip-Toe* (which had once been called *Endymion*) and the others? It was a shame to put them into a book uncompleted, as Hunt had persuaded him to do. . . . Perhaps it would help to write to George and Tom, a plan might form under his pen. He had told them a little of what he would be up against, but they could not realize. Four thousand lines; four books of a thousand lines each; all centred about one circumstance, and all filled with the essence of poetry’s choicest. They thought it a very fine thing to be a poet, and to have such a task, and in truth he would rather be dead than not have it. He would go mad without it, merely confronting that naked cliff unscalable over him. Hunt had said, “Why endeavour after a long poem?” But had great poets kept themselves to short ones? He had to prove himself a great poet—or nothing. In any case, his carryings-on of the winter were absurd. Oh, what a fool, a sickly fool he had been to listen to the mellifluous Hunt; and still more in himself a fool, wearing a laurel crown, forsooth! Apollo hardly could forgive that, even to Hyacinthus—had the great god slain his adopted one by accident? And what



would another deserve who was so foolish as to make a mock of him? . . . Ah, there was little time, a man died soon without the agency of the gods.

Thoughts, thoughts, more thoughts, feverish assurances, reproaches, they were unending. He was not ready to write, and yet, to escape these, he did commence. A bright April day lured him out upon the hills and among the trees, but he sharpened his quill. This moment would live in *his* history, whatever the disgrace of failure, even in a huge attempt. His first line had been held ready for years. Stephens had heard it in that musty room in the Borough. "A thing of beauty is a constant joy" lacked something, they agreed, then they had struck the right thing. Until now there had been no poem lovely enough and great enough for that line. He wrote it once more with the old thrill: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." Then his pen moved soberly, almost sadly, led as many a time before from image to image almost without his will.

When he had done his day's work, it did not satisfy him, and there was no one to whom he could talk. Suddenly as he was about to pay Mrs. Cook for another week's lodging he changed his mind and told her he must be off. He wrote to Tom, entreating, commanding him to come to Margate. Mrs. Cook would not let him go without the head of Shakespeare he had admired so much. "I hope it will help you write a fine book everyone will talk about."

Keats marvelled briefly at her understanding. As for the hundred and fifty miles' coaching to Margate, they did not mean much except a hope. He went to the identical lodgings where he had stayed last summer. Tom grumbled a little at lack of trees, but he had not noticed it before. He assured Tom that the other was saving his life, that his week of thinking of nothing but poetry had made him fit for the hospital. He could not digest the food. Even the thought that Taylor and Hessey were agreed to pay him a hundred pounds in advance for this poem had hindered him. Now all was well; he sent Tom out or let him read.

This shepherd swain, now-Endymion, haunter of the slopes of Latmos-what should he do and how disport himself to-day? Little he suspected as he fed his flocks, rejoicing over the predestined lamb lost amid the glens where fed the herds of Pan, little he suspected that Diana the moon goddess was becoming enamoured of his beauty, and how she used

to lurk about to spy upon him asleep among the trees. She would yet carry him off to the top of Latmos.

And now, as deep into the wood as we  
Might mark a lynx's eye, there glimmered light  
Fair faces and a rush of garments white—

Tom came in with a clatter, waving a magazine. "Tidings to wash the eyes of kings!" It was the *Monthly Review* with a brief notice of his book. He was compared to the Elizabethans, and not invidiously. "There is in his poems a rapturous glow and intoxication of the fancy—an air of careless and profuse magnificence in his diction—a revelry of the imagination and tenderness of feeling, that forcibly impress themselves on the reader."

Next day came a letter from George, who had undertaken to obtain satisfaction from the Olliers in regard to their lack of enterprise in pushing the fortunes of the book. He enclosed their reply:

Sir,

*We regret that your brother ever requested us to publish his book or that our opinion of its talent should have led us to acquiesce in undertaking it. We are, however, much obliged to you for relieving us from the unpleasant necessity of declining any further connection with it, which we must have done, as we think the curiosity is satisfied, and the sale has dropped. By far the greater number of persons who have purchased it from us have found fault with it in such plain terms, that we have in many cases offered to take the book back rather than be annoyed with the ridicule which has, time after time, been showered upon it. In fact, it was only on Saturday last that we were under the mortification of having our own opinion of its merits flatly contradicted by a gentleman who told us he considered it "no better than a take in". These are unpleasant imputations for anyone in business to labour under, but we should have borne them and concealed their existence from you, had not the style*

*of your note shown us that such delicacy would be quite thrown away. We shall take means without delay for ascertaining the number of copies on hand, and you shall be informed accordingly.*

*Yours most &c.,*

*C. & J. Ollier.*

“Damn his gentleman!” snorted John, and sat thinking.

“Olliers must be rogues; they must be, or they would not write to George in that tone,” said Tom.

“I hope George did not make any outright accusations. It seems plain they have discovered that I am bespoken by a new publisher.”

They discussed getting money from Abbey to buy the remaining copies, and John did not work the rest of the day. They walked out and found the *Examiner* treating of religious intolerance and blasphemy, while Hazlitt had a thundering article about Southey, his first love the Republic, and “her more fortunate and wealthy rival, Legitimacy”. The paper was a battering-ram against Christianity, Tertullian, Erasmus, and Sir Philip Sydney. Where was it all to end? This tiresome radicalism reminded him of his part in the set. The brothers ran a race back to their rooms. That evening John lectured Tom on the requirements of the new poem, while Tom was trying to put out a pimple under his jaw. The conclusion was he had no right to talk until *Endymion* was finished. Tom told him he had been reading Pope’s verses and they seemed like mice to his. Next morning John set to again.

He had, finally, to write to Hunt, but permitted himself a few digs about sentimental didacticism, and fobbed his old *Libertas* off without a section of the new work; he had done, he said, only a pin-point.

From Haydon he received a heartening letter, warning him of the self-delusions and sophistications which were ripping up the talent and morality of Hunt, and bidding him trust in God with all his might. Haydon “always rose up from my knees with a refreshed fury, an iron-clenched firmness, a crystal piety of feeling that sent me streaming on with a repulsive power against the troubles of life”. The current trouble was money, he intimated.

Keats replied in a thankfully calm tone. It did not matter greatly in the brevity of the “endeavour of this present breath”, but it would be as well if he were not teased with that bill-pestilence. “However,” Keats wrote, “I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of the man—they make our Prime Objects a refuge as well as a Passion.” This was his view of Haydon himself, and he went on to confess what he had scarcely hinted even to Tom; how looking over work done he had discerned an unaccountable rightness about it; the sensation was almost akin to direction from a good genius. “Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare this Presider?” he asked, and told of the picture.

Next morning a letter from George announced that money from their grandfather’s estate could not be touched because of the never-ending scarcely beginning Chancery suit. Abbey would not pass on a farthing; George was going to see Taylor and Hessey about an advance. With a sinking of the midriff, Keats, instead of starting his morning’s work, took up his letter to Haydon, without reading what he had written. Money troubles were to follow him and his brother perhaps always, he wrote. They were not a stimulation to greater exertion, but rather like a nettle-leaf or two in your bed. So he revoked his promise to finish *Endymion* by autumn. He was so at variance with himself that he was glad that in the fullness of brevity all things would leave not a wrack behind. Hateful was the delusion of being a great poet, one of the greatest sins after the seven deadly, and—he agreed with Haydon about Hunt. But, for himself, he never quite despaired, and he read Shakespeare.

Hateful was Margate in the hateful days that followed. No news from George or Taylor or Hessey. What they were to do John and Tom did not know, unless wander about the treeless waste of Margate and the sea as disembodied spirits waiting for waftage. At last came twenty pounds from the publishers. At an hilarious lunch John outlined an allegorical poem which simply called to be written—*The Dun*.

“Sounds like Pope, your *bête noir*,” said Tom.

“There would be the Castle of Carelessness, the Drawbridge of Credit, Sir Novelty Fashion’s expedition against the City of Tailors, and so on. Ah, Tom, me boy, there’s nothing like manufactured rag, with the pound

sterling sign upon it, to destroy the hydra-headed Dun. The good knight does not need any Sword, Shield, Cuirass, Herbageon, Spear, Casque, Greaves, Pauldrons, Spurs—”

“Come, the full stop.” Tom put down his tea-cup.

“But finger me the paper, light as the Sibyl’s leaves in Virgil, whereat the fiend skulks off with his tail between his legs. Then the full stop.”

“But your plans, general?”

“To write thanking my publishing friends; then you and I, good knight, shall mount palfrey for that good town of eld hight Canterbury, where are sundry trees and a beautiful cathedral. I was not in my right head when we came to this place.”

“Why Canterbury? Wasn’t Sir Thomas à Becket murdered there—”

“Why not Canterbury? Didn’t the Almoner, the Pardoner, the Ladies’ Maid and all of Chaucer’s motley crew issue from Canterbury? The remembrance shall set me forward like a billiard ball.”

It was only a couple of hours’ coaching through the delightful Kentish countryside, and they settled themselves that night. Canterbury’s age-old streets put new life into the poem. The highest gust of these days was to sit before his table and shape living moments for Endymion and his goddess. The shade of Shakespeare did not desert him. A month passed, a thousand lines were done, the first book, the first round of this creative bout, was his, the first leg of the long race won. It was time for some sort of holiday. They agreed that Tom, homesick for London, should take coach back to Hampstead. John went, free as the wind, to Hastings upon the sea.

A very different sort of sea-town was Hastings from Southampton or Margate. They took the sea as a matter of course, wresting a livelihood from its fish or from contraband or the smugglers. Hastings was a pleasure resort, and you felt a light holiday mood in its very air. The shops were gay, the hotels impressive, the sea promenade filled with ladies and moustached Waterloo officers; but he preferred to be a little outside these bustlings and went to Bo Peep, a little village westward of Hastings. Haydon had recommended it as an ideal place for recuperation. To Tom and George he

was just going, like a nabob, to Hastings; they might find out where he was if it became necessary for him to write to them. For a few days he would simply live.

But after the first day there seemed something lacking. It was very well to free oneself from friends of whom one was tired at the moment: what then? Life was drearily difficult. When he had been out of money and downcast over the Olliers' treatment of his book, he could not work; the morbidness of his thoughts frightened him. Now, he had worked, triumphantly, but there was no comparably satisfying way to play. He sat in his room the second morning at Bo Peep and yawned dismally. For lack of anticipation he had overslept. Death was better than this futile life that gave nothing any way you went at it. Death was a fine thing, a nerving thing to think of while you toiled toward the hour that would "leave not a wrack behind". It was better, by Heaven, to be up and at it, getting fame or gold or pleasure, tasting each more deeply, as Haydon did, because you never forgot that impending hour. Yes, death was a fine thing; had it not taken Chatterton, whose lines were one of the glories of the English tongue? Young and ardent poets were meant for death; his harvest and chief laurels, they. Death had claimed his mother. He could barely remember the way she looked, but she had been death's sweetest prey. How she had heaped endearments upon him while she lived! Tears rose to his eyes as he thought of her and the way he had mourned when she was taken. Never since then had Death seemed far away from him, never alien and never cruel to those he took, only to those he left. It must be a luxury to die as great and blissful as any, he thought, to melt into the arms, spiritual or fleshly, of those you loved.

Keats started to his feet and from the brink of that languorous intoxication; washed, shaved, dressed and went out. Having declined breakfast at his lodging, he was surprised to feel hungry before he had walked beyond the village. He had a bun and a glass of beer, and continued towards Hastings. It was a bright morning, with a freshness to match its warmth. May was almost at its last day. An occasional carriage with ladies and gentlemen passed him, then a doctor in a dog-cart. Keats smiled at the youthful apprentice. Presently he overtook a lady with a dog. The animal was giving her trouble; would linger here and there, making delayful excursions

among the copses and bushes at either side of the road. The lady would walk on a little way, and call back. She was an active little person, with red cheeks, brown eyes, neat, small, aquiline features; somewhat older than Keats, so he ventured to pause and offer to retrieve her dog.

“Oh, thank you, sir. I have a leash with me.” She swung the strap. “If I could but catch him to fasten it to him. The little plague!”

Keats leaped among the bushes and soon came in sight of the dog, scratching the grass-roots with his hind legs and snorting the morning air with gusto. “Come here, sir.” The dog looked at him noncommittally, but finally decided that the stranger was worth following. The lady laughed to see them emerging.

“I see you knew better than to try to catch him. Curiosity is the best bait. You see, he is not accustomed to see a man near me.” She would be pleased, she added in reply to his question, with his company, since she needed a man’s services.

“But tell me,” he continued, with a boldness he would not have ventured with any but a chance acquaintance, encouraged by a dimple that showed in a half-averted cheek, “How comes it, since you say that curiosity is the best bait, that your dog is unaccustomed to see a man with you? You appear to speak out of a fullness of knowledge.”

“Oh, I am a widow,” she said promptly and simply, with an almost merry recognition of the fact as though she had said, “Oh, I am a brunette.” This quite won Keats’s heart. Here was no morbid brooding upon death. The woman had known sorrow, yet was kindly and pleasant, almost gay. They walked along, talking as might be. He noted that she did not suggest that he might retrieve the dog now, but they kept up their conversation until he reappeared. She was a pretty little thing, neither thin nor stout, and she plainly had a seeing eye and bright mind. It was not long before they were talking of poetry. “What do you make of that naughty Lord Byron?” she asked. “A spoiled and incorrigible youth, I should say.”

Keats was vaguely pleased. He had not thought of Byron as a spoiled youth, but as a man, older than himself, and rarely favoured by Dame Fortune.

“Then Dame Fortune is rather careless as to whom she bestows her favours upon,” said the lady negligently.

“His poetry is truly a kind of play-acting—to carp at a fellow-poet—”

“Then you are a poet too! Perhaps I have read some of your verses.”

“Perhaps indeed. My friends would deceive me into thinking they are passable and that I am a poet. But the world insists, up to the present, that it does not want to read me.” This view of himself was astonishing, but he did not trouble to add the other side of the medal: that he was certain of success, and even now engaged upon a poem of real magnitude which would set the tea-coterie ajingle.

They agreed in a breath that Spenser was not to be read in stuffy rooms, and to-day was too fine for reading at all. “I saw that,” the lady laughed, “the instant I opened my peepers at the dawn; and when I got to the window, I declared I couldn’t stay inside an hour. I had to be out, drinking the dew, and racing with Pronto. So here we are!”

Something caught at Keats’s throat. “Do you know,” he said, impetuously at first, and then in a lower tone, “you remind me of someone. She was full of life and spirits too. She was young when I knew her as you are.” The lady smiled. “But I could not imagine her becoming old or discouraged, ever. My mother.”

“Your mother died when you were a child? Poor boy!”

Keats nodded. He had surprised himself, but this lady was unlike any he had known, too. The instant they had met, he had felt as though they were old friends, that nothing he might tell her about himself would astonish her. She was a velvety character. Some time he might tell her even that. Now, he was afraid of embarrassment. She was talking gently, impersonally.

“I often think we do not make allowance for the losses children suffer and the troubles they have. Their tragedies are as real as those of a grown person, and sometimes leave a far more lasting mark. Well, Pronto, what now?” she called. The dog was yapping excitedly, and Keats, at her glance, dived through a hedge, daring, it occurred to him, keepers’ guns and Heaven knew what man-traps or bloodhounds. But her knight would brave



greater dangers than those of trespass to serve her, he thought, as breathless he rushed upon the dog.

“What have you there, you villain? A hare? Your mistress calls you a plague, and I a villain. Must you live up to the names?” The little wretch lifted his muzzle from the hole in the sod with nothing more impressive than a field-mouse. He submissively allowed himself to be captured and carried back to the road.

“And diddums little doggums catchums naughty mouse all by hims ‘ittle self?” She hugged him, mouse and all. The terrier submitted patiently, but without releasing the defunct rodent.

“Lucky he didn’t attempt a hare and get carried away!”

“Oh, um didn’t hear what a big cruel man said, diddums?” She cast a roguish secret eye at Keats as she spoke. The dog’s indifference changed to satisfaction, complacency, then he pricked his ears in the direction of the bushes and struggled to be set free.

In this fashion they went to Hastings, and were surprised to see that it was one o’clock. “I declare I’m hungry as a bear,” the lady said. “’Twas an admirable stroll.”

Keats twinkled. “Would we were a sort of ethereal pig, turned loose to feed upon spiritual mast and acorns—if you prefer, a squirrel feeding upon filberts, for what is a squirrel but an airy pig, or a filbert but a sort of archangelical acorn?”

“A pleasing fancy. If I were a squirrel I shouldn’t like to be called an airy pig. Had you any engagement for the noon meal? Then you may please to have something with me. Come to my rooms at least to rest a little.”

“I will not hesitate about that. I have nothing better to do with my day than to pass it pleasantly.”

They turned into a doorway and up a flight of stairs above a row of shops, and so into her sitting-room, bright and smelling as though filled with sea air; the windows looked out upon the sun-brightened Channel. It was deliciously cool after their warm walk. He sank into the armchair she indicated. There were books on the table, a bronze statue of Napoleon, a

spinnet and an Æolian harp, a parrot and a linnet, both of which spoke out at the arrival of their mistress, in harsh and dulcet voice. The lady went into a back room and gave directions to a servant. When she returned she carried a tray, two glasses, and a bottle of Spanish liqueur. She was a deuced pleasant companion, he assured himself as he accepted a second glass. She sat at the spinnet and played tinklingly: “The Lass of Richmond Hill”, which she sang, and “Water Parted From the Sea”.

“What is that?” asked Keats, moved.

“That was composed in allusion to a penchant of George, the Prince.”

“I mean the latter one, which you did not sing.”

“‘Water Parted From the Sea’; just an air from *Artaxerxes*, Arne’s Vauxhall opera.” Her light and gentle voice already seemed to Keats that of an old and scarce-to-be-placed friend. A friend met in dreams, perhaps.

“It has a lovely grace about it.” He sat with his eyes closed while she played it again, and a beatitude of joy filled his tired mind and body, driving other sensation away. He felt that somehow he had come home, found some destination. Luncheon was brought in and they talked brightly and lightly.

“Hastings lacks its Vauxhall, alas!” She permitted herself a sigh. “But it is better that it should not try to imitate the original.”

“I remember the first time I went to those gardens. I saw a lady there who has meant more to me for the time she was present to me than anyone. I just caught a glimpse of her in a crowd, and I saw no movement of hers save the ungloving of her hand. Yet she haunted me for weeks, I suppose. I wrote some kind of boyish poems begging for a brimming bowl to drown remembrance.”

“It is strange how deep an impression some such chance encounter can make upon one,” said the lady in a still voice.

“I feel something similar in regard to yourself. You are one who knows without being told, even everything about yourself; or else you are one who *is* and does not need to know. I can’t put it into common words.”

“Dear boy,” she murmured. “But don’t let us become sentimental. We were more ourselves out of doors. Weren’t we, Pronto?” The dog sat up for a bone. “Did you have some plum tart?” She sat with her chin on her wrists watching her guest eat. “You have a long walk before you.”

He was emboldened to ask for her company, but it was too warm. She was in a mood for nothing but conversation and inaction, she said. They rose and went to the window and looked out at the bright waves and the men and women emerging from the bathing-machines and the gaily dressed people upon the promenade. Neither spoke. Keats put out his arm and drew her to him. Perhaps it was because she looked so small and encompassable there beside him. Her resistance was negligible and might have been instinctive. They stood conscious of the bright day, then he kissed her.

“Don’t do that,” she said, drawing back and looking at him, out of his arms before he knew it. He was trembling.

“Why? Why?” he muttered.

“Because—it’s not fair. If I want you to kiss me, I’ll tell you.”

He laughed at the absurdity. She looked reproachful, and they sat down to talk again. He tried to be rational, but he wanted her. He could not force himself to be bantering and suggestive, she was the wrong kind of woman for that. He listened, musing, half bitter, half dismayed, to her pleasant talk; his content in her, his liking for her trim good looks and graceful maturity were not satisfying. He felt that he had better get away. So soon? Then she and Pronto would see him part way, to finish a pleasant day.

She was her gay self again out of doors, and Pronto was his, to a degree which made her hurry on, and talk very animatedly indeed—about her late husband. Keats did not quite know what to make of that. He was trying to think of some effective and conclusive way of love-making.

“I have been thinking that if you wanted it very much I might let you come back to-night to my rooms. I have a couch on which you could sleep. . . .”

She spoke so coolly and sensibly that Keats could scarcely believe his ears. Then he heard his own voice, as incredibly, “Don’t talk of extra couches, if you mean me to spend the night at your rooms.”

“Yes, we may be frank, I think. You’re really a very nice boy.” Her look made trebly dear the already-formed memory of her. She drew thoughts out of him he had not known he possessed. Afternoons and mornings passed in a dream of companionship, the nights in a delirium of delights, while the moon blessed them and the sky and sea.



## CHAPTER II

Parting was terrible, but once on the London coach, his spirits were up. He was free, he was ready for life, a part of it. He was itching to get at Book II. What delights would he not put into it! Youths and maidens for a hundred years would read of the ecstasies of his gods and goddesses, and some, surely, would be emboldened to plunge into the sea of life's beauty, whether or not society became still more long-faced and hypocritical. "But there, I'm become a moralist myself," he told himself. No, life, life at the pitch of music, was all that he wanted to put into his poem. His foot joggled, his spine thrilled, shoulders hunched as though in cold, while his face beamed so that fellow-passengers and walkers in the road stared at him.

George and Tom were getting on well enough in their new rooms in Well Walk. They both bewailed the fact that Hunt the idol had moved just as they got there. "He left his address, did he not?" asked John. "I'm glad you have been keeping well, Tom." He hesitated, for Tom, though always slight, had before seemed more wiry, vigorous and well-coloured. "George here is getting fat enough to kill. You don't go to the City every day now?"

"Oh, that wasn't much of a situation. I am tired of such petty dealings. Shopkeepers, all of them. How a man of any pride or manliness can curtsy and slave and accept browbeatings of such fellows is beyond me."

"You'll find some occasion yet. Abbey did not like our proposal to buy up the remaining copies of the book, eh?"

"Did he?" George slapped his thigh. "You should have heard him! You are an abandoned character, associated with toppers and wastrels!"

"Our landlord's a postman, John," put in Tom. "You should have it convenient sending your letters now!"

"Bentley, a decent sort, you know, for his class," mentioned George, lowering voice. "They have a troop of carrot-headed children." A baby suddenly screaming, a woman loudly comforting it and scolding older children, confirmed his words. The brothers burst into laughter.

“Ah well, if the people are respectable, and the rooms comfortable, that is the first thing. We can’t be moving all the time.”

“It’s splendid, John. I have felt ever so much stronger since I have been out here, roaming about the fields and the woods. And you can write better here than in Cheapside, I’ll bet. We can take our books outside with us, we won’t have to make a day’s pilgrimage to get the dust and smoke out of our lungs. Did you see the benches across the street?”

“How is your poem going?” asked George.

“I feel a great deal better about it now. I have got the first part done, and I do not doubt of my strength sufficing for the rest. It is a huge attempt, but I defy any power to stop me now. I defy!”

“Read some of it to us,” begged Tom. “That chorus to Pan, I want George to hear that.”

“Presently, presently. There was something I wanted to ask you—what was it?”

“I’ll never tell you,” said George. “Oh, Haydon sent once or twice to know whether you were back. He wants to draw your face in his painting.”

“I must see him at once. Rice, Reynolds and the rest. Three R’s.”

“Talking of artists, what do you make of Severn? He writes that we have forgotten him, until I told him outright, I’ve given him a dozen invitations to one he has taken.”

“Poor Severn, he needs appreciation. But a little of him goes a good way. All right, Tom, I’ll read; but first I must tell you, what I’ve told nobody yet. It is more than a story. I want to embody my ideal of beauty in it. I want to testify to the faith that is in me. Love and friendship, above all love between man and woman, are of the highest beauty in this life. No doubt I shall draw the fire of the precisians and the pedants who prefer an abstraction to a flower. In my poem I say:

“ . . . but who, of men, can tell  
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell  
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,  
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,  
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,  
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,  
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet  
If human souls did never kiss and greet?”

The low tones of his voice were lifted a little as he put this dulcet query, but when, almost without pause, he swung into the “Hymn to Pan”, they soared in powerful invocation. The magnificent swing of it, the changing harmonies, lifted and freed the spirits of the hearers. There was a silence after, and the young men knew that there was nothing to be said. Something final and majestic in beauty had taken form.

But as John lay awake in the night, it was of Tom, instead of that woman, or the might of poetry, that he thought in the darkness. Perhaps Tom had consumption as their mother had had, and died of it.

Next day he decided that if he waited before applying to Abbey for money, the interval would give more force to his petition than an unsuccessful repetition. He would try his new publishers. Taylor was a good sort and a man of discernment. Both he and Hessey had shown the friendliest interest, invited him to their houses, lent him books, before he had left London. It was better not to call, for they might question about the twenty pounds they had sent him at Carisbrooke less than a month ago. At any rate they should have a little entertainment for their money. He began, “I must endeavour to lose my maidenhead with respect to money matters as soon as possible—and I will too—so here goes!” And he ended, “I am afraid you will say I have ‘wound about with circumstance’, when I should have asked plainly—however, as I said, I am a little maidenish or so, and I feel my virginity come strong upon me, the while I request the loan of a £20 and a £10, which, if you would enclose me, I would acknowledge and save



myself a hot forehead. I am sure you are confident of my responsibility, and in the sense of squareness that is in me." Master Launcelot must have his element of Polonius.

"Look," said Tom, coming in, "you didn't see this, did you? It was redirected here. Hunt has a review of your book."

John flushed. How did Tom know he hadn't seen it? But, true, *Examiners* and reviews had meant nothing to him at Hastings. He took the paper and grunted. "Look, he says the volume is by the author of the sonnets he had printed, signed J. K. Then he goes on to say he had printed one of them before he knew who I was. Then he goes on in the same old vein about the new poetry, about English succulence and Italian sunshine, and stops without another mention of the poet he's reviewing. To be concluded next week. But it wasn't, eh?" John tossed the paper on the floor and lit a candle to melt a wafer with which to seal his letter. Tom meekly picked the paper up. "So that's the way he reviews his friend's book! An ardent vindicator of beauty he is. I am glad he has moved. Reynolds did better than that, and he did not pretend to be my uncle."

"Never mind, he'll finish it," said George, coming in from the bedroom.

"What if he does?" demanded Keats wrathfully. "He gives the worst impression by leaving it hang that way. And I'll lay you it will be a month, if he ever finishes it. Yes, and then he'll make it some essay about the Italians. I never want to make the acquaintance of another literary man; never, unless Wordsworth. No, not even Byron. Devil take them!" He rose, gripped his letter and strode from the house.

The June morning was lovely. As he went down Well Walk, sniffing the air like a charger and snorting indignation, his face was uplifted to the day. An inspiration! John Street, where Dilke lived, was near by, now. He had been to the house once, and had been obliged to refuse another invitation from Mrs. Dilke when he had been busy seeing his book through the press. The roomy structure, with a chimney at each corner and an air about it, stood in the midst of a large garden at the foot of Hampstead Heath. It had been erected by young Dilke and his friend Charles Brown. There were two entrances, and a partition in the middle, making it in effect two houses, one

occupied by Brown, the other by Dilke. The whole was called Wentworth Place. Down a slight slope walked Keats and knocked at the front entrance. Mrs. Dilke came to the door with a bright face.

“How do you do this lovely day, Mr. Keats? Charles will be so glad to know you’re back in town. Did you have a pleasant sojourn in the Island?”

“It was delicious, Mrs. Dilke. I could have eaten all the green leaves for a salad, and drunk all the ‘quick freshes’ with the fish in ’em as a pickle!”

“You certainly did enjoy the country. But did you make a start on that immense poem I’ve been hearing about?”

“Just a start. Or not that, according to my version of the old saw: Not well begun till half done. But I’ll do it,” he added cheerfully.

“Charles is at home to see you. He is in the garden, with little Charlie and Mr. Brown, our neighbour.”

“I’ll just step around, then, and see what he’s up to. Thank you, Mrs. Dilke.” Keats liked her cordial, casual ways.

There was a gravelled walk, and the grass knolls were smooth as though the house had been a century old. There were a couple of peach trees and between them a taller plum tree, beneath which sat a man and a small boy, Charles Brown and Charlie Dilke; while standing beside them with one foot on the bench was Charles Dilke. Brown was a thickset, bald man, with a face full of good-natured cynicism. He was facing Keats while Dilke talked to him, and nodded. Dilke turned around, a well-built fellow with a large bright eye and plump jaw. His hair and sideburns swept away from his face in a dark frame. His forehead was good, Keats thought, but a trifle on the square order, as though turned out to specifications in a lathe. He was about twenty-seven, but Brown must have been thirty. They disputed chaffingly the merits of Hampstead and the country, but Keats had the last word, and amid the laughter little Charlie looked up wonderingly.

“I like you,” he said. “You are quite intelligent if you *are* small.”

Keats reddened. Dilke sat down on the bench, perhaps to take away the difference in their height, and took Charlie on his knee. “Small people like you should not talk much unless they are very, *very* intelligent indeed.”

“You had a pleasant trip?” asked Brown.

“Yes, I made a grand tour of the south of England,” said Keats hastily. “Wight, Margate, Canterbury, Hastings.”

“Oh—Hastings. Hastings is quite a pleasant town, you know. A fellow can have quite a pleasant time in Hastings if he does not worry his head about poetry and learning, however much he may be addicted to ‘em. Dilke here is the worst fellow to go on a holiday with.”

“Ha!” said Dilke, looking up. “Brown, you’re a light-minded bachelor and no good influence for our friend. By the way, Keats, someone told me, perhaps it was Hunt, that you were writing an immense long poem, in the country.”

“What did Hunt say about it?”

“Why, it might have been somebody else who told me. I hope you were.”

“Well, I went at it for a month until I was not right in my head. But I hope to do it all before the end of the year. Now if I do not fall off in the winding-up as the woman said . . .”

Brown’s eyes were twinkling behind his spectacles.

“Now I remember who it was told me: Haydon. He wanted you to come and be drawn and you told him you wouldn’t get back until the end of the year. We feared you were entangled with some rural fair.”

“Rural fairs usually take place in the autumn,” returned Keats. Brown laughed. Keats began to take notice of this Brown, whom he had scarcely met before, and who amended:

“Rural fairs are not necessarily entangling, either. I’ve never found ‘em so!”

“But perhaps you are a heartless lady-killer,” Dilke said.

“No, I am a practical man who knows something of his world. I know little of goddesses, except that they treat a common fellow like me in the same manner. Such a goddess is Fame, for example, ‘she shines not upon fools,

lest the reflection should hurt her', like Imogen. So I shall have to content myself with lesser madams."

The allusion to Shakespeare, and the general exaggeration, won Keats.

Dilke let young Charlie down to the ground. "Go and tell Phillips to bring us a bottle of claret, there's a good boy."

The old gardener who had been bending over rows of beans in the vegetable garden behind the shrubs, stood up, looked at the gentlemen, and went to the house with the child. They drank and talked, and Dilke insisted that Keats stay to dinner. Keats jumped up, remembering other calls.

"I am sorry. I rest your debtor. God 'ield you, gentlemen."

"Next time you come, you need not mind if Dilke is not at home. Probably I shall be," said Brown. "And if so, glad to see you."

Fanny, that afternoon, was glad to see him, and her delight was not lessened when he began to undo a parcel, *Essays in Rhyme on Morals and Manners* by Miss Taylor.

"Oh, it's splendid, John, to remember me like that, just grand."

"I remembered your liking for those pleasant little things, the *Original Poems for Infant Minds*."

"Oh, that is a long time ago. I was a mere infant then."

"These essays are the more mature productions of the same hand. You see, the writer has been growing up as well as yourself. Perhaps you'll like them just as well in their way." Keats took on a formal and solemn air in talking to his little sister about books. It was important that she have the proper respect, and that she read good things. "But, Fanny, you *are* growing up! I expect next time I come you will have your hair done up."

"Of course. I'm fourteen—past." She hated to remind John that he had actually forgotten her birthday. It had occurred on June third, during his week with the lady. He struck his hand to his forehead.

"If this keeps up I shall have a bad conscience—I was taking a holiday, resting from my work, at Hastings. If I had had anybody by to remind me

of home, or not been in a strange place, I surely would not have forgotten. I hope you'll forgive me, Fanny, and accept the book as a present after all."

"Of course . . . I am to go to school soon, in the autumn, I think."

"You'll be giving me lessons in French. Will you like French?"

"*Pour ainsi dire*," returned Fanny mischievously.

"Little rascal! You have been reading French novels already, under Mrs. Abbey's eye."

"Sh—sh!" Fanny wagged a forefinger at him.

"In fact I may say," droned Keats, in a pedagogical voice, "that French is probably the poorest language ever spoken since the jabbering in the Tower of Babel. I wish the Italian would supersede the French in every school throughout the country, for that is filled with a real poetry and romance of a kind more fitted for the pleasure of ladies than perhaps our own."

He had Fanny laughing before he finished his rant, and he was going to tell her that his meaning was quite serious, when he recalled that this was part of Hunt's doctrine. He was sorry when he had to leave her. Fanny was a bright child, and all kinds of good fun, in spite of her dismal surroundings. "Poor *ainsi* dear!" he punned in his mind, and a tear smarted under his eyelid. He would make her friends with the Dilke and Reynolds ladies.

In the Marlborough Street studio next day he found Haydon sitting at a window facing his painting, a book on his lap. He started up and came to Keats with arms outstretched. "My dear fellow, why didn't you tell me—"

"I thought to surprise you with Betty-over-the-way in your arms, and here you are reading the Bible, I'll be bound."

"Reading, think of my troubles, but not working, alas!"

"Your troubles! What's the matter?"

"Never mind. Some days I just can't go on. I am glad you're back, so that I can make the drawing of your head among the shouting multitude about the Christ. I have put Hazlitt's in as an investigator. It has a good effect. My eyes are in a terrible condition. I am in the clutches of the

moneylenders. And I am looking for a new studio. This room is so small, the air so confined, the effluvium of paint so overpowering, that many people of fashion have advised me to move if I wish to save my life. But how can I?"

"You seem to have all the troubles but being in love! But I *am* sorry."

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Haydon. "I am. But don't let's talk of it. There is no hope. You do not know of anyone who could help me, do you?" Keats knew, he said, of more wanting help than able to give it, but Haydon was off on another tack. "Oh, Keats, you know the *Annals of the Fine Arts*, do you not? My old friend, Elmes, is the editor. He gives me a free hand to print anything I like. I have opened my battery against that stumbling-block and coiled snake, the Academy. A joke I must tell you—one Academician, report has it, said, 'By and by a man will be afraid to become an Academician.' And once when Wilkie was with me, and an Academician came in, Wilkie, seeing the *Annals* on the table, said, in absolute horror, 'Just take away that publication.' Wilkie is a good fellow, but not very tough-fibred. When we were young fellows I used to consider him a rival. The best thing I've done in the *Annals* is my *Dreams of Somniator*. I pictured a deputation from the French Academy to the British, to consult on the principles of Greek form, and I made one member into a vinegar cruet, another a viper; Fuselli was sent to hell as a place congenial to his genius; West was changed into a chameleon; Wilkie and Mulready were spared, and so was Turner. Why, the circulation of the paper increased! Everyone read it, and wanted more *Dreams*. But to feed human malignity is not my principle, and sound views of art are not enough to interest the public."

"I must look into this journal."

"But what I was going to say, my dear fellow, is, Elmes would be delighted to print some of your poems, I know he would. If you will give me some, I shall be overjoyed to take them to him."

Keats's face lit up. He had printed in only one magazine, and this would be more than another outlet, it would be a token that he was not wholly under Hunt's wing—or thumb. By the time they had discussed this and the great painting, it was late and they had lunch in a chop-house.

When he returned to Well Walk, who should be waiting for him but Severn, his gentle and callowly magnanimous face wearing a look of patience.

“How is your “Helena and Hermia” painting? Did I tell you I have illustrated the same passage of Spenser, in my poem?”

“Then you did think of me! My painting had a better reception than I expected. You must come with me to the Royal Academy.”

But for that afternoon, John decided, the open was better. It was one of the longest days in the year, and they trudged a great distance, through Southgate toward the Barnets, through a great sweep of lovely English country, by the remains of Enfield Chase: a district of winding, elm-shadowed lanes, of bosky hedge and thicket, undulating pasture and barley fields, dales and slope. It was the land of his boyhood, the land he was putting into *Endymion* in the guise of Greek landscapes. The familiar beauty gave him a sense of pride, and yet of some other feeling that tightened his throat and caused his eyes to blink tears back. His erectness and smooth motion contrasted with the taller but slightly stooping Severn, who lagged at times.

A shambling tramp rose from the grass at the roadside where he had been napping under some bushes. His elbows and knees seemed designed as signals, for these features, not of the most suave contour otherwise, were patched with red cotton. A tall, strong-looking fellow with a face bitten with lines of experience, under a week’s beard. He had tied pieces of wood beneath the soles of his feet. “Pray, sirs, have you any occasion?”

“We have no situations ourselves,” replied Keats.

Severn was impressed. “Did you grasp the furtive animalism beneath—”

“Not beneath his fine raiment,” said Keats with some compunction. They walked more slowly. “I shall people my landscape with true gods and goddesses,” he continued with no sense of relevance. “It shall be a poem to reinvoke the old Greek religion of joy. But you shall see. . . . Hark, the wave billowing through that tree!”

A vast old chestnut stood before them, overspreading the lane and a great tract on either side of it. A light flurry of wind had struck its outer branches,

and afar off could be heard a great surging which approached nearer every second. "The tide, the tide!" cried John delightedly, seizing Severn's arm and leaping upon a stile to watch its approach across the meadow grasses. He did not stir until the tide was flowing all about him, past him into a field of ripening barley, while his rapture made his eyes gleam and a slight smile appear on his parted lips. He was not to be dragged away.

"Your eyes are like those of a wild gipsy maid—or a young faun waiting for some cry from the forest depths," Severn said in his mellow voice.

"What? Nonsense! Think of something more virile than that or I—"

"A young eagle, then, staring with proud joy before taking flight."

"That will do. I wish I could take flight," he sighed. "Severn," he said, looking down suddenly on this friend who was so good a fellow and so exacting a bore, "what would it be to see the classic scenes with our own eyes!"

"Perhaps we shall." Severn of course took the "our" literally. "Rome and Athens are far from being dead cities still. But this—this is enough for me. Your enthusiasm—I do not know what I should have done without you when I broke away from my perpetual stabbing of copper, and almost broke with my father in the process. And as for aspiring to oil paintings, that would have been totally out of my scope but for your spurring."

Keats stepped down from his stile and they walked along again in a silence which Severn respected. The crowd of bewitching visions crowding the brain of Keats had vanished with Severn's talk; and though he did not wish to call them back, a profound uneasiness, a disquiet that was almost anxiety, held his mind. Was it some memory that had almost come to him? Some premonition that had almost taken form? He was still disturbed as he searched.

"What are you thinking of?" Severn wanted to know.

"Ah, well, to-morrow I shall be at *Endymion* again."

To-morrow he was, but in the afternoon he took himself off to the Reynolds's house in Little Britain. It was early, in spite of his walk, and John was not yet come from the insurance office. Mariane and Jane were



there, decorative in crisp summer gowns. They welcomed his return to town eagerly, and were full of inquiries about the Isle of Wight.

“But didn’t you become lonesome for female companionship?” asked Jane teasingly.

“But why should I—among sands, stones, pebbles, beaches, cliffs, rocks, deeps, shallows—”

“Master Shallow,” said Mariane.

“Seriously, it would take a Madonna or a Juliet to distract one from such beauties. Which word, by the way, I must acquaint you was derived from the Syriac, and came down in a way which neither of you, I am sorry to say, are at all capable of comprehending. But as a time may come when by your occasional converse with me you may arrive at ‘something like prophetic strain—’”

“Indeed!”

“The word ma-don-a, my dear ladies or—the word mad—ona—so I say! I am not mad, howsoever I say, ‘Let everyone drink to the health of Archimedes who was of so benign a disposition that he never would leave Syracuse in his life—so kept himself out of all knight-errantry—’”

Jane and Mariane exchanged glances. John thought Mariane’s face had a slightly unwholesome plumpness. Did they suspect he was a little so-so? From the open windows of the house came notes of piano music. Keats sank upon the grass before the bench upon which the two young ladies sat. His eyes had no hope of so much as an ankle.

“Oh, a man would prefer Juliet,” said Jane, with a toss of her head. “In my opinion Imogen cannot be compared with her.”

“Or Ophelia,” preferred Mariane.

“Well, I sincerely believe that Imogen is the finest creature, and I should have been disappointed at hearing you prefer Juliet. But still—”

“But still,” said Mariane rather stiffly, “men will prefer some gadaway body—”

“’Tis so, ’tis so,” said Keats with a twinkle. “Do I defend ’em? I feel such a yearning toward Juliet that I would rather follow her into Pandemonium than Imogen into Paradise—heartily wishing myself a Romeo to be worthy of her. But I think I am safer in talking about the sea.”

“We are contemplating a vacation beside the sea ourselves,” said Jane, “at Littlehampton.”

“You will enjoy it, I am sure. And be sure to bathe; I prescribe it. Bathe thrice a week, and let us have no more sitting up and chilblains—”

“Your memory becomes embarrassing,” laughed Jane.

“What Dr. Turton is this expounding?” demanded John Hamilton Reynolds, striding into the garden. Keats sprang to his feet, a delighted smile overspreading his face. But behind Reynolds came the stiff figure of his friend Bailey from Oxford.

“I am just commiserating with myself,” explained Keats. “Here’s Jane and Mariane going to the sea. Tom and George are thinking of going to Paris. But I—I must continue to drive the quill.”

“Think of me,” said Reynolds. “Driving the quill, not like a lance in rest on the withers of Pegasus, but across musty ledgers.”

Bailey’s glance seemed to travel to the figure of Mariane on the bench. Now he spoke, more, it seemed, to Keats than to anyone else.

“For my part, while I am going to the country now, I ask nothing better than to spend the greater part of the Long Vacation in my immemorial Oxford among my books.” Perhaps, he further intimated, Keats would care to share these with him. Keats hesitated. He was avoiding other influences, Hunt’s, and Shelley’s; but then Bailey was not a poet.

“Ah,” said John Reynolds waggishly, “Wordsworth is a worthy bard. Didn’t he write encouragingly of my poor attempts? Though he is annoyingly noncommittal about my taking up poetry as a vocation. And, John, I warrant there is no meanest merit in Wordsworth but you shall have heard it before you leave Bailey’s roof.”

“Between him and Milton I should choose the living one,” said Bailey. He would think it over, Keats decided, as they trooped into the house for tea. Bailey stayed in town a week or two, and became more understandable in his dry, sound-hearted way. When he and Reynolds and Jem Rice and Wells and Severn came to spend an evening with the Keats boys, Bailey fell in with the crowd and joined in the “concert” with a full-toned bassoon, “aggravating” his voice as Keats advised on the “rum-ti-ti”. But chiefly, he was a fresh influence, with a high seriousness and a tentative scholarly liberality.

It was not until July sixth that Hunt continued his review of *Poems by John Keats*. And then he was rather niggling, in spite of considerable praise. Of *I Stood Tip-toe*, conceived at the first meeting with himself, he said, “The first poem consists of a piece of luxury in a rural spot.” That was an innocent description of it, yet somehow Keats felt bitter. Next week Hunt continued the review, announced that *Sleep and Poetry* was last, best and longest, and quoted fifty lines or so about the poetry of the day, which pointed his own predilections; so ended his essay with reflections on and against the Lake Poets.

Reynolds, as a fellow-poet, grasped all the implications, and declared that it was rather cowardly. He wrote a letter disparaging Keats and all his works. Then together they composed a sonnet which their imaginary correspondent was to proffer as his own, on “Liberty”. It was great fun. In the ninth line they wrote “The goal must be near at last—Bright Liberty,” and spelled it “gaol” instead of “goal”. John Scott printed these in the *Champion*; then two weeks later Reynolds came to the defence of his friend and printed the sonnet on the sea which had been written at Carisbrooke.

So August, which was a rather dull month, with Book II not going too well, was enlivened somewhat. In truth, with that inexorable poem lying in wait for days, while Keats tried to live gay-heartedly, he actually felt a kind of relief in getting his brothers off to Paris. He managed to finish the Book, but he needed a change, for fear of staleness. At the end of the month, Providence, in the guise of Bailey, reappeared. To Oxford they would go and work like cloistered monks, in leisure time testing the qualities of one another’s mind.

The Dilkes were going away too; Mrs. Dilke was disappointed at his not being able to oversee Wentworth Place, in return for which he might have had some fine cabbages, onions, beetroot and French beans. But failing this, would he get her a box of medicine to take for her sciatica? Keats promised, smiling at the importunity of people about to take a journey, who demanded all assistance, divine and human. Dilke came in and they rallied each other.

“Better leave a few pheasants for next season, and rein in if possible the Nimrod of your disposition. I would request you to shoot fair, moreover, and not have at the poor devils in a furrow. When they are flying, then you may fire, and nobody will be the wiser.”

“Well, good luck!” Dilke stretched forth his hand. “Don’t become a clergyman like this new friend of yours.”



## CHAPTER III

John was up betimes the day after his return from Oxford. The call he owed Haydon was rendered urgent by a matter of business. A young fellow Haydon had met showed such an ardent impulse in the direction of art that he had instructed Keats to see the youth's work in the country. If it promised well, Haydon would take him as an apprentice. Bailey had agreed that Cripps should have the opportunity of correcting his faults in Haydon's studio. (He had brought them a copy of a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots with the eyeballs coloured yellow as, he said, the original had them.) And so they wrote Haydon. The artist reiterated his intention to be a true mentor and trainer, in return for a nominal fee: three hundred, or even two hundred pounds. Keats's surprise approached shock, but he did not betray it to Bailey, and as Bailey said nothing, they cast about for ways and means. Cripps would have to do his best, and they would try a subscription list. Now, Haydon made some suggestions as to whom it would be well to approach; not Sir George Beaumont, who had proved a fickle patron. He himself would contribute five pounds; he could not be expected to give more. Keats agreed soberly, and was glad when they spoke of other matters.

"Never was such a country of clear streams and clear weather. September at Oxford was heaven. But is it not strange that we never have enjoyment save at the expense of another? The old man Cripps, with whom Bailey and I had some curious conversation before the son arrived, said, 'If we have much more of sich fine weather we s'll starve, and England with us.' I had never thought of droughts, and reapings, and keeping body and soul together."

"But your poem, man: you have said not a word of that."

"Oh, Endymion led me to the bottom of the sea where we met an old man—Glaucus, from Ovid. I do not know that it was very happy: it was easier to talk with Bailey on the problems and moral nature of man. We worked every morning in his rooms, and in the afternoon we went upon the river. Bailey's health was not good and he did not relish the reading he had to do. He claims, fancy, a resemblance between my principle and Wordsworth's. My *Sleep and Poetry*. 'The blue bared its eternal bosom', he

says reminded him at once of Wordsworth's 'The world is too much with us'. But the debt I owe Bailey is—aside from Dante whom we read at morn and noon and middle night—his upright principle, and the way he searches out the truth."

"The good fellow sounds like a parson," remarked Haydon. "You must take warning—"

"Bailey is the soundest-hearted fellow—he does not, like you, look upon the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and its contents as materials to form greater things—that is to say more ethereal things—than our Creator—but now I am talking like a madman."

"Methinks John Keats shares that passion," said Haydon with an affectionate glance.

"By the way, we visited Shakespeare's birthplace, inscribed our names with myriad others upon the walls of his house. We went to the Holy Trinity Church and the sacristan dealt in sacrilege—chattered at us even when we went into the graveyard and tried to think of the gravediggers of *Hamlet* throwing up the ancient skulls."

The day was short, and when they had discussed the painting, Keats rose to take his leave. Haydon came with him to the door, and, looking up and down the street, remarked: "Keats, don't show your lines to Hunt on any account, or he will have done half for you. I know him. He comes here and walks up and down before my picture criticizing every head in it."

"But he has not even seen the poem yet," objected Keats.

"That is the point. He can't claim a share in it unless he does."

Keats laughed uncertainly. "I did not confess that my ideas with respect to it are very low, and I would rewrite the subject through again—but I am tired of it and think the time would be better spent in writing a new romance which I have in my eye for next summer. Seeing your patience and ardour reminds me that Rome was not built in a day, and all the good I can expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of experience which I hope to gather in my next poem. It will be the story of Hyperion."

“That sounds well, and no doubt it will be of a higher flight than this one. Come and see me often while you are in town!”

Hunt too had moved, into the same street, of all places, Lisson Grove, North Paddington. It would be strange to walk past the house and not step in and greet Libertas. Waiting for an answer to his knock, looking at the extinguisher for flambeaux which still hung beside the door, he felt a warming of memory, an excitement which far surpassed his feelings at seeing Haydon again. He had to admire Haydon; some humility might be reserved even for his defects, though that Cripps business had been awkward!

“Well, well, Junkets! And you have returned to Babylon! Aren’t you afraid your muse will become so shy she will not stay in the metropolis if you keep yourself away so much of the time?”

“My muse has become a jog-trot pack-horse,” laughed Keats. Then he saw Shelley in the study. The two tall slim men stood over him, smiling both. Shelley writhed awkwardly, fiddling with a pen and papers on the table. He was speaking in his gentle, piercingly high voice. He hoped that Keats had not forgotten their agreement to write each a long poem.

“Be seated, gentlemen, be seated.” Hunt rested his elbow on the table and crossed his knees. “Shelley and I have been discussing the preface he is writing for *Laon and Cythna*.”

“I was a number of years in arriving at the conclusions embodied in the poem. Of course I should not publish it in its present condition; long labour and revision would do wonders for it. But then,” he sighed, “It would lose much of whatever there is of newness and energy of imagery. Did you have a good summer?”

“I have written three of the four books of my poem. Moving about from place to place does nothing to further my rate of composition. But pray, you were about to read your preface?”

“Yes,” said Shelley eagerly. “Perhaps the ideas will be of interest.” He took up a dozen sheets of closely written manuscript and began to read: “The Poem which I now present to the world . . .” Keats listened with



strained interest, fearful of missing points which he would catch at once in reading. He would have to write some sort of preface to his own poem at the proper time, "*I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality.*"

"Nonsense," Keats told himself, looking at the rapturously listening Hunt and the fervid, boyish countenance of the obliviously reading poet. "If he is going to use poetry to sell creeds, why doesn't he write catches or hymns?" There was little use in listening farther, but he smiled politely when Hunt nodded gravely to him. There were such words as "bloodless dethronement", "religious frauds", "treachery and barbarity of hired soldiers", "legitimate despotism", "sophisms of Mr. Malthus". Then he pricked up his ears: "But in this as in every other respect I have written fearlessly," Shelley was declaring. "It is the misfortune of this age that its writers, too thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame. They write with fear of the Reviews before their eyes. This system of criticism sprang up in the torpid interval when Poetry was not. Poetry, and the art which professes to regulate and limit its powers, cannot subsist together. . . ."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Keats.

Hunt interposed. "That will be the most valuable thing in your preface safeguarding all the rest. It will show that you are no subject for the intimidating tactics of the *Quarterly* and the others."

"It does not leave them many legs to stand on," volunteered Keats.

"It is splendid; could not be better," rejoined Hunt. When some further discussion had been got through, he turned to Keats. "You will call upon Haydon surely, while you are in Lisson Grove. Oh, you have! Rather tiresome, Haydon; it seems to me that every time I go he has done some damage to the heads he had already painted into his picture."

Keats rose, and wrath increased his height, while his eyes glowed. But he would not do himself and Haydon injury, or give these two satisfaction by making a scene.

“Oh, don’t go yet, Junkets,” said Hunt, rising. “We should have a memorable session to-day—especially if we could have had the third Grace, Reynolds.”

Shelley stood with a look of ingenuous puzzlement on his delicate but somehow not fine features. “You must not forget to come and see me,” he said.

“Thank you. I am making the rounds of my old friends,” he told them, both laughing, “seeing what spiritual heights they have reached.” There was bitterness in his voice, which almost broke. Hunt did not accompany him. Mrs. Hunt, in the hall, with two of the children, invited him to dinner.

He stayed all of the next day with his brothers. Tom had caught a fresh cold in Paris, a result of taking a set of boxing-gloves, perhaps. He was pale, and any little exertion, even a brisk walk, brought bright patches upon his cheekbones. The cold had gone, but now there was a cough, which would start at times when he stepped into fresh air, or went to bed in cold sheets, or even passed from one room to another, and bother him sorely.

George’s unease was mental. He could not find an occupation which suited him. Without large capital his position would be servile, and generosity ruinous. They tried to talk reasoningly, but George made a worrying matter of it. He claimed that any consideration people paid him was owing to his brother: the Reynolds girls spoke against him. John corrected him; they had never said anything, but time would bring forth the manner and thoughts they had internally. To cheer Tom and George, he told them the comedy of Haydon and Hunt’s relations and of finding Hunt all ears before his patron.

They were more fortunate than he in their friends. He would go and stand before his familiar portrait of Shakespeare, and now the blessings he bestowed upon his Carisbrooke landlady were shared by Georgiana Wylie; she had worked a set of tassels and hung them from the corners of the picture. The sight of the Wylie family’s wholesome happiness that night cheered him, and next day he went to Wentworth Place. The Dilkes were not returned, but Brown made him welcome. Talk of the brothers led to the intimation that Brown had five and that his father had been a Scotch stockbroker on the London ’Change. One of the older brothers had been in

business as a Russia merchant, while Charles until he was eighteen perched upon a stool in a counting-house. Then John took him into partnership and sent him to Russia. At first he did well, but a wholesale purchase of bristles floored them when split whalebone began to be used as a substitute. Brown was launching into the experiences in Russia leading up to his penniless return, when Reynolds came in.

“Heigho, John Major! Haydon told me you were back, so I have been stalking you. I met Hunt in the pit of the theatre one night and he enquired whether I had heard from you. I told him you were getting on to the completion of four thousand lines. ‘Ah!’ says Hunt, ‘had it not been for me they would have been seven thousand’!”

“Oh, I suppose Hunt meant he would have been glad to help me.” Keats spoke quickly as the reaction of knee-jerk, but he was hurt, bewildered.

“This man Hunt must have been made rather *opiniâtre* by his long editorship,” observed Brown, who had contributed to the *Examiner*.

“Failings I am always rather rejoiced to find in a man; they bring us to a level. Hunt has them, but then his makes-up are very good.”

“He fancies himself as Sir Oracle,” sniffed Reynolds. “But if he reduces us all to barking dogs he will be sorry. There’s Horace Smith completely bored with him. Heigho! What does it matter, let us all grow fatter, like our friend Brown.”

“You’ll have to eat—and drink—what your friend Brown eats, then.” Brown went downstairs himself.

“I shall ever feel grateful to you for having made known to me so real a fellow as Bailey. If the old poets have any pleasure in looking down at the enjoyers of their works, their eyes must bend with a double satisfaction upon him. We had regularly a boat on the Isis, and explored all the streams and beds of rushes. There was one we christened ‘Reynolds’s Cove’, where we read Wordsworth and talked.”

“A good fellow, but troubled,” Reynolds agreed, holding one of the glasses Brown offered. “I feel gloomy. This London is so dark and foggy.”

“I have almost decided to do all my writing in the country. There is always something wrong with one’s lodgings. Where we are now, it is the Bentley children, little carrots. Running noses and smelling stockings are not so bad as their shrill voices. But then, in London I can see my friends.”

The three sampled the bottles very judiciously. Soon, however, the drinks were only incidental to the conversation, which became brighter. Dinner hour came quickly. Brown became so ponderously grave that they rallied him. But he repeated an invitation to all three brothers for to-morrow night. Outside, Keats urged Reynolds to step over to Well Walk. Reynolds would not. But it would mean only a few squares more, Keats insisted. No. Keats promised him a sight of the postman’s little carrot-heads in bed. No. Finally they parted.

One afternoon George appeared with a blue and yellow *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. “It is pleasing to see one’s juniors addicted to *belles lettres*.” But George grimly pointed out a title: “The Cockney School of Poetry”. Turning to the page, John stared aghast at a motto containing his own name and Hunt’s in capitals:

Our talk shall be (a theme we never tire on)  
Of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron,  
(Our English Dante)—Wordsworth—HUNT, and KEATS,  
The Muses’ Son of Promise; and what feats  
He yet may do.

Cornelius Webb.

The snake! To come to Hunt’s house as a guest, and then vilify host and guests! The article itself, whether by Webb or not, was a wild farrago, on Hunt and his crimes, ranging from treason down; it decried his morals, his wife, his poetry, habits, company and conversation, in terms of hysterical malice which one felt was bound to neutralize its own intention. Before he was done, while George was waiting expectantly and watching him, John smiled. “These Philippics are to come out in numbers, it seems. I suppose my turn will be next.” He looked up.

“Do you think they will be taken seriously?” asked George.

“Those who take such a magazine seriously will take this seriously too. It doesn’t matter.”

“You relieve me greatly to say so, my dear John. But all the same the fellow should be stopped from writing another. I am very anxious to meet him.”

“No more than I. I suppose nothing less than a duel would do?”

“I would not wait for such a formality. The vermin might get away! But couldn’t a warning be placed in the paper,” asked George, “warning the writer that justice would be executed on his person? It might be effective. Let me send an advertisement to John Hunt for next Sunday.”

It was some relief to concoct the advertisement, but, once sent, Keats had his doubts of it.

In spite of being kept indoors with Tom and a cough of his own, he was not getting forwarder with *Endymion*. There were too many petty things to think about, too many petty errands to be done, even too many friends, in spite of disillusion. The old recourse would have to be tried—a trip and a quiet sojourn in a fresh place, alone. Tom had to go away for the winter, but George would have to go with him. John might join them at Teignmouth when his task was ended. It should have been Lisbon, but Abbey would not forthcome.

As soon as London was swept away, exhilaration came to him. It was but a short ride, for his purse was slim, and when the coach came to Burford Bridge and its little inn, at the foot of Box Hill, he dismounted. Nelson had stopped here a night before Trafalgar, they told him. Scarcely an hour could be spared for making oneself at home, yet he could not ride or walk without feeling the newness of the world. The soft November sunshine had no haze of smoke and mist to contend with, but fell brightly upon leaves that bestrewed the grass, the lanes and footpaths, with a shifting pattern of cloud and bare boughs.

His troubles drifted away as easily. What if he had the reputation of Hunt’s *élève*? What if Haydon did nothing to further the Cripps plan? Bailey wrote, hurt by an offensive letter from the painter, and even expressed

doubts of the imaginative faculty in man. Hadn't these faults been plain in these men at the first meeting? But for all that one did not on principle cut their acquaintance. One should have enough humility to learn from different people, aye, from people who differed. Bailey of course, scholarly fellow that he was, was not imaginative, or only by appreciation, not creation. He would have to reassure Bailey. Men of genius were like certain ethereal chemicals acting on the mass of neutral intellect. But as for having any character of their own, they had none. Shakespeare was Iago just as readily as he was Juliet. Men of character were like Bailey—themselves and no one else. Of course the top of this category held the men of power, the Pitts and Nelsons and Napoleons.

Perhaps it could be phrased in that way, so that Bailey would not take offence. But the imagination—nothing could be more authentic; what it seized upon as beauty was bound to turn out truth. It made of all the passions in their sublimity, essential beauty. The truths men thought to seek out by consecutive reasoning might be proved, they could not be believed. Bailey had seemed to think that all that was necessary was to know a thing; that was different from comprehending it through intuition. Whatever heaven there might be could come only to those who delighted in sensation, not to those who hungered after a simular truth.

John Keats looked out at the group of poplars that served as his sundial.

Such letter-writing did not interfere with his poem more than walks through these footpaths beneath skimming swallows in the wind, with wide glimpses of the dark little river Mole (why should it not be dark?), these shorn hills and dry meadows that seemed like a recollected birthright. In *Endymion* he had something to do with the playing of different natures with joy and sorrow. Tranquillity—that was the great thing. Look unconcerned at heart-vexations, he would advise the troubled Reynolds. A man should have the fine point of his soul taken off to become fit for this world. Foolishly literal people believed there was such a thing as happiness to come at; perhaps even marked out the time at which to expect it. They would wait for ever, not knowing that the moment was everything; if you could live in no other way it could be in taking part in the existence of the sparrow before your window. Before and after was nothing to be seen

but partings from those you loved. Death, estrangement, indifference, for choice.

In the midst of the world's confusions you might go a whole week without a generous impulse of passion or affection. Solitude was best for wisdom and kindliness. The moon stood over Box Hill and Keats stood still. All the long days he had spent in loving toil to evoke her spell in an old heartening story returned to him. It was little relief to be done with that task. Freshly written lines came to his lips:

To Sorrow  
I bade good-morrow,  
And thought to leave her far away behind;  
But cheerly, cheerly,  
She loves me dearly;  
She is so constant to me, and so kind.  
I would deceive her  
And so leave her,  
But ah! she is so constant and so kind.

Come then, Sorrow!  
Sweetest Sorrow!  
Like an own babe I nurse thee on my breast:  
I thought to leave thee  
And deceive thee.  
But now of all the world I love thee best.

## CHAPTER IV

Tom was worse. They had not gone to Teignmouth, nor wanted to disturb John at Burford Bridge, but Tom had scarcely been up from bed. The coughing now was aggravated by spitting, and there were palpitations of the heart which he thought would work him an injury. Dr. Sawrey admitted privately that it was probably the consumption. Keats went white. High words ensued between him and George. The boy had what their mother had died from, and he had not been told. That night and the next day were spent in getting the two off. Tom was very pale and much bundled, but enlivened by the prospect of the journey. Fortunately the weather was mild for December.

Reynolds came repeatedly to cheer him up. He wanted to go on a holiday to Exeter, and plagued Keats to take his post on the *Champion* and write the theatrical notices. Kean, who had been ill, was to come back in *Richard the Third*. For one admiring Kean and worshipping Shakespeare, what lark could be better? When the night came, Keats dressed with care. His coat was of the softest material, but cut so cunningly that its wrinkles and lapels fell into graceful lines. The collar was turned up at the back, the sleeves were long with a flared cuff and two buttons, almost covering the backs of his hands. His curly hair rose in a mass of solid gold colour. As he surveyed himself in the glass he decided that he looked more like a little dandy and coffee-house wit of the time of Steele and Swift than of his own prosaic days of sickly safety and comfort.

He was early, and found himself seated apart in the pit, which was full of a buzz of conversation of which no word could be distinguished unless it was near. The curtain was black, and rushes protruded on the boards beneath it. The awesome business of tragedy was doing. Gradually the seats were filled. A definite thrill was in the air. Kean was back!

The musicians came filing into their side stage, and began pegging and fagging away at an overture. They were very ceremonial about it; never did you see faces more in earnest. But the curtain did not rise. Hazlitt on the other side of the house, under the wing, touched a finger to an imaginary hat. The orchestra played the overture for the third time, working variations



into it. Still the curtain did not rise. They passed into a country dance, and their old familiar boonsome “Pothouse”. Then it was a treat to see how pompous they turned on a sudden, how much at their ease as they swung through the melody; how they looked about and chatted and did not care a damn.

But the curtain did rise at last and Kean did appear: the first notes of his voice struck a thrill into Keats. “His tongue must have robbed the Hybla bees and left them honeyless—perhaps stingless, too.” There was a gusto in his voice; he delivered himself up to the instant feeling without a shadow of doubt clouding his intention. In direful and slaughterous accents he was stupendous. “From eternal risk,” thought Keats, “he speaks as though his body were unassailable.” Or again there was morning freshness and dewy charity when Richard said, “Be stirring with the lark to-morrow, gentle Norfolk.” Scene followed scene. It was all “a thing to dream of, not to tell”. Never, never had Shakespeare lived so before Keats; perhaps never before had he himself lived for hours at more intense stretch. He went home as though in a dream, walking to Hampstead and coining ecstatic phrases.

The article would do splendidly, Reynolds said, and give him his freedom. “Oh, did you know that Shelley’s new poem is out? *Laon and Cythna*, he calls it, and there is talk of its being objected to and suppressed. You’d have thought *Queen Mab* would have been lesson enough.”

“Poor Shelley! I think he has his quota of good qualities, in sooth la! But so soon after he lost the custody of his children!”

In the theatre Horace Smith had met and invited Keats to dinner. He and his brothers had to live up to their reputations as deans of wit; nor could Hill and Dubois, two other guests, fall behind; while a third, Kingston, was a stupid cackler at the others. Yet it was uncommonly strange to see how they all contrived to act alike, even to affecting the same mannerism in handling a decanter. They were all acquainted with people of fashion, to whom they referred familiarly. It was possible to get on well with them by making a few puns and by appreciating their references. Probably his presence was to provide them with a neat quip or two in other company. They said things to make one start without making one feel. When Dubois referred lightheartedly to Kean and the low company he kept, it sufficed.

Keats felt like saying that he wished himself in that low company. Horace Smith spoke reasonably about Kean's being a good actor. They were perhaps trying to pull his leg because of his eulogy of Kean in that Sunday's *Champion*. Keats said nothing, though Kingston's laugh was ribald.

The days slipped away in this holiday time. When he called at Taylor and Hessey's with the manuscript of *Endymion* the partners were warm and cordial. They wanted to publish in the Spring, so that, after they had examined the poem, he would have to turn to and revise it as fast as he could. A week or two later he called again, and they expressed themselves content; but they would like him to see Mr. Woodhouse, their editor, before he went.

Woodhouse, it seemed, was a lawyer by profession, a man with a real sense of literary values and a taste for vivid stuff which counteracted the somewhat classical tendencies of Taylor. He received Keats now with consideration; a man of about thirty, with wide-arched brows and full and well-opened clear eye—a level-headed fellow. Keats soon gathered that he dabbled in verse occasionally, but that he was too sensible of its lack of merit to attempt publication.

"Sir," he declared, "you have done something which I have not seen successfully accomplished in modern literature, either French, Spanish, or Italian. You have made those ancient gods and mortals and their ways alive."

Much could be done in revision, Keats said in his eager way, and thanked him. Woodhouse continued. "As a whole it satisfies me, quite. But some things appear obscure. For example, in the second book, two lines:

Yet, in our very souls, we feel amain  
The close of Troilus and of Cressid sweet.

Now perhaps you will pardon my question, for the matter may not be important enough for a note at the bottom of the page: is it to Chaucer's or to Shakespeare's work of that title you are referring?"

*“Troilus and Cressida?”* It was not to the poem of that name I referred at all. ‘The close of Troilus and of Cressid sweet’ signifies, ‘The embrace of Troilus and Cressid sweet.’”

“Oh!” Woodhouse was almost confused. “Well, such details can be weighed and pro’d and con’d as you revise the poem. The whole, as I said, is sublime. Yours is a gospel for young and ardent natures. And now, perhaps, you would be pleased to tell me something of your methods of composition.”

“With pleasure,” said Keats gravely. “In the first place, I never sit down to write unless I am full of ideas, and then thoughts come about me in troops as though soliciting to be accepted, and I select from them. If poetry does not come naturally, it had best not come at all.” Woodhouse nodded. “And then I never correct. I had rather burn the piece and write something else. My judgment is as active while I am actually writing as my imagination is. In fact all my faculties are strongly excited and in their full play—and shall I afterwards, when my imagination is idle, and the heat in which I wrote gone off, sit down coldly to criticize, in possession of only one faculty I had used in creating?”

“N-no. It sounds reasonable. How interesting it is to get this. How valuable would be such information about Shakespeare’s manner of work.”

Keats snickered at the ease with which Woodhouse could be smoked, when he got outside. Perhaps they would not expect too much from the revision. After dinner with Haslam he betook himself in high spirits to the pantomime at Covent Garden Theatre. Bob Harris, the manager, was standing on the steps, a quizzical fellow who treated Keats as though he had known him since schooldays. He told how young Macready had brandished a battle-axe in the green-room with more enthusiasm than a rehearsal demanded, and broken a mirror worth £100 for which he offered to pay. . . . Nevertheless the pantomime was bad, and one had to say so as gracefully and lengthily as one could.

But one day Haydon produced the great event of these days. Wordsworth was in town, and a few days after Christmas would attend a dinner at the studio. The occasion turned out food for laughter more than thought.

Lamb came first, with an air of almost exaggerated serenity and self-possession, and greeted them mildly. He was telling Keats of attending Coleridge's course on Shakespeare and of the metaphysician's skill in talking of everything but his given topic, when Haydon returned from the door with a tall old man, perhaps forty-eight or fifty, a little stooped, with an air somewhat stately but shy as of one who knew men but did not mingle with the world.

Wordsworth's eyes were smouldering and deep, and he greeted them in a harmoniously rumbling voice. Haydon insisted on bringing Keats to the great man's notice, and the upshot was a chanting of the *Ode to Pan*, which Wordsworth said was a pretty piece of paganism. Lamb was the life of the party throughout dinner, and attacked Wordsworth for saying Voltaire was dull. After dinner, in came Landseer, Monkhouse, Ritchie and Kingston. The latter had come to Haydon that morning, said that he knew some of Haydon's friends, and would very much like to meet Mr. Wordsworth. Ritchie had met Tom in Paris and was much concerned by his illness. In Paris he had also met Humboldt, as a result of which he was now to head an expedition into the Soudan. They talked ardently of the new poetry, but Keats kept an eye on Kingston, who was sidling up to Wordsworth to ask him whether Milton were not a great genius. Lamb started up from the fire where he had been comfortably dozing his drinks away, took a candle and insisted on examining Kingston's phrenological development. Kingston plunged deeper, telling Wordsworth that he was the Comptroller of Stamps; and Lamb chanted "Diddle diddle dumpling", until Keats and Haydon hurried forward, seized his bony arms, and deposited him in the painting-room, where they exploded in laughter. They soothed the comptroller and got him to stay to supper, when Keats tried to astonish him by keeping his own two glasses at work in a knowing way.

During Christmas holidays too it was possible to see Fanny, who had been unwell, and give her a little advice about health. She told him that Mrs. Abbey had said that the Keatses were indolent and always would be, for it was born in them. Fanny had spoken right up: "If it is born in us, how can we help it?" John laughed. What would she like for a present? She had had most of Tassie's Gems by this time—Shakespeare's head, and Milton's, and

Adonis and Leander and all the pretty Greeks. A medal of the princess, she said. He reflected as he walked away with a rueful smile upon the divinity that doth hedge a king.

Those wild and fervent dreams of human and communal perfection the generation before his had entertained at the beginning of the French Revolution had been passed on to all too few free-hearted and open-minded men. There was Wordsworth himself gone over to the Tories, plainly: for upon the table when Keats reached Well Walk was an invitation from Kingston to come to his house to dine with Wordsworth next Saturday. What did a man like Wordsworth, surely one of the most sublime of God's creatures, mean by dining with such a nincompoop as Kingston, a business man and a Philistine? It was a stunning blow; but because Wordsworth had this common side to him was no reason to shun his company; that was still to be valued, even with some diminution of respect. A mischievous plan came to Keats. He would send regrets, but go to call on Wordsworth Saturday afternoon, and see him before he dined with Kingston. That worthy would hear of it too. But when he was kept waiting a long time after sending in his name, he began to have his doubts of the scheme. At last the old bard entered briskly, in knee-breeches, silk stockings, stiff collar, a cocked hat in his hand. He seemed to be in a great hurry. His face lit up when he saw Keats.

"Ah, my friend! I fear you will have to pardon me this time, for not being able to talk with you. The truth is I have an engagement to dine with the Commissioner of Stamps."

"Mr. Kingston, I presume?"

"Yes. Yes, you met him. You must come another day and read me something you have written."

"I will be most glad to see you at any time that pleases you."

Two ladies entered the room, dressed for the street; one in middle age was his spouse, the other younger, charming-looking, might have been his daughter. Wordsworth did not take time to introduce them, but, at the door, asked Keats to dine with him next Monday, or if that was impossible, Thursday.

The London streets seemed cold and bare. Christmas had come and gone; carol-singing and holly and all overt manifestations of jollity with it. Poetry! Where was she? It was hard to think of that dry old man in Mortimer Street even venturing to touch the hem of her shift. Something seemed to be taken from her charm to see what was without doubt a great poet so prosaic.

John walked to Jem Rice's lodgings, and found that young solicitor and man about town in a jocund frame. You never knew whether you would find him sick abed or away on a spree. But he would have the town's latest slang and gossip and a new story or two generally of his own make-up. "I say, Junkets, you look morbid as Ferdinand in the *Duchess of Malfi*. You must be in love or wanting to be."

Keats started a rant. Love in this age of rent and leases! Wordsworth's daughter had given the impetus. "Silly youth looks in the mirror and thinks itself divine by loving, so goes on yawning and doting a whole summer long, till Miss's comb becomes a pearl tiara and Wellingtons turn to Romeo boots. Fools! Must such passions be more common than the growth of weeds?"

"Bravo! Many a fellow that will boast of knocking out an apple will not confess so bravely that there is no such thing as love in our days. But deceptive appearances do not deceive *you*."

"You *would* try to smoke me. If I did not know you are ill most of the time I would put you down and sit on you. Here I have just come from Wordsworth, and feel all is vanity—"

"Speaking of Wordsworth, I'll tell you something I warrant he thinks no one knows. *He* knocked out an apple. I know a fellow who says he has an illegitimate daughter, in France, and that he has seen her."

"And I suppose your friend knows a fellow who has better knowledge. . . . Rice, you are a knowing chap, but sometimes your imagination takes the bit in its teeth."

"It was during the Revolution. Wordsworth was living in France at the time, you know, and fell in love with this Frenchwoman. Are you coming to

Redhall's to-night? Our little band is not meeting here this time. I have sent them all word that the old gent is to entertain us to a dance. I will leave a note for any that did not hear, and they can come on over."

"I am not one to cut much of a dash on the floor."

"Never mind the dancing, if you don't care for it. The girls will be rather scarce and not too respectable—though old Redhall will not know that. He likes to see the young people have a good time, and he thinks that manners are a sight freer now than in his day. I will tell you a trick I played. We shall dye scarlet, and no mistake. He is not used to giving parties, and has no idea of the quantity of wine that will be drunk, so he asked me how many he should have in readiness. I told him six dozen should be enough, but he wished to have a sufficiency, so after some discussion he decided to place *eight dozen* of wine on the kitchen stairs in readiness."

"Verily, verily, saith the prophet, shall you be taken sick—"

"So long as I am not *taken* in adultery, well enough."

"You'll have to be careful. But you always come on your feet like a cat, don't you." They laughed, Rice found a bottle of wine and they talked until after dinner. Then Reynolds and Bailey called on the way to Redhall's, and they went together. Bailey burgeoned from the budding clergyman and enjoyed himself. Keats did not dance with the doubtful semi-demi-mondaines, nor even with Redhall's two innocent daughters, each twice as large as their periwigged parent; but drank deep and looked on, occasionally cutting for half-guineas in the cloakroom. He won ten shillings and sixpence. The hour was late when Rice, who had seemed to be everywhere at once, finally narrowed down to a single self, and taking Keats by the lapel, asked him how he was enjoying the evening; not that he seemed to listen when told.

"S late, but I care less for the hour'n anybody. Prove it by m' dancin'. Care nothing for time, jus' dance though you're deaf! Wash me!" He threw an arm about an unsuspecting girl and was off. Applause followed him.

Next day was Sunday, and something had to be done in revising the first book of *Endymion*, spite of late rising and the fact that he remembered

having asked Wells and Severn to dine with him. The manuscript looked a little messy, but Taylor and Woodhouse should be able to make out the corrections and additions. He couldn't take time to copy it.

Monday was a nasty morning, and one had no business out of doors, yet, preyed upon by thoughts of Tom, he went around to Dr. Sawrey who had desired an account of Tom's progress. There had been a hæmorrhage. It would go hard with him. . . . Yet why kick against the pricks? Why go home and brood? Had he not friends to give him gay hours? He would go dine with Wordsworth. Welcome joy and welcome sorrow!

I love to mark sad faces in fair weather;  
And hear a merry laugh amid the thunder;  
Fair and foul I love together.  
Meadows sweet where flames are under,  
And a giggle at a wonder.

Ugly winter, cruel circumstances to buffet against, all, all were life. He stopped at the Featherstone Buildings, saw Wells, and wrote a cheerful letter to his brothers.

Wordsworth was in a mellow mood. Keats with a desperate gaiety recited the new improvisation, and brought out a tag from Milton as a motto for it. They talked a long time of Milton, and when it came to light that Keats considered the name and works of his host comparable to those of Milton, Wordsworth was pleased. He had a habit of keeping his left hand in the bosom of his waistcoat while he stood, dealing out eloquent characterizations. Occasionally he would turn to the shelves behind him (his brother's library) and take out a book from which he read. His interest in poetry was passionately real, and Keats sat fascinated while that rugged yet harmonious voice rolled on. There was peculiar sweetness in his smile, and the young man remembered that this really was the man who had written *The Sailor's Mother* and the *Excursion*, and the Tintern Abbey lines, memories of youth which had stirred his youth. Diffidently, he proffered the opinion that this age held three grand achievements. Haydon's pictures, Hazlitt's depth of taste, and the *Excursion*. Keats smiled to think,



especially at dinner where Wordsworth was genial and his wife and the younger woman, his sister Dorothy, both charming, that this was the dour man he had pictured literally as “not one who much or oft delighted to season his fireside with personal talk. . . .”

This young friend, Wordsworth indicated, might be counted one of the hopes of a new day in literature, the new day he and Coleridge had inaugurated nineteen years ago with *Lyrical Ballads*. The ladies went to another room when the meal was finished.

“You see, Keats, there is no such thing as poetical language. Poetical thought is what makes objects poetical, not quaint festoons of conceits.”

“Emotions,” broke in Keats eagerly, not stopping to apply the dictum.

“To be sure. It is the thought, the emotion, the man or object. I broke from the schools of the eighteenth century in showing the affections as part of the liberating elements in man’s life. But we have to keep to this world, which is the world of all of us—as I wrote—the place where in the end we find our happiness, or not at all! But enough, you have something, have you not, which you can read to me, something of your own?”

Keats had brought no manuscript, but he recited a piece from his Book IV which he called the Triumph of Bacchus, with its stanzas to Sorrow intertwined therewith. The listener seemed struck, and began to talk of Bacchus in a way which caused Keats to open his eyes. Dryden in *Alexander’s Feast* had made him a mere good-looking youth and boon companion, instead of portraying a conqueror returning from India, crowned with vine-leaves, drawn upon a chariot by panthers, with a train of satyrs, wild men and animals that he had tamed. And then the meeting of Bacchus and Ariadne! So classic was the conception, so glowing the evocation, that one thought of Titian.

Last of all before they had a parting glass of wine, Wordsworth brought forth a manuscript which he explained would not be published until after his death. It was part of a poem called the *Prelude*, which was much vaster in conception and bulk than the *Excursion*. As to its quality, Keats was awestruck to behold a Wordsworth he never had guessed at before, a mind of almost unsoundable profundity in its grasp of human life. He was exalted

as he walked away from the house. He must tell someone of this wonderful thing that had come to him. Severn's studio was near by, why not drop in on him?

Severn looked up from the miniature painting he was toiling over, evidently bewildered at the sudden irruption of his friend telling him Wordsworth was quite as wonderful as his poems—*was* his own poems. When they had quieted down a little, it transpired that Severn had good news too. He had an order for some drawings for the Emperor of Russia.

The bouncing little Wells came to go with him to a private theatrical. Having an inkling that it might be a dirty hole, Keats took his Drury Lane ticket with him, and they saw Kean after one act in the private theatre. But then Wells suggested that they return to the sign of the guttered candle, as he could get them behind the scenes. They were both much of a size, and the people might have thought that they sought employment. There was scarcely a yard space around the property for the actors, scene-shifters and interlopers to move in. The green-room was under the stage. The grimy scene-shifters threatened to turn them out, time and again. Actors and actresses came in from the stage and went out again. A little painted trollop was telling nobody in particular that she had failed in Mary, and damned if she'd ever try a serious part again, as long as she lived. Two of the fellows, one a belligerent scene-shifter, and the other someone else, had a brief fight. The someone else got knocked down, and a fat girl standing by in soldier's clothes cried "Oh!" and wished she'd been a man for Tom's sake. They got behind a hole in the wings and observed the audience. One fellow came out on the stage and began a song, but a finger pointing from the gallery put him off his stride and he went back like a shot. "Now we have Hardham's job," observed Wells complacently. "He was a numberer at Drury Lane, and counted the people in the house from a hole over the top of the curtain."—"What, Hardham of the snuff-shop, the inventor of '37'?" whispered Keats.

On Sunday he accepted Haydon's standing invitation to dinner, which he would not have done but for a need to discuss the Cripps affair—not that it seemed to concern Haydon. Hazlitt was there, and Bewick the painter, bosom friend who understood Haydon better than anyone except Keats, as

Haydon claimed. Hazlitt was in a vigorously talking mood. He offended them with his outspokenness regarding Wordsworth, saying caustically: "If there had been no other human being in the universe, Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would have been just what it is. If there had been neither love nor friendship, neither ambition nor pleasure nor business in the world, the author of the *Lyrical Ballads* need not have been greatly changed from what he is." But he insisted that Keats come to his lectures at the Surrey Institute—on the English Poets—and signed a card for admission. Hazlitt seemed to take him, with one book out and another coming, as an established fact in the writing world, whether he had read any of the book or not. It was a pretty good omen.

Keats and Haydon talked privately in a low tone, apart from the others, in a way they had got into, before parting. "Taylor is well pleased with my First Book. He proposes to print the whole as a quarto, if you would consent to make a drawing for the frontispiece."

"Well," said Haydon, "I shall do anything you like. I should prefer to paint a finished picture from the poem. This will mean something to you in a year or two. By that time your poem will be published and perhaps famous, and my picture shall add to its fame, or tip the balance, if need be."

Keats was fairly dancing. A painting, a whole large picture! Haydon was the most generous man he knew. He forgot to mention the business of Cripps, forgot that Haydon was broadcasting evil opinions of Reynolds, who had not accepted an invitation to dinner at the studio with Wordsworth, and of Hunt, whose wife had borrowed silver from him without returning it.

He was happy. Had it not been for the fever of aspiration, he need not have spent an hour alone. The Dilkes were always cheerful and friendly: he got in the habit of taking his manuscript to Wentworth Place in the evening, having revised a portion of it during the day, and copying while he chatted with them. Dilke had taken over the *Champion* theatricals, Reynolds being unwell. Afterward, the walk over the Heath to Well Walk, at bedtime, was enough to drive sleep away; then he could write a letter or two, to Tom and George, or to Bailey. And Brown was back, fresh and genial as the casing air after his holiday. Tuesday Keats went to hear Hazlitt for the first time.

He was an hour late, and met the lions' herd coming out of the hall. They all pounced upon him—the lion himself, John Hunt (Leigh's brother) and his son, Wells, the painter Bewick, and Landseer with his family, who inquired of the brothers, and Bob Harris.

It was something like compunction which finally drove him to spend an evening with Hunt, the same Hunt, wrought up now by the acquisition of a genuine lock of Milton's hair. Nothing would do but Keats must write, and what he wrote was not the best. There would never again be a Grasshopper and Cricket sonnet written in that house. They got talking afterward. Hunt was full of his old glee, even over the attacks on himself in the *Edinburgh* magazine, which, he declared, were written by Scott. And how his first book of poems had inspired Byron's first, and how Byron had accused him of making Wordsworth popular upon town, and in resentment against the phrase, "prince of the bards of his time", allowed him to be "the blind monarch of the one-eyed" instead of the "one-eyed monarch of the blind". But at the next visit, Keats took *Endymion* to his old mentor. Hunt made the reading a mere incident in the call: skimmed over the lines, making light-hearted objections as he went, casually questioning. Then he found one point to fasten upon: the dialogue was everywhere unnatural, high flown. The real language of real people was what was wanted, and it should be simple.

Keats had been hot and cold, almost incapable of sitting still while Hunt read, wanting to get up and show him this passage and that. Now he became calm. "This is a different case from your *Rimini*," he remarked. "They are overshadowed by a supernatural power. To make them talk as though eating cakes and drinking tea would not do."

"No?" asked Hunt, with a solemn stare.

"No," said Keats. "Because the natural is what is wanted. The natural here is not the naturalness of the common, it is the naturalness in the heart of every reader, which he finds in his own highest thoughts. You must first prove Caliban unnatural."

“Yes, I see what you mean, now you explain it; but you do not give it a clear semblance in your poem. Shelley has been wondering what it would be like. Won’t you leave it for him to read?”

“I have been wondering what his poem would be like, after hearing his preface,” said Keats, with a grin. “But of course I have not succeeded. I have moved out of the cradle into the leading-strings, that is all.”

The truth was, Shelley and Hunt were hurt, and perhaps could not be blamed—they were older, after all—because he had not shown them and discussed the affair as it progressed. Heigho! *Hyperion* would be better. He wrote Haydon it would be as well to put off his painting until there should be a choice of subjects out of *Hyperion*. The hero of the old tale, being mortal, was led on by circumstance, like Bonaparte and all humans; whereas in *Hyperion*, Apollo, a foreseeing god, was to shape his actions like one. Meanwhile, what did not being appreciated signify? If all his poetry came to naught, and everyone depreciated it, he would nestle beneath the wings of the great poets. He could, thank God, read, and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths.

Spring was coming, there were many fine days, and many boisterous. But the thrushes sang as vigorously into wind as into sunlight. Life was unpredictable, certainly it became more ominous than happy. Tom, at nineteen fighting for his life. The noblest men fighting one another like creatures of tooth and claw, fighting, recriminating, turning false to their principles, or forced from them like poor Reynolds. Gay Reynolds, in spite of all; and true too in his way. He had never shown any little mean drawback in his value of his friend; nor had Haydon—but what were they to each other! Reynolds now was engaged to Miss Drew in Exeter, and decided to give up his post in the insurance office and his poetry at once, to become an articled clerk under Mr. Fladgate the solicitor. Rice was paying the fee; some day they would be partners at law. Was ever better friend than Rice? Yes, Keats told him, there was Reynolds. They trudged many an afternoon away when it was fine; and made it fine indoors when it was not out. They exchanged letters and verses when Reynolds could not get away, and when he became seriously ill, Keats went to the house. Mrs. Reynolds was concerned, but Jane and Mariane seemed to pay no attention, keeping

up a rattle of talk, while Charlotte played the piano. After a few jocularities, and gossip of Sir Richard Croft shooting himself following the fatal birth of Princess Charlotte's child last November, he went into Reynolds's room.

"They have me at a disadvantage, John—four of them. They've got me into bed at last, and leeches on my chest." But the fellow did not look well. "What have you been doing?"

"Enjoying myself most heartily. I see a deal of Brown and Dilke. Brown and I have almost decided to take a walking tour through the Lakes and Scotland. Dilke and I have many a set-to, and always part friends. He has very decided opinions; sometimes he is right in them, but he does not see that it doesn't matter. What he calls truth may be truth for him, but every man has to prove it upon his pulses—and it may be a lie for someone else. What I call philosophy is to lay oneself open to all the influence of life, not to a select party. By the by, it seems that Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he went in town: intolerance and pride. Mr. Crabbe Robinson, an old friend of his, and Coleridge, called to see me."

"That ubiquitous gossip and well-known bore!"

"Still, if Wordsworth were not himself, we should not have Lamb tweaking his nose!" Keats paused. It was as well not to enlarge upon Wordsworth's personal deficiencies, but the impulse was too strong. "It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries. But, for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing—but not Sancho. Man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his neighbour."

But Reynolds only smiled wearily when his friend told a joke at the expense of Haydon. He felt cast down, and if he could be brought into good conceit of himself, might tolerate Haydon. Presently Keats took his leave, and went into the drawing-room, where the girls asked him to stay.

He would, he said, read them his newest sonnet, if Charlotte would play specially for him. When he spoke of their brother's health, Mariane sighed:

"John, you know, will not write now. He says he is to be a lawyer."

"He talks of a separate household. Though why he should leave this one I can't for the life of me make out." Mrs. Reynolds spoke bitterly.

Birds would leave the nest, he told her. The notes of the music imposed quiet. John heard his brother poet cough in the next room. Brother as much as poet. Genius, forsooth! Haydon, Hunt, and Wordsworth; Wordsworth, Haydon, and Hazlitt's taste! That sort of probity and disinterestedness which a true friend, Bailey or Reynolds, showed, did grasp the tiptop of any spiritual honours to be paid anything in this world. It was the poor vanity of an aspirant that had made him believe works of genius the finest things in the world. Yet Handel's rousing music beat his blood to the old pitch. He closed his eyes and tried to relax, to soothe from his brain all the strain and fever of his days, and his constant wakeful nights, when the rustling pinions of poetry fanned him for ever. The music, Mozart now, would say, would insidiously whisper to his very bones, that there was beauty, there was peace. His mind cried out upon it; there was none. All creatures were bent upon destruction of their kind. All things preyed upon and were prey; even in love. . . . Men and animals the same, goatish, winnyish. . . . But was love that? How should he know? He never would. The music was lighter now, softer. . . . There was something in it all that made you sad that it should pass, have an end. Death; perhaps death was all that made life lovely. Dreamless death.

When Charlotte rose, Keats straightened, and recited his sonnet:

“When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,  
Before high-pilèd books in characterly,  
Hold like rich garnerers the full-ripen’d grain—  
When I behold, upon the night’s starr’d face,  
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;  
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,  
That I shall never look upon thee more.  
Never have relish in the faery power  
Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore  
Of the wide world I stand alone and think  
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.”

They were impressed; then Charlotte girlishly asked who was the “fair creature of an hour”.

“The sestet is not so good. I was disturbed by my landlord’s children, and I had to think of something!”





## CHAPTER V

Tom lay back in an armchair, with a weary white face turned almost as though sightlessly to the window and the sky.

“Well, here we are, Tom, my lad. No sooner is one brother gone than you have another to badger you. You’re looking more fit than when you left London.” John strode restlessly about the Teignmouth sitting-room. “I’ll lay you would have run off with one of these comely Devonshire girls if I hadn’t turned up. There was one at an inn door holding a quartern of brandy. The very thought of her kept me warm through a whole stage—a sixteen miler, too.”

“George just left yesterday. But I seem to have nothing to think of—”

“You weren’t fretting about me? Damme, who’s afraid! Accidents are silly things. I enjoyed the storm—and the coach didn’t quite blow over. The wind was playing young gooseberry with the trees. I was riding outside.”

“Outside, John! You must be tough and healthy as a bear.”

“Needs must when the devil drives. I wanted to save pence and enjoy the tumult too. I had to laugh at Ollier’s reception. I thought they had left me completely in the lurch with my book, but they invited me to keep Shakespeare’s birthday. There were your parlour poets and bards in bombazine! Ah well! Nature has framed strange fellows in her time, not to put a vinegar aspect upon it. I must tell you about my Winter.”

“You will be crowned in the capitol, or made a mandarin!”

“Our friends like *Endymion*. They all inquire after you when I meet them. Reynolds and I are going to do a book in partnership. It will be a rendering of the tales of Boccace into English verse. I’ve started the *Pot of Basil*. . . . Ah, there’s no pleasing everybody! There’s Hazlitt, the greatest taste of this age; I heard his lectures on the English poets, they were full of good things. But he didn’t appreciate Chatterton. Fancy!”

Tom smiled sadly. “You didn’t see George at any of the posting-places?”

“No. He said nothing in his letters of coming up; but I received a letter for him in Georgiana’s handwriting. Then I knew he’d promised her. Young rascal! Still, we shouldn’t blame a man in love. I was sorry to be so long getting away. I was so pressed with rewriting my poem. Clarke’s reading proofs for me. Taylor wants the Fourth Book and a Preface so as to publish next month. I promised Bailey I would stop off on my way here and see him; but I couldn’t.”

“So you are thick with Dilke and Brown. What is that Brown like? I only saw him at dinner once or twice.”

“Brown’s a great chap; healthy as a bear, and always ready with a joke. But he takes poetry and all the other luxuries in his stride. There’s no humbug about Brown.”

Tom’s face was wistful. “You like healthy people. It’s so long since I could go about without thinking of health, I sometimes think—”

“Now no putting off. You’re to get well at once. You and I will be running footraces along the Edge here, and maybe save coach fare to London. But the first thing we must do is to cut the acquaintance of that fellow Sickness. He’s one to whom I have a complete aversion, and who, strange to say, is harboured and countenanced in several houses where I visit. If he pokes his nose between *us*, I shall mash it with my fist. He insults me at Jem Rice’s and Reynolds’s, and I have seen him beside me at the theatre when I thought he cast a longing eye at poor Kean. I shall say once for all, to all my friends generally and severally, cut that fellow, or I cut you.”

By this time Tom was laughing and coughing so that he could hardly drink his tea. This was his old John, more spirited than ever in his ranting. Tom’s fingers were as nearly transparent as the cup against the light. “I must introduce you to the people, since we can’t go out. George and I have got acquainted with a squad of them, and I am anxious to have them see and like you.”

“What, both?” asked John.

“First there is Dr. Turton. He will call at ten, so you will get acquainted with him. He’s a very good doctor; I like him fine. Then there are the Jeffreys.

Oh, you will fall in love with the Jeffreys, John. There's Mrs. Jeffrey, she's a widow, and Sarah, who is rather thoughtless and giggling but very nice, and Mariane, who is steady and quiet. She was very much interested when she learned you are a poet; she has a feeling for such things. Then there is Fanny."

Keats started, as he always did at hearing the name of his mother and sister. "The youngest, I suppose. What other families are there?"

"There's a Mr. and Mrs. Atkins. Atkins is the squire's coachman; and a funny old maid, Miss Periman, who keeps the bonnet-shop across the way, and a Captain Tonkin who is courting Miss Mitchell, and Bartlett the surgeon, and Simmons the barber, and—well, you'll have to see them all to know them."

"I doubt it. Their names sound frightfully provincial and village."

It rained all day, in a dismal, persistent way, and kept it up the second day, the third, the fourth and fifth. Were it not for the constant toil of copying his book, and the routine of caring for Tom's wants, he would have been sore pressed by the foul fiend Depression. As it was, the skirmishes were far from decisive. His work seemed fruitless and of little moment. Tales of mortals and goddesses in golden pre-Hellenic days could not have much reality for people who knew this soggy life.

The fifth day his constant promenade to the window was rewarded. A pause between showers revealed a pretty valley, cliffs, a view of meadows and trees. "'Tis a splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, haily, floody, muddy, slipshod country, this, that Reynolds and Rice and Haydon think so much of. Still, the hills are beautiful when you get a sight of 'em—the primroses are out, but then we are in; the cliffs are a fine, deep colour, but then the clouds are constantly vying with them. This Devonshire is like Lydia Languish, very entertaining when it smiles, but cursedly subject to sympathetic moisture."

Tom rose from his chair and came to look out. For great stretches of hours they had been silent, and not too good-humoured. Invalidism made Tom querulous, almost impatient. Five days and nights without other company save the landlady or her maid was a test of brotherly love.

“I am pretty bobbish since you came, and it is bright; could we go out?”

Sprightliness veiled Tom’s tired voice.

Keats finally consented. They were not to go far, but somehow they found themselves outside the town, in a fine country of knotted oaks, lusty rivulets, luxuriant meadows. They stopped to feast their souls upon it. Tom held out his hand. “I felt a drop of rain.” They turned instantly. The footpaths had been wet, and with the rain coming down, the boys soon had damp feet and clothes. Tom started to cough. Keats saw that if they hurried, Tom might become overheated, so they proceeded with impatient deliberation. When they came to the door of their lodging the faces of two girls could be seen in a window across the street, staring out in evident astonishment.

“There’s Mariane and Sarah. We’re wet now, we might almost as well go in and see them, and get warm.”

“No, sir,” said John firmly. “We go in and get under covers as quickly as we can.” The boy was shivering by the time this was done. Keats went downstairs and requisitioned hot broth, and hot bricks to place in the bed, but they could not be made ready at once. Tom began to cough raucously, persistently, unendingly. Keats put on his greatcoat and went forth for Dr. Turton.

While the genial doctor did not object to coming, he found that the patient’s brother had done all that could be asked at the moment; it was not necessary to bleed him at that juncture. He talked about his collection of shells; he was at work on a great book, *Conchological Dictionary of the British Islands*. As for Keats, he was interested in shells and questioned the doctor pleasantly.

In the evening, Tom was worse; finally his coughing produced a spitting of blood, then another hæmorrhage. Keats was broken-hearted; but what shocked and frightened him was that Tom in his struggles seemed unconscious that his brother was beside him. Turton was sent for, and bled him; the hæmorrhage was not repeated, but Tom lay very quiet and white in his bed.

Of course George had to be written to with this news and a request for money. He had left none, and John had left London with very little. Meanwhile it was necessary to borrow from the landlady as well as to ask credit for their lodgings. She was sympathetic, and sure that George would be dependable. Mrs. Jeffrey called; she proved to be a rather depressed and depressing woman, full of good and indifferent advice on the care of Tom; learning that John was an articulated surgeon, she would not leave with less than an hour's chat upon malady matters. George's letter came at last, with twenty pounds, which brightened things. He told of reporting Tom's good progress to all their acquaintances and how he could hardly believe the melancholy news: "I hope and trust that your *kind* superintendence will prevent any violent bleeding in the future, and consequently that this alarm may prove in the end advantageous. Tom must never again presume upon his strength, at all events until he has *completely* recovered." John smiled sadly at the underlinings, when in anything less serious he would have been enraged.

What a scurvy life! The care, the smells, the agony of sickbeds might not be insupportable did the sun but smile and the moon stay in her heaven. But here was nothing but abetted its fellow in downright maliciousness. When it seemed he could support it no longer, a fresh, clear afternoon came, and towards evening he went out to walk alone by the sea. A soft fringe of foam was flung upon the flat sand, and the rocks had no echoes among them. John Keats sat down on a rock covered with dried seaweed and limpets. With his sea before him he should have been at peace; but even the tranquil ocean waited only for a piercing gaze to show the shark at savage prey. Eternal, fierce destruction was the lot of life: the hawk at pounce, the robin ravening a worm. It was simple enough to love the good, it was wisdom to see it needful to love the good and ill—to love life as a majestic pattern of those two; but, confronted with the pain and evil, how bring oneself to it? Easy to love beauty, hard to love beauty in all things according to the philosophy he had confided to Reynolds. The only thing was to put oneself in command of life through knowledge. He hurried home to tell Tom.

"Tom, I shall study Greek, and Italian. I'm glad I did not give away my medical books, so that I may look them over. When my mind was in its

infancy my bias was poetry. But now I feel capable of undertaking any department of knowledge, spite of friend Bias. I shall try to get some law books from Rice or Reynolds, and become a sort of pip-civilian. In general I shall prepare myself to ask Hazlitt in a year's time the best metaphysical road to take. You see, an extensive knowledge takes away the heat and the fever, and helps to ease the Burden of the Mystery. I shall read Homer to you from the Greek."

But there were other things to do; *The Pot of Basil* had to be finished, a thing of sweet romantic love and tear-watered tragedy removed, after all, from the real ills of life! And Taylor pestered him about a Preface. It was necessary to establish with readers the author's modesty and non-opinion of himself; and in particular to apologize to lovers of heroic days who might draw from their own imaginations, for profaning the solitude which had hung about *Endymion*. Then he wrote, "It has been too much the fashion of late to consider men bigoted and addicted to every word that may chance to escape their lips: now I here declare that I have not any particular affection for any particular word or letter in the whole affair. I have written to please myself, and in hopes to please others, and for a love of fame; if I neither please myself, nor others, nor get fame, of what consequence is Phraseology?"

They did not like it, Taylor, Reynolds, none of them. Too humble: too proud, they meant. The deuce with them. He hadn't the slightest feeling of humility towards the public, or to anything in existence, but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the memory of great men. He would jump down Aetna for any great public good—but he hated a mawkish popularity. So he would tell them. But he would rewrite the preface in more restrained tone.

The Jeffrey girls were passable. Sarah seemed to have thoughts and feelings in her, if one could get her apart from her sisters. It was not unpleasant to go across the street to their house and pass an hour. There was gay chaffing, talk of Mr. George, and Mariane having given him a lock of hair, and Sarah refusing; and laughing, blushing references to kissing. Tom was slow in improving, but a little of such diversion helped.

The town in general was full of gaping, insignificant fools. Tom, they thought a madman; himself being stunted, they considered nothing. Besides, he wrote poetry, a more or less pernicious, as well as useless, practice. It was easy for anyone of any sensitiveness to perceive their attitude; and one night, being insulted by an oaf in the theatre, Keats was so oppressed by the weighty atmosphere of a whole townful of fools that he did not fight, scarcely spoke a word. Had the insult been to Tom, he must have fought.

Taylor sent down some copies of *Endymion*; the Jeffrey girls were impressed by its physical presence, but Keats had only a heavy depression and dissatisfaction with himself at beholding this fruit of a year's care. He dutifully looked over the volume and congratulated Taylor for *his* care in it; and confided to him that he intended to follow Solomon's direction. "Get learning—get understanding." Some men did good in the world by their society, others with their benevolence, others by conferring pleasure and good humour on all they met. For him the way would lie through application, study, thought. He had been hovering between the luxury of beauty and the austerity of philosophy. Well, it would be philosophy he would perfect in himself instead of travelling over the north with Brown, if Tom needed him throughout the summer.

And Milton would be his master for the nonce. Severn, and then Bailey, had reproached his lack of familiarity with the austere, unapproachable beauties of *Paradise Lost*. It was impossible to imagine a genius of more sovereign order. But had he turned his back upon the cares and sinister woes and ludicrous inanities of this life? Shakespeare had not. Even Wordsworth had not, though he was not disinterested as Shakespeare was, he scarcely trusted his genius to his own instinctive being. It would be easier to turn to abstractions—to accept a rôle, just as it was easier to write smooth versification of an old romance of Boccace, instead of battling through to one's own realization of things in *Endymion*—and seeing that a failure.

The almost insupportable weather was mitigated: Spring was coming, was here. Endless nights, in which he could not sleep, but buried his eyes in his pillow to see the spangly darkness, or dreamed heavily that his goddess the Moon had dwindled in her heaven and poetry was a mere jack-o'-lantern to



amuse the simple, or that the rain he still heard in sleep had metamorphosed him, drowned and rotted like a grain of wheat—endless nights did not matter so now. One day Tom, after a night without a wink of sleep, and of remittent fever, had a refreshing nap, and rose better than ever. He was for going out; it was really a splendid day. After some discussion they sallied forth. Soon they were out of town, walking between hedgerows of primroses, watching swallows tumbling in the clear air. And again they returned before they had seen more than the fringe of the country. But Tom felt so well that they lingered a while in what was called the den, the open space between the sea and the houses facing it. Boats were sailing, a crowd was enjoying itself, a band playing. As they walked towards their rooms they discussed the advisability of returning to London soon. Tom could not bear to leave Dr. Turton; he had great faith in him. They would wait until May.

Then, wonder of wonders, came Rice to see them. He cheered Tom immensely; then John and he took an endless walk and fine clamber over the rocks to Kent's Cave at Babbacombe, talking ceaselessly. The men of Devon, Keats confessed, were a degenerated race, the government had not thought it worth while to send recruiting parties among them. Were he a corsair, he would make a descent upon the south coast of Devon, save for having cowardice imputed to him. The men would run away to the Methodist meeting-houses, and the women would be glad of it. *They* were passable, and had such English names as Ophelia, Cordelia, and so forth! He wished their paramours, or imparamours, had but one head, that he might cut it off and deliver them from any horrible courtesy they might do their undeserving countrymen. He improvised some naughty verses about Rantipole Betty, then Rice and he got talking of Milton, who had rolled himself three hours a day in a meadow hard by; the mark of his nose at equidistances was still shown. As for Milton's genius, Keats explained the matter in detail. There is ever the same quantity of water in this globe, notwithstanding waterspouts, whirlpools and mighty rivers emptying into and out of oceans, so there was a certain amount of intellect lodged in the air for the brains of men to prey upon. That which the Pacific contained could not lie in the hollow of the Caspian; so that which was in Milton's head could not find room in Charles the Second's; and his gourmandizing

had left lean the bucks and Castlereaghs of the present day, who might all have been wise men.

Their walk ended in a bookstore, where they discovered a superb black-letter Chaucer. Rice bought an old Spanish romance, *Guzman d'Alfarache*, and Keats had to buy the Chaucer then. They chuckled over the tale, in its quaint old English, of the boy who had two fathers and a far from reputable mother; even Tom was side-lamed. John said it would kill himself. Rice, in lawyer's phrase, hoped not, for he had no mind to turn his book over to the use of the King as a deodand.

The leaves had been out many a day. Rice's visit had given the boys themselves again. After all, one might contemplate a year in Teignmouth. The truth was, there was something real in the world, which nothing could take from a man, once he had laid hold upon it; not even Tom's fresh spitting of blood. But that shook their faith in Turton, and along with the news of George's decision to marry, made them decide to return to London. Not a coach journey this time; it had to be post-chaise all the way, with the greatest care. John bade good-bye to the Jeffreys, for the doctor had forbidden that agitation to Tom. The girls wept and promised not to come near the windows when poor little Tom was brought out. Sarah's eyes feasting upon John's face were a suddenly illuminated page. The streets and roads ahead were dark with heavy-leaved trees.

At Honiton Keats sent a note back with the chaise, and hired another. But the jarring was too much; Tom had a relapse on the road, and they spent horrible days in the cold comforts of the Green Lion of Bridport with a strange doctor. At last they reached London, and George, married already, and decided to emigrate to America in search of fortune, taking wife and happiness with him. It was as incredible and devastating as death. Yet who could blame George? It was better to toil with one's hands in the backwoods than to truckle to a customer. Yet—men did get on in business, and even made friends in it. And as for friends, they were life's highest boon; there was a comfort in throwing oneself on the charity of one's friends. But George would not be indebted to anyone—he could not afford it, his spirit was too haughty, admirable in that, John thought.

Yet, when he went to see the young pair, the wonderful thing was their happiness. Where could so high-spirited and gentle a creature as Georgiana have been found? She would go to the banks of the Mississippi; and Mrs. Wylie said nothing against it: a self-sacrificing woman, different from the knowing Mrs. Reynolds, who expressed such astonishment at the plan. Of her and her girls Keats had seen enough. They roused a wild impatience or a bitter spleen within him; malice and evil thoughts attended him. He could not be comfortable while he searched every word they uttered, unable to speak or be silent—in a hurry to be gone. What was this trouble? As a boy, one thought a fair woman a pure goddess, ethereal above men. To find them equal to men, when great by comparison was very small—that was enough to disappoint anyone. The human race should possess some few specimens of an angelic cast, whom one could revere for other things besides profound understanding or creative power—exemplars of the latter were most likely to be grey-headed broken men, assailed; or dead ones. But Georgiana was different from other women. She belonged to George, and did not have a self-conscious or interested thought in her head; she was going away. To see such a girl happy in her marriage, thought Keats, listening to their almost oblivious chatter, was the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world. It depended upon so many things. Remarkable poise of soul, effortless poise. Most women could be happy only through lack of imagination. Thank God that such a delicate being could feel happy without any sense of crime. There was unhappiness enough in the world to make happiness a crime.

George would talk of his plans. The dreary, dreary subject of how many horses, how many cattle should go with the fourteen hundred acres he was buying, assailed Keats's ears once more, when all he wanted to do was listen and watch bemused their happiness. The land was to be purchased from the American Government. And Birbeck, the Quaker "Emperor of the Prairies", with his sixteen thousand acres to be subdivided, and his *Letters from Illinois*, which book George read constantly. It was all a weirdly foolish dream. And Georgiana and George would inquire about Tom, and look at each other as though if Tom became worse they might not go. Never mind, Tom would last until they had left.

With Tom he sat on a bench opposite their house, in the sunlight, and Tom congratulated himself on not being in “Tartary” Teignmouth, and wondered whether waltzing would reach the provinces in Sarah Jeffrey’s time. And John basked, and answered questions, and felt half dead. Nothing was worth doing. A vast lethargy lay upon him soul and body. Had he been under water he scarcely would have kicked to come to the top. He really should write a letter to Bailey, here in the sunlight, his paper on his knee. But his very hand was heavy. The good Bailey had written letters to the *Oxford Herald* in defence of his friend’s poems; very foolish. The world was malignant enough to chuckle at the most honourable simplicity, the slightest enthusiasm. *Blackwood’s* continued the ambushade of Hunt, dragging in one “amiable Mister Keats”. The *Quarterly Review* wrote about Hunt’s *Foliage* and insinuatingly referred to Shelley and Keats. “I have more than a laurel, they smother me in *Foliage*,” he wrote indifferently to Bailey. Tom was talking happily about a trip he might take alone to Italy that summer, while his brothers were away.

The hearty Brown was the only soul who saved him from complete and spiritless capitulation. Keats had to come to Scotland. Tom would be well with so many kind friends about, and with such a capable and motherly woman as Mrs. Bailey to care for him. Brown was an unobtrusive chap on the whole, but this tour was an old plan, and he would not give it up. They would see Wordsworth’s and Scott’s countries, the mountains and the lakes. Keats did his best to summon enthusiasm, but drank too much claret, went home, caught cold, and was kept to the house a week.

At last George decided that it was time to set off for Liverpool to be in readiness for his boat, which would put to sea with the first favourable wind. It was Midsummer’s Day when they started for the north, leaving Tom to tears and the smell of the Bentley children’s worsted stockings. Brown and Keats sat opposite the bride and groom, atop the “Prince Saxe Cobourg”. It was a bright warm morning. George was important and elate, Brown was full of puns and anecdotes and warnings of a jocular nature; Georgiana was most delightful, excited and laughing even while the tears were drying at the corners of her eyes. Her sensible face with its tender

mouth and large grey eyes were enough to cheer anyone. They were upon a journey, in swift motion; anything might turn up. John was himself again.



## CHAPTER VI

Seven weeks later a bedraggled and weary-looking small figure confronted Mrs. Dilke at her door at Wentworth Place. "Your 'umble servant, Missis, an' could ye spare a poor seafarin' man a bite and a bit o' rest for 'is weary bownes?"

"Why, John Keats! Come and sit down. You look worn out." Mrs. Dilke could not keep from staring at him. His jacket was torn at the back, he carried a knapsack and a great plaid bundled about his shoulders in this August weather; he had scarcely any shoes left, and carried a fur cap. He was brown as any seafaring man he might personate. He laughed, and then sighed as he sank into a comfortable stuffed chair in her sitting-room.

"This chair is as comfortable to the body as the mountains were to the soul. I fell in love with 'em, and lived in the eye. No bad thing, that."

"You came back alone? Did you get the letter Charles wrote you?"

"Yes, alone; my throat troubled me. Brown has gone tramping it by himself. He was a prince; never was such infinite invention and good humour in dealing with landlords and travellers and that ilk. I tramped six hundred miles, and rode four. You say Charles wrote me? What—is Tom well?" Keats started up.

"Dr. Sawrey says his condition is not improving, so Charles wrote—"

"I must get home at once. It is serious, it must be. I just came from Inverness in a Cromarty smack. Nine days' voyage, without being sick. A little qualm now and then, but nothing like the case of a lady on board who could not hold up her head all the way. We had not been in the Thames an hour before her tongue began some tune. I was the only Englishman on board."

"Good heavens, what were they—what nationality was the lady?"

"Why, Scottish, I presume, or Hebridean, or Irish. At any rate, Gaelic and Lowland Scots clacked in my ears all the way. I fed upon beef, not being able to eat the thick porridge, which the ladies managed to manage with large awkward horn spoons."

Mrs. Dilke smiled almost incredulously, and in the pleasant atmosphere of her sitting-room the whole experience seemed to float away. She had been to see his sister Fanny, who was well. She had new neighbours in Brown's half of the house, a widowed lady, Mrs. Brawne, with two girls and a boy. A very pleasant family, as could easily be discovered, since the two sides of the house shared the same garden. The elder daughter, Fanny Brawne, was such a lively young lady.

"I must go," repeated Keats. "At once. Tom must be got well."

"Won't you stay and have some tea?"

"No, thank you, not this time." He was hungry for civilized delicacies, but he remembered Mrs. Dilke's unconquerable dilatoriness.

Tom was in bed—wasted and worn, his eyes enormous as they looked at his brother over his own length—scarcely able to lift his head. Keats ran to his side, without throwing off the knapsack, and kissed him.

"Tom! Tom! You're not well! You must get better now your brother's home with you. You've got to!" His own lips quivered, and tears were not to be kept back.

Tom looked at him silently, and a pleased, quiet expression came over his face. At last he spoke in a whispering voice. "I—I thought you might come, John, but I couldn't hope for it—I didn't hope. You said you would be gone all summer." A great tear gathered and rolled across his temple.

"I got sick too, Tom; wasn't that splendid!" Keats rose, and began to tumble his impedimenta from him. He laughed. "If I hadn't got sick I wouldn't have come. Not so soon," he added, thinking of Dilke's letter; "But I got over it. It was just a sore throat I got in Oban—was it, or the Isle of Mull? I think it was Mull—terrible place that! But I got better."

"Much-travelled man!" Tom jeered gently. He was beginning to stir as though he would rise.

"I tell you—I want to say a few words to Mrs. Bentley. You just lie there and rest."



Tom gave him a look of disappointment as he shut the door softly behind him. Mrs. Bentley was in the hall below.

“Lawk, Mr. John, it’s you! I thought ‘twas one of your friends come to see Mr. Thomas, without ringing, but young Nathaniel here said ‘twere a pedlar.” The child was looking at him with awe, and others were to be heard in the near background. “I shall smell damp worsted sooner than I thought,” Keats had told Brown. He told Mrs. Bentley: “I came sooner than I expected, because I got a sore throat on the Island of Mull. There was a wild place! Thirty-seven miles of jumping and flinging over great stones and no path at all, wading through rivulets and crossing bogs over our ankles.”

“My goodness, it was a horrible voyage, that was!” said Mrs. Bentley admiringly. “Was all of Scotland like that? It must be terrible.”

“No, I enjoyed it, until I had to give up. But what of Tom? Is he serious?”

“Serious enough, poor wee’un. I’ve done what I could to make him comfortable. That Mrs. Dilke came, and brought his sister; your sister, begging your pardon, sir. And other gentlemen—there was a Mr. Haslam, very kind. And Bentley, ’e does all ’e can being aw’y all day—’e takes Mr. Tom’s letters, and once got up in the midst of the night—just starting ’is second sleep, ’e was—and got the doctor.”

“And what does the doctor say, Mrs. Bentley?”

“’E says—whatever there may be in it, for I’ve not much faith in they doctors—’e says it is something like the sound a goose makes. Pthee!”

“Not phthisis?”

“Yes, that was it. And one time he said it was a consumption.”

Keats returned to his brother sadly, after requesting that a meal be brought up. When he had washed and changed his clothes he came to Tom again, but to keep him from talking glanced over a magazine, the *British Critic*. Ha! a review of *Endymion*! He would read it aloud to Tom for the joke. But no.

“It seems that one evening when the sun had done driving ‘his snorting four’, ‘there blossom’d suddenly a magic bed of sacred ditamy’ (Query dimity?) and he looked up to the ‘lidless-eyed train of planets’, where he saw ‘a completed form of all completeness’, ‘with gordian’s locks and pearl round ears’, and kissed all these until he fell into a ‘stupid sleep’, from which he was roused by ‘a gentle creep’ (N.B. Mr. Tiffin is the ablest bug-destroyer of our days) to look at some ‘upturned gills of dying fish’.”

Mrs. Bentley came in with tea, and John began rallying Tom, who was allowed only a bite and a sip, with tales of the privations of his trip. “No supper but eggs and oatcake, many a night. We lost sight of white bread entirely. I got so hungry a ham went but a little way with me, and fowls were like larks; a batch of bread I made no more ado with than a sheet of parchment. But that was in our good days, in Cumberland and the Lowlands. When we got among the Highlanders I had to be contented with an acre or two of oaten cake, a hogshead of milk and a clothesbasket of eggs.”

“Don’t, John, it hurts me to laugh. I wish I’d been there.”

“Poor bairn! My own private opinion is that a man in your shape should eat something solid. We shall see what can be done.”

Alack, he came from Sawrey with the dictum that he himself would be better to stay indoors with his sore throat, as well as to care for Tom. It seemed a terrible and wanton blow when he was accustomed to make an eager round of all his friends after such an absence. Well, they would have to call on him. He spent a good deal of the next day writing letters. The doctor called. In the afternoon the solitude and the sense of Tom’s helplessness and dormant hopes almost stifled him.

“I’ve told Reynolds to be sure and come. If he does, I’m just as well pleased. John is never quite himself with those women around him. I told Bailey I was not calling at Little Britain so frequently, and he reproached me. I am certain the girls are glad I should come for the sake of my coming, I told him. But I am certain I bring with me a vexation they are better

without. I get so spleenical at the plausible ways of women! Besides, the Reynolds girls are no longer as young as they used to be. . . . But what am I to do about this suspicion and malice I have in the presence of women? I must absolutely get over it—but how? The only way is to find the root of the evil and so cure it ‘with backward mutterings of dis severing power’.”

“Don’t get married and go to America,” murmured Tom.

“No, you and I shall go to America together, in three years’ time, and stay a year, God willing.” But a chill question obtruded itself into his tone almost as though his inflexion had been raised; Tom appeared not to notice.

A couple of evenings later Reynolds came. He was busy with his law, and could not write.

“You will again, when you get the law subjugated and conjugated. Why, I do not see why a mind like yours is not capable of harbouring and digesting the whole mystery of law as easily as Parson Hugh did pippins, which did not hinder him from his canary wine.”

“It is too bad we can’t have the wine alone. But you’ve told me nothing about your trip. You must be full of poems from Scotland.”

“Not I,” said Keats a little glumly. “Full of poetry, perhaps. But poems—I don’t see any. I wrote one occasionally. I became a mountain climber, you know. There was Skiddaw, but that was nothing to Nevis, Ben Nevis. It was worst coming down, racked you to pieces. There is a story of a certain Mrs. Cameron, fifty years old and the fattest woman in all Inverness-shire, who got up this mountain some years ago. True, she had her servants—but then she had herself. Wait—Tom, where is your letter with the poem in it I wrote for you?” Soon he had them both laughing at the comic dialogue between the bald-pate mountain and the ingratiating lady. He turned the letter and found the sonnet he had written on the mountain itself—mist over the caverns and across the heavens—so much could men tell of Heaven and of Hell. Himself, poor witless elf, knew only that he trod upon the crags. He did not read this but told of trying to write a sonnet in Burns’ cottage. The man in charge would talk endlessly about himself and Burns. “I’m a curious old bitch,” he commented, going on with his stories. “A flat old dog,” Keats said. “The fellow did not seem to have known that Burns was

a sublime specimen of humanity, he was a curious fellow to be gossiped about with the first comer. There he sat, drinking glasses five to the quarter, and twelve for the hour. And Burns—one song of his was worth a county full of such fellows. Why, he talked with bitches, he drank with blackguards, he was miserable! And there in his house sits that mahogany-faced old jackass who ought to be kicked for speaking to him. It is enough to give a spirit the guts ache, as it does me whenever I recall it. But Reynolds—you should have news for us from Exeter!” John added more calmly.

“Oh, I am going down to Devon in a week’s time, to visit the Drew—”

“Daughter. Never mind, you are in the right path. You must not mind my carping. I have spoken against marriage, but it was general. The prospect in those matters has been to me so blank that I have been not unwilling to die.”

Reynolds started, and somehow their eyes went to Tom.

“Not now, for I have inducements to live—I must see my little nephews in America, and I must see you marry your lovely wife. And Tom well and married well, and carrying two pairs of twins on his brawny forearms.”

Tom opened his eyes and smiled wanly.

“Well, you have poetry for a mistress. With my health, I cannot hope to be able to practise law and poetry. I shall do well to make enough to marry.”

“You are in the right path, you shall not be deceived, as I may be. One of the first pleasures to me will be to see you happily married. The more since I have known what it is to love a sister-in-law.”

“In law—ha-ha! You are the same old punster.”

The two young poets cleansed their bosoms by talk while they drank, and Tom dozed in the shaded candlelight.

In the morning, after routine, the body of the day stretched interminably dreary. Keats would find himself talking of parts of his Scottish trip he thought he might not have told Tom. He read old letters, wrote new ones. But he could do nothing, not even passively read, without losing his peace of mind and growing uneasy. All he could do was watch Tom, almost

setting his muscles as one did in a carriage one wanted to hasten, trying to push Tom ahead, into brighter days, into health. When the strain became conscious he would rise, walk to the window, and look out at the late summer prospect. The hours passed somehow. But he told Sawrey he would have to get out. Couldn't he at least see Mrs. Wylie?

Mrs. Wylie had letters from George and Georgiana, as well as her own cheerfulness and optimism. Tom enjoyed the letters. The brother and new sister had endured the long voyage without mishap, but they were disappointed not to find letters for them in Philadelphia. So another day was saved, and the next brought Fanny. She was concerned over Tom, but she could at the same instant be enthralled by Keats's stories of the North, and the sight of pebbles from the Isle of Icolmkill. She wanted a copy of her brother's books. Mrs. Abbey, she suspected, had hidden hers from her. Her canary had died, and she wanted a flageolet.

"But I wouldn't advise you to play the flageolet," said John, and Tom smiled. "However, I will get you one if you please. What do you want of a flageolet?"

Fanny half pouted and said gravely, in a low tone: "I—I would like to have one."

"Very well, you shall."

The days passed. Keats could get out as far as the Dilkes' though he hated to leave Tom even long enough for that. He paced the room, looked out, hummed an air from opera, staring at the bright sky.

"John, don't you feel like writing poetry any more? I'd like it. . ." John shook his head. "When you were with me at Teignmouth, you started to study Spanish and Italian, and you were saying you wanted to learn the law, and how knowledge gave wings when sensation blew one up into the empyrean."

John smiled sadly. "I shall write. I feel differently now than I did at Teignmouth." He paused, thinking how ineffably unhappy he had thought himself there. Purgatory blind! But this, then, was the Inferno. A sharp chill crossed his heart to think of the corresponding difference in Tom's health.

"I can't write any truths but those my own experience has brought me," he added lamely. "And my philosophy is changing—from Scotland, you know."

Tom's eyes, almost glassy, questioned him until he had to turn away.

Next day came a copy of *Blackwood's Edinburgh New Monthly Magazine*. Keats opened it in silence. Here at last was the fourth article on the Cockney School of Poetry, and it was his turn to be castigated. The same motto by Webb stood in front. Keats ran his eye down the pages: "The Phrenzy of the 'Poems' was bad enough in its way; but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy of *Endymion*."

"Good Johnny Keats," the cur addressed him with vulgar superciliousness; finally: "And now, good-morrow to 'the Muses' son of Promise'; as for 'the feats he yet may do,' as we do not pretend to say like himself, 'Muse of my native land am I inspired,' we shall adhere to the safe old rule of *pauca verba*. We venture to make one small prophecy, that his bookseller will not a second time venture fifty pounds upon anything he can write. It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to the shop, Mr. John, back to 'plasters, pills and ointment boxes', etc. But, for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been with your poetry."

Well, it had happened. There was no use letting Tom see the article, or even guess that it was disturbing. John rose and went to look out of the window. It had not been as bad as the one on Hunt; if there were degrees in insult, this was not so filthy. And Hunt had lived through it without pining inordinately for justice upon the miscreants. But then Hunt had his own paper. Whatever any other magazine said of him could not destroy his prospects. But for the general run of writers—they did draw their rankings, in the eyes of most polite readers, from the reviews. It could not have any effect with persons of judgment—but how many were there of those? It could not influence friends to anything but active loyalty; but it would affect the sale of the book, and of any others its successors. Nothing could be done about that. The cowards would not give their names; an advertisement such as that put in the *Examiner* probably made them sneer. His fingers twisted behind his back, as he thought of somehow meeting in

a square or street this unspeakable refuse of humanity who had advertised in this way its own spiritual putrefaction. It would be the most manly thing it would have done—to take a beating.

“What are you thinking of, John? You must wish you were in Scotland now with Brown.”

Keats hastened to the bedside. He laughed as he turned away. “Oh, of course I will be glad when we can both get out again. On the whole I was happier than when I have time to be glum. I think I’ll go see the Reynoldses.”

The Reynolds girls seemed unusually animated. Yet there was a patience about the way they heard of his trip. Even such women’s fare as the prevalence of Wedgwood’s white and blue china in the hamlets of the Highlands did not seem to interest them; when he remarked that at Fort William it was said a man was not admitted into society without a kilt, that the ladies had a horror of the indecency of breeches, Jane was the only one to laugh in the old way. Mariane sniffed.

“I had thought mother might have come down before this, and brought Charlotte to meet you.”

“Who’s Charlotte?” asked Keats. One could scarcely let the other explain, for fear the impression of Miss Charlotte’s importance and transcendent charm might not be made clear.

“Oh, we’ve been in such a taking! Charlotte does not know what to do. Mother and all of us are determined she shall make an asylum of our house. She has quarelled with Grandfather—she’s our cousin, you see—and she is his heir. She’s an East Indian—”

“Heiress,” said Keats. “I didn’t tell you about the faery castle on the coast of the Island of Mull—looking over the most forlorn sea. Its chatelaine was the faerie mistress of an Irish gentleman; so they tell.”

“Oh, Charlotte is wonderful. You shall see. So genteel. So interesting. So clever, and literary.”

“Have you heard from John, and is he marrying in Exeter?”

“You nasty boy!” cried Mariane. “Don’t you listen to what we say? Why, Charlotte is a Cleopatra compared to any of the young ladies *we* know.”

“I hope you don’t think I am trying to diminish your esteem of your cousin. I am not partial to nine-days’ wonders.”

Mrs. Reynolds came downstairs a moment later, bringing a dark young lady she introduced as Miss Cox; who certainly had a rich Eastern look. She moved with a smooth panther-like grace, and though she did not seem to direct her remarks or her eyes to Keats, he was aware of her attention as he would have been of the presence of the moon in the sky. She talked brightly of routs and fashionables, lightly of literary and musical matters. Yet her charm was to suggest familiarity with another more mysterious world which enhanced her adept participation in Occidental fashions. Keats listened while the girls drew their cousin out. Her manner with him was an impersonal consideration blended with a cordial warmth as far from coquettishness as it was from hauteur. She was capable of moving in the highest society, if she had not done so. Natural gifts could not quite simulate such polish, surely.

When he reached home, her voice still haunted him. He would tell Tom about her. Tom should have some idea of what constituted an imperial woman. Already Keats had chosen a name for her: Charmian. He brought the topic in casually with cheerful news of the Reynoldses.

“It was a pastime, an amusement better than ordinary, a conversation with a woman who takes herself for granted, and a man for granted. This one has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any man who may address her—from habit she thinks that nothing in particular. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman; I am at such times too occupied admiring to be awkward or in a tremble. I forget myself entirely because I live in her. I have no sensations; I lose myself. It is like poetry. The very *yes* and *no* of such a woman as Charmian are a banquet.”

Tom looked wearily at him as though he had not been listening, and only vaguely knew what he was talking about. John broke off: yes, love was



impossible. For himself almost as surely as for Tom. What was the good of talking of such a woman except to drive her from one's mind? The devotion he owed his brothers would not permit such a thought. Tom—poor Tom—

“You must not think I am falling in love with this Miss Cox. It is only that my sensations of that sort are dead for weeks at a time makes me find her unusual. I know women well enough to know that to them the important fact about me is that I am five feet tall. No, it is you and Fanny who will keep me from such a hopeless abyss.” He bustled about assiduously.

Next day someone sent the June number, only now appearing, of the *Quarterly Review*. *Endymion* again! This scribe—he needed the prestige of the hidebound Tory organ, so he remained anonymous, like the rest—confessed at the start that he had not been able to read more than the First Book of the poem. Accordingly he was able to be judicious upon the whole of it and upon the poetical prospects of its author:

“It is not that Mr. Keats (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody), it is not, we say, that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius—he has all these; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language.”

“Aye, there's the rub,” muttered Keats, with a grin. “Not the lack of genius, but the fact that someone has called me a Cockney poet. But this fellow's power of language and rays of fancy do not permit him even to discover a new means of insulting me.” He read on, and was better satisfied, for the man was obviously an uninspired pedant who did not know poetry.

“There is hardly a complete couplet enclosing a complete idea in the whole book,” he screeched.

“Argal,” thought Keats, “’tis not poetry. That must be moral maxims in separate jingles like strings of sausages. Why not say Pope is Shakespeare, himself Solomon, and his employers God, and have done?”

That night—again Tom, poetry, that woman. Charmian, Tom, poetry, with criticism added to make a quartette. He would not suffer in this way through another night and day. He would start that new and mighty poem, *Hyperion*. If his thought for Tom must be divided, let it be turned above all these matters, where it might do some good in the world. Besides, the critics must be answered as soon as could be, in the only final way—by the appearance of a finer poem. He had waited too long. Yet he was not ready. In this history of the poet-soul, Apollo, he would have to picture his Titans before he came to the god and the Olympians who conquered the Titans. But Apollo was not formed yet. How could he be, when his would-be creator struggled through the morass of life, or trod, “a poor witless elf”, upon its craggy heights? Tom was dying, the old struggle between the beauty and the horror of life had no issue. Perhaps the love of good and ill was possible only to a man who had renounced life altogether—a dying man. What mighty turmoil it had occasioned in Shakespeare, silencing him in his prime! A dying man—well, he would be a dying man if this tempest kept up within his brain. Keats smiled bitterly as he tossed and turned upon his bed. It was Tom—Tom was dying. Every day made it more gruesomely plain.

Next morning when the doctor had gone he took out paper and pen, and started. When a few lines were written he read them. They had a plangent sorrow, yet a delicacy of tone and poignancy of beauty which lifted the reader above participation in the emotion of the subject. Whether this beginning was to remain or not, the day had been well spent. Yet in the afternoon he became uneasy again. He could not go to the Reynolds’ house and see Charmian. He would go to Dilke’s.

“I’m so sorry Charles is away at Brighton,” said Mrs. Dilke, “but I must introduce you to Miss Brawne, our neighbour of the summer, you know.”

Keats scarcely heard what she said. Why was she so formal; women were strange. He had been looking at Miss Brawne, who now rose and bowed.

She was scarcely his own height; young, elegantly formed, elegantly dressed, with an air. Her eyes were blue. So much he saw before entering into conversation with her. She listened well, and talked better. There was an eagerness about her.

“I’ve heard so much about you, that I feel I know you well—much better than you know yourself, I’m sure!” There was a bright light impetus to her tone which made her words mere leaves of gold upon a silver stream.

“Then, since you know the worst, you’re in no danger of disappointment.”

She looked archly, sincerely reproachful.

“John, how can you?” Mrs. Dilke laughed. She went out to order tea. When she returned, John was telling of his travels, talking with a richness of imagery and an unflagging imagination that reminded her of Kean upon the stage, in Shakespeare. And Fanny Brawne was listening enthralled.

## BOOK III

### *Too Many Tears for Lovers*

*Where they unhappy then?—It cannot be—  
Too many tears for lovers have been shed,  
Too many sighs give we to them in fee,  
Too much of pity after they are dead,  
Too many doleful stories do we see,  
Whose matter in bright gold were best be read.*

—ISABELLA; or, THE POT OF BASIL.



## CHAPTER I

It was such a bright autumnal afternoon, and he was so invigorated by the air and the immediate freedom from the sight of Tom's pitifulness, that Keats determined to walk all the way to Fleet Street. One should not pamper oneself even in the effort to get rid of a sore throat. London, as he approached, seemed different, now that he came to town so seldom. Besides, travels about England and Scotland made one look upon London, and the people who found London all-in-all, with a tolerant eye; Cockneys. The word returned to his mind painfully. At any rate neither he nor any of his acquaintance could be so parochial as those Edinburgh coxcombs who sneered at the "Cockney School of Poetry". Let the simpletons take what advantage they could, they were only hanging themselves; in a few years an attack upon his new work would make them laughable even to the public. Of course, Hunt was frequently trivial, with his tea-table familiarity with grand passions; they could laugh at such a thing in a political reformer they wished to crush. But why had he become attached to Hunt's fortunes? Must a youthful admiration formulate his destiny? Keats scowled as he walked, and his bright head, before held so high, was downcast. By the time he had come to 93 Fleet Street he could not have told whether the day was bright or stormy.

The bookshop and publishing offices had been one of his haunts during the past winter, where he had browsed among the books and prints and chatted perchance with Taylor and Hessey, the partners, or Woodhouse, their reader, or one of their authors, William Hazlitt or John Hamilton Reynolds. Hessey now came forward from behind the counter to greet him, a quiet-spoken man whom he did not know so well as he knew the scholarly bachelors.

"I am glad you came early, thus, Mr. Keats, so that we may have some talk before dinner. Mrs. Hessey is expecting us in the house, but I have to keep the shop open at least until the other guests arrive."

Keats stipulated that if a customer came in who wanted fifty copies of *Endymion* he should wrap the parcel. What a queer, soft, mild-mannered fellow Hessey was; did he know that Keats called him, to Taylor,

“Mistessey”? He was talking now of certain liberal-thinking individuals—Sir James Macintosh was one—who expressed admiration for Keats’s writing, and asked to know what high designs he meditated. Thus, he concluded, one was not to be misled by the seeming power of the reviews.

“I am convinced,” Keats agreed, “that what reviewers can put a hindrance to must be—a nothing, or mediocre, which is worse.”

It was growing darker in the shop, and Hessey busied himself straightening the shelves and piling books neatly upon the counters. He was carrying a shutter outside when Woodhouse arrived, and greeted them in his usual impersonal manner. His large eyes seemed to hang brooding over his broad, flat cheekbones. Hessey continued undiverted: “These young men in charge of *Blackwood’s* have not even a sound quarrel to justify themselves. Their wanton malice is the outcome of the mere desire to provide sensation for the new magazine. Your friend Bailey met one of them, Lockhart, during the summer, who made such wild accusations against you that Bailey had to speak out, though it was at Bishop Gleig’s table.”

Woodhouse, it appeared while Hessey was speaking, did not approve of making this confidence; but that, and Hessey’s good will, became unimportant: “What did Bailey tell him about me?” Keats exclaimed.

“Of course, that you had no party affiliations with Hunt, and that Hunt had had nothing to do with *Endymion*,” put in Woodhouse. “This Lockhart is a young fellow who has read at the university and must display his learning. It would have been better if he had used his abilities to write something instead of trying to stop another.”

“Don’t think twice about it, Keats,” said Hessey. “As a friend of mine said, ‘if these are the worst passages, what must the best be?’ Even those who read only the critique cannot be misled in this manner.”

“I shall think twice about it, never fear,” said Keats. “A man’s knowledge of his faults, so they do not paralyse his endeavours, is a good thing. It is better for me than being the versifying pet lamb in a sentimental farce which I was in Hunt’s circle.”

Hessey bade them enter his living-quarters at the back of the shop. Mrs. Hessey, a brisk, friendly woman, a busy housewife, not too busy occasionally to mind the shop, came forward and greeted her husband's business associate and his young poet. In a moment or two she excused herself. Keats noted a picture of an old man above the head of the table.

"Hazlitt," remarked Woodhouse, crossing his legs, "has on foot a prosecution against *Blackwood*. He is greatly vexed with the treatment they have given him. I hear that the London agents of the magazine have resented their policy. It will be fortunate for those people if they do not attract even more attention than they have bargained for. There is a rumour that Murray has put money into the concern, and that he threatened to withdraw."

The picture, Keats learned from Mrs. Hessey as she passed through the room, was that of Taylor's father. "What Mother Midnight's Oratories are these?" A step was heard coming through the shop, and Hazlitt appeared in the lamplight with his churlish honesty of countenance. Hessey apologized for the tenebrous gloom. Hazlitt said nothing of *Blackwood's* unless by way of reference to the fact that "Public opinion in England is governed by half a dozen miscreants who undertake to bait, hoot and worry every man out of his country who is not prepared to take the political sacrament of the day, and use his best endeavours to banish the last traces of freedom, truth and honesty from the land." But a question regarding his course at the Surrey Institute started him and Keats upon Shakespeare, "though," said Hazlitt, "he was somewhat fonder of puns than became so great a man." Keats blushed when the critic added, "He knew, I'll be bound, that it is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not poets reviewers."

The maidservant, Mrs. Hessey, and a small son appeared, and during dinner they talked of Coleridge, who, Hazlitt said, had taken metaphysics as his mistress, choosing for his lady-love, as most poets do, a woman with the fewest charms, in order to make something out of nothing.

"Once a poet, always one, I dare say," said Keats. "But for myself, I will write no more."

"How would you define genius, Mr. Hazlitt?" asked Woodhouse.



Keats shrugged impatiently and hardly listened while Hazlitt reverxed the old question. He could not explain it to himself, but the whole occasion oppressed him dismally. He knew that Hazlitt possessed the finest critical feeling and the most fearless forthrightness; he knew that these others were his own friends if he had any—aye, there was the rub. He was glad to excuse himself early, pleading his brother's sick-bed. Mrs. Hessey and the others asked to be remembered. Hazlitt with his sullen and magnanimous forehead, replaced his snuff-box, and spoke sympathetically.

"You must take care not to get a chill in this damp night air."

"Thank you, Mr. Hazlitt. I'm never ill. Till we meet again!"

He rode back to Hampstead and found Tom dozing, his colour high in the dusk of candlelight. Keats put the candle on the chest. Tom stirred and opened his eyes. "You were gone a long time, John. Is it near morning?"

"Not more than nine o'clock. I wanted to get away; I am sick of the horrid chit-chat of writers. I would be doing myself far more good helping you to get better than listening to them."

"Perhaps it's only talk," whispered Tom.

"Talk is the most important commodity in such a life," said Keats moodily. "If a man blackens my fame—what's the use of talking about it? It does me not the least harm in society to make me appear little and ridiculous: I know when a man is superior to me, and give him all due respect—he will be the last to laugh at me, and as for the rest, I feel that I make an impression upon them which ensures me personal respect while I am in sight, whatever they may say when my back is turned. It is a mere matter of the moment, Tom. I think I shall be among the English poets after my death."

"I—I'm glad you are thinking of poetry again," whispered Tom. "I was afraid you wouldn't any more, occupied with my useless carcase."

"Why, you—you drive me to higher heights. It is soul-making. I have only to remember you to have selfishness driven out of mind. I have you and Fanny—and our brother and sister in America . . ." But this was disturbing Tom, who was still tender from the loss. To-morrow, Keats decided, he would stay with his brother all day, except for a brief morning walk upon

the Heath; and when the time came, trudging indifferently up the hill he descried a small figure approaching under the trees, with falling, yellow leaves about her. It was Fanny Brawne, wearing some kind of shepherdess dress which was fashionable now. Her blue eyes sparkled as she greeted him. She had expected, at that hour, to be undisturbed by men, she said, tossing her glowing brown head; her hair was interlaced with ribbons. Apparently, then, he chaffed, she needed an escort, and he proffered his arm. He scarcely dared look at her as they proceeded in the direction from which she had come. She was like a charmingly turned Dresden doll, with miniature features of classic aquiline contour. Keats felt his own head and shoulders large. What a picture they must make! She was certainly the most charming girl ever seen on the Heath, skittish yet fashionable, prattling of how they had moved to a house near by, on Downshire Hill. Her mother had liked the Dilkes so much, and even Samuel had played with Charlie Dilke without getting into quarrels. "Something rare, for boys, you know."

"Passing well. When I was in school I was fighting continually. My brother George was larger, and sometimes able to hold me till I got over my rages. Wonderful how children change; I can scarcely credit it of myself."

"Changed? You seem like a fighting person to me."

Keats laughed. "You have little perspective on childhood yet."

"Indeed, I thank you, sir, for your good opinion of me!" She tried to withdraw her arm. Keats laughed, half delighted at her unreasonableness.

"I intended a compliment. I dare say, though, you are an experienced charmer. Haven't you referred to conquests . . .?"

"I am too wise to mention any such thing," Fanny said demurely. "Military men may. In my opinion every man attending a ball should wear a uniform, whether he is a soldier or not. It lends such an air of distinction," she added dreamily. "But then, young men in the Temple make a good appearance driving about in their knowing gigs."

It was Keats's turn to be piqued; he launched into a rant against the military, their useless and demoralizing way of life, their effect on the community,

especially the minds of immature girls who fell beneath their spell and could not help it, with their feminine instinct for the showy and martial.

To his alarm, she withdrew her hand from his arm and turned her head away. She would not look at him. He murmured something about his brother going to America because of the burden of a society where such things— She turned, stamped her foot. Were there tears in her eyes? “I never want to speak to you again; never.”

“But—but, I did not know you had a relative or sweetheart in the Service. I was speaking of the general, and the influence they have upon—”

“I—sweetheart or relative? Absurd. It was only your meanness in making light of something so interesting, so brilliant, so . . .”

“Winning,” suggested Keats sweetly.

A light cascade of laughter came from her throat. At the same instant, it seemed, the sun came out and flooded the meadows and golden trees. What a creature she was! They walked on and she was chattering in her animated intent manner, teasingly. Suddenly they were before her home. Keats, she declared, was fascinating, and had no cause to be jealous of officers. She forced him, he said, to say that she had no cause to be jealous of a minx. They were even, she declared in an off-hand comradely way; and when he asked if he might call, reminded him of her youth. She would ask her mother. He saw the blank door after a minute or two, then sighed and turned back to Tom.

The afternoon passed sombrely, as though the hours had a heavy, muffled tread, but at least with more dignity than the gross cares of the morning. From the table where he worked at *Hyperion* Keats could watch over his brother. How difficult to compass “That large utterance of the early gods!” when anxiety and sorrow almost unstrung mind and heart, and “sorrow made sorrow more beautiful than Beauty’s self”. Yet it was easier than opening arms to life, making of its clashing horror and beauty another true beauty in acceptance. Milton was the ideal; absenting himself, not submitting himself to life, he had worked in philosophical abstraction, creating his own great art. “I have left my strong identity, my real self,” wrote Keats from the mouth of Saturn. Tom was dying, every day made

it plainer. It was not possible to take life to one's heart, as Shakespeare had done, when its mouth was so bitter. He could shape forms of epic grandeur shadowed far above the petty bickerings in the vales of men. And let the reviewers read this and call him "good Johnny Keats!" Through his afternoon's work he felt escape from a strange threatening sorrow, and there was an awful warmth about his heart like a load, he told himself, of immortality.

The evening stretched before the brothers alone in their lamplit room. John stared into the dusk of the night. The moon was rising. He must still do something; out came the writing-pad, quill, and ink; a letter to George and Georgiana. How should he tell them of Tom's decline, they, whose happiness to him was sacred? How could he express the delight he had in their content with one another? That to him in spirit was what the moon was in matter. The moon—goddess, rather, presiding over all his dreams; casting the spell that must be set in sweet words. Forecaster of the love that might come, perchance, some day to him. It had taken only the accidental meeting with "Charmian" and Fanny Brawne to show him that he was capable of love, to frighten him into caution. The moon was shining full and brilliant; he could speak to Georgiana as a sister, and in words he could not bring himself to pronounce in her presence—but not of this. He would place himself before them; their mention of playing cricket at Philadelphia had done the like for him, in a flash. He could share with them his sorrow and foreboding; "the tears will come into your eyes—let them—and embrace each other—thank heaven for what happiness you have, and after thinking a moment or two that you suffer in common with all mankind, hold it not a sin to regain your cheerfulness—"

Ah, it was easy to counsel others to cheerfulness, four thousand miles away. They were not oppressed, weighed upon by the identity of a sick person, which paralysed their wills. Yet poor Tom could not help it that his brother was his only comfort. "Poor Tom!" The words woke a memory: Keats went to his shelf and picked out *King Lear*. Once more he would burn through the fierce dispute betwixt hell torment and impassioned clay. Perhaps by a miracle he could come to look upon the ravaged field of life with the tranquil intensity of gaze which made all disagreeables evaporate in the

sunlike, moonlike presences of truth and beauty. How foolish he had been to state in his article on Kean's acting that Shakespeare certainly had been the only completely lonely and happy man! For certain-sure Shakespeare had gone through more turbulence of woe than other men: for certain-sure he had emerged therefrom with power over it, all doubts resolved; for certain-sure? . . . Keats read on and on, wandering with Lear in the storm on the heath; and when Edgar disguised as a madman uttered, "Poore Tom," he underlined the words. "Tom's acold . . . Do poore Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes." He wrote the date, "Sunday eve, October 4, 1818". There it shall be seen years after, when Tom's illness would be over, and—God knew what happened.

Monday afternoon was not to be borne; not when Tom seemed enough brighter to let his brother go for a few hours. It was time he had had some talk with Reynolds, who had written a heart-warming note after reading the final copy of the *Pot of Basil*: the poem should be published at once as "a full answer to all the ignorant malevolence of cold, lying Scotchmen and stupid Englishmen". Yet he gave over the plan they had held of putting forth a volume of their own of these tales from Boccace, though he too had one written. He was putting writing wholly from his mind. "Do *you* get Fame—and I shall have it being your affectionate and steady friend." Now this seemed a little despairfully wrongheaded in Reynolds; at least it would bear talking over.

On the way to the Reynolds' house in Little Britain he recalled the stir it had contained over the fair East Indian, or, rather, the brunette East Indian. This time he found the girls changed in their regard for their cousin. She was a flirt, they confessed, in fine; but the sum of her delinquencies was increased by other faults at which they darkly hinted. Her relations with her grandfather were not quite what she had represented them to be. And she kept to herself so much, and if you wanted to entertain her at cards or sewing or even by taking a walk, you were to understand that she preferred her own thoughts. Keats listened with amused detachment as he had to their former adulation, and when the girl came downstairs it was plain to him that she had fine eyes and fine manners; the beauty of a leopardess; every movement told him she was a splendid worldly being; she crossed

the room in such a manner that a man was drawn to her. It was an effluvium of personality; and Jane and Mariane called it flirting! As though they had parted a few hours before, she began to talk to him. Yet her charms seemed too clever and burnished; his “Charmian” was of the theatrical order of Bonaparte and Lord Byron; lacking in reality. If she was always thus, what an uncomfortable woman to live with!

While they were at tea, John Hamilton Reynolds came home. The talk was general until the two young men were parting in the hall. Keats had a question: “Do you remember that poem you wrote in praise of dark eyes, and the one I wrote in praise of blue? Last Spring it was.”

“Yes. What brought them back to you?”

“A little thing.” Keats smiled mischievously. “Why are you decided not to send out a barque in my company?”

Reynolds was not feeling so bobbish as when he had recently returned from Devonshire and his Miss Drew. He was bidding farewell to the muse.

“*Cogliam la rosa d’amore*,” Keats counselled. “Gather the rose, gorge the honey of life. You are on the right path—you shall not be deceived in it. But I would not wish you to take so rash a leave of t’other goddess.” It was with almost the old verve and elation that Keats walked home. He was determined to write to Fanny Brawne. She was like a lovely flower compared with even this richly endowed “Charmian”. A lovely flower. . . .

It was dark when he came home, and no light had been lit for Tom, lying there as ever. It seemed strange to recall happier times, when George and Tom were well, and full of plans and interests; and he had busied himself with a round of calls upon friends who seemed mostly to have become no better than strangers. This London was a dreary warren of streets returning upon his mind—filled, doubtless, with drearily unhappy people and people who would be unhappy if they were sensitive enough to think of their fellows. And now, new torments. No sooner had this “Charmian” fever worn itself away in sleepless nights than Fanny Brawne had planted her image not to be dislodged.

When he had fed and rallied Tom—and himself in the process—he enjoyed writing a ranting, joking letter, in which he marshalled reasons for and against falling in love, but concluded with the intelligence that he had felt the poisoned dart of the blind godlet. He sealed the letter as though intending to put it into Bentley’s hand in the morning—such a letter to a lady should be prepaid, by the way—but first he should see her again.

“Are you writing to Fanny, John?” asked Tom faintly.

“Ah—yes. That is, I am going to.” He should, indeed, write to the other Fanny—shame, Fanny Brawne was the other Fanny. The fact that Tom was ill seemed to make him unfit for his sister’s society, in the eyes of their guardian, who had not let her visit him.

Next day the letter he had written occupied him. Suppose he took it when he called, and had her read it in his presence. No, that might prove painful for both, or she might with the simplicity of feminine guile refuse to read it until he had gone. It was preposterous to pay attentions to a woman when he had purposely let his brothers take the place one might have taken in his heart. But then, a little diversion might fit him for taking care of Tom. Poetry, alas, was not intense enough to keep the foreboding mind from its traffic with death. Then how was it a sin—disloyalty—to turn to a woman? He decided to go that evening to Wentworth Place. Charles was back from Brighton, and Brown from Scotland. But Tom remarked upon his care in dressing.

The Dilkes welcomed him graciously; when he went into the drawing-room who should be there but Fanny and Mrs. Brawne! He bowed at the introduction, but when he twinkled at Fanny she tossed her head. Evidently he was not to mention their meeting on the Heath. Mrs. Brawne was a pleasant, firm-mannered woman. He ignored her glance at his height.

“And how is your brother?” asked Mrs. Dilke.

“Still ill—Nature and sickness debate it at their leisure.” His tone carried implications which forbade a smile of recognition at the quotation.

“I shall bring him something home-made from my larder, one day soon.”

Keats was silent when he had thanked Mrs. Dilke. He was not at ease in this group. Fanny, he saw, had another astounding dress, with a kind of pink gauze covering it, and her hair done more elaborately than ever. She was silly, fashionable, strange. She ventured upon opinions lightheartedly against which Dilke remonstrated. John might have agreed with her, for reasons different from hers. She judged the world from the silly ignorance of eighteen, not from truth of deeply felt principles. She *was* an annoying minx. He was heartily glad he had not mailed the letter. The conversation was going on without him. Yes, he would give in to their opinions as though they were children. Was not that his secret for getting on with conflicting people and factions? They liked him because they could all show to advantage in a room, and eclipse in their tactful ways one who was reckoned a good poet. He was content to seem what they thought him, middling, silly, or foolish, because he had in his own breast so great a resource.

Presently the ladies retired into another room. Dilke smoked a pipe, and asked what he had been writing.

"I translated a sonnet of Ronsard the other day: 'Love poured her beauty into my warm veins.' What do you think of that for a line?"

"Very pretty," said Dilke thoughtfully.

"You have passed your romance, and I never gave in to it."

"Have you heard from George? I want to learn all I can of America. I wish you'd tell him to write me comprehensively. To my mind, America will be the country to take up the human intellect where Europe leaves off."

"There I differ with you," said Keats eagerly. "You're a Godwin perfectibility man, Dilke. A country like the United States, whose greatest men are Franklins and Washingtons, will never do that. They are great men doubtless, but how are they to be compared to our countrymen Milton and the two Sydneys? The one is a philosophical Quaker full of mean and thrifty maxims, the other sold the very charger who had taken him all through his battles. Those Americans are great, but they are not sublime Man."



“Why, you,” said Dilke, “talk like a Divine Right gentleman.”

“Far from it. No, I am of no party. Of a truth there is nothing manly or sterling in any part of the government. There are many madmen in the country, I have no doubt, who would like to be beheaded on Tower Hill merely for the sake of *éclat*; there are many men like Hunt who from a principle of taste would like to see things go better, there are many like Sir what’s-his-name Burdett who like to sit at the head of political dinners—but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their country. We have no Milton, no Algernon Sydney. Governors in these days lose the title of man in exchange for that of diplomat. A man now entitled chancellor has the same honour paid to him whether he be a hog or Lord Bacon.”

It was Napoleon, Dilke reminded him, who had taught the nations how to organize monstrous armies. Now Emperor Alexander, it was said, intended to divide his empire—creating two Czars besides himself. Russia might spread her conquests even to China.

“What—China now?” said a familiar voice. Brown entered, and they greeted. “This downright Englishman,” Brown told Dilke, “teased me almost out of my mind with his curses upon the Scotch and all pertaining to ’em. He cursed himself into a fit of distemper and I had to pack him off home.”

“But then, I was with a Scotchman.”

“By the way,” said Dilke, “did you see the letters in the *Morning Chronicle*? Signed J. S. and R. B. They will show the *Blackwood’s* and *Quarterly* detractors how reasonable men take their slanders.”

“I laughed,” Brown said. “Did you notice how J. S. compared Croker’s own *Battle of Talavera* with *Endymion*!”

Keats’s heart was warmed by the simple frank friendliness of these men. He heard the voices of the women in the next room, and felt himself in a better world than they could inhabit. He told Dilke and Brown that Reynolds had written in the *Alfred, West of England Journal*. Changing the subject, they ranged from the Bible, to metaphysics, Euclid, and the horrid system of

fagging at the great schools. Before he knew, it was ten o'clock and he took his departure without seeing the Brawne ladies again.



## CHAPTER II

The days and the endless nights of the autumn became terrible. As the long hours alone with Tom stretched and repeated themselves, it seemed that the brothers never had lived another life than this doleful wayfaring through a nightmare progressively intensified. Tom's personality weighed upon the spirit of the watcher until Keats was convinced that he himself was the sick man. It must be ruinous to health to act as nurse to one whose least change for betterment or decline was wrought upon his own pulses. And now he was haunted by something that could not be—happiness, new life. The image of Fanny Brawne was like a visioned oasis in the desert. The remembered sight of her across the room sent a delicate excitement and longing through him. He had torn up the letter he had written her, and he was not sorry for that. But he had wronged her by his impatience and bad temper at the Dilke house. In his mind's eye he saw her gay, beautiful, touchingly willing to entertain and be entertained; while he had been rude, bear-like.

Sunday morning, when the doctor and Mrs. Bentley had done all they could to make Tom comfortable, Bentley himself came up. "Sunday being my day hoff, you see, sir, I thought as how it was convenient to come hup and pay you a bit of a call, as 'twere. My missis tells me the young feller gets a bit lonesome now and then."

"He's very ill. The doctor has been calling regularly."

"Oh, I knows how you've been going on. Hevery day I asks her and she tells me all abaht it. But begging your leave, sir, and you being a doctor yourself and all, as I *might* say . . . Now, I'm a common man meself, just a common man as you might say, a postman, what can't even take the time he should to call on his sick neighbours, not really, except on a Sunday, like to-day—"

"Would you mind speaking a little lower?" asked Keats.

"Well, it do seem to me, sir, thet these doctor cheps go abaht it wrong end to," whispered Bentley. "'Ere's a young gentleman sir, as can't get himself

about, he can't: weak, you might say. By and by, he takes to his bed; getting weaker, you see." He paused impressively.

"It's too true," agreed Keats sadly.

"Well, and then what does the doctor do? I'm not talking against Mr. Sawrey, sir. He's the best doctor in Hampstead; leastways I've heard men say so. That is not what I'm talking about. The doctors is all alike when it comes to this part."

"Yes?"

"They bleeds him, and they feeds him sham victuals. Can any man expect to get up out of bed feeling spry after that? A well man might stand it, but a pore, weak little feller, now, to come that on im'—it's bad sir, to my mind, anyhow."

"The doctors have a reasoning of their own, Mr. Bentley, and things often go by opposites. You may have observed a man who became ill, and nearly died; when he recovers, he is quite plump and healthy, even if he was thin before he was ill."

"Yes. I've seen that. I dunno." Bentley shook his head. "It don't look reasonable to starve a pore feller like that. Cries for food sometimes, I'll bet yer."

Tom looked on wanly, at times turning his face to the wall. He did not take in half that was being said, and the voices tired him. Bentley before going came over to the bed and tried to cheer him up a bit; both young fellows were glad when the worthy man was gone. And John was annoyed that Tom must hear.

It was St. Martin's Summer, a day of glorious colour to equal anything in September. The trees and shrubs of the Heath were glorying for perhaps the last time in the sun and wind that flattered their animation. Keats shaved and dressed in the morning and went to call on Fanny Brawne. Mrs. Brawne received him with calm courtesy. They chatted amiably and generally for twenty minutes. She was a fairly well-informed person, accustomed to converse with literary and scholarly people when they were of good family, and with officers of the Army, no doubt when these were

of like circumstances. So Keats gathered from the names she let drop, in relation to the balls and routs which Fanny attended.

“Young people nowadays require these amusements so much more than when I was a girl. Then a dance or reception was the high light of a year. Now if a week passes without an invitation, Fanny becomes uneasy.”

“By the way,” remarked Keats, “is Miss Fanny at home this afternoon?” He had noticed a tambour-frame with signs of recent embroidering.

“Why, yes. I must tell her you are here before your call is over.” Mrs. Brawne rang and told the maidservant to call Miss Fanny.

She had been prinking and prettifying since she had heard his arrival, Keats surmised when she appeared. She was not wearing the shepherdess dress; possibly she would not care to go walking. But she received him like an old friend. It was not long before, thanking his stars that he had come early, he found himself proposing a stroll. They could have quite a precious hour, with tea-time still to be enjoyed. Fanny got herself a wrap and at last they were outside. Keats took breaths of the autumn air.

“There are bonfires about, surely,” said Fanny. “Don’t you enjoy the smell of bonfires at this season, Mr. Keats?”

“I enjoy the air at any time. I can be made happy, for a short time at least, merely by coming out of doors. The air seems like claret.”

“Now I think it would be nicer were it like incense.”

“So it would,” said Keats, adapting his step to hers. “It is very pungent, very fine indeed just now—and soon to be embittered by the frost.”

“Oh, but in winter we have balls and parties.” She started to hum a tune: *Water Parted from the Sea*. Keats glanced at her, thinking of a room and a singing lady, and promenades beside the waves at Hastings. Fanny was lovely; her delicate walk seemed to bear her along as though upon air. Her hair was not brown, but dull gold in the sunshine; her face small and daintily proportioned as her body, and its longish, patrician, aquiline features were entrancing. It was amusing to think that only a doubling of the scale was necessary to make her a horse-faced dowager-like person. She had not the small woman’s usual doll-like cast, but was refined to a

diminution which made other women seem gross; “fine by degrees and beautifully less”. “Have you heard that?”

“Who hasn’t? It is very hard to get away from. And like most songs it keeps up a jingle in the mind in proportion to its hollowness.”

“Thank you. I didn’t know my mind was hollow.”

“I mean the hollowness of the song—the hollower it is the more it returns to the mind.”

They were walking toward Caen Wood, and that gateway where with Cowden Clarke and Hunt he had paused and looked back upon the lanes and woods and meadows: everything green beneath the sea of blue sky. Now the green had vanished in a sense, and all the blue was centred in one pair of eyes. It was an autumn more beautiful than any Spring could be, he swore. The trees clad in yellow and brown and red leaves were more lovely than when full-fledged, with new birds singing in their branches. They were braver now, awaiting the uplifted, chill sword of winter with a flaming defiance, and then a stoic, if sighing, resignation.

“The sunlight is showing the smoke and steeples of London now,” observed Fanny. “One can almost pick out the castellated spire at Charing Cross.”

“Let us stop here, sit and look over the kingdoms of the earth, the petty doings and undoings of men, remote enough to tell what they are worth.”

Fanny hesitated, but the grass was clean and dry. She was curled up before he could lend her his hand.

“Now we are fine and comfortable, as a Scotchman might say. Strange fellows, those Scotchmen,” Keats rattled on, in a great hurry. “We saw a great difference between the Irish people and them. The Scotch never laugh, but they are comparatively neat and clean. Their constitutions are not so remote and puzzling as the Irish. A Scotchman will go wisely about to deceive you, an Irishman cunningly. An Irishman would bluster out of any discovery to his disadvantage. He likes to be thought a gallous fellow. A Scotchman is contented with himself. But they both are sensible of the reputations they have with Englishmen, and act accordingly.”

“You seem to have made a study of the races.”

Keats gestured. "Why, yon's the spot wheer Mungo's mither hanged hersel', and drunken Charlie brake's neck's bane." Fanny laughed, and he continued with a description of the coachman who had pointed out to them the tomb of "Burrans—there, do ye see it, amang the trees—white, wi' a roond tap. . . . They horses takes a hellish heap o' drivin'." But then Keats told her of the wonders of Fingal's Cave in the Isle of Staffa, and how in the glorious hues, mists and lakes he had identified scenes before witnessed in the imagination. "I felt positively familiar with the ash trees of Lodore."

"There was a field mouse came and looked at us, and listened to you carefully, and then turned and ran away."

"I am not paying enough heed to my surroundings," he admitted. "Yet it is a bright day, and here I am sitting beside a beautiful girl." He put his arm around her waist and tried to kiss her. He was more surprised than disappointed at the lightning-like quickness of the struggle which lodged his kiss on her cheek instead of her mouth.

"No!" She shook her head. "You mustn't!"

"Why not?" He asked automatically. He noted that she did not try to rise—it would be too ungraceful, perhaps. He was touched to see that her bonnet was disarranged.

"Why—it is not fair. Is that what poets take young ladies walking for? And you were telling me about your travels so nicely."

"Bless my travels. You have a strange idea of poets. I thought differently of girls. Don't they all like to be kissed?"

"Then you have a strange idea of girls."

"It is not so important as your misconception of poets. In order that you may not make the same mistake in future I shall explain."

"Indeed!" said Fanny. "And what shall I do that you may not—"

"A poet, my dear young lady, is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity—he is continually in, for, and filling some other body—"

"I am not your dear young lady," said Fanny with perverse seriousness.



“The sun—the moon—the sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute; the poet has none, no identity—he is the most unpoetical of all God’s creatures.”

“I begin to believe you.”

Keats laughed. “Indeed, I’m serious, more than half.” He picked up her hand and looked at it. “Your hand is real. A great poem might be made from it, I, who might write the poem—I would not have another write it—am not poetical, but quite as ready to make a poem out of a turnip—if my spirit was engaged as much by a turnip as by your hand. There’s the rub—or the squeeze.”

“Best be careful how you reveal your character or lack of character. I might not care to come walking with you again.”

“Oh, then, perhaps you would find that I am not always the poet. But if you make a love-lorn swain of me, I promise you shall suffer, too.”

“You must not talk such stuff and nonsense the first time you take me out,” she cried.

“Is it the first time? I can’t believe that. I seem to have known you long ago in those fields called Elysian.”

“Are you so sure it was me?”

The girl was no slowcoach. Keats was exhilarated, every moment increased his excitement. But he must be careful not to put her to flight. He could not give up the prospect of more afternoons like this. What a pity he had not made her acquaintance before; alas, the winter stretched before them, and Tom . . . Fanny was talking of tea; the word “mother” struck into his musing mind. She was like his mother had been: gay, young, fond of pleasure. But she did not know what tenderness was, yet. She would not know what it was to have his head upon her breast, to comfort him from the world’s stings. . . .

“What are you thinking of?”

“I suppose your mother expects you to make a good match.” He paid no attention to the amazed stare Fanny turned to this observation. “For my

own part, the barrier I feel to matrimony will keep me ever from thinking of it—”

“You are young yet,” said Fanny cheerfully and decisively. “You may find someone some day—who would marry you! Middle-aged men make the best husbands, I have heard.”

“No! Not I. Though the most beautiful creature were waiting me at the end of a journey; though the carpet were of silk, the curtains of the morning clouds, the sofa stuffed with cygnet’s down, the food manna, the wine beyond claret, the window opening upon Winandermere—I should not feel—”

“Yet Mr. Wordsworth is married, is he not?”

“Or rather, my happiness would not be so fine, as my solitude is sublime. Instead of what I described, a sublimity waits to welcome me home. The roaring of the wind is my wife and the stars through the window-pane are my children. The mighty abstract idea I have of beauty in all things stifles more divided and minute domestic happiness. An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that beauty, but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more—”

“What do you feel?” Fanny asked gently.

“Commerce with the world does not satisfy me.”

“Perhaps it does not satisfy anyone, at times.” He felt that she was moved by the richness and warmth of his words, by the brilliant picture of the estate he desired. She must therefore be convinced of the truth of what he said. He felt almost convinced himself, though it sounded like a ranting actor. They talked of his boyhood, of his brothers; they rose to go home, and soon were chattering gaily as boy and girl. Every circumstance and little detail was interesting. They spoke of Fanny, and Keats declared his wish to bring her to see this Fanny. By the time they reached the house on Downshire Hill it was five o’clock. He explained that Tom would be waiting, and the strain a sick person was under; would her mother mind greatly if he did not come in? He wanted, without confessing it, to keep their companionship from slipping into the trivial.

He strode home swiftly, and talked for some time in the dusky room before lighting the candles, for he felt that Tom had been crying. Poor lad! he was only nineteen. Fanny should come to them, John said, if he had to employ *force majeure*.

When supper was brought up, Mrs. Bentley carried on the tray with it a letter . . . from Woodhouse. Poor Woodhouse! He had taken seriously that idle threat made at Hessey's dinner, and begged Keats to reconsider his decision not to write any more, but be one of those who "allow their fire and originality to be damped by the apprehensions of shallow censures from the grouching and cold-hearted. . . . And shall such a one," continued the good Woodhouse, "upon whom anxious eyes are fixed . . . be dismayed by the yelping of the tuneless, the curious, the malicious or the undiscerning? Or shall he fall into the worse error of supposing that there is left no corner of the universal heaven of poetry unvisited by Wing? . . . and shall he give the land which let Chatterton and K. White die of unkindness and neglect—but which yet retained the grace to weep over their ashes, no opportunity of redeeming its character and paying the vast debt it owes to Genius?"

Well, well, as for the question of the reviews . . . But he would write a letter at once on the general nature of the poet and how he could not be held to responsibility for any of the utterances he made in the guise of any one of his chameleon selves. Stop writing! Why the faint conceptions he had of poems to come brought the blood frequently to his forehead! It was the picture of the poet he had given Fanny Brawne that he passed on to Woodhouse, and it was of her he thought as he sat in the room afterward, until the fire was at its last click.

The next fine day he went early to Walthamstow for Fanny, and they were gay upon the coach-journey, and in the street bought a toy lamb in memory of earlier childhood; but when the young girl saw her brother outstretched, a pitiful slack bundle beneath the clothes, his head dark with damp hair upon the white pillow, and his hazel eyes large and fiery, she was taken aback. Yet Keats marvelled at the quickness with which she hid even her recovery, and came forward smiling, talking brightly.

“Why, Tom, you’re not going to stop in bed like this, are you, and miss all these nice days? I tell you, sir, if you meant to cut and run from winter this way, you are too early for it. And then you must not forget and stay in for Christmas too. Mind and don’t forget that, now.”

Tom smiled wanly, but when he started to speak, a cough beset him, so that it was some minutes before he could get a word out. For a while they kept up a fire of puns and jokes and references to gayer times, careful not to bring anything to his attention which might inspire regrets or excitement; and Fanny told of her experiences at school, of the funny teachers and students, and what she did on holidays. To Keats it was a gruesome nightmare, and for the first time he fully realized what the death of Tom would mean; for the first time he admitted the prospect of a world without his brother. This cheery visiting was the more ghastly for the charmed, rapt expression which came over poor Tom’s face as he listened, sharing the new person’s vitality, becoming unconscious of his own endless prostration and the four walls which, containing his suffering, had contained his world. Keats felt as though his chest had been under a great strain, as from holding the breath under water, when he came into the open air. It was terrible that he should want to get away from his brother.

Fanny seemed to recover quickly. “Is this friend of yours a nice lady?” she asked. “And are you thinking of marrying her?”

“Not particularly nice,” returned Keats grumpily. No woman could seem pleasing who took his mind from his brother. “Her shape is very graceful and so are her movements—her arms are good, her hands baddish, her feet tolerable. Her profile is better than her full-face, which indeed is not full but pale and thin without showing any bone—she wants sentiment in every feature.”

Instead of being impressed by this enumeration of implied desiderata, Fanny giggled. “I hope nobody ever makes a catalogue of me like that—it is as bad as Homer’s ships.”

“But then, she’s only a child, and her mind is unformed.”

Fanny pursed her lips and paced along demurely. Mrs. Brawne was kindness itself in her reception; and soon began talking to Keats, leaving

the two Fannys to get acquainted in one corner of the room, where they were soon giggling and chattering as though they had known each other for years. Keats could scarcely keep his eyes from them or a smile from his mouth. There were the two girls he loved more than any others in the world; and if that delectable “nymph of the sidelong glance”, Georgiana, had been there, the three beings he loved best after his brothers would be together. Some day, perhaps; was it too wild a dream to picture himself married to Fanny Brawne—Fanny Keats then!—crossing the ocean with her and his sister to see the Georges, minor and major? Mrs. Brawne was talking of two pugilists who were in training at different places in Hampstead for a bout to take place in the winter.

“It seems a terrible thing that men should set about work for months in such a calculating fashion, so as to do each other the most hurt.”

“It is too bad that two beings should spend so much of their time—their mortal days—in such an employment; I agree with you. But perhaps the effort is not lost, for the world derives much enjoyment and perhaps benefit from witnessing such a contest of skill.”

“Oh, Mr. Keats! I am surprised that a poet should hold such an opinion. The time and money might be spent in more refined enjoyment.”

“Ah, the enjoyment of such a spectacle is fine in itself. There you have two fine bodily specimens, fitted to the utmost of condition, displaying the utmost of their skill. The contest is enough to brighten the eye and gladden the heart. Of course such diversions are not to be recommended to ladies.”

“Surely not,” said Mrs. Brawne dryly. “They might see the brutality and not the skill.” Keats let her have the last word.

Too soon the tea-hour was over, and Fanny had to be taken back to Walthamstow. Her bright gaiety shaded into a charming, childish diffidence when the formal moments of leave-taking came. In the coach, she turned from the landscape which spun past, and said. “She’s awfully nice and such good fun. She knows a great deal about dress, you know.”

“Miss Brawne? I would suspect it from the manner of wearing her hair, and that pink gauze she wears over all her white dress.”

“But I mean costuming and all that. She can tell you what the ladies wore in the time of Richard Plantagenet, and everything. She knows more than Miss Parsons at school.”

“Oh, she’s not every girl you meet on a day’s journey,” admitted Keats. “If I were you, I would not tell George anything about her in your letter. If he knew I was making new friends he might think I was neglecting Tom.”

“Oh, surely he couldn’t think that.” Fanny was shocked.

“When Tom and I were in Teignmouth, and Tom suffered a relapse, George came down rather hard on *me*. I don’t blame him, anxious as he was. Only I want to keep him from becoming anxious again.”

They rattled and laughed the rest of the way to Walthamstow, as though beginning a holiday. Mrs. Abbey’s saturnine countenance expressed satisfaction at seeing Fanny return before it was quite dark. Mr. Abbey’s rotund form inquired regarding Tom’s welfare. Tom was no better, John told him; their purses were strained with the extra expenses of medical attendance. Mr. Abbey looked as though he might say something about an articulated surgeon who called in another doctor.

Tom was better next day, and less nervous. John called at the Brawne house, but Fanny for some vaguely excused reason would not go a walk. He thought he would go to see Reynolds in Little Britain while he had his freedom. But when he turned off from Bedford Row on that street leading to Lamb’s Conduit, he met a strangely familiar small female, not too slender, figure. Just as he came opposite he was sure it was his lady of Hastings. He could not believe it, and could not stare. He passed her, then turned his head. She was looking back too.

“I’m afraid you didn’t recognize me.” Her merry kind eyes did not seem offended by the possibility.

“I’m sorry,” said John gravely. “Truly I am. But you wouldn’t have me stare at a strange lady, if you had been one? May I accompany you?”

“Yes, come. We can talk.” They swung into step together. “I have been acquainted with your doings. You have published another book. And I know some of your friends, too; I have been in the same room with your

brother George, and your friend Reynolds. So you will have to be candid with me!"

"As candid as you are likely to be to me," Keats laughed, blushing as he thought of Fanny Brawne. "You are an enigma to me, you know."

"Oh, you men! I suppose that is the only interest I have for you."

"No. I have remembered you for other things; and gratefully. But you can't expect me to even hint at 'em, can you?" She looked at him rather aggrievedly, he thought. They talked pleasantly while they went along, sometimes through shabby, sometimes through decent, streets. Exhilarated, Keats had his guessing at work, wondering where their destination lay and what would happen when they reached it. They were going towards Islington, and finally turned in at a large double-winged house. It was, he saw, a school of some kind. Did she teach? When she had lifted the knocker, she explained that a friend of hers kept the boarding-school. He groaned inwardly; now he was in for it? An hour of old maids' talk would be the death of him, he knew. But the lady introduced him to her kindly-mannered, spectacled friend, and withdrew to another room where they talked in low tones for about ten minutes.

"Now you must allow me to see you home," insisted Keats.

"Very well. But it is a longish walk, again." They bickered archly. Again Keats's thought went ferreting among possibilities. But now he had received a sort of genteel hint from the boarding-school. They came to Queen's Square, and Gloucester Street, and again went upstairs to her sitting-room—it might have been the same one he had spent a week in at Hastings, over the summer-brightened Channel. There were the books, the pictures, the bronze statue of Bonaparte, the spinet, the Æolian harp, the parrot, the linnet, and somewhere, he was sure, the case of choice liqueurs. She laid his hat down with her own hat and cloak on the sofa. Her sympathy was quick and warm, and she told him that Tom should be well fed; she chanced to have some game, and insisted that he take home a grouse for Tom's dinner. Him she brought a wineglass of Benedictine, but would not drink with him. Time was passing, curse the arch-enemy. It was unfortunate that their first walk had not led here. Now he must go to Tom, and away

from all memory of those bright spring days less than two years ago, when he had been writing *Endymion* full of hope, and enjoyed light love like a brief and hearty feast. Ah, life itself was different.

Scarcely knowing until he touched her, he attempted to kiss her. She shrank away. He had warmed with her before and kissed her, why not now?

"No. It won't do. You would make it a matter of course."

"But it would be living backward not to do so again."

"You are wrong, *that* would be living backward. You are changed. You have had part of your share of troubles and disappointments ere this, and some of the joys too, no doubt. You are grown to be a man."

It would not be right to back down now, unless she was really sincere. But she insisted that he would please her much more if he would only press her hand and go away. It had been a great pleasure to see him again.

"Well, I declare, you make me feel more pleasure by continuing to disappoint me than a simple kiss would do."

She smiled and went out. "I shall wrap the grouse for your brother."

When she came back, he said: "We shall pass some pleasant times together. I may be of service to you in matters of study and taste; if I can I will."

"Yes, let me know what improvement your brother has in his health. Or stay—give me your address and I shall send him a hare now and then."

So that, he reflected as he walked away, was over. He might go back but it was over. He had not even desired her. But what good taste she had shown, what a warm heart. By heaven, he had not been such a fool after all; not at Hastings, or now. "You would make it a matter of course," she had said.

Mrs. Bentley received the grouse rather dubiously, but it made a delicious stew with dumplings and broth. After supper, John could not rest. When Tom had fallen into a doze he brushed his hair and stole out—to Mrs. Brawne's house. It was that lady—curses upon his star—who opened the door, interrogatively. Yes, Fanny was at home, but was going out. She would see him, since he seemed to have an urgent communication; so Mrs. Brawne implied.



Lovely was Fanny when she came down the stairs in her ball clothes, carefully bearing a candle which showed her hair a radiant mass, her delicate thin face with its pinched nostrils and blue eyes tranquil and aristocratic. When she set the candle upon a table in the hall, he wished that he dared put his arms around her. Ah, even if she were willing, that would be sacrilege against her splendid robes, dedicate to joy on a ballroom floor.

“You—you’re going out, Miss Brawne?”

“Yes, Keats; there is a perfectly splendid ball in the city to-night given by Lady Toshenham and Sir Reginald, the Lieutenant-Colonel. Don’t you envy me?” she asked gaily, as though such a fête would be beyond his conception. He nearly laughed outright at the silliness and vanity of a girl who had got herself dressed in new finery.

“I don’t envy you the invitation; no, nor the company. But I envy them theirs. Must you go?” He could have bitten the absurd embarrassed question from his lips.

“Of course I must. I accepted and the coach will soon come for me.”

He muttered rapidly something about sitting down to talk until she had to go: like a fool, he told himself; but then there were only the few things to be said, and you said them. Only the one thing you wanted, and you couldn’t hide that.

“Of course, come into the parlour. Captain Conroy will soon be here, but we can chat until he comes; and you can stay with Mother when I am gone. How is your brother?”

“Tom is better; but I really should not leave him. I was away this afternoon. On second thought, I will not accept your very kind invitation,” Keats added stiffly. “Good-night!”



### CHAPTER III

Keats did not go home when he left the Brawne house, being too torn inwardly. He did not know just what he felt nor what he intended to do, and he wanted to investigate and identify his feelings. He walked about the Heath. Tom would have been alone had he prolonged the call. He need not, could not, go back at once. He was enraged at Fanny Brawne. Yet why? She was young and pleasure-loving, and the standards of life about her were based to a degree upon the shows of rank, fashion, and military trappings. What more natural than that a young girl should enjoy these things and be glad of the opportunity of doing so, even if she loved a different sort of man—himself. Ah, but had she any such thought? Was she capable of doing so? It seemed that his dream of Fanny as an exquisitely and vitally sympathetic being, capable of understanding one's finest perceptions, was distorted. She was a common, suburban belle, caring for nothing more than for the empty shows and the gaudy husks of life.

It was himself he hated. What must she think of one capable of talking about poets as he had done, fatuously confident of a sympathy which didn't exist? She must have dubbed him fool at once, even while she consented to be amused by him on a profitless afternoon; even as she listened to his strange words which might have stirred her sensations while she thought of frocks, in the way a bon-bon would have tickled her palate while she debated the grave choice of a partner for the *cotillon*. He had been blind, and a bigger fool than she thought him, not to have known; every moment revealed the truth in his recollection.

He tramped about beyond the ends of the streets in the darkness, until it came to him that he might be set upon by footpads and robbed of his bit of money and have his head broken. A fine end for Tom's only remaining brother. As far as his inclinations went—he ground his teeth—it would have been joy to meet any stranger there in the darkness and the cool autumn air, with bare fists and fair play! The bare, dry bushes shivered wickedly, gleeful. Back under the lamps again, he approached the mournful house, his laden heart fevered more with another ill.

Tom was awake, staring at the candle-flame. As though that brilliant vital girl had given him new sight, he saw his brother for the pitiful wreck of being that he was. The face was like a garishly painted image upon the counterpane—dark shadows beneath chin and temples, bright red the hollows of the cheeks, large-pupilled and fateful the eyes. And the covers lay almost smoothly drifted over the meagre remainder of that body which had been agile and laughing with life as a squirrel's.

John picked up the spittoon and examined it with care. A few drops upon its dark brim seemed to be brighter in colour than ordinary blood. He did not question Tom; there was no use in exciting him, his condition was serious enough; but sat down on a chair opposite. Tom looked at him fearfully.

"I have been walking on the Heath. It is very cool."

Reassured, Tom turned his face to the ceiling and closed his eyes. John leaned his head upon his palm and watched. A bitterness such as he had never known crept into his heart and flooded out every other feeling, as though never again would he taste anything but gall, or speak words save of rancour. His mind was stilled, no words came into it; he only knew the end of all ends made such things as love, happiness, beauty, even pain, mere words. There was only, awaiting even these, and men and women who floundered through them, nothingness, futility. Was that what God had created life for—to refine means of making it naught? Ah, it was to him that such thoughts could come. Tom had to fight for every breath, while every breath put him deeper into the black pit which finally would swallow his struggles.

Suddenly Tom coughed, sharply, involuntarily. Keats rose. A large bright drop of blood, a dribble of smaller ones, lay upon the sheet. He held the candle. Yes, bright, brilliant, scarlet, that blood. Arterial. There was no long time now. He put the candle upon the table and stood a moment, his hands to his head. Then he ran downstairs, and sent Bentley for Dr. Sawrey.

But when the doctor came he could do nothing except to bleed Tom again. The blood fell dark and thick from the elbow. It was doing Tom a great deal of good to take it from him, Sawrey gave them to understand. The boy was so weak as to be almost unconscious except when roused to a spell

of coughing. There was barely a trace of blood when he spat. By midnight he was resting easier, and seemed to be asleep. Keats kept watch until the room became unbearably cold. The night had begun to thin away into the grey of dawn before, stifling coughs, he got under covers.

For two or three nights Tom slept better, not so nervous and so vexed with his own impotence as he had been; no longer querulous, but sweet-tempered as in health. Keats did not leave his bedside. He wrote Mr. Abbey telling him to bring or send Fanny out to see her brother; but Mr. Abbey replied in caustic strain: he had learned that Fanny had been to another house than the one in which Tom was lying. He opined that one more visit before Christmas holidays would suffice.

It seemed to Keats that Fanny Brawne might have been offended, thinking he intended to curtail her pleasures in proportion to any interest she might take in himself. But he came to the point of questioning whether he should have anything to do with the girl further. The garboils she awaked were too distracting for such a time. Only—he would have to meet her, at the Dilke house; and he could not cut her. Explanations would have to be made. But when at last he made his way outside and toward that house on the hill, he found himself to be but the engine for one emotion—eagerness. The fresh air seemed to have intoxicated him. He had hard work to keep from running all the way. Instead he paused so that he would not arrive puffing and blowing.

“Why, how do you do, Mr. Keats?” said Fanny, curtsying merrily at the door. Her prettiness and amiability were thrice as striking as he had remembered. What a fool he nearly had been!

“Why, Miss Brawne! You look as well as ever after your ball!”

“And why should I not?” she asked, pouting. “Mrs. Dilke tells us that your brother has been very serious these few days past.”

Keats winced. He had meant her to think if she liked that he had stayed away from pique. It was annoying of her to have had the explanation. “My neglect of you has been an everlasting knapsack upon my shoulders,” he told her. “Talking of knapsacks, I intend to make my everlasting fortune by them in case of a war—which you must consequently pray for—by contracting with Government for said materials. A tax which is taken from

the people and shouldered upon the military ought not to be snubbed at. . . . This will show you how easily if I cared to I might become wealthy.”

“Best not talk of it until it is done. Unless you succeed it is treason.” She laughed easily.

“I see you have been discussing affairs with Mr. Dilke.”

“There are other people besides writers who have some sense of affairs.” Miss Brawne spoke briskly, as one accustomed to holding her own.

“Ah, yes. Writers deal in eternal principles, they have no time for the politics of the hour. Would you care to walk with me this afternoon?”

“Is that an affair of the hour?”

“Certainly not. It is an eternal matter.”

“That won’t do—you must promise to get me back in time for tea!”

“I submit. That is if you will come. I haven’t a pun in my head.”

When she was bonneted and cloaked they walked briskly. The November sunlight was soft and mellow, but without warmth. When they came to a clear vista from the heights, London was seen to be shrouded in smoke and fog. His silence was referable to Tom; Fanny took his arm. “I shall pray, every night. And I’ll tell Mother—and Mrs. Dilke. . . . Oh, he must get well.” This was almost more than he could bear. He spoke gruffly.

“Aye. If praying will help he shall have it. . . . I have scarce a doubt of immortality of some nature or other—neither has Tom. You know, Fanny, you remind me of my mother. She was like you—light and gay, but with such a good heart underneath.”

“Oh, I haven’t a kind heart!” They walked along looking at their feet. Keats feared that he might lose courage to speak.

“I’ve been wanting to tell you something, Fanny, you must have suspected.” She was looking about as though for a change of subject. His musical, gentle voice seemed to frighten her. “When I have acted so queerly. . . . Oh, I know that I am not a responsible being. I loved you. I love you, and I will love you as long as I live.” The sun had vanished,

the sharp breeze rose, the dry shrubs and grasses whispered complainingly. "What are you going to say, Fanny?"

"What is there to say? Is that why we came walking?"

"You mean that you do not return my love?"

"I can say nothing when I do not know my own feelings?"

Keats groaned. "You have no feeling. Then you cannot love me." He gazed at her tragically. She was pale now, in spite of the whipping wind, and her face looked drawn. "You do not love me."

"If you will have me say it, I do not."

"I might have known it. Why don't you tell me there is no hope?" What a fool he had been to expect this exquisite creature to care for him! Didn't she see finer-set-up fellows at every dance and rout?

"Because I do not know whether there is any hope," she whispered. "You can't expect me to give an answer when you ask point-blank as though you expected me to deliver a yard of silk!" The annoyance in her tone changed as she spoke to tearfulness. Good God! He was silent, his despair becoming charged with exasperation.

"No," he said finally, with an enforced and tragic calm. "You don't and you never can love me. You would know, else, before this. No hope! Let us go back."

She was curiously slow and hesitant. He took her arm and almost pushed her sidelong before him, his face set sternly. "Don't!" She jerked her arm away. They plodded along in silence again. She stole a glance at him. "If you weren't so abrupt and fiery, I might tell you that it is possible I might change."

"Now you are trifling. This is not a matter of deciding; it is a question of one's whole heart and inmost being. I love you. And you tell me you will attend to the matter!"

"But I have never thought of marrying anyone at all."

“Oh, marriage!” he snorted. He supposed that if he had had ten thousand a year she would have acceded to his love and set a date at once. “I believe in love.” They were coming near to the Brawne house. He would not enter it if it meant mortal offence to all the ladies in the kingdom. He had better things to do than attend upon heartless coquettes. “It doesn’t matter,” he muttered. “I have never been happy. Any being I ever loved was lost to me. It was too much to expect it.”

Fanny hurried forward and turned to bid him good-bye before they entered the gate. “Come and see me again when you can,” she said brightly. Her fair beauty smiled at him as with bravery in the face of an eternal parting. He told himself that he did not care if the parting were eternal. Muttering to himself, quoting Webster, he went straight home. Tom was unchanged. For the last few days Keats had been writing his poem at the bedside. He had to escape into these abstractions, or go mad. But it was mad to think that he could write this evening. He sat there, gazing out of the window, at Tom, at his portrait of Shakespeare with the tassels which Georgiana had crocheted. Could one imagine Georgiana treating George in such manner? It was plain that such a girl as this Fanny cared for nothing but to snare him and keep him in her train. Go to see her again, indeed!

What would it pleasure me to have my throat cut  
With diamonds? or to be smothered  
With cassia? or to be shot to death with pearls?

Those fiendish children below were shouting and running, banging doors and screeching. When he got downstairs it transpired that Mrs. Bentley was out. He admonished them sternly, and they meekly promised to mend their ways. But once he was in the room again, the noise recommenced with doubled vigour. That was the prerogative of infant minds; they had to rebel against any authority they dared flout, in order to reach a rational and self-respecting maturity. He might not even tell Mrs. Bentley about it, she had been so kind. He reassured Tom, and falling into a muse was surprised to hear his landlady’s voice, in the dark, bringing their tray.



The next afternoon, Keats felt obliged to take a walk on the Heath, if he were to keep well; in a few weeks winter would confine him still more. He intended to steer a course past the house of Mrs. Brawne, but his feet carried him to its door. Mrs. Brawne told him that Fanny was not at home. He could make nothing of her manner. Probably Fanny had not told her a thing. But she did not seem surprised at his calling on two successive days.

A few houses farther on he became aware of ribald yells and the squeals of a cat. A butcher's boy had stopped his hand-cart in the street, and enticed some householder's cat with a bit of meat. Then he had seized the cat by the tail and held it above the meat, for which it clawed. The blood rushed to Keats's face. "Put that cat down!" he shouted.

"Garn, little guvnor; I'm a-training 'im to come the double monkey in the vaudeyville." It was a heavy-set florid youth of nineteen or so.

"If you don't put that cat down I shall call the police at once."

"No perlice abaht 'ere," said the other with satisfaction. He chuckled delightedly as the cat squirmed and attempted to claw him, and jerked its tail. Keats swung his left fist.

"Garn, I'll put you in me pockit." The overweening fellow made a brusque movement with elbow and foot, thinking to trip his assailant.

Keats evaded the tripping and landed his right to the jaw, his left to the heart. With an oath the cat was freed, and they sailed into each other. Keats was light and swift. He was away a couple of yards before the other could strike; then he plunged into the *mêlée* as swiftly, landed two, three times, and was out and away again. The butcher was becoming enraged now, and it was certain that he would take a great deal of whipping. However, his right eye was blackened, his left cheek cut, and his nose bleeding. He was shouting vile names, the beef-eater! In silence Keats settled down to business. Thud, bang, plunge, out and away! Again and again he hurled himself upon the other and got away without serious damage. That was the only way, he told himself; the hulking fellow could not be knocked down, or even shaken much, but he could be battered until he could take no more; and so he would be.

They were both panting and nearly exhausted when a stranger interposed and struck up their fists. Keats became aware that a small crowd had gathered. "You'd better call time or you won't be capable of a second round. What's this?"

"This fellow," panted Keats, "was torturing a cat. He wouldn't stop!"

"Ye're a liar."

Keats made no reply, but when he dived forward he found himself almost held aloft. The stranger had an arm of steel. "Wait a bit. You shall have your chance." He took out his watch, and while the minute was passing, told an urchin to get some vinegar and cloths.

The rounds continued for more than half an hour after that. The butcher had grown cunning and would scarcely move, but lashed out heavily each time Keats boarded him; except when he could stand it no longer and, receiving a sharper stinger than usual, roared and plunged. Then he got it worse. Keats found that returning coolness was saving his wind. At last it was done, the fellow gave out suddenly and abjectly. "Are you going to torture dumb animals again?" There was a joy in Keats's tones that made the butcher's hesitation very brief. He was led home, an unseeing hulk, by someone who appeared to know where he lived.

"You did a proper professional job of him, Mr. Keats," said the referee. "My name is Jack Randall. You shall have a pair of cards to see me have a go with Ned Turner next month. You know where I train, don't you?"

Keats was amazed to recall his face and name. Many a time he and Reynolds had put on the gloves at Jack Randall's place. "I wouldn't have known my grandmother!" They laughed at the preoccupation of the fighter.

Mrs. Bentley insisted on giving him a beefsteak poultice. He told her the fight had started through his trying to buy one from the butcher. Tom took it all without a brightening of the eye, poor lad. Brown came over that evening, and had the whole scene enacted, to which he listened good-naturedly. Next day Severn called, and was much exercised by his friend's condition—the bruises had begun to turn black and blue and the sore throat had returned. His kindly, gentle face puckered up at the recital and never

changed until it was over. Rather annoyed, Keats told him that he had no time these days for a walk, but would be glad of a call.

As the weeks passed, Tom sank lower and lower. Three times Keats went into the city to Abbey's coffee warehouse to get their guardian's consent to a visit from Fanny. He could not go so far as Walthamstow to see her himself. Tom was helpless and required attention every hour of the day. Keats did not go to the Brawne house for two endless, Spartan weeks; but for the last few days of that time the girl he loved was in his thoughts constantly. She was kinder when they met, and seemed to take it that they should be friends. She had heard of his fight, perhaps witnessed it, though she would not admit that. Her mother called him quite the hero. They, the Dilkes, everyone, gave him great help in sympathy; but Tom was so low that he could not see anyone. He could scarcely stir, his breathing was a choked, painful effort.

Watching him die, Keats suffered a thousand deaths. Every tremor of effort burdened and swelled his own heart as though somehow he could suffer for Tom and so save him. Was this the end of all, of beauty, hope and youth? If it was, what was the use of them? What could be the use of the poetry he practised when the issue of life was not beauty, but pain? Could the joys of life ever be anything but a sickening duplicity on the part of the gods, a strange interlude between this breathing and the end?

Longer and longer breaths . . . they did not seem to be breaths at all, but a slight heaving now and then in the prone form. Keats became conscious that his own diaphragm was keeping time with them. He rose and wiped his brother's brow. Tom did not open his eyes . . . yet. At four o'clock the doctor stumbled into the candlelight from the wintry void. At eight o'clock Tom was no longer living. The sun was rising; the candles were blown out. Keats lifted his head from the table and drew paper and pen towards him.

*Tuesday morn.*

*My dear Fanny,—Poor Tom has been so bad that I have delayed your visit hither—as it would be so painful for you both. I cannot say he is any better this morning—he is in a very dangerous*

*state—I have scarce any hopes of him. Keep up your spirits for me, my dear Fanny—repose entirely in*

*Your affectionate Brother  
John.*

He gave the note to Bentley. Mrs. Bentley was weeping in the back part of the house. Into the sunlight he stumbled and instinctively made his way to Wentworth Place. Brown's servant let him in, and he climbed to the bedroom. Brown was asleep. Keats took his hand. Brown opened his eyes without stirring. "Poor Tom . . . is no more." They were silent awhile, hands locked, both thinking of the Tom Keats they had known.

"Have nothing more to do with those lodgings—and alone too! Had you not better live with me?"

Keats pressed his hand warmly. "I think it would be better for now." He sat down on the edge of the bed, and the tears started to flow, although he tried to talk as though he did not know it.

Suddenly there were so many things to be done that one scarcely had time to indulge in grief—though Dilke and Brown undertook pressing tasks. Haslam wrote to George and Georgiana, and Brown to Woodhouse. Tom was buried Thursday, in St. Stephen's Church, Coleman Street, where his father and grandmother were buried. When the day was over, weariness claimed body and mind in dreamless slumber.

The friends seemed in a conspiracy not to let him have an hour to himself. In one house or another he was pressed to meals and to passing time in visits. Fanny was lovely and kindhearted, and though not uncheerful, subdued; his heart opened to her and lost its impatience; he did not vex himself with questioning. Brown was eternally coming into his rooms to talk, to explain the house and their arrangements. There were two sitting-rooms on the first floor besides the servants' kitchen below stairs—one looking out on the road and the expanse of Hampstead Heath, and the other commanding a view of the garden they would share with the Dilkes. Upstairs, each had his bedroom; and there was in addition a bit of a crib for the odd guest.

At breakfast the day after the funeral, Brown got talking of the bout between Jack Randall and Ned Turner next day at Crawley Hurst, in Sussex. The excitement in town was tremendous; there had been nothing like it in his memory. It was rumoured that forty thousand pounds had been staked. It would be a shame to miss such an outing. A fellow of Keats's prowess would be committing a crime against his own craft, and so on. Brown's eloquence finally engaged him to make one of a party with Dilke, Haslam, Wells and Reynolds. As they returned to the metropolis, hundreds of people appeared at the turnpike gates to learn the outcome of the fight. Randall had won.

A letter came from Woodhouse telling how he had loaned a copy of *Endymion* to a cousin, who had loaned it to someone else, so that finally Miss Jane Porter had read the book and desired an introduction to the author, speaking of the "very rare delight" this "first fruit of genius" had given her and her sister. She hoped that "the ill-natured review will not have damped such true Parnassian fire". Woodhouse opined that this opened a way to "an introduction to a class of society from which you may possibly derive advantage, as well as gratification if you think proper to avail yourself of it".

"Well," said Brown practically. "Why not know Jane and Anna Maria? They might prove amusing. Horace Smith tells me the admirable girls are admirable foils to one another. Thaddeus of Warsaw is tall and tragical, they call her 'La Penserosa', and the Hungarian Brother, Anna Maria, is blonde and jocund—'L'Allegra'.

"By George, I will—and for George, too. I must have something in my letters to amuse them in America." But when he came to write Woodhouse he said he must work and was hardly able to do justice to the acquaintances he had. As to making an impression on a set of ladies, he would have been content to do so by meretricious romance verse, if they alone, and not men, were to judge.

Brown had been talking in his lightly humorous way which caricatured profundity, against women and the ties their "love" bound about a man. Keats kept away from the Brawne house for a few days, rather than reveal the degree of his enslavement. But, after calls on his sister with Mrs.

Dilke and Haslam, Fanny Brawne had to have her turn. A quickening of anticipation came over him as he neared that house again. Miss Fanny was in, her mother out. She sat beside the fire, and talked and rallied him as no other girl had done or could do, while he toyed with a guitar riband and a glove of hers. Whatever she said, even if it would have been outrageous in another, was rendered charming by her delicate, firm beauty, her ethereal animation. She went out for a book of costuming to show him; they sat together upon the sofa; their hands could not help touching. They whispered and laughed, and the words were full of a thrilling music. His arms went about that tiny waist, and their lips met at last. She had been thinking of him a great deal. Yes, she did love him; she was almost certain of it. Keats walked home; or he supposed he must have done so, when he saw Brown's questioning look, and struggled to banish the rapt, inebriated complacency from his own face.

Something interesting was happening every day. Haydon called, and told them of Hoppners' expedition to the Pole and how the mariners had rejoiced when after the month-long blank days and nights they came once more in sight of the stars; and that was life. Hunt invited them to his house, whence after dinner he proposed to take them to one of Novello's musical Sunday evenings. These affairs of the dilettante music-publisher were not unknown to Keats. Clarke was smitten with Mary Victoria Novello. It might be diverting with Brown's company. Hunt, when they met, was in his old vein; was most sympathetic regarding Tom's death, and proposed a meeting with Tom Moore the famous Irish poet. Lamb was present. In the intervals of Mozart there was a merciless round of puns, worse and worst. Keats sat silent for the most part, constrained by the usages of society and his own pride. To act as the others did would have been to make an ass of himself; to act as impulse directed would have aroused amazed sneers. His troubles had unfitted him for general society; if he appeared an idiot, it could not be helped. He could be himself, when he wrote. Nor was Brown who, alone, seemed a most sociable fellow, much better suited. As they walked home in the bright winter's night he declared that he would not go again. The puns were too bad.

“Hunt is certainly a pleasant fellow in the main,” reasoned Keats. “But in reality he is vain, egotistical, and disgusting in matters of taste. He understands many a beautiful thing; but then, instead of giving other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself professes, he begins an explanation in such a curious manner that our taste and self-love are offended continually. Hunt does harm, by making fine things petty, and beautiful things hateful.”

“Lord!” sighed Brown, “but wouldn’t that set make a comedy! You and I should write it, Keats.”

Messrs. Taylor and Hessey forwarded a letter from one “Mr. P. Fenbank” of Teignmouth, which contained a sonnet hailing John Keats “Star of high promise”—pretty bad. And, most amazing, a note for £25 beneath it. Taylor had been talking too much about his author again. Or had he—Teignmouth? Who was there—the conchological Dr. Turton and the Jeffrey girls. Hum! This Mr. P. Fenbank, whatever his taste in poetry, was a trifle galling. It would be dunderheaded to refuse his gift—yet Keats wrote after him to Teignmouth.

The Brawne ladies came one evening to the Dilke house, bringing a friend of Fanny’s, Miss Robinson. Never could be such an unsatisfactory evening. Dilke talked with Keats about America. He had, in spite of Keats’s gloom, a good deal of confidence in George’s business ability and in general conditions in America. During this time Fanny was showing off her friend to the ladies and Brown. Keats saw a round-shouldered girl with a red, chapped face, and lips with cold-sores, pouting as if for a pullet. She was urged by Mrs. Dilke to sit down to the music, and complied in a downright way, playing without one sensation beyond the feeling of the ivory at her fingers. Brown, he saw with pleasure, was gently smoking and baiting her. This being with Fanny in a room of other people was more tantalizing still than having her alone. She came over to him and asked in a whisper whether he did not think Miss Robinson a paragon of fashion. “She is the only woman I would change places with.” The two girls were like rose and dandelion. “What a stupe!” muttered Keats sourly. Let the others think he and Fanny were rather cool.

That night when he had dived into the cool sheets, Brown came to put out the taper that stood in the doorway between their two bedrooms, and said, "By Jove, what an ugly old woman that Miss Robinson will make!"

Keats groaned aloud as long as his breath would last, and then recommenced. "Hereafter, Brown, I never intend to spend any time with ladies unless they are handsome. You lose time to no purpose!"

"She wouldn't keep a fellow awake thinking of her form. But that Miss Brawne's tolerable, what?"

"Eh? Oh, yes. I have been thinking . . ." Keats doubled the pillow and raised his voice. "The more we know the more inadequacy we find in the world to satisfy us."

"Didn't know you were Irish."

"For example, this is true: Mrs. Tighe and Beattie once delighted me—now I see through them and can find nothing in them but weakness, and yet how many they still delight! Perhaps a superior being may look upon Shakespeare in the same light—is it possible? No—this . . . Brown, are you asleep?"

"Ugh-huh!"

"Brown, oh, Brown! Fire, Brown! Fire!"

"What, where?"

"In Vesuvius. I thought you were asleep."

"The idea!"

"Well, good night."

"Good night, Keats."

Less than a week before Christmas, Keats called on Fanny Brawne. That egregious Miss Robinson was still there, and he wanted to show Fanny a long rhyme containing the picture of the mistress to his mind.



With a waist and with a side  
White as Hebe's, when her zone  
Slipped its golden clasp, and down  
Fell her kirtle to her feet  
While she held the goblet sweet,  
And Jove grew languid . . . Mistress fair!  
Thou shalt have that tressèd hair  
Adonis tangled all for spite;  
And the mouth he would not kiss  
And the treasure he would miss  
And the hand he would not press  
And the warmth he would distress.

She did not like it well enough, it seemed, to let Miss Robinson see it, for which he was thankful; but he would not show her any more of his poems. He suddenly remembered an errand for John Reynolds. "Mother wants me to tell you you are to come to us for Christmas dinner," Fanny whispered at the door.

Reynolds gloomily told that since the death of old Mr. Drew, George Drew had expired in a fit. He would have to go down to Devonshire. A sorry Christmas he and his fiancée would have. "But why should I complain to you?" Mrs. Reynolds told him they expected him to spend Christmas day with them; but then Mariane and Jane talked of a Miss Brawne whom they knew; they considered her vain, silly, and extravagant in dress. Very well, Keats thought; it will be some time before I darken your door again.

The traditional substantial English Christmas dinner, with three kinds of meat and plum pudding, welcomed him at the Brawnes'. The little boy, Samuel, and his sister Margaret, were simple and gay in their enjoyment of the presents St. Nicholas had brought them. With their mother they went upstairs after dinner. Fanny and Keats were left at peace, tranquil, drawn closer in an air of kindness than ever before. The wintry wind was outside, and many a homeless wight had to dine at the ordinary or in the house of someone else. They were on the sofa before the fire. They would talk

for a while, and Keats repeated the loveliest lines of poetry he knew, until, watching Fanny's fair face as she gazed into the embers, he fell silent too, and watched her with devouring, caressing eyes. This time, she told him yes. They plighted troth.

He never had dreamed of spending such a Christmas, or fancied it possible that he could have lost his brothers, been separated from his sister, and yet have found a new world, and a happiness greater than any he had known, as the moon is beyond a taper's light.



## CHAPTER IV

Brown had gone to relatives at Chichester. Alone in the house, free to spend his hours as he would, Keats should have been most happy. But there was Fanny, so short a distance away, and not to be seen but after long intervals of waiting. He scarcely could believe that his love satisfied her or that her heart would not change, and be lost to him. There were thoughts; old troubles and fresh griefs returned to his mind. Tom's body was plain to him as ever those of Georgiana and George in their travels and gestures of living. It was a curse that brought Apollo this gift. He had told Haydon he valued more the privilege of seeing great things in loneliness than the fame of a prophet. Yet loneliness always haunted him with masks divine or malevolent. He did his best, made long and careful toilets, wrote letters, read, and looked out of the windows over the Heath or the garden. Mrs. Dilke's two cats had the privilege of coming into the house frequently as Brown's servant went to and fro. The tabby had a black-and-white daughter, but only the former came into Keats's room, whether for sympathy for Ann, or himself, he did not know. Perhaps Brown had left behind him some atmosphere of maidenhood! But no—the tabby was not an old maid herself; her daughter was proof of it. Keats questioned her, read the lines of her paw, felt her pulse, to no purpose. Why should the *old* cat come to him? It might be revealed thereafter.

His sore throat kept him in, but despite that he went one afternoon to Haydon's studio. Poor Teniers! Not only his eyes bothered him, and the set of people who came and found fault with his picture and attempted to bully him conversationally, but his creditors. He was in the custom, it seemed, of paying them off as well as he could with the returns from each picture as it was finished. But "Christ's Entry Into Jerusalem" had cost him six years, and he was finding it increasingly difficult to convince people of the necessity of finishing it. What could he do? Paint portraits of stockjobbers and their portly wives and bumpy daughters? He could not sell his drawings, those irreplaceable drawings of the Elgin Marbles. Of course not, Keats agreed, looking over a book of prints taken from the fresco of the church at Milan, showing specimens of the first and second age of art in Italy. Haydon told him they were full of romance and the most tender

feeling; though grotesque to a curious pitch. Keats agreed that he had never had a greater treat since the times they had read Shakespeare together. The magnificence of the draperies was beyond anything, even Raphael.

Next day came a note from Haydon. Could Keats get thirty pounds for him for a short time? Keats would sacrifice everything rather than see him distressed. But since the death of Tom he had been obliged to pay for rooms out of one allowance. He had lent small sums to friends now and then, and he figured the total at something like two hundred pounds—enough to form a small library. Then, he could not expect anything from the sale of his books, nor did he want to put out poems to be fingerable over by vicious cravens. He could do well enough without men's or women's admiration. . . . The outcome of his gloomy musing was that he tried Taylor and was put off, went to Abbey, and learned that their affairs were complicated by the Chancery suit. Went to the bank two or three times and stood about in a crowd of pig-faced customers in an agony of impatience; tried to give his note with Haydon; and got, instead of the money, another sore throat. He was very tired, but did not sleep well.

Fanny seemed almost the same as before their engagement. There were people about whenever he called. Parties and holiday festivals were all the talk. She had been invited to a New Year's ball at Woolwich. This all showed how little one could depend upon any permanence of happiness. Only her tenderness at parting each night made up for her frivolity and attentions to others. Tears came into his eyes at the thought of this tenderness, which was somehow abortive, and her beauty. He rose in the night and stared across the snowy Heath. A white figure stirred; not a ghost, or was it?—it was a rabbit standing on its haunches, cocking its ears at the house. Keats watched, entranced, while it dropped and loped silently and deliberately around the house. He got into bed again, warned by a cough, but he still saw the rabbit, its ears twitching, pinkish its eyes. Hadn't an animal a will and purpose; you had only to see their bright eyes. It had gone searching around the house, spirit-like. If you could believe in ghosts, you would have to admit that that must be Tom's spirit. He rose again, and again the rabbit was before his window. Was it reproaching his eternal thoughts of Fanny? He was alone; the servant at home, the Dilkes in town; alone.

The rabbit was aware that he watched it solicitously, and picked its way carefully among the bushes.

New Year's dinner at Mrs. Brawne's table, with the Dilkes, who had a kind of freshness from their absence, was a great relief. The children, even Charlie, were well behaved. Keats pretended to include Fanny with them and was soon put in his place by the vivacious miss.

"Did you hear of the dinner given to Moore in Dublin?" asked Dilke.

"I read of it in the Philadelphia democratic paper," volunteered Keats. "That was a very pleasant speech made by Mr. Tom on his father's health being drunk."

"Very kind of his countrymen, I should think," said Mrs. Brawne.

"Of course he might have been dined here," said Dilke. "Thousands have read his poems. But in general we prefer dead lions to live dogs."

"The lions must be dead," agreed Keats. "And whatever conditions are needed to hasten them to that condition will gladly be supplied. Look at Coleridge, Wordsworth . . . They are nothing to the three literary kings of our time, Scott, Byron, and the Waverley novels."

"It seems to me," said Dilke, "that the reviews have had their day. The public have been surfeited; there should be some new folly to keep the parlours in talk."

"Perhaps the parlours can do nicely sans follies," said Fanny.

"You are right. There may be soon a change in the fashionable slang literature of the day." Mrs. Brawne addressed Mr. Dilke.

"What do you say, John?" asked Mrs. Dilke, smiling.

They were not going to have him take such matters seriously. "Oh, I think we should have no readers but women; then Thomas Moore would be Shakespeare, and Miss Porter, Milton, while Mrs. Radcliffe could be Dante. Forgive me, ladies, if I say that your sex, with few exceptions, are all equally smokeable—the dressmaker, the bluestocking, and the most charming sentimentalist differ but in slight degree in this."

“Has your experience with women never taught you that the ignorance you laugh at in them may be due to the fact that they are not educated as men are?”

“Now we are coming to real principles,” exclaimed Dilke. “It has been proven that both animals and men are improvable. With education, as you remark, Miss Brawne, there is bound to be an improvement in the case of women.”

“Perhaps they may not be quite so far behind, then,” said Keats. “But seriously, Dilke, you cannot hold that doctrine. Rousseau and Godwin invoke the name of Nature, only to betray her. When we can change her multifarious ways, we may perfect man. When the lion does not eat the deer and the robin the worm, when we shall put aside earthquakes and ocean storms, we may begin to talk of changing our natures.”

“You sound very pessimistic, Mr. Keats,” said Mrs. Brawne.

“Not I. It is those who will not accept man’s part in the universe who should be called pessimistic.”

Dilke was not to be shaken off; he had printed words to quote, and then seemed less controvertible than Keats’s solitary intuitions. Fanny became serious enough to say that she saw what he meant. Keats could hardly look at her when he thought that in a few hours she would be dancing, half-swooning in the arms of some moustached gallant who would be telling her stories of his experiences throughout Europe. He decided to go home with the Dilkes, but when the moment came he was not strong enough.

“We haven’t seen each other alone all day,” he reminded her.

“And to-morrow will be another day,” she more lightly reminded him.

“Must you go to this ball, Fanny?”

“Of course I must. But if I had thought you would be well I would have saved the occasion for you.”

“I don’t dance; but never mind, I should have taken you.”

“You wouldn’t have me give up dances because you don’t like them?”

“If you loved me as I love you, you would not ask that question.”

“Of course I love you—can you doubt it still? But what good can it do to make me unhappy?” Fanny seemed to be trying to sound reasonable.

“Oh, you can be happy away from me. I could not, away from you, and knowing you to be unhappy.”

“Would you like me to stay at home with you?” But she did not look up.

“It is not your going, it’s your wanting to go, taking pleasure in being there in a gay crowd. Never mind. You cannot break your engagement.” He pulled on his greatcoat, took his hat in his hand, while the other ungloved hand held the door-knob. Was he going to leave without kissing her? He did not know—let her kiss whom she would, he thought savagely—until she said, speaking with lowered head: “I’ll think of you while I’m there.” He ached all through as his lips held hers.

“And you will give no one else more than your hand?”

“Surely not. Good-bye.” She kissed her hand as he looked back from the snowy path.

The trees and houses looked with immeasurable sombreness at the New Year. Keats returned to the empty house and his own thoughts. He sat by the fire holding one ankle spanned in his fingers, and old Burton’s *Anatomie of Melancholie* on his lap. Dully he turned the pages to find something to beguile his mind. Here was Part 3, Section I, pencilled by himself: “They cannot look off whom they love; they will *impregnare eam ipsis oculis*, deflowre her with their eys.” They. Ah, the generality of men! A pang shot through him. “Who now with greedy eyes eats up my feast?” he asked himself. He put Burton aside, sharpened his quill, got out a large sheet and the ink-horn. Nature should let the blood of his spirit through poetry. Fanny would hear, surely, this written prayer to be relieved of jealousy. She did not know the danger; she did not know or would not confess that a woman was a feather on the sea of men’s passions. How easy it would be to lose her this very night. “Sweet home of all my fears, and hopes, and joys, and panting miseries . . . Let none profane my Holy See of love.” His hand sprang across the page, diligent, prayerful. . . . He was reading over



his *Ode to Fanny*, weighing the delights of letting her see it and keeping it from her, when a loud report rang out—a fowling piece. He dashed to the back window. Silence. There was Dilke with his gun on his forearm, and something in his hand, swinging, white—a rabbit.

Keats groaned. Hatless, he was outside. Dilke held up the body. “Isn’t he a fine one! Charlie just saw him in the garden as he was going to bed.”

“But—it’s Tom! Oh, why must you shoot him—”

“What? Feel how thick his fur is. And white. It would make a cap.”

Keats groaned. Dilke looked up suddenly. “You must get into the house, Keats, you have no hat. I suppose you had to see whether I got him.”

“I tell you, it’s Tom you’ve shot, Tom’s spirit was in that rabbit. It has been about here a long time, and I have been watching over it—”

“Oh . . . I thought you said, ‘It’s a tom.’” Dilke was staring at him. “Come, we shall go into the house. Poor fellow, you’re overwrought, you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“But I do.” Keats went willingly. “I am greatly afraid that was my brother Tom’s spirit. I knew it, I tell you.”

“You mustn’t get cold in your throat. Where does Brown keep his brandy? Never mind, I shall step into my house.”

Keats leaned his head on his hand. He had been watching over Tom’s spirit! Neglecting him, rather, while he thought and wrote of that girl. Despair filled him. When Dilke’s steps returned he looked up and pretended to be quite recovered, smiled at the joke Dilke made of it. Next evening when Dilke came in he listened to the account of how the rabbit had been brought to the table and they had begun heroically to eat, but how no one’s portion had been much diminished.

“I was wishing you might come,” said Keats abruptly. “I want a pinch of snuff very much just now. I have none in my own snuff-box, because I gave it up on account of my throat. I think I may venture on a pinch.”

Dilke had been up to his ears in Walpole’s *Letters*. Soon they were discussing Cobbett and Mr. Hobhouse and the election. It occurred to Keats

that the Dilkes might be guilty of a ruse to keep him in. He had meant to go to Fanny Brawne, throat or no throat. They were so kind, though, that it was scarcely to be resented. Nothing would do but Keats must go shooting tomtits on the Heath with Dilke to-morrow. He did shoot a bird, though there seemed to be as many guns abroad as birds. But after supper with them he was free.

Mrs. Brawne was embroidering. He did not know just what to make of her staying in the sitting-room. Did she regard him as a member of the family? The talk had to be general. He told them of his interviews with the Dilke mother cat, and about Kirkman, who had had further bad luck after being held up, beaten and robbed on leaving their house. His uncle William had become sole creditor of his father, under pretence of serving him, and recently went in to the family, conversed with them casually, and went out and sent in the sheriff's officer. It was abominable conduct, Fanny agreed.

Then he told them what Kirkman had told him of the execrable behaviour of Archer to their old friend Caroline Mathews. Archer had almost lived at the Mathews's for two years—amusing Caroline the while. Now he had written a letter to Mrs. Mathews, declining all thoughts of marriage, on pretence of being unable to support a wife as he would wish. And Caroline was twenty-seven.

"She deserves to lose him," declared Fanny decisively. "I've no sympathy with her." Mrs. Brawne remonstrated, but Fanny would not budge. "In the next place," she continued, "why should it bother her? I am sure I would be pleased to be free of a man who had paid me attentions for two years—if he no longer cared for me."

"Long before that, no doubt," said Keats with a laugh; but he paled. "Brown writes me that I will be very amused if I come to Chichester."

"And shall you go?" Mrs. Brawne asked.

Fanny went to the spinet.

"Yes. About the middle of the month. I seem very idle now."

"Let me see." Mrs. Brawne bit off a thread. "That will be about the time of St. Agnes's eve, will it not? Shouldn't you write about it?"

“Now that,” said Keats, “is an inspiration. Should you like me to write a poem on that legend, Fanny?”

“Of course, I like your poems,” said Fanny lightly, turning over sheets of music. “But what is the legend?”

“I think you might go through the rites, when I am gone. ’Tis said young girls may see their future husbands that night, in dream, if they go to bed supperless, silent, and without looking behind them. She must sleep on her back with her hands on the pillow above her head.”

“More elaborate than amusing, considering the reward. Shall I play?”

“I can well imagine maidens not taking the trouble, if they can see the man without going through the ritual. Yes, do play, Miss Brawne.”

Mrs. Brawne kept her eyes on her work, and her lips twitched. Keats was listening fondly to the music and singing, the culmination of all of that sort of pleasure he had enjoyed. Incomparably clear and light, like an April breeze, her voice. When she had done, and the mother bade them good night, Fanny came to him without a word. Could there be any delight more incredibly exquisite than to have that form within the circle of one’s arm? They sat and whispered on the sofa, and all the misunderstanding, the flippancy and the bitterness were melted away. He began to feel that he had the power of charming her as she had of charming him. Her eyes closed against even the firelight as she listened to his appealing voice vivify his poems; and after the *Ode to Fanny* her lips clung to his. He urged her to try never to give him such pain again. She would try; didn’t she love him?

“I can scarcely bear the thought of leaving you to go to the country.”

“Yet you must?”

“Perhaps I must. I and myself are not agreed. It is not just to please the Dilkes and Brown; but I must get into the cue for writing again. You know I must not stop. I may try the public pulse once more with a book of short poems such as may be appreciated by people who cannot go a long one.”

“I think the Eve of St. Agnes would make a lovely story. As lovely as the *Pot of Basil*.”

A thoughtful glow of happiness pervaded him as he walked home. He would go. It was strange that he should be willing to turn his back on his happiness, when he could not bear to have her out of his sight so long as his hopes had been tormented. But the strange things one learned about oneself only began when one fell in love.

He found old Mr. Dilke a most friendly and scholarly chap. With Brown he strolled through the Chichester Cathedral. Beyond talk and a couple of dowager card-parties there was no other entertainment. So huzza for the thin paper Haslam had given him and the *Eve of St. Agnes*! Like a sweet music in a desert place was the achievement of such beauty in the lonely and bitter struggle Keats had had. Away with ponderings on man's destiny and the symbolism of the early gods and their large utterance! When a man had caught a glimpse of the felicity of love, he had to picture it, give it the shape in which it had been born in his soul. There was evil and pain in the world waiting to assail beauty and stifle love; and from that very circumstance sprang a quite special beauty. Young Porphyro making his way among bloodthirsty foemen, the ancient bedesman and the beldame Angela, to his fair Madeline. Wild was the storm without the castle, boisterous the riot of wassailers within; and both deepened the soft-breathing peace of Madeline's chamber. Shifting moonlight threw warm gules through the stained windows from the chill night without. And then, the dream, the dream of love melting into reality. It was all richly wrought and full of loveliness. With pride Keats took the poem to Elm Cottage to read it to Fanny Brawne.

She was not expecting him. He hadn't written to her during his whole stay in the country—two weeks and more; she pouted. He was almost surprised. What need had there been of letters? One wrote to people with whom one feared to lose the sense of one's relation. But when lovers were vowed, it was almost an impertinence. He could not convince Fanny, and even as he spoke began to search his mind. Why *had* he gone? To enjoy his happiness in peace? Had he been afraid to wear so fragile a possession where it might be shattered? Ah, it seemed now a true instinct. He turned to a rant on dowager card-parties, and evenings at Redhall's or Butler's where a fine feature could not be mustered among the ladies, and all the evening's

amusement consisted in saying. “Your good health, *your* good health, and YOUR good health, and—oh, I beg your pardon, yours, Miss—”

But both Fanny and Mrs. Brawne enjoyed and praised *The Eve of St. Agnes* when he read it to them. They talked late, but it was only when her mother had withdrawn that Keats confided to Fanny that he was writing another poem, with which she had something to do: *The Eve of St. Mark*, set in monkish times, as the other was in knightly. “The heroine—her name is Bertha—is remorseful over trifling with a sick and now absent lover. Now I must be careful of my periods.”

“For certain you must. I think her lover should be the remorseful one.”

“I think it will give you the sensation of walking about an old country town on a coolish Sabbath evening. The city streets clean and fair from the drench of April rains, the windows reflecting the chilly sunset across cold, green valleys. I shall not read it to you until it is finished. But tell me what you have been doing since I went.”

“Well,” began Fanny in delightfully businesslike tones, “I missed you. Yes, I did. I went out only a few times. Mr. and Mrs. Dilke were here.”

“Were you taken to any dances?”

“One—wasn’t it? Or two? At any rate, they have been fewer lately. I suppose resting up from the New Year’s whirl—or getting ready for midwinter—What else happened? The children were kept from school because of colds. And one day Mother went to town in the coach and talked on the way with your friend, old Mr. Lewis, and he said, ‘Oh, he is quite the little poet.’” Fanny laughed at the joke, or the old man.

“Now that is abominable!” exclaimed Keats. “You might as well say Bonaparte is quite the little soldier. Mr. Lewis has been a true friend to me by being one to Tom, and shall never get away from my gratitude, but that saying of his is one I shall not be at all contented with. You see what it is to be under six feet and not a lord.”

“Is Lord Byron short? I read a poem of his, *The Waltz*, in which an old foggy pretends to be scandalized by the waltz.”

“He does very well for people who want a nine-days’ wonder. His newest flash satire is to be called *Don Juan*.” Keats was silent, then spoke with an effort. “Fanny, we are free for a few minutes from the dragon world and all its thousand eyes. Must we talk of such trivialities as even—my poetry? You are my goddess, I your priest, and I shall build to you a fane in some untrodden region of my mind.”

“Blasphemy!” whispered Fanny. “Really I wish you would not be so intense, Keats. I like you to care for me—”

“Not blasphemy!” exclaimed the young man, rising and beginning to pace the floor. “Fanny, what can be holier than love? What can be so holy, since in love all the forces of our nature are brought into play, and fused at white heat. For most of us poor forked creatures, it is the only time when we are complete—except for a few, able to combine mind and heart in the creation of beauty. No, you must not make light of our love.”

“Come here; sit down,” said Fanny. “I am not making light of it, my poor boy. Why, your hair is soft and thick as the plumage of a bird!”

“I could almost believe you when you speak so,” he murmured. “Keep your hand so.”

After breakfast Brown and he sat at opposite sides of the table composing. Letters claimed Keats. His sister said that Abbey objected to her receiving letters from him. But this was nothing to the fact that Abbey had withdrawn her from school, notwithstanding John’s arguments. The effects of this sort of life would prove serious. He warned her not to let it fix any awkward habit or behaviour on her—“whether you sit or walk, endeavour to let it be in a seemly and if possible a graceful manner”. She was not to forget that there was at least one person in England to whom she could turn.

Brown was writing an allegory in rhyme, about an old woman in a forest, whom the Devil, disguised, visited one night and gave three nips of Eve’s apple so that she set out from her smoky cottage in magnificent apparel, and in the first city she entered everyone fell in love with her, from the prince to the blacksmith; a whole regiment of soldiers were smitten at once and followed her, joined by a whole convent of monks in procession. Finally, Brown thought he would have the Devil himself fall in love with

her, fly with her to a desert isle, where she would lay an infinite number of eggs which, being hatched from time to time, filled the world with many nuisances such as John Knox, George Fox, Johanna Southcote, and Gifford.

Keats sighed at this inventive faculty. Work was not easy for him these days. He had a curious reluctance to any decisive course; he even hated to rise and face a new morning. Brown threatened to give him cold pig if he did not look alive. It was not fair to be so little companionable as not to care whether you got down to breakfast or not, when you were not actually ill. At least he could read, study: Shakespeare, Dryden, Dante; and in the old romance *Palmerin of England*, a word struck him: "He had no other food than his own imagination, which would sooner destroy than support him." And there was Hazlitt's new pamphlet, *Letter to William Gifford*. "Listen, Brown: 'Sir, you have an ugly trick of saying what is not true of anyone you do not like; and it will be the object of this letter to cure you of it.'"

"That is just the spirit I must feel when I am writing of the Devil."

"No, the fact is you are like Gifford—your tale is a libel on the Devil, and as that person your muse, look ye, if you libel your own muse, how can you expect to write? Either Brown or his muse must turn tail. Here endeth the first lesson."

"Thank God," said Brown candidly, knotting his brows at his paper. He rose and began to walk up and down the floor.

"Conceiving couplets, eh?" said Keats, perversely teasing. When Brown rushed to his paper, he added: "Being delivered of a couplet, ladies and gentlemen, and I dare say as well as can be expected. I mean the couplet. Gracious, he has twins!" He sighed, and turned to his own work. *The Eve of St. Agnes* was as splendid in cold daylight as when read by a coal fire to the beloved; but it needed touching up, recopying. As for *The Eve of St. Mark*, that refused to be continued. Perhaps he should not have talked about it.

After three weeks in Hampstead, Keats went to town, and saw numbers of old friends who seemed to have been posted by Providence in the streets he passed. Then there was a birthday dance given by Georgiana's cousin, Miss Millar. Keats took Fanny, and proved miserable. Everyone seemed curious about her. He could propel her about passably, but then not so brilliantly

as many other young fellows who shouldered them. She was in the highest state of animation, and marvelled overtly at his silence going home. He felt like telling her that that was the only dance he had been to for a year or would attend for another year. It would give her too much satisfaction, he thought moodily. Perhaps he could get his sister Fanny to give him lessons in a few dancing steps.

Taylor persuaded him to take a short holiday at his house in New Bond Street and see a few plays. The set of literary people he met seemed remarkable for littleness; conversation rose not from a thirst after knowledge, but an endeavour at effect. If Lord Bacon were to make any remark in such company, the talk would stop on a sudden. For himself, he preferred idleness to writing for the sake of having written, and he would wait until some bit of knowledge or experience or intuition crystallized from years of reflection. Otherwise he would be dumb. He would not write for livelihood, when it meant running with that vulgar crowd. He was three-and-twenty, he told himself, with little knowledge and middling intellect. In the height of enthusiasm he had been cheated into some fine passages, but that was not the thing. Perhaps some day he would have wrought works complete and organic in themselves. . . . A fever of his old inspired impatience came over him. He should complete *Hyperion*, not leave it a battered lopped trunk. *The Eve of St. Agnes* was a fine mood, but there were grimmer things to be taken account of in any complete piece. . . . And besides these difficulties of sensation and thought there was the difficulty of forms. Verse could scarcely be effective when the reader had simply to run his eye down the rhyme-ends to get a notion of its content. The sonnet was a pouncing measure in its Petrarchan form, while the Shakespearean was too elegiac. Sandals were needed more interwoven and complete to fit the naked foot of poesy.

Day hurried after day. They had Severn, and Cawthorn the print connoisseur, to dinner at Wentworth Place. Old young Severn was his usual mild namby-pamby self, in spite of his promise-deferring to Keats, to Brown, to Cawthorn, to everyone, it seemed. He was going to hang his large painting, "Hermia and Helen", in the Royal Academy Exhibition, and wanted to hang his miniature of Keats. It would be best to advise Severn



against that. People would laugh at the puff of the one and the vanity of the other of them. But in this Severn was dogged. Next day he and Severn took a turn about the British Museum, and later walked to Hampstead and called upon the Brawnes. Fanny was arch with them equally, Keats thought, watching her. Brown's small nephews being on a visit to Wentworth Place, Brown and Dilke got out into the garden even earlier than they might have. Nothing would do but a cricket game, which Keats had to join, though he was saving the resistance of his throat for visits to Fanny. His reluctance of the sharp air was confirmed when the white ball struck him neatly in the eye. Brown dressed the bruise very sympathetically and meticulously. Next day the fatigue of the game, tempered by lying abed until ten, gave Keats a delicious languor, in which he wrote philosophically to George and Georgiana.

But then Spring did appear. The ground was no longer wet and squashy under foot; there was no chance of snow or sleet-rain at worst. Tender green clothed incredibly the world that had dulled the eye through long months. Keats went out upon the Heath for a walk. At last the time had come when he could have Fanny to himself, with no one within possible hearing. He called at Elm Cottage, and in high spirits they set out over the rolling country.

"The servant came to-day for Brown's nephews. They have been a toothache to me. Sometimes am I all wound with Browns. Fanny, I have been wanting to talk to you seriously about my plans. There are several alternatives. I called on Mr. Abbey the other day, and he suggests now that I become a hatter. Gave me a card of introduction to such a firm—with which he seems to be connected."

"A hatter, my goodness! But you won't?"

"But if it provided a living for you and me, what then?"

"Why should you not keep on as a poet? Even if it does take a few years, we are young—and that is your real work, you know."

"We are young! There is your old sophism! You do not care for me as I care for you or you would never talk of putting off our marriage! You can't, you

can't. Why must I wear myself to death in a passion for someone who does not care if she ever is to be mine?"

"John, you mustn't talk in that way. Have I talked of breaking our engagement because you cannot support me now? Have I talked of loving someone else? You know you are not fair." Fanny spoke in her firmest manner, but a tear sprang out and glistened in the corner of her eye.

"You must have thought of such things. Well, well, I don't accuse you of not caring. But it is not your life or death. Let me proceed with the possibilities before us. I have at different times taken it into my head to go to Edinburgh and study for a physician. I am afraid I should not take kindly to it; I am sure I could not accept fees. And yet I should. It's not worse than writing poems and hanging them up to be flyblown on the review shambles. But Abbey tells me that I have no money available to do this." He did not tell her of the amount of his small loans, nor that he was making good his friendship with Haydon, who had reproached him with not keeping his word . . . "And then, you know, I was trained for the apothecary business. Would you like to see me go back to my gallipots? I could not buy a business now, though I could have once, when Abbey advised me to do so."

"It is honest, I presume, whether it is genteel or not. But I would not have you take to it for my sake."

"You are right; the people I associate with are a little above the scale of an apothecary's apprentice. I have been on a high horse—or at least one of those new velocipedes, with poetry for my rudder wheel! Why shouldn't I do what I can do? But then, I won't—not that—unless I must. Everybody is in his own mess. Oh, what a farce are our greatest cares. Yet one must be in a pother for the sake of clothes, food and lodging."

Fanny laughed. "But meanwhile we have sycamores and elms to cheer us, and turtle-doves calling, and goldfinches with black and golden wings."

"Thank God you can see them, my goddess! Let us sit down on that knoll." He spread his cloak, first pulling from its pocket a tiny volume. Dante's *Vision of Hell*. "Let your eye shine upon this. Or no, I shall read." It was of Dante's and Virgil's entrance into the second circle, where Minos warned

them, and they witnessed the punishment of carnal sinners, tossed about ceaselessly in the dark upon furious winds. Fanny's face became stiff as she listened.

"That canto pleases me more and more," Keats concluded. "Oh, not for the moral precept—there are differences enough in the views held even by parsons, I'll be bound, on Dido, Helen, Paris, Tristram. The world is disinterested in the end, when it has got so much beauty from them. And listen to this on Francesco and Paolo—still together . . . and what she says of Lancelot:

"When of that smile we read,  
The wished smile, so rapturously kissed  
By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er  
From me shall separate, at once my lips  
All trembling kiss'd. The book and writer both  
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves that day  
We read no more."

They were silent, and Keats looked at her profile, so delicate, yet so stoically restrained. She turned to him.

"It's lovely, isn't it? . . . I see what you mean."

"I had passed many days in a rather low state of mind, and one night I dreamed of being in that region of Hell. It was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had. I floated about the whirling atmosphere, as it is described, with a beautiful figure to whose lips mine were joined as it seemed for an age—and in the midst of all his cold and darkness I was warm—even flowery tree-tops sprang up, and we rested on them, sometimes with the lightness of a cloud, till the wind blew us away again. The sonnet I tried has fourteen lines, but nothing of what I felt." He read again from the little volume and handed it to Fanny. There were two beginnings he had crossed out, and the whole poem was copied on the last end-paper.

She softly read the sonnet again. "'That second circle of sad Hell . . . where lovers need not tell their sorrows.' And I am to keep the book? Always?"

Keats nodded. “‘Its leaves that day we read no more.’” Then he took the sweet bliss he had been tasting in anticipation for an hour. Fanny was the first to speak again, with news to make his eye kindle. She and her mother were taking Dilke’s half of Wentworth Place next month.

The Dilkes were moving to lodgings in Westminster, having after great ado picked a school there for young Charlie, who was wearing their lives out in apprehension of his fate with the masters and the other boys.

Keats knew a strange happiness, a certainty at last in the midst of uncertainties. Every day brought nearer the time when Fanny Brawne would be actually lodged beneath the same roof with himself, when he could see her, live her life constantly. Contentedly he took to work again, on *Hyperion*, and brought it at least to the entrance of Apollo. The April days and his tranquillity in Fanny’s love seemed to give him strength and calm. One pleasant morning he set off to his old lodgings at Well Walk. Mrs. Bentley’s kindness was a touch of irrevocable times past, when the brothers had been three and together, and happy. In a closet lay a pile of their papers and letters, kept safe but sadly disarranged. Sitting on his heels, John began sorting them into bundles which he tied up to put into the portmanteau. Many a time before he had soothed or aggravated his feelings by looking over old letters and papers, while a morning passed as five minutes, or a great stretch of time seemed crowded into half an hour. But what was this, for Tom’s pile—a letter from some Amena, she had a heavy mannish handwriting. Something false and mawkish struck him in the letter, and he read another. The woman was in love with Tom, according to her own story. Queer, very queer. Tom had said nothing about any such affair. Amena’s letters became more ardent, passing the borderline of burlesque. Amena was not real—it was a man! Keats studied the handwriting. Then he found a letter to Tom from Wells. The handwriting was the same. Amena was Wells, a heartless cad full of vanity and love of intrigue! Furiously Keats threw all the papers into the portmanteau and scarcely stopped to bid Mrs. Bentley good-bye, though he smelt tea brewing.

This was no thoughtless hoax, but a calculated and continuing deception of the sanguine temperament of a dying man. Death was not too bad for such

a villain; though the world would see it merely as a prank. It was a duty to Tom's memory to be prudently revengeful, to hang over the miscreant's head like a sword by a thread. To injure his interests might be impossible, but his vanity lay open: he was a rat and he should have rat's-bane for his vanity. Keats thought of plans.

He was alone, Brown having gone out to dig with the gardener. His eye strayed to a new letter on the table. Automatically he tore it open. Haslam's father was dead. Poor Haslam, working double tides and not minding because of the fortunate outcome of some love affair he half hinted at—such hints would never come from Keats. Poor Haslam, the oaken fellow, always at hand when needed, writing of Tom's death to George and Georgiana, giving his friend a special thin paper with which to write to America when the postal rates were increased. The mother was bearing up well, and Framptons, the tea-merchants for whom he and his father worked, treated them well. . . . This was the world; we could not expect to give many hours to pleasure—or revenge. Circumstances like clouds were continually gathering and bursting. While we are laughing, the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts, it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck. Even so we have leisure to reason on the misfortunes of our friends. Our own touch us too nearly for words. Then we might tell to try the resources of their spirits, remembering that our good and our evil are but counterpoints in the great harmony of life.

Brown came into the house sweating, and announced that the first van-load of the Brawnes' furniture had arrived. So Fanny would be there at last. Once more he was aroused from some gloominess, interrupted in some abstraction by this certainty. Life would be different. Brown had gone back to his digging, and presently a vision was framed in the window: Fanny Brawne walking across the garden like Cynthia through cloud-fields, and talking to Brown—*faut de mieux*. Keats went back to sorting his letters briskly. At lunch, Brown bemoaned once more the loss of the Dilkes. Of course Mrs. Brawne would not invite them in so frequently as the Dilkes had—the good widow would not regard it as proper. She might surprise them, Keats replied, in crafty preparation; though for two or three days

while they were getting settled he kept away. Then on a perfect morning of Spring he worked in the garden. The gardener from whom he had ordered some bulbs for Fanny Keats sent him bulbs in flower, which couldn't be sent through the post. Just as he began the task of setting them, Fanny strolled out. He told her that this part of the garden was to be called "Fanny's Plot". She would consent, she said, since that really was his sister's name. He laughed grimly; he would not be caught in disloyalty to his sister at least. "What would you advise me to get for her, now?"

"I have seen some beautiful heaths in bloom in pots. But they should not be in bloom, so that she can see them come out. Children make so much of such things. Now Sam will give mother no peace until she gets him a pair of rabbits to keep in the garden."

A shadow crossed Keats's face briefly and he did not look up from his spade. "I used to be fond of the whole tribe of the bushes and the brooks. But verily they are better in the trees and the water. Though I must confess even now a partiality for a handsome globe of goldfish. But I would have it hold ten pails of water and be fed continually fresh through a cool pipe with another pipe let through the floor. Well ventilated they would preserve their beautiful silver and crimson. Then I Would put it between a handsome painted window—"

"Stained glass, uncouth youth!" laughed and pouted Fanny.

"Painted window, and shade it all around with myrtles and japonicas. I should like the window to open on Lake Geneva, and there I'd sit and read all day like the picture of someone reading."

"All alone!"

"If need were. Oh, there is nothing like fine weather, and health, and books, and a fine country, and a contented mind, and a diligent habit of reading and thinking and an amulet against the ennui—love, by your leave—and please heaven a little claret wine cool out of a cellar a mile deep, with a few or a good many ratafia cakes, a rocky basin to bathe in, a strawberry bed to say your prayers to Flora in, a pad nag to go you ten miles or so, two or three sensible people to chat with, two or three spiteful folks to spar with, two or three odd fishes to laugh at, and two or three numbskulls to argue with."

“Your wants are at the tip of your tongue. Yet you had breakfast?”

“It is nothing to Coleridge. I met him with a friend of mine the other day and walked with them two miles at his alderman-after-dinner pace. He invited me to Highgate to see him. His rant covered a million *unearthly* things, yet I could not believe in the existence of the poet of *Kubla Khan* and the *Ancient Mariner*. I took his hand and it was waxy. No, as you say, my wants are simple: all I really want is you. If I cannot have you, these other things are an opiate to my brain. I’ll tell you what—let’s go and sit on the bench under the tree and I shall read you a poem.”

“Is it about us, like the *Bright Star* I copied into my Dante?”

“No—about life, which seizes upon a man’s soul. Hark ’ee: *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*,” he began.

O what can ail thee Knight at arms  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge has withered from the Lake  
And no birds sing!

His voice was hushed, and the last line was drawn out to the length of the others. Fanny closed her eyes as she listened. The strange long-haired faerie lady with her song and wild eyes, her elfin grot, lulling the knight to sleep and visionary thrall, caused a strange tremor to come over the girl, while his low cool voice went on through twelve stanzas. He waited in vain for her to speak.

“Why four kisses, you will ask,” he said gaily. “Why, four, because I wish to restrain the headlong impetuosity of my muse—she would fain have said score without hurting the rhyme. But we must temper imagination, as the critics say, with judgment. I was obliged to choose an even number, that both eyes might have fair play, and to speak truly, you may say two apiece quite sufficient. Suppose I had said seven there would have been three and a half apiece—a very awkward affair, and well got out of on my side.”

“It is the strangest poem I ever heard. But it is beautiful, all the same.”

“I’m glad you added. You were the strangest girl I ever saw. But I would fight any man who said you were not beautiful.”

“But why must you always write of death? I suppose we all think of it,” she hurried away from her inept reminder.

“Why, death is part of life, Fanny. We must go from acceptance of death to a looking at our mortal days with temperate blood. I used always to be fevered with uncertainties, spurred by the old bards to deeds beyond me, and hopes of nursing a golden age in—the Borough. Then I learned that we must open our leaves like a flower and be passive and recreative and receptive. Sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink. And yet I cannot see that I have reached truth. Unless I place my ultimate in death—dying for some great cause.”

They walked on the Heath that afternoon and every afternoon, looked on the early lark and the hedgegrown primroses and the shaded hyacinth, and declared the world good. Keats told her that he likened her presence now and after all his blind years to the hidden face of a singer of delicious voice; a face formed in the imagination more beautiful than possibility, yet the imagination was so potent that that face was created, made ready. “That delicious face you will see, I might have promised myself. And so I have. And ‘where, O where, Hast thou a symbol of her golden hair? Not oat-sheaves drooping in the western sun.’”

Even people and social occasions were not enough to dim her. Br. Sawrey held a rout at his house, mainly Hampstead people; and seeing Fanny with the eyes of others, Keats was dumbfounded by her beauty, her grace, her marvellous taste in dressing—she wore a new kind of shoe, of shiny leather like the knapsack he had carried in Scotland. Her delicate vivacity of manner gave a prettiness to all those commonplaces which women who talk must utter. Who would have a finer wife? And perhaps she would be his. The Spring was in his veins like wine. Like potent wine was the constant association with Fanny; it was his life, his bloodstream, now, rather. Between times he turned with full power to poetry. He wrote an *Ode to Psyche*, an *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Since the *Ode to Fanny*, he had a distinct partiality for this lyric freedom and eloquence of form. Fanny, Brown, everyone who heard it, was loud in praise of the *Grecian Urn*,



with its chaste picturing, its satisfaction with the static completion of art. Beauty, it is said, is eternal. Perhaps it had more of the Greek spirit than all of *Endymion* together. With high heart he wrote an *Ode to Melancholy*, that dwelt with joy, whose hand is ever at his lip, bidding adieu. Had not his moon-goddess, clasping Endymion, round grief in the very shrine of pleasure? Saddest contradiction in contradictory life, this between the two odes, one content with the beauty of carved happy boughs that never would shed their leaves, the other a weeping cloud that fostered the droop-headed flowers.

It was from command over the warp and woof of tangled life that the satisfaction of Keats came, in these golden days. All the haunting beauty and pain of his life, the uncertainty of his love and its fate came to him, softened now by present contentment in it and in inspired creation. Now he could write.

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows  
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave  
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

Ah, the love of beauty, love of grief, never could compass that!

He did not need sleep; why should one sleep away these nights of late Spring? They were to write, after talking and walking with Fanny, to sit and dream of her, to listen for the movements of life in her house beyond the wall of partition. What should one do with sleep in such times? He persuaded her and they stole out at midnight in a delicious agony of trepidation until they sat on the bench in the moonlight. His passionate pleading almost moved her to pity beyond discretion. Other nights he stole out alone and sat watching her window and the face of the moon, that old potency which had dried his tears as a child. A half-intoxication from sleeplessness and memory of unheard music came over him.

In these days the song of a nightingale which had built its nest in the trees of the garden gave him a poignant, almost excruciating pleasure, while the pain and melancholy of life were woven and enhanced with sweet relief of the imagination. One morning he took pencil and paper, and sitting

on the grass-plot beneath the plum-tree wrote eight stanzas that resolved the fugitive lovelinesses and fevers of eternally mutable life, forlornly environed by the sufficiency of death and beguiled by the duplicity of dreams. This was the fullest poem he had written. A jaunt with Haydon through the Kilbourne meadows, and a recital of it, brought Haydon's insistence that Keats should send it to friend Elmes, for *Annals of the Fine Arts*. Let it be signed, then, with a dagger. Haydon could not return the loan made him; was almost nonchalant in acceptance of the impossibility. Alas for friendship! Haydon, Hunt, Bailey, Wells, in one year.

One night Brown and he gave a party for Taylor, Woodhouse, and Reynolds. Keats was already tired from a call upon Georgiana's mother and the walk back from town. They started to play cards at nine o'clock, and when they would have gone home the night turned out monstrously dark and rainy. Reynolds had taken the wild fancy of writing a burlesque of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*, though that poem was not published yet. Taylor and he chuckled, well pleased with their prank. It served Wordsworth right. Why should he choose such weirdly unpoetic names? Lord Byron, Keats suggested, needed such a trouncing too. Reynolds wanted him to get Hunt to notice the book in the *Examiner*. The simplest way was for Keats to write a brief critique, which he promised himself to do, keeping clear of both parties. The card game went on until daylight and breakfast. That day Keats was pretty well fagged. Yet at night he could not sleep; strangely distorted images of love, poetry, fame, friends, death, bred woes upon his pillow in a panting glow.

But the past receded as he confronted the predicament of the present day. Where would he be during that summer? Away from his love, that much was certain, for Brown was letting his house; away from Brown, for there was no money for the trip to Brussels.

All winter there had been no word from George, and now came news of no good tenor. He had bought himself a carriage and horses to save his wife the rough journey across country from Philadelphia to Pittsburg. Arrived there, they sent the horses on to Cincinnati by land, and put themselves and belongings into a boat in which they floated six hundred miles down the Ohio River. They did not stop at Louisville, but went on to Henderson, a

small town, where they lodged with a naturalist, Mr. Audubon. This man persuaded George to buy an interest in a cargo-boat plying on the river. The boat was away on one of its voyages, and sunk, then or later, when George heard. He and his wife were not unwell, which was good news—though it was a strange world where such tidings were the best. Moreover, a letter to Abbey revealed that they had a child, a girl. This would increase their responsibility, and John's, if George should fail.

Before the cumulative weight of these matters and his own weariness made their full effect, John wrote one more ode, *On Indolence*, nothing like so good as the others. Neither Poetry, maiden most unmeek, nor pale Ambition with fatigued eye, nor Love, had any alertness of countenance as they passed him; rather were they become figures on a Greek vase. He had visions enough without them. His sore throat returned upon him from sitting in the night dews with Fanny. He had no coach hire to get to Walthamstow to see Fanny Keats. His very walks with Fanny on the Heath began to lack the lush perfection of the prime of Spring. What was he to do? He might go as a surgeon on an Indiaman, and so provide for himself. He knew how it would be: "To be thrown among people who care not for you, with whom you have no sympathy," he told Fanny, "forces the mind upon its own resources, and leaves it free to make its speculations on the differences of human character and to class them with the calmness of a botanist. One of the reasons that the English have produced the finest writers in the world is that the English world has ill-treated them during their lives and fostered them after their death. They have in general been trampled aside into the by-paths of life and seen the festerings of society. The middle age of Shakespeare was all clouded over; he was a miserable and mighty poet of the human heart. Ben Jonson was a common soldier and in the Low Countries in the face of two armies fought a single combat with a French trooper and slew him. For all this I will not go on board an Indiaman nor for example's sake run my head into dark alleys. I dare say my discipline is to come, and plenty of it."

"Plenty has come, poor boy," sighed Fanny. "Oh, dear. I wish I could do something. You should write this summer, and put out a good book. Then, don't forget me."

“Rice came to me yesterday. He has been in a low state of health, and he proposes that we go to the Isle of Wight. My friends at Teignmouth describe a pleasant spot at Bradley, to which I shall eventually retire, I dare say. If I succeed not this time, ye hear no more of me. I shall not return to London.”

“You will overcome this depression, my dear Keats. You will remember when you are alone that I love you.”

Keats’s eye smouldered. “No, I shall remember that I loved you. Have I not? I must be gone at once, it is June, and I will make this attempt. At any rate living there should be cheap in the summer. I am sure it will be in the winter.”

Fanny’s smile had more of resignation than raillery.



## CHAPTER V

It had been unwise to disdain the Indiaman, Keats thought, when on going to Abbey for money he learned that Mrs. Jennings, impatient over the course of the suit in Chancery, was about to start another action. This might put Abbey in the wrong box; certainly he could not be expected to divulge moneys now. What was to be done? Why, Brown would come to the rescue. The loan could be repaid from the proceeds of the drama he had been talking about half the spring, *Otho the Great*: they would write for Kean, and the thing was bound to be a success, as another attempt of Brown, *Navrensky*, had been a few years ago. As for Keats, hard work and a variety of it would be the making of him as well as his fortunes; a change of scene was bound to be beneficial. Keats bit his lip, hearing this.

In pleasant June weather, he and Rice journeyed to Wight and settled in a pleasant cottage looking into the country, with a glimpse of sea above housetops and cliffs. When far-off ships sailed past the cottage chimneys they might have been taken for weathercocks. But what a horror to go into that sepulchral narrow chamber, lonely, silent, unmusical, to sleep, instead of knowing that Fanny slept under the same roof, watched the same moon. To sleep! Fanny might be sleeping. It was not one night, not a sennight, nor a fortnight—an age stretched before him. And he was to forget her, write, toil, create something beautiful and bright enough to win the gold from people's pockets, that he might love her. The mocking contradiction pressed his mind like a band about the temples. Forget love that he might create love, that he might enjoy love. Fantastic, implacable. What a vast virago, what a rank, base quean, what a rotten-toothed mistress was Life! She would kill him if he preferred beauty, if he chose Fanny. She would kill Fanny? No, Fanny was her decoy . . . a picture of Fanny's beauty floated above his fevered head. That girl could tantalize him as well as anyone she did not love; she could do without his love. He had the whole burden of the mysterious cruelty of life. He turned wearily from one side of the bed to the other.

By Tuesday night he decided to write to her; but it was so desperate a letter that when he read it over he could not send it; it might have come from the

*Nouvelle Héloïse*. No carrier's cart came from Shanklin for the letter and he tore it up. She might think him unhappy; she should have thought him a little mad.

Rice said that it was time they went out and bought a few provisions. "I don't think a ham is a wrong thing to have in a house." Keats was amused at the easy chatty way he had with villagers. You never would have thought it had occurred to him as strange that people should gravely inform one another of the state of the weather. "It's very simple," Rice explained, returning. "You have only to defer to villagers. Remember that they regard us as a pair of simple-minded Londoners, with barely sense enough to leave such a backward place to come here. Humour them in this view, and they will treat you well."

"I leave the job to you, and when they give you wooden testers in change for a sovereign I shall laugh at you. I fear I have scant patience with folk who would bow down to the squire more quickly than to Shakespeare."

"Never mind that," said Rice. "If they were capable of appreciating Shakespeare, they would fancy themselves embryo Shakespeares, and have an even more foolish vanity without the excuse of ignorance."

The mornings were fine; and, free, he might have wandered and breathed like a stag, were it not for Fanny. A cruel entrapment when no one's sickness or death presently preyed upon him. "I almost wish we were butterflies," he wrote, "and lived but three summer days—three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common days ever could contain." Had he felt that she suffered as he did, he must have returned, work or no work.

But he had to settle to it. Reynolds had written a poetical farce, *One, Two, Three, Four, Five*, purported to be "by Advertisement". It was to be produced in the English Opera House in a few weeks, and published in book form. Now if Reynolds could raise the wind with such a thing, why shouldn't he? *Gripus*, Keats would call his piece. There would be talk of an adult cast in it, matrimony, mistresses, and suchlike matters.

There was a letter from Fanny Brawne. How cool and soothing it was! The fire of love should not consume them, could it be bedewed with pleasures.

The picture of her laughing returned upon him, and blurred in a dull patience: some day. But she complained of “horrid people” upon whom it appeared to depend whether he should see her again. Brown? or Rice? Then she was tired of his talking of nothing but her beauty. Was that all he valued in her? Without it, he would have to ask, could he have loved her? “There may be,” he added reasonably, “a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others; but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment, of love after my own heart.” She might let him speak of her beauty, when it was to his own torture, and to his own endangering should she presume upon it and try elsewhere its power. But instead of replying to this talk of others, she wrote her fear that he might think she did not love him—sweet girl!

Rice was ailing, in spite of his good humour. In the same house with such a person, Keats suffered for him; besides, it was a reminder of Tom. They walked as much as possible, and Rice called themselves Sauntering Jack and Idle Joe. Keats talked of the new poem, *Lamia*, upon which he was working. From Burton he had got the tale.

The young man Lycius meets a fair gentlewoman, and though “a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her a while to his great content, and at last married her”. His tutor, Apollonius, a realist, comes to the wedding feast and reveals that she is a lamia, a serpent in human guise. “She vanishes, and Lycius dies. You see, it shows more experience of life than my other stories.”

When they returned home and Rice lay down to read, Keats did not try to evade the dolorous languor that came over him at the thought of Fanny. He had worked long and hard, nearly a month. He took her last letter to bed with him; her name in the seal was obliterated in the morning. He wrote little that day, and as he wrote to her at evening, something of his old ardency returned. Yet why mark off this eternity and dead waste of passing time with letters?

Suddenly Brown arrived, bringing the genial bon-vivant publisher, Martin of Bond Street, who was going to Dublin. Also, Martin’s sister and two other young ladies came with them and took a cottage opposite theirs.



The young men played cards night to morning in the small room, and in the afternoons all but Keats joined the young ladies in gadding about and ravening sights. He took to *Hyperion* once more. Grand as the flight above the pain and partings of the world had been, that poem could not be finished. It would have to be re-cast, related to human concerns. Shakespeare would not have attempted to utter truths so, but would have embodied them in the fates of persons. He would make of it a vision, within the frame of a human poet's sight: he would have to dramatize it. Nevertheless, it was the abstract side which he required to draw his mind from the horrible impossibilities of life. Brown had told him casually that Miss Brawne did not look well, seemed to have been indisposed. A swooning vision of her loveliness came over Keats, and made him wonder what it portended. Might she not be dying at that moment? How strange to feel that, when the two luxuries of his walks had been her loveliness and the hour of his own death, and he had longed to have possession of both in the same instant. At least, if she died, so would he.

At last all these people, except Brown, went. They started work at once on *Otho*. Brown with great vim supplied the whole plot and action, the characters, their names and goings on and off, while Keats clothed the same in verse. It would be a bank to them, and they would share the profits equally. When each scene was done, Brown read it over and declared that they two were Beaumont and Fletcher. "Otho! Emperor! You rob me of myself; my dignity is now your infant; I am a weak child."

"Now that," Brown said, looking over his spectacles at his collaborator, "has the true Elizabethan ring. Keep that up and our names shall ring with Shakespeare's, not Beaumont and Fletcher's."

"Let's have dinner," suggested Keats.

They bickered and wrote their way through scene after scene and act after act. In the afternoons they went walking; Brown took a sketch book and Keats the *Anatomie of Melancholie*. Coming in one evening, Brown sighed.

"Keats, I am tired of this place. I propose to don my ancient knapsack and go gadding for a couple of days. Will you come?"

“Why, no.” Fanny’s letters might miss him and be lost. “We should keep going with our dog-cart, the tragedy, and not riding Shanks’s ponies.”

Approaching their lodging-house they met a brown-faced old fisherman who always grinned at them as in Rice’s time. Brown did not heed the villagers. The old lady across the way was screeching at her next-door neighbour. The fences looked as though they never would change for the end of the world. When they got inside and found no letters, Keats sat down wearily.

“Hold that pose,” admonished Brown. “Lean your head on your fist as you were. You look very languid and gentlemanly. I shall make myself famed with this sketch.” Brown seemed to catch animation now that Keats had lost it.

“I say we should go for good. But we can’t until we have finished four sets,” Keats said.

“Let’s compromise on the thirteenth, that’s a fortnight hence.”

“Not the thirteenth!” said Keats in mock terror. “By the way, I wrote to Dilke.”

“Keep still. Tell him I shall write him too when the fit comes on me.”

“I’ll tell him if he will stand law expenses I’ll beat you into one before your time.”

“My time hasn’t come yet,” said Brown. “I haven’t met my fate. If I had I would put her out of my mind.”

“Thanks, Apollonius,” thought Keats. A flush of anger rose over him, and he was glad to remember that Brown would be gone to-morrow. Alone, he toiled with heightened ardour, thought of plots, speeches, counterplots and counter-speeches, and the lover with double-distilled fire in his heart, all day and as far as midnight. Then the artificial excitement left a fever which turned him more than ever to the indelible image of Fanny Brawne. But something surely would come of all this slaving. Should it please Venus, he wrote, to hear his “Beseech thee to hear us O Goddess”, he and Fanny might enjoy a year of scenery superior to this—at Berne or Zurich. Should Shelley and Byron and Moore be the only British poets who could do such

things? Oh, they would have noble amusements and a spacious life. God forbid that they should settle as people said too aptly—turn into a pond, a stagnant Lethe, a vile crescent, row, or building. Go out and wither at tea-parties; freeze at dinners; bake at dances; simmer at routs. No such ignoble pursuits for them. So he wrote her, encouragingly. Brown's return came upon his solitude, silence, toil and dreams like a thunderbolt. The wanderer talked but a few minutes and took himself to bed. But he brought a letter.

Alas! Fanny seemed disturbed. She said she must not have any more like his last. How did she expect him to express himself when he was devoted to her? Yet she reminded him of a promise to see her soon. If he must keep it, it would be with as much sorrow as anything else; he was not one of the paladins of old who lived upon water and grass and smiles for years together. Yet, what would he not give to-night for the gratification of his eyes alone? he wrote. Ah, that would anger her anew. But why should he have all the suffering to bear? While he was in the midst of his letter, Brown came down in morning coat and nightcap, declared that he had had a refreshing sleep, and fell to upon a cut of beefsteak tart. Keats took up his letters and went to bed.

The day they crossed to the mainland was clear, windy and sunny. The packet bounced along and swung up and across the waves with a movement as exhilarating as a swing upon the springy branches of an elm to the boy Keats had been. He declared that one of his ambitions was to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean had done in acting.

"If the good lad will just act in our play, he may go on furlough after that." Brown stared with pensive waggishness over the rail.

A talk in the course of their bog-trotting in Ireland returned to Keats. They had come upon two girls, ragged and tattered, carrying a box, a sort of dog-kennel placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing; and in this sedan was an old woman, squalid and squat like an ape half starved from a scarcity of biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the Cape, with a pipe in her mouth, looking out with a round-eyed, skinny-lidded inanity, a sort of horizontal idiotic movement of her head. "The Duchess of Dunghill," Brown had said with a respectful intonation which alone the girls could hear. What a thing Shakespeare could have made of a history of her life and

sensations! It came to him then that only the drama could render the full poetry of life.

Keats raised his eyes from the water; there was a beautiful yacht anchored opposite, at Cowes; and a swarm of other yachts and vessels were beating up and down the coast, hovering about it, passing and repassing like butterflies. So light and silent and graceful they tacked and circuited about, that he exclaimed in delighted wonder.

“It’s the Prince Regent’s yacht they are paying so much attention to,” Brown informed him. “Do you hear the strains of the band?”

“Faint, far, like an echo,” marvelled Keats. A vision of Brighton’s esplanades—like those of Hastings—of glitteringly varnished curricles and satiny horses, spangles, spurs and epaulettes, came to him. He fell silent.

At that instant a boat appeared from nowhere, and the bowlines of the packet instantly took the top of the little mast and broke it off short. Two naval officers were in the stern of the little boat, and it was well manned. The sailors in neither craft moved a muscle, scarcely exchanged a hail. There was a proper reception of mischance!

The whole town of Winchester, to a lark singing above it, would have been hidden. But the buildings did not call to be hidden, as they often did in towns, where few trees were. Old William of Wickham’s cathedral, now fourteen hundred years old, was not the only magnificent pile. There were schools, chapels, nunneries, and not a manufacturing business, beyond bakeries and butteries, in the town. It was the more quiet because the local fashionables had gone to Southampton. Beaumont and Fletcher walked to the hill at the eastern end and found the prospect good.

Their tiny room with the huge view, at Newport, was changed now for a large one in which they could promenade—but its windows looked upon the blank side of another stone house. In complete concentration and quiet they worked, except when their landlady’s son practising on the fiddle sent a few strains like a gimlet through their ears. In less than two weeks they had the last act completed, and Brown began copying it in a florid, scrolled hand. Alas! news came in the *Examiner* Dilke carefully directed to them,

that Kean was likely to go to America during the coming season. Brown went on copying.

“What shall we do? I had hoped to give Kean another opportunity to shine. There is not another actor of tragedy in London, or Europe.”

“There’s always the other house, if Drury Lane turns it down.”

“But the Covent Garden company is execrable. Young is the best among them, and he is a ranting, coxcombical, tasteless—a disgust—a nausea—and yet the very best, after Kean.”

“They make a fellow rant like themselves,” said Brown coolly.

“What a barren set of asses are actors!” concluded Keats without listening.

“Ah, well, I have enjoyed my summer, Brown, anyway; I’ve better health here, too, away from that damp valley. Give me books, fruit, French wine and air worth sixpence a pint, and a little chance music heard out of doors—not demanding one’s time for a concert—and we can pass a summer very pleasantly without caring about fat Louis, fat Regent, or Duke of Wellington, eh?”

But he was disturbed. Was this heroic driving, like a cavalry charge that took vigour and determination for weeks at a time, to come to naught? There was one thing, meanwhile, which could not be put aside: money must be forthcoming. Fanny had taken alarm at his grim preoccupation and told him he might do as he pleased in regard to meeting her. But he would not borrow money to go to see her; and now both Brown and he were low. They agreed that Keats should approach Taylor for a loan. A painful long letter was composed, in which Keats felt compelled to assert his capabilities: “Just so much as I am humbled by the genius above my grasp, am I exalted and look with hate and contempt upon the literary world. A drummer-boy who holds out his hand familiarly to a field-marshal—that drummer-boy with me is the good word and favour of the public. . . . I equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman. They are both cloying treacle to the wings of Independence. I shall ever consider them as debtors to me for verses, not myself to them for admiration, which I can do without. . . . This is not wise . . . ’Tis Pride.”

Brown's face was queer, but he agreed that Taylor would see that Keats got no pleasure out of borrowing; and he added a note to the doubling of the letter, offering his bond. Then a week passed—eight days. No letters, no papers. Dilke had forgotten to send them, or they were being held through someone's curiosity. Brown was almost strapped, and expected only quarterly dribbles from his investments. They counted their pounds, their shillings, and before it came to pence, Keats wrote to Taylor again. A couple of days passed. They felt like skulking when they approached the Winchester gaol in their walks, and agreed that they could give Mandeville and Lisle points in cursing. Then Brown received a loan from some Hampshire friends.

At last Taylor wrote; he was having the thirty pounds sent. To be sure he had been in the country. Keats tore open another letter—from Hessey, with the blessed thirty pounds. Then there was still another, from Haslam, with twenty pounds he had borrowed from George. Keats capered.

"I suppose someone will send me a pair of asses' ears by the next waggon."

"For myself," said Brown, "I shall be off footloose to Chichester and Bedhampton. I may be gone three weeks."

Alone and rid of money worries, Keats tore into his work once more, albeit misdoubting success; finished *Lamia* and came back to the *Fall of Hyperion*. He began to re-read *Paradise Lost*. What a unique and matchless production! Of course it wore a splendid robe of Greek intonations and Latin inversions, instead of British home-spun—it was the verse of art—not the poetry of heart-burnings, woes and spiritual strife. But still—if one could—acceptance thus far would mean peace.

The constant ache to be near Fanny was deadened; it was now merely an unforgettable memory like—death. Sometimes when done with work he thought of her with sullenness. Let her break the engagement; if his strength sufficed, he might keep away until she was forced to do so. Again, when he felt the possibility that they might be changed and mean nothing to one another when they met, he closed his eyes and his heart seemed to sink, to swell within him, as though it had broken in twain and dissolved

through his body. Alas, what was this fever of sensation and work doing to him? An iron organization of lungs, heart, and vitals was necessary to bear that shock without weariness. With endurance, one might be content, alone, for eighty years. Then one could look back upon monolithic works as detachedly as upon a heedless world, the while gazing with mild generosity towards posterity and future time. . . . But the body was too weak to bear him to these heights and maintain him there. He was obliged constantly to check himself and be nothing.

Scarcely a week of this determined endeavour, this half-comfortable churlishness toward Fanny to nerve him—then came a letter from George, with news more dire than ever. All of George's money was gone and he was dependent upon a temporary loan from a Louisville acquaintance. His share of Tom's patrimony would have to be got out of Abbey. Keats took the nine o'clock coach to London and through the night revolved plans. If a packet was setting sail for America at once, he would send Haslam's money in it. Otherwise he would wait and send it with what he could get from Abbey. If Abbey could or would do nothing, he might mortgage his next poem, his very intellect, to Murray; but that potentate, owner of the *Tory Quarterly Review*, would laugh at him. From Taylor, nothing more should be expected; yet Taylor had a right to his next book—if he cared to risk money on that too.

The coach pulled into the Bell and Crown Inn, Holborn, at nine in the morning. What a strange place London was; how the world wagged on, furiously! Straight he went to Abbey, who agreed to see him and drink tea with him, Monday at seven. There was no sense in less than a full interview and a complete understanding. But now, what? Half Saturday, Sunday, Monday. There was not one house at which he would feel any pleasure to call; no, not one. Reynolds and the Dilkes were in the country, and Taylor. But in the shop, talking very decisively to Hessey, was Woodhouse, who invited him to come to Sunday breakfast at his chambers in the Temple.

Well, there, was good old Jem Rice. He was at home and this, Keats chaffed him, must have been because of ill-health. It was too true, but Rice, as genial and sensible as ever, recalled their Shanklin days with hilarity. Haslam was at home too, but he would give a fellow no peace about the girl

he was infatuated with. He showed her picture; she was not very cunning, Keats saw, but cunning enough to fool Haslam. He was glad to get away: when one thought of what good friend Haslam might be getting himself into, it was enough to make one laugh in his face. Still too early to go to the ordinary. He went to Covent Garden and got in at half price, and later, weary, slept well.

Passing through the empty Sunday morning streets, he saw in Colnaghi's print-shop a profile portrait of Sandt, assassin of Kotzebue, the German playwright renegade. What a young Abelard it represented! Fine mouth and nose, full temples, and cheekbones, incredibly enough, full of spirituality. Woodhouse received him friendlily, and as though he knew all the circumstances of his life. Keats told him a second Chancery suit had brought him to town.

"I have copied out the *Eve of St. Agnes* fair, and you shall see what improvement I have made in it. Also I have by me the new poem, *Lamia*, which you shall hear and decide whether they are not to be published at once."

"That wants some weighing," Woodhouse remarked. "You know Hessey said yesterday that it could not answer just now. I am inclined to agree with him. Your next book should contain a body of work sufficient to deal effectively, by its very existence, with any hostile criticism."

"I had thought to wait until the play I have been writing with Brown was performed. Were it to succeed it would lift me out of the mire of bad reputation continually rising against me. Did Taylor show you my letter for money?"

"No—yes, he did. I have hopes of your play myself. But you are not right to speak of a mire of bad reputation."

"It is continually rising against me. My name with the literary fashionables is vulgar. I am a weaver-boy to them. What of that?" Keats struck the table with his fist. "Real ills rouse a man, but imaginary ones paralyze him."

Woodhouse turned to the subject of *Isabella*, which Keats, declaring it mawkish, wished to exclude from his book. They might agree before the



time came, Keats said. Over cigars they discussed the alterations in the *Eve of St. Agnes*. Old Angela had been brought in at last, dead, stiff; which transported the reader back to the real world. Woodhouse raised his eyebrows. "I apprehended you had a fancy for playing with the reader in the Don Juan style. But you altered it before his Lordship had flown in the face of the public?" As he read, a stiffness came over him, and he put down the manuscript. "Now, you know, if a thing has a decent side I generally look no further. As the poem was originally written, *we* innocent ones—ladies and myself—might very well have supposed that Porphyro, when acquainted with Madeline's love for him, and when 'he rose, Ethereal flushed' and so on—he set himself to persuade her to go with him and succeeded and went over the 'Dartmoor black' to be married in right honest, chaste, and sober wise. But, as it is now altered, as soon as Madeline has declared her love, Porphyro winds by degrees his arm around her, presses breast to breast, and acts all the acts of a bona fide husband, while she fancies she is only playing the part of a wife in a dream. Is that not correct?"

"It is clearer than the poem itself."

"There are no improper expressions, true, but all is left to inference, and though, profanely speaking, the interest on the reader's imagination is greatly heightened—"

"Isn't that a chief thing?"

"Up to a certain point. But this will render the poem unfit for ladies, and indeed scarcely to be mentioned to them among the 'things that are'."

"I do not want ladies to read my poetry!" exclaimed Keats. "I write for men. If there is any doubt as to what took place, it was my fault for not writing clearly and comprehensibly. I should despise a man who would be such an eunuch in sentiment as to leave his love in such a situation. I should despise myself for writing about such a hero. I should—"

"There we will have to part company. I am sure Taylor would abuse it a full hour by the Temple clock!" But they agreed about *Lamia*. The metamorphosis was quite Ovidian, Woodhouse said, but better. The young fellow's persuading the woman to marry her was explained by the author: "Women love to be forced to do a thing, by a fine fellow such as this was."

It was time for lunch, and Woodhouse urged the young man to stay and see him off on the coach to Weymouth at three. In spite of disagreements, Keats became conscious of a liking for Woodhouse as they walked down Lad Lane to the “Swan with the Two Necks”. He was such an efficient man who knew exactly what he was about and did not forget that he had a sufficiency of cash in his pocket nor yet that he had fine tastes and obligations. He was saying something now about a trip to France next summer.

“You’re right,” interrupted Keats. “My poetry will never be fit for anything. It doesn’t cover its ground well. Now a blow in the spondee would finish her.” Nevertheless he was in good spirits when he came to the Wylies’. Georgiana’s mother had a new dress, and Henry and Charles were become great bucks, running to waistcoats and trips to Paris. Until he reached his room he felt more at home in the world.

If Fanny would give him no peace, he would compromise and write to her. In a way, it would be better than silence, give her an idea of his stony-heartedness to know that he could be so near and write, but not come. He could not, he told her, venture into the fire. Knowing that his life must be passed in fatigue and trouble, why should he put them upon her? Fanny Keats he found more like Tom than ever; she followed him ghost-like in memory. He carried the letter about all day, congratulating himself upon his wisdom in writing. What could he promise her? He could bear no more.

Abbey, drinking tea in his counting-house that evening, was quite considerate. Even Hodgkinson, the villain, was all attentiveness—smiling in his sleeve the while, no doubt, to think of George in America. Abbey was concerned over this definite bad news, and agreed to apply to Mrs. Jennings, her solicitor and everyone concerned to expedite the getting rid of the suit. Keats offered to stay in town and act as messenger and go-between, much as he loathed the prospect of such interviews. Mr. Abbey, however, said that he perhaps could, as one interested on both sides, make an arrangement more easily. Later he ventured upon belle-lettristic small-talk. Byron he blew up as a public scandal and nuisance of the first magnitude. “However, maybe the fellow says true now and then.” Abbey picked up a magazine and read complacently tripping lines from *Don Juan* anent literary ambition.

*“Experto dixit,”* said Keats.

On leaving Pancras Lane he walked up Cheapside, but feeling the letter in his pocket, decided to post it, and came back. He would be off for Winchester on the instant. In Bucklesbury he met Abbey, who surely was anxious about him, for walking through the Poultry to the hat-shop he was interested in, he hinted that Keats might be permitted to work there. Alone, Keats chuckled; two years ago he would have been indignant.

How people changed, he mused, half-lulled, on the coach to Winchester. In town they seemed to consider that he was not the same person; he'd lost the ardour and fire he once had had; but surely he was animated by a more thoughtful and quiet power? Didn't people's bodies change completely every seven years? It was not that hand upon his knee that had clenched itself at Dr. Hammond. When he thought of the callow boy enchanted by the possibilities of luxury in life, who had listened entranced to Hunt, and all that boy had been through since, trouble falling on trouble, to know that his life formed a definite and only too allegorical pattern was easy. Let his works illustrate that allegory. He could write finer verse, honestly, than he had dreamed of in those days. What was it in life that made such things naught, made naught of the sole principle of your life, or any thought of escape from that principle? Here he was going away from the world whose sight had calmed him. “Kepen in solitarinesse. . . .”

Four days alone he mused quietly, taking stock of himself. Wherefore those haunting gusts of blind ambition? Quieter in pulse, improved in digestion, he was convinced that his verses could not have been the best since they left behind such fevers. He took out the *Fall of Hyperion* from which he had hoped so much, and put marks against it, minus to the false beauty proceeding from art, plus to the true voice of feeling, as well as, so near he could tell them. Yet what a poem it had been becoming! Apollo asked Mnemosyne, the veiled priestess, why he had been saved. Because he had known what it was to die and live again before his fated hour. He was one of those “to whom the miseries of the world are misery and will not let them rest”. “Knowledge enormous had made a god of him.” The poet was not the dreamer—“a fever of himself”—but the creator, partaking of “the giant agony of the world”. No romanticist now, who sniffed the flower and refused to

drain the popped draught of life. He would renounce all this abstraction, even to the august vision of the God Himself. The vision achieved in the poem made impossible its completion. He must accept life, that had been proved upon his pulses. True, true he must be. Sadly the young man intoned the freshly written lines. They were of the past.

The season was beautiful, and the air he could not get enough of, finely tempered, almost sharp. Every day for an hour before dinner he took a walk. Out the back gate and across the street into the cathedral yard he strolled, along a flagged path, past the front of the cathedral, then to the left under a stone doorway, and on through two squares that reminded him of Oxford, seemingly dwelling-places of deans and prebendaries, with grass and shady trees. Then through one of the old city gates, and a street with meadows at its end. He stooped under a railing; "Why did I not get over?" Because, he answered himself, "no one wanted to force you under." How warm the stubble looked, better than the cold green of spring, beneath chaste Dian skies. He mused upon a poem for this matchless autumn as he came to an alley of gardens, to the foundation of St. Cross with its Gothic tower and alms square. The rich rents went to a relative of the Bishop of Winchester. Then on to a beautifully clear river.

Sunday he composed an ode *To Autumn* on this wall. Calm, rest, were what he needed, to write more of those superb odes of the springtime. But then his summer had not exactly come to nothing. If *Otho* were to be rejected, he was certain there was a sort of fire in *Lamia* which would take hold of people. Give them sensation of some sort, pleasant or unpleasant. How foolish he had been to talk of the poisonous suffrage of the public! It had not been Shakespeare's way to retire into the palace of his art, but to give forth with large hand the best he had. Now this *Autumn* poem was surely the flower of all he had ever tried to do; perfect simplicity, perfect acceptance; the fact and the feeling, but no irritable reaching after reasons. It would need no more explanation than a beautiful autumn day itself, to unspoiled people.

How quiet the place was! Was it not in solitude—in the Isle of Wight beginning *Endymion*, at Burford Bridge finishing it, and at Teignmouth, that he had grasped new vision? Here the side streets were maiden-ladylike;

the doorsteps always fresh from the flannel. No old maid's sedan had lost its way returning from a card party; and if any old women had got tipsy at christenings they had not shown themselves in the street.

What was keeping that scallywag Brown? Three weeks had passed, with no reply to letters sent to Bedhampton and Chichester. He would find his friend gone, if he were not careful. Keats had arrived at a plan. He would write in the periodicals and so gain himself a livelihood; selling one's pen was better than depending upon loans it might be difficult to return. He could even help George, and so he promised—to send if not hundreds, then tens, if not tens, then ones—though he warned his brother that in a few years he would have to begin to think of his own security and comfort. How fortunate that they had not guessed his engagement, and would make no objection!

Still no word from Brown. Keats did not post the letter he had written to Dilke, asking him to hire rooms in Westminster. At last Brown wrote saying that he had moved from one place to the other and missed the letters, which he now received in a bunch. When he appeared in person he declared that the latest news was that Kean might yet stay in England. In that case, Keats said, there would still be no harm in fagging on as others did; it would be easy to stop when he did not need to. "I am determined I shall not lie like a dead lump."

"It surprises me to hear that you have been," said Brown dryly. He had a complacent air about him since his return.

"You may say I want tact—that is easily acquired. You may be up to the slang of the cockpit in three battles. Two years ago it might have been different; I should have spoken my mind on every subject with the utmost simplicity. Now I shall be able to shine up an article on anything without much knowledge of the subject—aye, like an orange."

"I suppose that fellow Woodhouse has had something to do with this," said Brown. "I shall lose your company because of him."

They gave hostages to misunderstanding, and discussed the matter at length, but finally agreed to part in good humour. At the end of the first week in October they packed, and betook themselves to the metropolis.

Brown went to Hampstead, and Keats to the rooms Dilke had got him at 25 College Street, Westminster, a sedate place of Queen Anne houses overlooking the Abbey gardens. Surely much could be done here.

The second day, Severn came to welcome him back to the set; and was quite carried away when he heard *Hyperion* read, preferring it to the story of the serpent girl. It was just like Milton; those talks of long ago had borne fruit. Keats had to tell him in the briefest simplicity that he did not care to write a poem that might have been Milton's, but one by no other than John Keats.

Sunday morning he found himself walking toward Hampstead. Brown received him cheerfully, and grinned at Keats, remarking upon the absence of the Dilkes next door. Fanny had not been in sight, not in the garden nor coming into or going out of the house. The excitement against which he had struggled all the way out would not down: go he must. He would inquire if Fanny was well and at home. . . . Brown declined to come. He might drop in later.

How drawn Fanny's face was—he saw it in the room beyond the hall as Mrs. Brawne answered the door. But when she heard his voice she was out in a twinkling, and joy shone in her eyes and every movement. Well—he had known she was beautiful, but nothing like this. His eyes feasted and feasted.

Everything they did delighted them more with one another. They went on the Heath, and managed to come back in time for dinner. In the afternoon they were alone in the parlour, and again on the Heath. Mrs. Brawne sent to ask Brown in for tea, and he began telling stories of Keats, and Keats looked at Fanny in agony. But she, after a sudden intentness, saw that Brown was joking, laughed at him, and began to tease him about his philanderings of the summer. Was ever such an enchantingly elfish girl—yet so quiet and understanding when they were alone. The thought of having believed that he could part with her was enough to brand him as a fool. The thought that he might have to part from her was enough to chill the blood to the heart.

The day and the evening could not, though Heaven, last for ever. Back in his lonely room miles from her, with the dazzle gone from his eyes, his memory stung with her sylphid form and a hundred kisses, he felt that he might become unmanned, that the courage would melt within him. What an aching void of time lay ahead, and obscure horrors lurking. But he had had that day. Out of a full heart he wrote:

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!  
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,  
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,  
Bright eyes, accomplished shape, and lang'rous waist  
Faded the flower and all its budded charms,  
Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,  
Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,  
Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise—  
Vanished unseasonably at shut of eve,  
When the dusk holiday—or holinight  
Of fragrant curtained love begins to weave  
The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight;  
But, as I've read love's missal through to-day,  
He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray.





## CHAPTER VI

What of all the other mundane Mondays to follow this one? He might be absorbed in some hack work, perhaps satisfied with making a livelihood. To-day, he could escape the house and the thought of Fanny Brawne by visiting the Dilkes to thank them for the satisfactory rooms. He should get a great deal done here; he would ask Hazlitt what was the tariff for magazine writing. The very wheat of the field was grown to grind and eat, so why should he be delicate? He fell into a study, from which Dilke would have roused him with one of his dissertations on political justice. Keats turned him from that to his boy, since he knew that he must hear both, and advised him to inquire of Charlie concerning these present woes when the boy had become twenty-two. "Everyone has to bear some wear and tear," he concluded. Mrs. Dilke looked at him curiously, and offered to go with him to Wentworth Place to see the Brawne ladies any fine day. They both seemed surprised that he would not stay to dinner.

Back in his room again with the afternoon before him, he knew that he could not engage in even so mechanical a task as copying with the longing in him to be near Fanny. The sonnet written last night could not be sent to her. All his true poems would have to be to her; and what miserable stuff he would write for the magazines! How foolish an attempt; to forget her and leave her were the only means to win enough to be near her. Coining the heart for drachmas was simple and sane compared to it. Ah, if he could put forth his own heartfelt poems and win wealth and fame for Fanny. No, let fame go, let his name be vulgar with the vulgarest sets, so they bought his work and gave him money. How happy they could be, away from the world. He sat down and wrote to her.

Tuesday passed: there were affairs; George was to have a hundred pounds sent him from Tom's money. Not a day should be lost before some editor ordered an article, but there was no time that day. Wednesday was too dreary for anything; he should have gone to visit his sister, since he could not work. At last he rose from his chair at the window. He would be vapourish no longer. He washed, shaved, put on a clean shirt, brushed hair

and clothes, tied his shoes neatly, completing the rites of adonizing. Then, all clean and comfortable, he sat down to write—a letter to Fanny Brawne.

The postman's bell sounded, and he forgot his resolution not to pester the good landlady about his mail. No, he could not even keep on with a letter to her, he thought as he bounded down the stairs silently. There it was! He kissed the note before he read it. Of course she loved him; why should she be so reluctant to write it in three words? But then, every sentence carried the message. But why should she say that he was better off, even happier, apart from her, and jestingly threaten to run away? Pity that the thought had occurred to her; some day she might put him to that misery, as she could so easily. He pictured himself trying to find out from her mother, from everyone who knew her, where and to what relatives she had fled. He released his breath and read the rest, and went back to his note to her. He was martyr to the religion of love. He could die for it, for her. The resistless sway had taken him now. The time was past when he could warn her against the unpromising morning of his life. The time was past when he could leave her, now that he had seen her once more.

The hours and days were a dream, the streets, shops, libraries, the noisy and muddy walk to the British Museum less than a dream. At the Dilkes they were annoying enough to assume that he needed cheering up. At last Friday came and it was nearly a week since he had been to Wentworth Place. Perhaps there would be good news of the tragedy. The walk out to Hampstead was memory, joy and pain. A hint of chill became no less sharp where there were gardens and trees than back in the low and fog-draped stone streets. The long winter was ahead. Then there would be less difficulty in keeping away from Fanny and settling to business.

Brown received him with affectionate heartiness. He was lonely, he said; Keats was a queer friend to go back upon him like this. Besides he was in a tangle of negotiations over their child. After a crack or two about parturition pains Keats set himself to listen to the account, but it boiled down to nothing more than the fact that Elliston, manager of Drury Lane, had heard of their effort, and would be pleased to consider it when it was copied fair. Probably, too, Kean was not going to America until next year. Was that not encouraging enough? Moreover, a subject for a still more

splendid historical tragedy lay to their hands in the reign of King Stephen. Keats simply would have to come and live with him and write this play. Brown seemed to have forgotten the long argument at Winchester. The very thought of this conflict of purposes was pain, and Keats rose abruptly and told his friend that he would think it over while he slipped into the Brawne house for a few minutes' chat.

"Will ye be back for dinner?" asked Brown.

"Of course. On time, too."

. . . There she was! And in his arms. Nor, over her shoulder, was any other soul to be seen. "Mother is gone to town," Fanny explained; "and of course the children are at school."

"All as though ordained for me. There is my star predominant!"

"All for you, my love," said Fanny blithely. "Now take that chair at the fireside. If you walked all the way from Westminster you're cold."

"It is enough to see you again." Keats sank into the deep low chair. Fanny sat upright on one with a straight back, her tiny waist accentuated by the flare of her bell-shaped skirt. Her hair was done in an elaborate coil, with ribbons intertwined. It would not do to ask her if she slept with it that way. She was demurely perfect and perfectly demure; and not to be pictured in any other way. How tranquil her clear-cut features were, yet they could stiffen in pain, harden stoically in denial. Blue eyes, fair brows, lovely cheeks and neck. But it was not of those eyes and that breast, so well remembered, that he could think. Fanny was there, and not to be defined crudely and partially in terms of charms. His heart tightened within him at a sudden access of remembered longing. To be near her was to hear a ravishing music that drew the soul out of him. Tears came into his eyes.

Fanny was talking in her clear, small, precise voice, delicate as her person, clear-cut and thought-shaped as her features. She did not seem to see the effect she had upon him, but laughed lightly and deliciously as she told some story of her little days, and Keats found himself laughing. He did not want to talk, just now. It was enough to be near Fanny.

“Why are you so silent, my Keats? No unfortunate happening has taken place since you were here?”

“Because I am your Keats. But I have lately shirked some friends of ours, and I advise you to do the same.” Fanny looked inquiring. “I mean the blue devils—I am never at home to them. Perhaps you never fear them.”

Fanny smiled. Keats pictured the open-eyed wonder with which she had greeted his sayings a year before. “Well—hardly ever. When I do it is because I am feeling for you and wondering how you are getting on. You were not very kind about writing to me, you know.”

“Yes. I have had to keep my mind at work. Things may turn up court-card very suddenly. Will you come and applaud our tragedy when it is put on?”

“Oh, I surely will do so,” said Fanny with animation.

“Brown says he has hopes now more than ever. I see a lonely face in this room.” He waved to the sofa. “He is sure we have forgotten all about him.”

Fanny smiled as though not understanding, but when they had kissed and he held her in his arms she suffered herself to be led away. All, all was lived over again: their vows, their pleadings, his whispered frenzy. How often their lips met, or why they should part, they did not know. They did not know whether minutes or hours had passed while they sat whispering when Brown’s full round tones rang from out the door of the next house.

“Heavens, I told him I would dine with him.” Keats smiled ironically at the lothness of Fanny in every feature even to the hand he held, contrasted with her cool ladylike tones.

“Yes, of course you must. How stupid of me to keep you.”

At dinner Brown teased him about Miss Brawne, and for that—because he would not be surprised at it—Keats left him early. The lovers walked about Hampstead Heath. It was a bright, brisk day; the autumn rains had brought new roses. At the upper end of the Heath, in the grove beside the Spaniards Inn, Fanny reminded him of the nightingale they had heard there.

“But it was in your garden under the plum tree that I wrote my ode. Eternal bird, it will sing again next Spring, but matters will not be the same for us. I

would not like them to be!" he declared fiercely. "Yet for all that, they may be worse."

"Let us hope they will be better. Look at that smithy! In the distance it looks as bright and glowing as though night had fallen already."

"We must go nearer and see this fascinating fire. There was a smithy at Winchester I loved to stand in the road to look into. When the sparks flew and the hammer rang mellow on the anvil I was almost ready to sign myself as apprentice. But I fear harder work than signing would be required of me."

"So long as it was not battling with butchers," smiled Fanny mischievously. She turned away; it was questionable to detain a lady in such a place.

Two more days passed in this way—three precious days. Monday found Keats once again in his anchorite's cell. Another week. But was it possible? At least his refusal to Brown had temporarily gone by default. He had given Fanny no hint, but Saturday he had written to prepare his sister. Now it behoved him to break the news to the Dilkes, or at least to sound them on the subject.

Mrs. Dilke inquired, as always, regarding his sister Fanny. She opened her eyes when he confessed that he had not been to Walthamstow since returning from his summer. He had been unable to spare a day. When so inclined he could do a great deal in a day. In spite of being fonder of pleasure than study, he was going to buckle himself together; he was leaving off all animal food, that his brains might never be henceforth in a greater mist than was theirs by nature.

"Have you seen any of the editor breed yet?" asked Dilke.

"You have something on your mind, I fear," Mrs. Dilke commented on his shake of the head. "You are not wont to be idle and thoughtless like this. When bad news comes I hope you will feel that you can share it with your friends."

Keats was silent. He would not put up George's American misfortunes as a stop-gap. Dilke hastily began a cheery story against himself and Brown.

"I think I shall go and live with this Brown, now I think of it."

“What, go back to Hampstead?” Keats laughed at the way Dilke’s dignified countenance gaped. Mrs. Dilke kept her eyes on her sewing.

“You see, I am accustomed to my room there now. I expect to get a great deal done. There is a new play we have talked over. And then I shall be free of petty attentions to a diminutive housekeeping.”

“But that should not matter since you are giving up bulky foods,” said Mrs. Dilke.

Keats maintained an angry silence. Soon after dinner he left. Of course they were disappointed in him. But then he was disappointed in Dilke, with his eternal argumentativeness, and did not take the trouble to indicate the fact. Moodily eyeing the pavement, he walked home. Worst of all, they were right. What would his friends think, after his high resolve to live alone and fag away as others did at journalism? But could he convince even himself that he was doing the right thing? How quickly he had given up the struggle! He *had to be near Miss Brawne*. So might his epitaph read. He had to be near her, so he was forced for ever to be separate from her. He could not look forward and work for the years to come, but had to have his moment with her. Yet surely he could work with Brown, and surely something would come of that.

What could he do to shake off this terrible feeling of betrayal? He wrote a note to Fanny, but could hardly tell what he was writing, and by the time he was finished he was in a tremble. Mrs. Dilke, he told her, could tell her that he intended to live at Hampstead. Oh, that he could cast the die for love or death! With nothing else, certainly not with this purgatory blind of life, could he have patience. If he could be sure that she intended some time to be as cruel as she threatened in jest, he could cheerfully leave this world.

Outside, walking in Hampstead after having directed the carrier with his luggage, he felt better. What had become of the philosophy he had won so painfully out of solitude and long thoughts upon his losses and his destiny? Keats smiled bitterly and gently. “What sea-bird o’er the sea is a philosopher the while he goes, Winging along where the great water throes?” He might win a little surcease by composing to—Fanny. So this is what it was to be a poet, if any of these intent scurrying people should ask

him! Not that they would care where he got his songs, or that he would tell them. Woodhouse had asked him who was the “true and onlie begetter” of St. Agnes Eve. Mrs. Jones, he had told Woodhouse.

Yet, as the days and weeks passed, he did win a kind of peace. Since he could see Fanny at almost any time, he was able to school himself, and work doggedly a few hours in the mornings, promised the pleasure of being with her soon. She was kind, and yet it was the patient kindness of one who cannot give an alms, but only fair words. One day she talked hesitantly about money. Her mother perhaps would not refuse her a substantial amount if she were to marry. Without actually coming to an understanding, Mrs. Brawne indicated that they were very young yet, and could well afford to wait. Keats declared that he would not take such money, and that if they married it would be hers to do what she pleased with it. He did not tell her of his promise to help George.

At once he had thrown off leading strings and begun to compose *King Stephen* by himself. He got a book about the period, and delved in research. But after four scenes the thing refused to budge. Brown was doing the business of *Otho* and assured Keats that, according to rumour, Kean was taken with the leading part and would like to act in it. With him for ally, the piece surely would be produced. But still, Elliston would neither accept nor reject.

As for friends, they had to come to him. Severn called, and was his old sentimental self. Keats with bitter caprice made him agree to contradictions, and poor Severn, puzzled, humoured him as though he had been ill. Two months later Keats excused himself again, explaining that he had been lax, unemployed, unmeridianed and objectless. He was not even attending Hazlitt’s lectures. After all they were not over until nine, and the hall was seven miles away. But he would come and see “The Cave of Despair”, which the artist had submitted for the Academy prize, Keats promised. “You don’t see Haslam, I suppose. He is very beadle to an amorous sigh, I know. Poor fool.”

Brown looked at him sometimes as though worrying. One day he broached a new scheme. Why shouldn’t a kind of fairy tale in rollicking verse treating allegorically of the fads and foibles of the day make a success?

There was all kinds of material. You could start with some such fairy episode as those in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the German poet's *Oberon* Southey had translated, and from there bring in the Prince Regent and his quarrel with his wife and many another diverting matter.

"It would give me a chance to vent my spleen upon all the twang-dillo-dee of the world," admitted Keats. "And I think you are right in assuming that the marvellous is the most enticing and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers. Perhaps if I untethered Fancy she might put herself through some diverting paces."

They set to with glee, inventing such names as Parpaglion for a scandalmongering publisher, and Scarab Street for his habitation, while Mr. Whitebread, the violent radical, was called Biancopany, and Byron's *Farewell* lyric was parodied. Brown copied the poem as Keats wrote. Some mornings there would be as many as twelve stanzas of the witty fooling. In a few days Keats tired. He would not tell Taylor about it until it was finished. Too many of Brown's worldly affectations and familiarities were bound to creep in. Of course, the public liked to be flouted; look at the dashing *Don Juan*. When eighty-eight stanzas were written, and a day in town over George's affairs had intervened, and another day most of which was spent with Fanny Brawne, Brown's inquiries about the *Cap and Bells* were coldly received.

"You mean *The Jealousies*. I and myself cannot agree about that poem at all. Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home among men and women."

"You don't mean you're going to drop it now?" There was little amiability in Brown's tone.

Keats nodded. "Now I am. Later I may be in the cue again."

"I can tell you one reason why you are not able to sustain this work," said Brown, looking his friend steadily in the eye.

"I have been thinking of another subject for a play," said Keats hastily. "The Earl of Leicester's history. Perhaps Taylor can send me books."



“Keats, Ann made a discovery which I cannot ignore. I should think one of your training would not need to be warned of such a habit.”

Keats with a calm smile refused to deny anything provable. Brown drew a small phial from his waistcoat pocket. “Laudanum! Taking it secretly!”

“I had to keep my spirits up some way.”

“All along you have been too thoughtful or too unquiet. But that you should be so reckless of your health, your very existence—I want you to promise me never to take another drop.”

“Brown, I won’t, without your knowledge. Thank God for such a friend!”

“You had better see Sawrey, I think. He may advise you.”

“I did. He says there is nothing the matter with me but that I must see and not get any more of my sore throat through this winter. His only recommendation was to get a heavy greatcoat made, and thick-soled shoes. And I shall do so by the time the winter shall have set in.”

“You shall do so at once, if you want to call me friend.”

Keats strolled to the window. “What close, muggy weather it is, as they say in the ale-houses. What damned, uncomely, ill-conditioned, ill-favoured, gubber-tushed, gouty-legged, stink-footed, incondite weather. I could do better and give you a very Feu de Joie round the batteries of Fort St. Hyphen de Phrase if I had read old Burton’s passage about the man’s mistress more lately.”

“It is not the most pleasant day for walking with a pleasant girl.”

“Those half-built houses opposite us look dead and decayed,” said Keats, not turning. “But they will not decay and disappear. The Heath will soon be country no longer. In a hundred years, Brown, if the name remains, people will laugh at it. Ho—here comes Haydon.”

Haydon was his old advisory and sublime self. When he began to exhort, Keats told him he had just recovered from a six weeks’ debauch. When Brown tried to interpose, he heightened his rant, and told how he was accustomed to put cayenne pepper as far down his throat as possible in order to enjoy fully the delicious coolness of claret. Haydon was not so

exalted in his praise of art and poetry. It would be no wonder if he became stale even to himself in his tirades. Heartless tirade-maker, he had called Corneille. The day of friends seemed over.

In the Brawne house Keats was constrained by the presence of Fanny's mother, so that he could neither unbosom himself of the gloom within him, nor rouse himself to any self-forgetful spirits. The time for regular walks on the Heath had passed, though they did their best to keep them up. Fanny was so uniformly kind that he was at times suspicious. She occasionally received other young men, of the cultured and French-speaking order, and even went out with them to dances. No longer, as in Spring, was her mere proximity satisfying. The short poems he wrote were to her alone, and unbearable. All this led to no good. Fate had some rude baton up her sleeve, he was sure.

The days went on, in an old dog-trot of breakfast, dinner, supper, confab with Brown, and fire-stirring. No tea, now, and no meat for Keats at any meal. Yet though his spirits and health did not improve, the colds left him alone, save for brief attacks of a couple of days now and then. It was December. No news had come of their tragedy, and Brown finally agreed that they should give an ultimatum. If Elliston would not produce the play until next year—that was the best he had offered—and Kean was going to America then, they would do better to have it produced elsewhere this year. Kean liked the part, and Elliston, surely, would listen to reason.

Brown came home with news which made his eyes shine. The *Literary Gazette* for the date on which the Academy Prizes were to be distributed had come out with a vote in favour of “a Mr. Severn, who has produced a very clever and unexaggerated picture”. Yet the critic professed not to know the decision of the judges. Keats and Brown were equally surprised and delighted.

“Second attempt in oils,” beamed Brown. “I take it as a proof there is still some reward in the world for superior talent; it is an error to suppose that such is the common fate of true deserts. . . . This does not apply solely to genius in the arts, you understand, but to all of us, as to our general character.”

“What was the outcome of your interview with Elliston?”

“He will not budge. I brought the play with me.”

“Well, as he has not rejected it, I shall not venture to call him directly a fool, but as he wishes to put it off till next season, I cannot help thinking him little better than a knave.”

“You know Bob Harris, at Covent Garden, don’t you? Wasn’t it you who told me of Macready’s breaking a pier-glass worth a hundred quid with a battle-axe in the green-room, and how Harris let him off lightly?”

Keats brightened.

“Yes, I think we have a chance there. ‘Twould do one’s heart good to see Macready in Ludolph.”

There was no point in delaying a book of poems longer. Taylor, Hessey, Woodhouse, were agreed that Spring would be the time to strike the anvil, so Keats set to work. The book would mean money, and money had to be got. His hopes, he felt he should tell Fanny and his own Fanny, were higher than ever. Abbey suggested that he become a town traveller, with a gig; but Brown agreed that that would be altering his mode of life temporarily to no purpose.

Christmas Day, Brown and Keats dined at the Dilkes, where nothing happened. Brown delighted in fairy tales, Dilke did not; but the two old schoolfellows finally agreed to compete in this medium, with a beefsteak supper as the prize—beefsteak and punch, the food of the “Cockney School”. Keats, Reynolds, Rice and Taylor, were to be the judges. Coming home in late afternoon, Keats saw that the curtains in Fanny’s window hung as she had promised they would if their company should have departed. He had hoped he wouldn’t be well enough to go to Westminster, but this was eating the cake and having it. He and Fanny sat before the embers at midnight; the same watchman’s voice called the hour as had called it a year ago at Downshire Hill. Though they did not seem so near union as they had been then, they were happy and not averse from hope.

Then the astonishing thing happened. George arrived from America, soon after New Year’s Day. It was strange to have him back, and he was become

a stranger in two years' time. He kept talking of his little girl, and rallied John on spending so much time on those long philosophical letters to himself and his wife; he probably resented, Keats thought wearily, the chance remark that he did not seem fit to deal with the world, or at least the American world. John took his brother next door, and afterward told him that he was engaged to Fanny. George made almost no comment.

It was money he had come for, tired of temporizing and waiting. Abbey, apparently, was won into letting him do some administrating, for George explained that he had divided Tom's share of the money bequeathed by their grandmother. It had been fifteen hundred pounds, of which eleven hundred had been left at Tom's death. John had taken one hundred to repay himself for expense in Tom's behalf, and sent another hundred but a few weeks before to George in America. Now George set aside a third hundred to balance these, for his sister. The remaining eight hundred was divided into three equal parts.

"Now," said George, "your share is two hundred and seventy pounds. I advise you to keep one hundred for your immediate needs—it is well to have it in case you need it—and as for the other hundred and seventy, you would do well to let me take it with mine to America and invest it in business. I am sure the returns will justify this."

"Whatever you think is necessary and best, George."

"Abbey himself is putting in sixty pounds as a spec. and that makes seven hundred pounds I am taking back. This time I shall make a success. I shall embark in the lumber-cutting business. Saw-mills, they call them. You should do an article about America for a magazine, and get money for it."

"Well," laughed Keats. "Where there are so many trees, the sawing business should be good. Shall you care to dine at Taylor's?"

"Of course. Didn't we have a good time at the Wylie's? I must tell Georgiana."

"It is a shame Henry has not a prettier wife. She is not half a wife."

"Why, she is a silent body, in company at least; and so are you."

“Can you blame me? When once a person has smoked the vapidness of the routine of society, he must either have self-interest or the love of some sort of distinction to keep him in good humour with it. All I can say is that, standing at Charing Cross and looking east, west, north and south, I can see nothing but dullness. There’s Haydon and Hunt with their outworn tunes. That pianoforte hop at Dilke’s the other night was a horror.”

“I thought it very pleasant. Society in America is just as petty as here, yet it is amusing, and the affectations of gentility in a woman like Mrs. Audubon are even more amusing than our ladies here.”

“My only amusement the other night was to hate the Scotchman, whenever I saw him speaking in profile. It went down like a dose of bitters, and I hope will improve my digestion.”

“What about my American friend Hart?” George smiled uncertainly.

“I like him in a moderate way. We began talking of English and American ladies. The Misses Reynolds and others made a not very enticing row opposite us. I bade him mark them and form his judgment. I told him I hated Englishmen because they are the only men I know. Johnny Bull’s house is his castle, and a precious dull castle it is,” chanted Keats.

George began laughing. “You have your rants and your puns in better condition than ever.”

“I wish I could get change for a pun in silver.”

George wanted him to go to Haslam’s at Deptford to-morrow. It would be fun to see old Haslam as a married man. “It will not—not till he is somewhat recovered,” said Keats hastily. “He was infatuated so long I tired of him.”

“Something is disturbing you, John. You do not vent your griefs now.”

“No, I only smoke more my own insufficiency, and that of the world.”

Brown came in for a chat before bedtime, and read a fairy tale he had composed. George said he had heard it all before. Brown raised his brows; Keats confessed to writing it in a letter to America; but he had not given it as his own. Brown might ask Georgiana. It was of no consequence, Brown said.

“Yes, it is. I won’t have you think such a thing.”

“You must tell us of America, George. John and I have talked so much about you, with so little positive to go upon.”

“If I had the means I would accompany him back to America,” said John. “I should not think much of the time; I have no right to think, being very idle, as you, Brown, know. What I shall do, is retire to the country while I am young, and when I am older and deserve a rest I shall live in the city.”

“By the way,” George spoke in a diplomatic manner, “I must not forget to copy out all the new poems you have written, to take back with me.”

Every day of George’s visit was full, and Keats felt more than half regretful by the time he saw his brother off the end of January, from the King’s Arms, on the “Royal Alexander”. It was six o’clock in the morning, cold, and dark despite snow. George said it was like America. John confessed to putting Mrs. Dilke’s old quaker-coloured cat into the top of Georgiana’s bonnet in one of the boxes; and since she was wi’ kitten, they would have a whole litter for their little girl to play with. A grip of the hand, a noise of wheels, a shout, and George was swept away.

The weather soon turned mild. A thaw melted the snow, the sun made the world a joy. Keats went to town in the morning without his greatcoat. He delayed after supper with Taylor and Woodhouse, and came home on a late coach—outside, on the top of it, as his custom was. Warm and flushed from his evening indoors, he thought the air rather chill; but that was natural, at night. Surely it was not really cold, when the day had been so warm. Before he reached Hampstead he had half a mind to climb down and go inside.

Brown stared as though he had been a ghost. “Well, I may look fierce, but I’m not intoxicated.”

“What is the matter, you are fevered?” asked Brown urgently.

Keats stood with his back to the fireplace.

“I was on the hurricane deck of the stage. I did not know it was a bitter night, until now. I was severely chilled. Fevered! Of course, a little!”

“Now you must drink something hot and get into bed,” Brown said quietly.

“Very well, at once. I shall leave this delicious fire to please my friend, as soon as he shall have obtained some brandy for me.” In a few minutes he leaped into the cold sheets. Brown was coming into the room for the taper. “C-cold!” Keats coughed slightly. “That is blood from my mouth.” He stared at the single drop upon the pillow. “Bring me the candle, Brown, and let me see.”

He regarded the blood steadfastly, while Brown’s face set with apprehension. He handed the candle to Brown, looking into his face with a great calm.

“I know the colour of that blood—it is arterial blood. I cannot be deceived in that colour—that drop of blood is my death-warrant. I must die.” He listened to Brown’s footsteps running on the hard ground.

“Fanny! Fanny!”

## BOOK IV

### *Yet, Do Not Grieve*

*Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare:  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!*

—Ode on a Grecian Urn.





## CHAPTER I

In the grey morning light his mind was very clear and calm, it almost amused him with its sedate marching. Strange how the few hours had made him used to the presence of ogre-like death. He must have known long ago that early death awaited him. The fate of Chatterton, young and a misjudged poet, had not warned him; no, it had been the object of his musing adolescent envy. The end of his brother was admonition, still more fatal. He was of the elect; fame and fortune, love and happiness in a foreign land were never to be his now. He was chosen for a fate brighter, stranger, more compellingly beautiful than any fairy godmother could have bestowed. His death would burn with a fiercer flame into the minds of men than his life and works had done. The works were over, the injustice of the condemning world suffered. Whether he or posterity should judge aright, his fate would illumine them, keep them alive in spite of all. He smiled at this grotesque victory, looking down over the short still form of himself upon the bed, spent with the fever of yesterday and the bleeding of the night. He could watch even that with detachment. "Time's glory is to calm contending kings."

But no! His body, his hand stiffened with revulsion. He could not die. Leave Fanny? Never. He was twisting on the bed. The thought had come that he could spring up, dash around to the next house, and looking into those peerless eyes know for certain that he could not die. It was all a grotesque mistake, a dream. He had dreamt that he was more ill than he possibly could be. Could anything be more absurd? Fanny never would let him die. She loved him. After all, what else mattered? She loved him, so that she had begun to understand him. He could talk to her now, surely, as though she were a second self. And if she could not give herself to him, why should that be counted lack of love, lack of discernment? Child that she was, she did not have herself to give yet. Oh, the rich and wondrous woman that would be his Fanny, could they but have a few years together! Some day they would pluck a fruition of happiness burgeoned from your boughs of adversity! Some day the world would know what only she knew, that he was a poet of England whose words would not die in England. Some day . . . he and Fanny would be parted. Let it be by death and soon,

his spirit cried—in a deeper joy, of more divine a smart. Then he pictured Fanny living on without him. She would remember sometimes. She would turn from her pleasures, her admirers, and think of a rarer spirit she once had shared. And the earth would cover him . . . “Time’s glory is to calm contending kings.” Ah, it was a bleak victory he had over her now. He smiled. The ultimate, irrefragable victory. With eyes closed he felt the blood ebbing in a tremor to his heart.

Brown was coming into the room, rather haggard and drawn about the gills. Poor Brown, sick nurse now. Before his lips could form the words Brown stopped him. He was not to speak. “Did you rest, my dear Keats?” Keats assented with a glance. “I thought you might sleep through till morning. You had been in a quiet sleep some time when I left you at five. Let me feel your forehead. Yes, you have a temperature still.”

“Breakfast?” said Keats’s lips silently.

“Not until Sawrey comes, my friend. He says it will do you good to fast a bit. But when he sees how well you are he will order something for you, surely. I shall have my breakfast now. There’s nothing you want?”

Keats raised his hand at the wrist, let it fall, and when Brown had gone looked at the veins. Poor Fanny, she would be better off . . . she would come in to see him, perhaps before dinner. She must have heard the stirring about in the night and been disturbed and anxious, poor girl. Brown cannonading out of the house, coming back with the doctor, rousing the servant to put hot water over the fire. Sawrey bleeding him, fussily, asking how he felt and forbidding him to speak. And the taste of blood, one’s own blood—horrible—lasting through it all, returning with hearing the black drip, drip from his elbow to the pan. Then Brown watching over him after the doctor had gone, while the candle sank. . . . Ah well, here was a day with no work, not even reading, to tease him. Soon Fanny would call, and she might stir him up.

But when noon came and no Fanny, the hours seemed to have been long. Sawrey had permitted him to whisper; he did not consider this to be pulmonary tuberculosis. Perhaps laryngeal, he admitted to his patient’s ironical look. Keats got them to move the bed so that he could look out

of the upper window over the Heath. You couldn't see anyone leaving or coming into Wentworth Place but you could see the London stage, and who got into or alighted from it.

At last he had to ask what had become of the Brawnes. They were all out, Brown reported. It was a strange way to behave when a friend was seriously ill on the other side of a partition. The afternoon hours were terribly dragging. He looked for the stage all the time. If all his sick days were to be like this, he would find them a little Hell. Brown came in now and then to wait on him, the servant girl brought drinks on a tray. If he could he should have written his sister Fanny and told her to be careful always to wear warm clothing not only in frost but in a thaw.

There was a knock at the front door, and Sam Brawne's voice. What would Brown say to an apparition in bed clothes shooting down the staircase! But no, up came Brown promptly, with Fanny's note. She loved him, and now that he was imprisoned she loved him more than ever. She knew that Brown and the doctor would not wish her to disturb him, but she had to send a word. She had been in all day, hoping, listening, but now she was going out.

"Brown," said Keats with an imperative wave of the hand, "you must raise me, put pillows under my head. Give me your drawing-board to put on my knees. I must write a note." It would be sent the instant she returned.

At last she came, and though Mrs. Brawne was with her, talking to Brown, he could feast his eyes upon her in the candlelight, and listen to her light musical voice concernedly inquiring, then telling him of her anxiety, and her afternoon walk. She slipped a note into his hand to be read when she was gone. Her eyes as she looked back at him from the doorway were like stars; and just as easy to follow. Her note contained only three words. He sighed, and his tongue turned over silently the lines he had written: "The day is gone and all its sweets are gone"—he wrenched his senses from the picture of its sweets—"but, as I've read Love's missal through to-day, He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray."

Brown was casual about the Brawnes as he could be without pretending blindness, and cheery in his treatment as a bad cold of his own would

permit. He hoarsely retailed the contents of the papers. The late King had nodded to a coal-heaver, and laughed with a Quaker, and liked boiled leg of mutton. Then, old Peter Pindar was dead, a thorn in the King's side. What would they say to each other on the Stygian shore? Pleasant to think that the King might confess Peter to have been right, and Peter maintain himself to have been wrong.

Sunday morning, after two days in bed, Keats persuaded Sawrey to let him go down to the front parlour on the sofa, which could be made up as a bed. He would be able to see more than the pattern of the bed-curtains—which in the end did impress itself even on eyes which willingly saw nothing but the face of a beloved with blue eyes and bronze hair. No stretcher for this moving; Brown stated decidedly that he and no other would carry his friend gently down the stairs. It felt like Sunday just to be able to look out of the window and watch the people pass. Besides, one could look out on the grass-plot, dingy as it was. The garden at one side showed holes where celery had been, and a few cabbage stalks which seemed fixed on the superannuated list. There went two old maiden ladies he knew lived in Well Walk before and after the Keats brothers had. Their corpulent little lap-dog, anxiety over whose welfare they increased by sharing it, had to be coaxed along with their shared ivory-tipped cane. Forth from the house came Mrs. Brawne's Carlo, and met the ladies and their pet as though he would sweep them all down for the joke of it. The little dog thought Carlo a devil of a fellow when after a sniff or two Carlo inspected a tree with greater interest, and scrubbed his hind feet on the grass.

Henry and Charles, Georgina's brothers, came in, ruddy from the cold. "And how are the Messrs. Wylie?" Keats asked in his half-whisper. "I was just addressing Carlo out there. He should peruse the fable of the boys and the frogs. Though he prefers the tongues and the bones."

"Oh—what?" The two young fellows had to go to the window and examine this dog. Henry was a greater blade than ever with his waistcoats, and Charles's whiskers curlier. They had lively jokes that made his seem strangely unworldly. It was no wonder invalids became old-womanish. Keats asked Henry how he managed to get out apart from his wife. When they had been a little while, Mrs. Reynolds came. The gracious middle-

aged lady and the Wylie boys counteracted one another, and were soon departed, to his relief.

There was no sense in thinking of dinner, much less in being impatient over its lateness. A mouse would starve on his diet. There went a potboy—somebody's one o'clock beer! There went old women with bobbins and red cloaks and unassuming bonnets, creeping about the heath and home from church. So the world wagged on. After the dinner hour surely Fanny and her mother would come, since there had been no note. Or would they send one saying they would be out?

It was Fanny herself who came—alone. Was ever such luck? How lovely she was, how tranquil and loving now; never the same girl who had flouted and flirted, and fished for admiration. But Brown had to come in—as of course he had been all day and every day and every night. Where could one find a better-natured, more sedulous nurse? Now he was smiling.

“Mr. Keats,” he told Fanny, “has just been through a terrible ordeal, so you must speak very quietly to him, Miss Brawne.”

Fanny went pale. “He's not worse? You're not—”

“He's just eaten too much dinner, you see. A lady friend and admirer sent him a brace of moor fowl. I ate a piece of the breast cold, and it was not tainted, though it had seemed to me they were so *high* the cook might decline preparing them for the spit. But Keats here declared them in excellent order, and enjoyed them in a disgusting manner, sucking the rotten flesh from the bones, and crunching the putrid bones—”

“How horrible! You're laughing, Mr. Brown.” She admired his wit!

“The joke is against me,” murmured Keats, “for a long time. . . .”

“Oh, you Jezebel,” Brown shook a finger at her, “to sit quietly in your room while your friend was suffering the pangs of gout.” Fanny bridled.

“Brown wishes I were well enough to,” said Keats.

“Anyway, you shan't tease him so,” said Fanny decidedly. Keats's heart was warmed by something real. Wasn't her name Frances, like his mother's?

“No,” said Brown, “that is the prerogative of woman.”

“It is a good thing that women are allowed some prerogatives in this age!” Fanny tossed her head.

“Now we are coming the Mary Wollstonecraft,” said Brown delightedly.

Keats closed his eyes, then opened them. “I think,” he began. He thought that the prerogative of a guest might be to choose her host. He was saved from saying so and wounding Brown by the good fellow’s getting up and out of the room with some remark about directions to Ann.

“Your friend is so amusing I don’t mind him. Quite the man of the world.”

Keats twisted upon the bed. “You might think so.”

“Come, you mustn’t mind his speaking to me. Hasn’t he left us alone?” she whispered, her face radiant.

Keats’s heart melted, and he did not trouble to deny heatedly that he was vexed. Fanny loved and was lovely. She was drawing out of her muff a note which he could hold in his hand while she was there, and read when she was gone. Cautiously he moved his farther arm, and when she handed him the note closed both his hands over hers. “Now I have you, you’re mine!”

“Of course I am!” But her smile and misty eyes gave him a picture of himself in his weakness. He let go the hand.

“No, everyone has treated me admirably. Mrs. Reynolds was here, and brought me a present of crab-apple jelly. Brown is kind, he can’t help his voice being trebled by making love in the draught of a doorway!” Fanny’s laugh was like a spray of dewdrops dashed from a flowering bush. “He’s taken to art now. He buys the most ferocious of Hogarth’s pictures, and copies ’em in ink. As for myself, I must do nothing, not even take a pinch of snuff—and you know there’s nothing like a pinch of snuff, except perhaps a few trifles beneath a philosopher’s dignity, such as a ripe peach or a kiss that one takes on a lease of ninety-nine minutes—on a billing lease!”

“Now aren’t you forgetting something?” pouted Fanny.

“What?”

“My notes.”

“My sweet physician! How could I forget them? I would they were longer, so that I might have more occupation learning them by heart. . . . But what dimples—adorable!”

“Nothing to your eyes—since you’ve been sick I have been admiring them. The pupils are enormous. Now don’t blush, don’t be shy. Shouldn’t a man be handsome as well as a—woman?”

“She loves me,” thought Keats that night. “And I shall get well.”

Monday would have been a settling down into that kind of life if one were to be forced into resignation. Brown went out in the afternoon. It was a shame that Fanny could not be with him, instead of the servant girl. He would not send a note asking her; her mother and Brown might think things, or look knowing. They never, never had been free of people.

“Tell me, sor, will ye, what is the old man that picture is of. Often I’ve seen ye watchin’ him that keen. Very like me father in Ireland, he is, but me father has the more colour than what he has.”

“That?” Keats’s tone startled Ann. “That is Shakespeare; you must not say he is like your father. He is not like any man that ever lived.”

“Meanin’ no offence, sir,” said the girl, her colour rising; “but I should know me own father.”

“Let be,” said Keats, calming. “Do you like the tassels on the frame? My sister-in-law, Georgiana Keats, made them for the portrait, knowing how much I loved it.”

“Aye, very nice. But I’m like you, sir, I like the picture best.”

What a piminy! Incredible! The afternoon was quite bright. Gipsies were abroad upon the Heath—after hare skins, and some householder’s silver spoons, no doubt. Then a fellow with a wooden clock under his arm, near enough that it could be heard striking steadily. Then the old French emigré who had been very well-to-do in France, with his hands joined behind his hips, and his brow plotting against the republic. Then Mr. David Lewis, erect and handsome old fellow; perhaps he remembered Tom, for he looked



at Wentworth Place. And the brickmakers were passing to and fro. Perhaps the half-built houses would not die before they were brought up. Then the stage, from which alighted Brown, with a flat parcel.

“Look at this, Keats, my lad. Another Hogarth, which for our edification I shall copy with such improvements as an imagination superior to Hogarth’s may suggest.”

“A damned melancholy picture it is, too. The Methodist Meeting, eh?”

“It’s too splendid,” said Brown with more candid sadness. “I never shall be able to achieve those expressions.”

“I hope not.” Keats was about to commence one of his old rants, but suddenly he was tired. He could not take his eyes off the picture. It haunted him throughout the evening in spite of Fanny’s note. Fanny herself did not come. The weight and tightness on his chest increased. That night he dreamed of those hideous people and their Hell, and woke in a cold sweat.

Fanny was blithe when she came to see him, but her face stiffened and she looked as though she wanted to cry when he began to talk plainly to her. She became still when he told her that it would perhaps be better for her to break the engagement. She shook her head determinedly, and left soon, putting a note into his hands. Tears came into his eyes as he read of her accusing herself of coldness to him. If only he could have read it before talking in that way. Yet what happiness could he bring her? That was what she should consider; though, if she loved him as blindly as he did her, it was cruel to suggest such a thing as parting.

How miserable he should have been if she had acceded to that reasonable proposal! He must assure her, swear by her beauty that he could do nothing, think nothing, say nothing of her but had its spring in the love which had so long been his pleasure and torment. Cruel, he had been, in his old suspicion of her being inclined to the Cressida. He would dismiss all suspicions finally and completely and rest in the confidence of her love; if he could. He would have health, and the Spring, and walks with her, the wonder of her love as great as its delight. The simple flowers of Spring, the beauties of the country, were things to muse upon as though he had created them in his fancy.

Visitors kept coming. Haslam looked at him in a kind of wonder, iron-framed man that he was. Careless Reynolds cheered him up as best he could. He was going to Brussels, and getting out another book. How many now? None of any importance, laughed Reynolds. Severn came and was a little too sympathetic and not understanding enough for comfort. The gifts of fruit and jams and jellies would reach the length of the sideboard. Keats scribbled letters to his sister, consoling her for Mrs. Abbey's tartness and Mr. Abbey's not allowing her pocket-money sufficient. Rice was ill, and reported a mind prostrate under hypochondriacal broodings. A letter of comfort, instead of the rollicking naughtiness the old Rice had liked, would have to be written.

Why didn't he make some strides in improvement? It was his own fretting that kept him back; but the doctor seemed to think it was Fanny, and talked with Brown apart; then they both went in to Mrs. Brawne's. Keats groaned. Good-bye, Fanny! He had hurt her by suggesting that she break the engagement, while she had refrained from going to town in order to be near him. He started a letter to her at once. How he was going to be able to bear it, and whether it would not be more harmful than her presence, he could not tell. She might go to town, he urged, and not come to him before to-morrow night. But above all send him a written good night. What hope could they have? Even if he recovered, his health would keep him from exertion, and always the burden of his mind would be the same. Now the doctor said he was not even to read poetry, much less write it. But this separation was the last drop. He was not strong enough to be weaned.

Fanny answered within the hour, accusing him of wishing to forget her. Was she thinking of his hardness of the summer, or was she trying to make him pluck up a spirit? He replied that he might have wished to forget her for her own sake, but that was the utmost, and he would have chosen as soon to die as be parted from her. She was to believe that their friends planned for the best, and if that best was not best, it was not their fault.

She loved him; she didn't care a button for the opinions of others, Fanny replied. She would see him if he wished it and thought it would do him good. Then all they had to do was to be patient, and no longer do themselves violence by even thinking of parting. So it was agreed that she

might come in a few minutes just about six o'clock each evening, and leave her note. One night it chanced that the taper was left long enough that he could read her words alone; he slept much better. Sometimes Fanny would go out into the garden so that he might see her. He took to sitting at the back parlour window. He was tired of the view of the Heath and the half-built houses, he explained to Brown. He wrote letters upon his knee, while his friend continued Hogarth.

"Maledictions upon the pen," he said in the mild tone to which he had accustomed himself. "I have mended it, and still it is very much inclined to make blind e's. However, these last lines are in a better style of penmanship."

"I haven't time to inspect 'em," said Brown dryly, knowingly.

"No, don't, for they are disfigured by a smear of currant jelly. The same is upon a page of your Ben Jonson."

"Oh, the very best book I have!" exclaimed Brown in mock indignation.

"I have licked it, but it still remains very purple," said Keats penitently; while he added in his letter that he was sitting in the back room, so that she might feel him near. Were it not for such inconveniences as mothers and Browns, they would invent a code of wall-tapping. Or they would be together in the same room—mustn't think of that.

Poor Fanny! She was unwell too, now. Her mother had told her that her writing to him at night disturbed him, for which reason her notes were cool, and she called him "Love" no longer. What a wonder to think that they should love after all they had suffered, the ecstasies of some days, the miseries in their turn. Her beauty, it was that kept up the spell. But he was getting better. The doctors said there was little the matter with him. He would believe them when the weight and tightness in his chest was mitigated. He was well enough that from lack of activity in the day he could pass nights anxious and wakeful, telling himself: "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory. But I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered." God knew whether he would ever be able to write even as he had done, or taste of happiness with

his love. Yet once again he might testify to the enduring beauty of life with its warp of good and ill, whether or not he could deceive himself with hope of bliss in this world. The time was past when he could glory in the thought of great poems unwritten that brought a fever to his brow. Calm, now. What did Milton say? “Comes the blind fury with the abhorred shears.” She could not take what had been his. He slept in the winter dawn.

Other days of this that he called his posthumous existence won him to patience. “Barry Cornwall” sent a copy of his second book, and it transpired that he had sent his first, through Hunt, who had neglected to forward it. He and Hunt called, and Proctor proved to be a simple, open and reasoning sort of a fellow. Brown told Keats that he had been pretty well-sustained for a sick man, but he had felt like a pygmy among these men. Not to confess it:

“Ah! No doubt with a bottle of claret in me I should have preached to them. It is shameful to think how we are subject to our frames. Nothing disgraces me in my own eyes so much as being one of a race of eyes, nose and mouth, beings in a planet called earth who all from Plato to Wesley have always mingled goatish winnyish lustful love with the abstract adoration of the deity.”

“Ah, but we’ve to make the best of it in this vale of tears. And we can’t do that by pretending to be what we aren’t.” Brown wagged his head.

Keats was silent a moment. But he had talked of serious matters with Brown before. “Vale of soul-making, not of tears only. There may be sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not souls until they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. How then are souls to be made? How but by the medium of a world like this? I would call the world a school instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read. I will call the human heart the hornbook read in that school. And I would call the *child able to read* the soul made from that school and its hornbook. Do you see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence, and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways. Not merely is the heart a hornbook. It is the mind’s Bible, which the mind has not only to read but obey.”

“Now I shall come at you another way,” cried Brown. “I shouldn’t keep you talking. But tell me in a word how you would apply these standards to persons we know. Where do you place Dilke?”

“Dilke does good in the world in so far as his intelligence and disinterestedness lead him to do. Dilke is a man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about everything. The only means of strengthening one’s intellect is to make up one’s mind about nothing—to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts, not a select party. All the stubborn arguers you meet are of the same brood. They never begin upon a subject they have not pre-resolved upon. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives, because he is always trying at it.”

“Now you must rest. You may not be able to take your walk in the garden. By the way, where do women come in your hierarchy?”

“You know as well as I do,” returned Keats steadily, if not patiently, “that the generality of women never reach any humble standard of disinterestedness. But they do seem to arrive at the stage of refinement upon their genuine feelings more readily than men.”

“They’re appendages of their men,” said Brown brusquely, rising. “I shall take a walk now before dinner. You know, I didn’t become keen about making your acquaintance until I saw you a few times. I wondered why you ended your poems, like *I Stood Tip-toe*, just when they got to the point!”

“Now I can stand your Hogarths. I nearly fainted in my sleep when I had that psalm-singing nightmare. I know I am better, for I can bear the pictures.”

Brown laughed. “Good-bye. If you want anything call Ann.”

More than three weeks had passed since the hæmorrhage, and there was no marked improvement. It was not even every day that he could walk in the garden. Ann came into the room with tablecloth and silver. Keats put away his letter to Fanny. Yet how could he forget her? Was that she in the room opposite or her mother? Was that she going upstairs, or her sister? He felt that he knew every movement in the double house. Why should one be cursed with such tantalizing delicate perceptions? What had Brown

meant about women? Fanny was far more intelligent than Brown. There was almost a coolness between the friends as they ate dinner.

In the afternoon Fanny came in with her work. A thrush was singing over the held. A fine fellow that one; it was to be hoped that he would be lucky in his choice of a mate. And then, surely he was a portent of mild weather. But such remarks did not detain Fanny; she seemed to have taken alarm. Shouldn't Sawrey be asked to consult a specialist? "But I can't afford to hire two doctors beside myself."

Fanny did not smile. "You must afford insuring your health," she pointed out in her firmest manner.

"So I must," he said affectionately and teasingly, squeezing one of her busy hands. "Now I think of it, there is a man, Bree, who wrote a treatise on asthma and respiratory diseases. He should know somewhat of these matters."

"Do you think it's asthma?" asked Fanny pointedly.

Brown sauntered in from the other parlour. His thick body's half-easy assumption of grace as he towered over the lovers annoyed Keats before he had spoken. "My dear young lady, your ideas accord wonderfully with my own. We should get another doctor. I couldn't help overhearing you, on such a subject. And Keats is right, too, probably, in choosing this same barley-Bree."

"Hark to the modesty of the man." Fanny looked at Keats, with a motion of her head toward Brown. It was almost possessive, Keats thought. If there was nothing between these two yet, the wind was blowing that way; he could see it perhaps before Fanny herself. They talked and rallied each other merrily until an acute discomfort of impatience came over Keats as it had when he had lain helpless in bed and unwelcome callers had talked interminably and would not go. He held himself from screaming.

When Fanny had gone home he wrote her a note. She had not meant to hurt him, surely, but he could not stand what she had done. He would simply say, "I think you had better not make any long stay with me when Mr. Brown is at home." But the note got out of hand, and he would not send

it. Next morning he wrote another and advised her to bring her work when Mr. Brown was out. And would she come toward evening, instead of before dinner? When she had gone, the day was dead—but if she did not come until evening, he had something to look forward to all day. Would she not come to the window a moment when she had read this note?

She came within five minutes. Her eyes and her lips smiled at him, and *they did not search into the room beyond him*. She had a far more precious gift for him that night—a cornelian ring, engraved with their initials intertwined. Brown was in his bedroom upstairs.

“I shall kiss your name and mine where your lips have been. Lips! Why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things?”

She shook her finger at him. He would have to turn from that subject or she would run away.

“And you’ll never be jealous of me again?”

“Thank God, though I told them the dearest pleasures in the universe—oh, I could write a song in the style of Tom Moore’s pathetic about Memory, if that would be any relief to me. No—’twould not. I will be as obstinate as a robin, I will not sing in a cage.”

They talked of his book of poems, and Fanny took the manuscript back with her. Dr. Bree, an indulgent greybeard, pronounced him out of danger, and later permitted him to work at revision. One of these days he would make an attack upon the *Cap and Bells*. The afternoon light of March was waning, and he rose and strolled into the front room. Brown had gone to town, and Fanny was out. He felt grey and Mondayish. What a long winter, and the same tufted heath and houses, with occasionally the sight of the coach arriving, as now.

What was that? Brown, and Fanny—not Fanny! Yes. Together, talking gaily. His heart gave one leap, seemed still, then raced as though it would rattle against his ribs. He sank into a chair. Brown came in, bright-eyed and flushed from the winter air—or from—

“What is the matter, Keats? My friend, my friend, what is the matter? What has happened? Did you have another spitting of blood?”

Suspicion seemed to leave Keats's mind at that exclamation, Brown had been his friend. He would give no sign. "I seem to have palpitations—"

"Well—well—shall I call Doctor Sawrey? Bree is not so near—"

"No—don't touch me. I shall be better. . . ."

"I'll get Miss Brawne. We came back from town on the same coach."

Keats shook his head dumbly, but Brown went. She spoke soothingly to him, but he closed his eyes, and his head was fallen back against the chair.

"I'm quite well, my love. You must not stay."

Brown was whispering to her. It was best to get him to bed.

Tuesday, Tuesday night, Wednesday, he was no better. Brown was writing to Taylor to tell him not to expect the poems corrected. Dr. Bree said there was nothing organically wrong, and forbade food. Fanny brought oranges. He learned that her window had been kept open to hear any stir in his part of the house. He would have to reassure her. Once she had complained that he wrote only of her beauty. But here, besides, was a heart naturally furnished with wings imprisoning itself with him. Her presence in a room concentrated his whole senses. Oh, she should know that he loved her as well as and in the way she wished—ever and ever without reserve. Even his jealousies were agonies of love, and in the hottest fit he would have died for her. He had vexed her too much. But for love!

Mild days were here. Brown was talking of going with him to the coast of Hants, and Keats was promising to walk with her on May-day, if he could not dance. At last he went to town and saw Taylor who was full of a new poet, John Clare, he had begun with last autumn—a sort of English Burns, a ploughman. This Clare admired and wanted to meet Keats, it seemed. Taylor said the work in the new book was comparable with either Milton or Shakespeare for beauties. Woodhouse and Hessey had talked of publishing the four longer poems and the shorter ones in five thin octavos, at three shillings each, with the whole bound in one for twelve and six. Keats's eyes glittered, but he knew it would not do. Before he left on the afternoon coach, Taylor advised a trial of his physician.



The event of the month—the world’s event, he would have said two years ago—was Haydon’s private view of his six-year picture. Even now it was not to be missed.

A crowd of carriages blocked Piccadilly. Beyond stood the strange architecture of the Egyptian Hall. Coachmen were hallooing, the passage was full of liveried servants, and all was bustle and chatter. Painfully Keats made his way through it and climbed the stairs. There was Sammon at the door, seven feet high at least; there was no speaking to him. The room was full. Richly dressed ladies and their escorts stood about, animated, languid or bantering. Haydon was bowing over the hand of one he called Lady Murray, who half mockingly told him, “Why, you have a complete rout.” How should one get out of this and into some corner of vantage? The Persian ambassador and his suite swept in. The robust port and black beard of the man, and his regalia, attracted attention as he made for the picture and declared in a loud voice: “I like elbow of soldier.” What a farce! Ha, there was Hazlitt!

“How are you, Keats? Have you seen the picture? Come up into this corner where we can talk. You may see it later. I am told you have been unwell.”

“I had thought myself recovered until I came into this concourse.”

“A person wants to be well to stand ’em,” said Hazlitt mordantly. “What have you been doing? I want to see your next book.”

“Taylor and Hessey will publish it this Spring if I can correct it.”

“It will be good enough. Don’t work yourself sick.”

Keats smiled at this from the man of such critical rigour.

“Here comes Haydon.” The painter was flushed and his high, bald forehead was shining. He was exalted with pleasure.

“I saw you two up here rejoicing, but I could not get away for talking to Lady Murray and Lord Mulgrave and the others. I signed eight hundred tickets. All the ministers and their ladies, all the foreign ambassadors, the bishops, all the beauties in high life, the officers on guard at the palace—everyone.”

“They all came,” remarked Hazlitt. “I dare say they thought you might be right again, since you were right about the Elgin Marbles.”

“And all the geniuses in town—first, last and always,” added Haydon, putting his hand on Keats’s shoulder. “What a time!” He looked about cautiously. “Picture up, tickets out, public on the *qui vive*, myself in good health, landlord suspicious—and no money. Six years on a painting and no money. Gave my note for fifty pounds and never signed ‘I promise to pay’ with such inspired fury before. Galloped back to the Hall where whispers were beginning to be heard. My mouth clenched five times fiercer than ever, my stamping walk, my thundering voice, put fire into all. Women began to sew, boys cleared away and bustled, fittings were tearing right and left, while I mounted the ladder, palette in hand, ordered the door to be locked and let fly at the foreground figures with a brush brimming with asphaltum and oil, and before dark had toned richly one-third of the picture.”

While Haydon talked he faced his gigantic painting. He would have turned his back on those he addressed rather than let it get out of his sight. “What do you think of it, gentlemen? The Christ’s head is not successful?”

“Success there would be almost impossible, and difficult to adjudge when it did exist.” Hazlitt turned his wilful-mouthed face to the picture.

Keats shook his head in dissent, while Haydon exclaimed:

“There is Rogers. I must hear what that veteran poet and friend of Wordsworth has to say. Come, Keats, and I shall introduce you to him.”

“I shall keep out of the bustle,” said Keats. “My strength has not entirely returned to me.” But Hazlitt went; Keats watched the pair plunge into the maelstrom. Old white-haired Rogers seemed to be making a sensation; at least people nearby were listening for what he should say. At last he spoke, and they turned back to their conversations. On faces turned his way, Keats saw smiles. In a few minutes Hazlitt was back.

“Rogers said to Haydon, ‘Mr. Haydon, your ass is the Saviour of your picture.’” Hazlitt had a saturnine smile.

“I think Haydon has been at too great pains to make his Christ different from other men in look.”

“Hush! here’s Mrs. Siddons. What dignity; she is a Juno, a Ceres. The room is a theatre to her.” It seemed to hang upon her words. At last a fellow of the artistic-bigoted-looking type asked her with a very delicate air:

“How do you like the Christ?”

After a moment, in a deep, loud, tragic tone the statuesque middle-aged woman spoke: “It is completely successful.” Then Haydon was presented to the great actress with all ceremony. It might have been a levee. When he returned again for a moment, he said:

“What a triumph! Mrs. Siddons says the paleness of my Christ gives it a supernatural look. Of course many will say as they always do when a great undertaking is accomplished, that it is ‘opportunity’ and ‘luck’. When it was undertaken, it was ‘insanity’. They first endeavour to hinder a man from all attempts beyond the ordinary course by asserting the impossibility of success, and when he proves them in error, they charitably attribute his success to anything but a combined action of his own understanding and will.”

“Yes, it is strange,” agreed Hazlitt. “The very people who make a man celebrated by talking of his name (which they cannot avoid) revenge themselves by attaching to it everything that can bring him down to their own level.”

Keats smiled sadly. Once he would have been surprised that these gifted beings should hope to exempt themselves from the common tribulations of mankind; while before that, long ago, there had been a boy who would have granted them that exemption.

And once he would have seen in this tawdry occasion the triumphant outer garments, coloured with magnificence, of Art.



## CHAPTER II

*My dearest Fanny,*

*I slept well last night and am no worse this morning for it. Day by day, if I am not deceived, I get more unrestrained use of my chest. The nearer a racer gets to the goal the more his anxiety becomes; so I, lingering upon the borders of health, feel my impatience increase. Perhaps on your account I have imagined my illness more serious than it is: how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms—the difference is amazing Love. Death must come at last; Man must die, as Shallow says; but before that is my fate I fain would try what more pleasures than you have given, so sweet a creature as you can give. Let me have another opportunity of years before me and I will not die without being remembered. Take care of yourself, dear, that we may both be well in the summer. I do not at all fatigue myself with writing, having merely to put a line or two here and there, a task which would worry a stout state of the body and mind, but which just suits me as I can do no more.*

While Keats was signing “J.K.” Fanny herself knocked at the door. “Now am I blessed by fortune. Here I was writing you in the melancholy frame which absence always induces in me—and you save me the trouble of being so.”

“Yesterday you did not give me a very minute account of your health. You must promise to tell me if you have any return of the palpitations.”

“But I am better. If I were a little less selfish and more enthusiastic I should run around and surprise you. I fear I am too prudent for a dying kind of lover. Yet there is a difference between going off in warm blood like Romeo, and making one’s exit like a frog in a frost.”

“Now do you see any alteration in *me*?” Fanny’s face was brighter. Keats gazed upon her ever-fresh charm with affectionate wonder.

“‘She was more blissful on to see, Than is the newe parjonette tree’.”

“Now come—can’t you see anything else strange about me?”

“Oh, you have a new dress, a new black dress—it’s splendid. But be sure to wear your duffel grey when you go out. I see you walking on the Heath as cold as a topsail in a north latitude—I wish you could hear me sometimes advise you to furl yourself and come indoors.”

Fanny laughed. He knew that her high spirit resented the least advice. “There’s the thrush again. Isn’t he sweet?”

“I can’t afford it—he’ll run me up a pretty bill for music—besides, he ought to know that I deal at Clementi’s.”

It was easy to believe in a bright Spring when sunshine and music were already there; even to talk hopefully of George and the family he might have. The very crying would keep their ears employed and their spirits from being melancholy. Only when Fanny had to go Keats became melancholy. Feeding upon sham victuals and sitting before the fire would completely annul him, he was sure. No maleficent witch would need a wax figure of him: he was melting in his proper person before the fire.

“Good-bye,” said Fanny brightly. “I wouldn’t trade my poet for Shakespeare!”

“Good-bye, my love, my dear, my beauty!” She closed the door before he could get near it and the cool air. Ah, what a glory to possess the love of such a girl, so tender, so understanding, so beautiful. Elation swept over him as exhaustingly as the most desperate emotions would have done in health. A pity for Fanny and her sacrifice to his monopolizing came over him. He began another note to her. Brown came in before he had finished, and said nothing. At last Keats asked, “What luck?”

“Mr. Abbey says his hands are tied in the matter. He cannot promise.”

“I suppose he means he will give me nothing until he is forced by danger of prosecution when I become a public charge. Never mind.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad as that, Keats. Pluck up a spirit. I have been thinking of plans for this summer.” Keats turned pale. “What do you say to coming with me to Scotland again? We should be very careful this time.”

“When do you expect to leave this house?” asked Keats with bitter calm.

“The sooner the better, I think. We need a change, to kick up our heels away from doctors and women and all blights of freedom.” Keats looked at him. Surely Brown could not believe his own words when he knew his friend could hardly walk. “I think it might be well to go a month earlier this year.”

“I dare say you have been at a good deal of extra expense this winter and can make use of the rent of this house. I want to pay you, Brown; and I can, too. But, if I do so, I shall be placed in an uncomfortable position. By the way, I have never written to George since the first start of my illness.”

“I’ll write to him,” said Brown hastily. “I’ll tell him how bad you’ve been but you can walk five miles now. You see, with no returns from our tragedy—”

Keats did not sleep much that night. Yet as the days passed he seemed to improve. Dr. Bree consented to his leaving off the drug he had taken for the palpitations. There was no inflammation remaining. He was advised to study geometry to calm his mind. At last came the day when he could go into the Brawne house. Then in April the lovers were able to stroll out together on the Heath. Their talk was of the summer, and what plans were feasible and what not. To Keats it looked as though he had the same choice of poisons as last year—South America, or surgeon to an Indiaman.

“Why, you can’t think of either,” said Fanny. “It is absurd.”

“Oh, but I shall be fit in time.” As Keats seemed to contemplate that time with grim pleasure, annoyance nearly drove Fanny to tears. Yet when she suggested going to Scotland in the smack with Brown and returning at once in the same way, he could not think of even that absence.

“Oh, I wish you could live with us. I know Mother would consent if—” She knew that he could not bear now to live at the Bentleys’.

When he went home he knew he had forgotten to ask Fanny of something disturbing about Brown. Young Sam had spoken about old Mr. Dilke and Brown’s visit to Chichester a month that autumn. Or was it about Mr. Dilke’s death? At any rate it was something derogatory to Brown, and he

would have to seek some explanation, for he felt deeply any suspicion at all likely to cast the least attaint upon the disinterested character of Brown.

Hunt turned up now, and suggested that Keats live near him, at Kentish Town, where he would be with friends who could keep an eye on him. Keats smiled to think how all his efforts to escape being under Hunt's wing were to come to this. He would go as far as Gravesend with Brown in the smack. But first he went to see his sister at Walthamstow.

Fanny was overjoyed; yet soon downcast, as seemed to have become habitual with her, over Mrs. Abbey's scolding all the time as though they were paupers. He started a rant to get her laughing and, leaving, twisted the hem of his coat as though it were a little girl's dress he was wearing.

When Brown had packed, Keats moved his belongings to Wentworth Place. They went to the city, and, as the smack was not ready to weigh anchor at evening they lodged at Taylor's and set off on Sunday morning. It was a pleasant voyage, but all too short. They parted over narrow Flemish glasses of claret, and as the lively beads burst and flitted, Keats rendered tribute in his old vein:

"Ah, claret. The ethereal part mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments like a bully in a bad-house looking for his trull and hurrying from door to door bouncing against the wainscot, but rather walking like Aladdin about his own enchanted palace so gently you do not feel his step."

"Who says you are not a poet!" said Brown admiringly, pledging: "'The unanimity of thy friends to prosper in long-animity of high fortune.'"

"If you wish me to recover, flatter me with the hope of happiness when I shall be well; I am so low now that one can give me hope by flattery."

Brown looked reproachful at that, but they parted good friends.

Back in his new lodgings, Keats found a vase of flowers on his table, from Fanny Brawne. In the outdoors, he had partaken of the rich, full life and colour of the earth and its creatures, in a quiet stimulation and a hope, not as in former years in fierce unrest and aching longing. He would stay away from Fanny as much as he could bear to. Hunt came frequently, and was



printing some of the poems omitted from the book. The signature was to be “Caviar”. Keats was occupied, when he could work, with proofs. The hours of struggling for sleep were long, and sleep itself short. And the dreams he had when he suffered himself to sleep! Tom’s bright, blanched face, and his mother’s, confused, in Hell, with Fanny’s.

He struggled through streets to Fanny’s house one afternoon, feeling among these jostlings like a china Lilliputian likely to smash to bits. Could he stay amid them he might become strong, or die on the kerb. The Brawnes received him soothingly, but it was cool indoors after walking, and his throat began to tighten. Fanny accompanied him part way back.

“You mustn’t think I am worse than I am,” said Keats outside in the sunlight, “or that I was annoyed with you. I assure there was nothing but regret at being obliged to forgo an embrace.”

Fanny started, then laughed.

“You laugh! And it has been many times the highest gust of my life. When I sit on opposite sides of the room from you I could cry for your help as though you were as far as the Moon. And that is all it is—crying for the moon. Even now I can scarcely bear the parting before us. When shall I see you again? What hunger I have when I am away from you, just to see your face and form. I am greedy of you.”

“Keats! John! Don’t you know you give *me* pain when you talk so?”

“But you should feel pain. It is not right that you should escape it. Unless you do not love me. There, we will not talk about it. Let us look at the beauty of the day, and fancy, like Hunt, that that is the only part of the world we need to see to know the beauty of the world.”

“I love you.”

Keats choked. He could say nothing, until they parted in the street. “I give you a great deal of pain, but I shall not do so again.”

Hunt kept calling; the Dilkes would give him no peace; soon they would be going to the country. When he arrived Dilke began his old round of political justice and Charlie at school; and Mrs. Dilke seemed to have had some dubious conversation with Mrs. Brawne. She began by hinting that

Fanny had many admirers and could not be expected to know her own mind, and hinted that his own health was too uncertain to permit of thinking of an engagement. Keats at once instructed Mr. and Mrs. Dilke to keep their tongues from Miss Brawne in his presence.

He had behaved badly, he confessed to himself on the coach. What could be expected from his health, spirits and the disadvantageous ground he stood on in society? He might go and accommodate matters with them. But wherefore? They were more happy and comfortable than himself, why trouble about it? In the course of a year or so, at this rate, he would know very few people. If only he could have stood independently, as his nature was. But no, here he was *chevaux de frise*‘d with benefits, kindnesses done by all manner of people. He would have to jump over or break down.

Day passed after day. Fanny was going to town, seeing people who were nothing to him, to whom—worse—he was nothing; perhaps even going to parties and dances again. He could no longer keep silent, he must do anything to entice her to give her whole heart, not to think of anything but him, not to live as though he were not existing. (Had he any right to think, much less say, she forgot him? Perhaps she thought of him all day.) Yet she could not—had not her mother called and said she had gone to town alone? While he was haunted with a vision of her for days at a time, of Fanny in her shepherdess dress. How his senses ached at it! How his heart had sworn devotion to it! How his eyes had filled with tears at her loveliness!

He would make her confess either that she was his, or that her heart was too much fastened upon the world. He must be near, or nothing. He should have gone to Scotland. To stay here, a mile away, was beyond endurance.

“Why, how selfish, how cruel not to let me enjoy my youth, to wish me to be unhappy!” Fanny exclaimed through the darkness of his fantasy.

She would have to be unhappy if she loved him. If she could really enjoy herself at a party, if she could smile in people’s faces, and wish them to admire her, *now*, knowing what he was going through, she never had and never would love him. She should know what pain and misery were in the world, and be ready to die upon the rack if he asked it.

In the morning his own phrases stuck in his mind until he had to write them.

*I wish you seriously to look over my letters kind and unkind, he concluded this one, and consider whether the person who wrote them can be able to endure much longer the agonies and uncertainties which you are so peculiarly made to create. My recovery of bodily health will be of no benefit to me if you are not mine when I am well. For God's sake save me—or tell me my passion is of too awful a nature for you.*

He was trembling from head to foot when he had finished. Never had he written in such a transport. This must shake her from her placidity, when he was burning up from wanting her. But reading it over he was stung to contrition. He added a postscript:

*No—my sweet Fanny—I am wrong—I do not wish you to be unhappy—yet I do, I must while there is so sweet a Beauty—my loveliest, my darling! good-bye! I kiss you—O! the torments!*

“Good-bye!” He could have killed himself very fittingly after such a letter. It was his disease. Life burned in him with a consuming flame, where there was nothing to consume. The world was ashes in his mouth, its people a shameful shadow-parade. He would die.

That day there was a letter from his sister. It had come to an open quarrel between her and the Abbeys. If he did not come at once and try to adjust matters she was going to leave that house. The picture of her, his sister, not seventeen, on the street, homeless, rent his heart as he shaved and dressed for the trip. He thought of his mother, of his grandmother. So this was the climax of all the years of their orphanage. Tom dead; George reduced to want and peril; himself dying; and now Fanny outcast.

As he walked down the street in the cold foggy air, he began to cough. Blood on his handkerchief. He spat blood. Back in his rooms he dragged through bitter hours. His sister would think herself abandoned. He had not gone to visit her as frequently as he should have done. But he himself was abandoned. Where were the friends of two years ago? Where was Brown? Where was Fanny Brawne? Wraiths that had never been, in this room where alone he had to face the bitterness, the agony of human life, a

specious heaven changed to real Hell. He would not call one of his doctors; he ate no dinner. When the afternoon seemed interminable, he crawled out of the house and made his way like a wounded dog to its master, to his old master, Hunt.

There was a company of people for tea. Hunt himself was ill of bilious fever, but talked almost as much as ever; his nephew was present and listened gravely to all his words in silence. Mrs. Gisbourne, a friend of Shelley, was a pleasant woman, if she would not adopt so soothing a manner. She wanted to talk of music, of Italian and English singing. Farinelli, she said, had the art of taking breath imperceptibly, while he continued to hold one single note alternately swelling and diminishing the power of his voice. Keats shuddered. "That must be somewhat painful to the hearer, as when a diver descends into the hidden depths of the sea you feel an apprehension lest he may never rise again." It was really like—though the good woman would not know what he meant—a hæmorrhage from the lungs strangling a man.

He could not tear himself away, and it was near dusk when he reached his rooms. Before he could light a candle it was upon him—a small hæmorrhage this time, perhaps. It seemed bearable at least, while he told himself it would not really choke him. He crawled out to the staircase, waited until someone appeared and told them to get Dr. George Darling, Taylor's physician.

When the doctor came, he seemed anxious, and stayed for some time, talking of Hazlitt and Clare and Wilkie and Haydon, patients of his. When he returned in the morning, he would go to Hunt. Then Hunt and his bilious fever appeared, and insisted that Keats move over to Mortimer Terrace at once. Keats quoted Shakespeare to him in the old way: "I am ill; but your being by me cannot amend me; Society is no comfort to one not sociable. I am not very sick, since I can reason of it: pray you, trust me here; I'll rob none but myself, and let me die, stealing so poorly."

"You cannot remain alone, if I come here myself to live." Hunt's long olive-complexioned face had none of the vivacity of that day with Clarke in Caen Wood. His voice sounded eerily hollow from the pillow. But Keats roused

and they went out beneath the trees. It was not yet noon, but the day was warm. He would not let Hunt call a hansom.

“Then take a better hold of my arm. You’re not putting any weight on it.”

“I am not Stephano, but a cramp.” He looked up and saw once more with astonishment how tall Hunt was. “Let us go on.”

“This reminds me of my schooldays. A fellow called Barnes and I learned Italian together, and anybody not within the pale of the enthusiastic might have thought us mad as we went shouting the beginning of Metastasio’s *Ode to Venus* as loud as we could bawl, over the Hornsey fields.” Hunt chanted it now:

“Scendi propizia  
Col tuo splendore,  
O bella Venere,  
Madre d’Amore;  
Madre d’Amore,  
Che sola sei  
Piacere degli uomini  
E degli dei.”

“A pleasant boyish diversion,” said Keats coldly. (A pretty piece of paganism, Wordsworth had called his *Ode to Pan*.) But Hunt was not letting him off; did he not know the other had learnt Italian?

“Descend propitious with thy brightness, O beautiful Venus, Mother of Love; Mother of Love, who alone art the pleasure of men and gods.”

“You are a little better situated here, but nothing like Hampstead. You are quite city, and even your trees show it.”

He became aware, as they neared Mortimer Terrace, that there was a plenty of people, shabby hucksters howling catalogues of saleables, nursemaids and children, ballad-singers, street music and street cacophony. The only attraction of the place was that the Terrace gave a view of Hampstead a mile away, and it was easier to imagine what Fanny Brawne was doing.

Mrs. Hunt was kindly, and the children seemed to have been instructed to regard Mr. Keats as an uncle and a very nice man. They brought their toys to him and told him of all their doings. Ten-year-old Thornton talked very reasonably. Well, Hunt and his wife had had some reward at least for their feckless—not ungenerous—way of life.

Dinner over, Hunt commenced making up the *Indicator* for the following week. He had Keats propped on a stool and chair and reading back numbers. Hunt began reading an essay he entitled, “A Now, Descriptive of a Hot Day”. It was a pleasant paper, and to fill out the miscellany Keats mentioned some of the manifestations of a hot day which *he* had observed: the apothecary’s apprentice thinking with a bitterness beyond aloes of the pond he used to bathe in at school; boys following fish into their cool corners of ponds and rivers and saying millions of “MY eyes!” at “tittlebats”. Never would such days return, once you had seen them with the simple pleasure removal gave them; but that was not a thing to put into so pleasant an essay. Never again would one enjoy thoughtlessly the mere being and moving, until one learned to dwell upon shapes and colours with the obsessed longing of a man threatened with banishment from them.

“I shall print your sonnet of ‘As Hermes once took to his fathers light’ in this number,” remarked Hunt, not as though he considered that he was doing its author an honour, but that he was pleasing him.

“Be sure the signature is ‘Caviar’.” Keats remembered that dream—floating about the whirling atmosphere with his lips joined to the lips of a beautiful figure, above and upon flowery tree-tops that sprang up in the cold darkness of the “second circle of sad Hell . . . where lovers need not tell their sorrows.” And he remembered a spring day and a walk to Elm Cottage, and across the Heath with Fanny, and a long talk of the future. No more. No more. The very word, he thought, was like a knell tolling him back to his lone self. “The second circle of sad Hell.” Whatever circle it might be, he was here entering upon a new one in this oblivious and rattle-headed household, where lovers assuredly need not tell their sorrows. He heard two of the Hunt children quarrelling violently outside the window. Hunt seemed not to hear them as he wrote with intent brow. Mrs. Hunt came in and smiled. Would he mind her cutting a silhouette of him as he sat

there? His feet just reached across the stool placed against his chair. When she went out for a moment to quiet the children Hunt told him Mrs. Hunt was considered very clever at cutting silhouettes. The outcome gave him a classic but large-headed profile.

“This will be a keepsake for your sweetheart, if you ever have one. But I know,” said Mrs. Hunt, “that you will be much too sensible ever to venture into matrimony at your age.”

Her words weighed upon him. It was not enough to be unable to confide in these people, they must talk among themselves of his doings, and make his most sacred feelings the subject of gossip. No doubt the Dilkes, that insufferably meddlesome pair, had been talking. No doubt all his friends knew of this attachment, and blamed his bad health upon it. It was insufferable to feel that they felt their friendship gave them this right, that there was no freeing oneself from them and their benefits—insufferable. He would not allow Fanny to come to Hunt’s if he died before he could walk to Hampstead.

Though he stayed in the same room with Hunt as much as possible, reading and talking, and taking two short walks during the day up and down the Terrace, which was pestered with noises and ballad-singers, he could not keep such thoughts from returning. Was ever such a cage? Every thought and every dream led to Fanny, to images of Fanny in every gesture and expression of hers. He was a fever of himself.

She wrote him calmly, frankly, of other interests. Was she listening to the talk of his friends, did she know the real opinion of the doctors and how they were thinking of sending him to Italy? There was a letter from Brown dated Dunvegan Castle, Island of Skye—perfectly cheerful. Brown too would have god-blessed him from Fanny long ago, and told him she was worthless, if he had dared, while ready to make an attempt upon her himself. Faugh! What was the world but a fever!

The book had come out; and at last, but not before the publication day, Monday, July third, he held a copy in his hands. Davenport, Brown’s friend, brought the package from Hampstead. A fine noncommittal dignified title-page; but what was this? A page set aside for an ADVERTISEMENT (with

silly headstone lines beneath it). Keats's blood ran cold when he read the words the villains had printed:

If any apology is thought necessary for the appearance of the unfinished poem of *HYPERION*, the publishers beg to state that they alone are responsible, as it was printed at their particular request, and contrary to the wishes of the author. The poem was intended to be of equal length with *ENDYMION*, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding.

Davenport looked at him with awe as he began to curse. Hunt looked up from the copy he had been smilingly examining. "What, a fly in the ointment already? It looks fairly enough printed to my eyes."

"Read this: 'Discouraged the author from proceeding.' They little guess after what I have told them, it seems, the contempt I hold the public in. Discouraged! Ill, beset with trouble, if you like—" In his agitation he had said too much, and he could not tell even his friends that *Hyperion* had been a huge and wrong attempt, and hope to be understood. They could not even catch the purport of the poem as it stood. He sat down and drew heavy lines through this ADVERTISEMENT. Above it he wrote: "This is none of my doing—I was ill at the time." And below: "This is a lie." The title-page he inscribed to Davenport.

Hunt was all enthusiasm over the book. He dedicated his own latest, a translation of Tasso, to Keats as to one "equally pestered by the critical and admired by the poetical". Yet in a day or two Keats could have forgotten his book. His health improved very little, though his walks on the Terrace increased to two half-hour periods. Hampstead stood on his horizon like a mirage of beatification upon the sight of Christian the Pilgrim. Dr. Darling proposed calling in a Dr. William Lambe, another Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and a good chap, a bit of a faddist, a pronounced vegetarian. Nevertheless an authority; yet still not one to press people who could not afford to pay.



There was an expectant hush in the house the morning Dr. Lambe called. The children had been sent out, and Hunt retired on meeting the doctors, leaving Keats alone with them. The young man's heart began to beat painfully, chokingly. Meeting any new person now was almost a shock, but a strange doctor whose dicta might affect one's whole future called up all one's reserves. As the examination proceeded he became breathless and feared a return of the palpitations. At last questions and all were over; Dr. Lambe cleared his throat and pronounced:

"You have a stout fight before you, my boy. You must leave England. You will find improvement in Italy and probably return as well as ever. You understand I am talking candidly with you because Dr. Darling has told me that you understand something of medical practice yourself."

"Then it is consumption?"

The doctor's eyes, which seemed small, closed behind his spectacles and he spoke with them closed. Couldn't he meet a fellow's gaze? He would listen to no argument against the voyage. The coast of England, Hants, Devonshire, west or south, would not do. He was not to allow any demands of work or friends to keep him from getting to Italy before the winter, as such a course might lead to fatal consequences.

When the doctors had gone, Hunt, after conferring a moment or two with them outside, came in, a book in his hand.

"The professional fellows seem to have me ticketed and labelled, Hunt."

"Not among the acquiescent, I hope. I trust you will be able to turn a neuk and fool 'em, though they may be right about Italy. I say, I have been greatly amused in reading Milton's account of his own apprenticeship. . . ."

"He never permitted himself to suffer," said Keats. "He hid in the grandeur of his conception of life; he-reared a great palace of art. And one song of Shakespeare, or the jokes of his gravediggers, move one to the marrow of one's being. One cannot but admire so exalted a genius as Milton."

"But there is a coldness and lack of intimacy in Milton."

Keats smiled. Afterward he looked back with astonishment to his talking thus calmly, even though it had been a concern upon which had turned his

whole poetic life, when he had heard the death sentence of his hopes and Fanny. That night he found himself thinking back over the years since he had met her. She had written complaining of him, saying that if it would please him she would not go to the Dilkes'. A great anger against the girl rose in him. Or was it against her? If he could persuade himself to any faith in her, could he not find peace? Could he ever forget the way she had flirted with Brown? She would have left off, if her heart could have felt one half of one pang his did. Brown was a good sort of man and did not know he was doing his friend to death by inches. Now, as the long hours of the night passed, every one of those other hours were wounds in the side. Though Brown had done him many services, though his love and friendship were known (he would tell Fanny, not admitting his own doubts of them), and though at that moment he would have been without pence had it not been for Brown's assistance, he would never speak to him or see him until they were both old men. She would think this madness. Let her. He *would* resent his heart being made a football.

She did not care! Why should she unless she loved him as he loved her? She was a girl of course, and unawakened. She could say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years. She could not understand his desire, and how the air he breathed in a room empty of her was unhealthy. She did not brood over one idea as he had. How could he explain it to her, cold virgin who never would know love until she had suffered and perhaps been cast aside, as he was now. Any party, anything to fill up the day, was enough for her. The sun rose and set, the day passed, and she followed the bent of her inclination, with no conception of the quantity of miserable feeling that passed through him in a day. He whispered into the black of the night.

"I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in: do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. You may have altered—if you have not, if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you, I do not want to live. I cannot live without you, and not only you, but chaste you; virtuous you. Be serious! Love is not a plaything." And he would write those words to her, too.

Mrs. Brawne came next day. She did not seem to wonder why he and Fanny did not see one another, or why he had not asked Fanny to come to Hunt's. But if she had loved him she might have come with her mother! Grimly he handed over the letter.

Hunt had company enough, heaven knew, and all of that hateful chattering literary musical set which talked of the grandest creations of the human spirit as though they were sweetmeats. But against these could be balanced his own friend, Severn, who told him he was beginning to look like Tom, and advised him to look to himself. He had been delighted in the new book, with reading over "lovely Isabel—poor simple Isabel". Hunt himself, however, never wearied of kindness. One afternoon he had an open carriage at the door.

"I thought you might have been wishing to go to Hampstead and see the old lodging-places. It is a good way of taking the air on a warm day."

Keats turned pale, but accepted at once. The coachman drove slowly, borne before them against the sky. Hunt was on one of his monologues, apropos of good fishing weather. The brethren of the angle evaded the fact that fishing was an amusement obtained at another being's expense. . . .

They were passing Wentworth Place, and Keats was giving all his attention to the house, the trees, the garden, the plum-tree. But no Fanny was in sight. It was a surprising shock, for he had not been conscious of hoping to see her. A mean and ambushed disappointment.

"There's your home and Brown's. Would you care to stop and see your old neighbour Mrs. Brawne? Coachman!"

"No! Drive on. I would like to stop in Well Walk, if you please."

When they came opposite the Bentley house, they dismounted from the carriage, which Hunt ordered to come for them in twenty minutes, and sat upon a bench under the trees, as the brothers had done many a time before. Keats had not a word to say; a word could not have been torn from him on any subject of small-talk, for his whole being was balancing between the dark past and the dizzy gulf of the future, and the present was a far speck

beneath. *Lachrymae rerum*. It was sad that he could not speak to Hunt, who liked tags.

Hunt was talking hurriedly about festive aldermen toasting two royal brothers as “Adelphi” and another, less literate, proposing that, while they were on the subject of streets, they drink to Finsbury Square!

Good old Hunt, cheery companion, wise man still! He knew or suspected, or would understand. Suddenly Keats turned to him, eyes swimming with tears.

“I am dying of a broken heart, Hunt!”

For a full minute Hunt was silent. Then he said gently:

“I know your feelings are excited by sitting here before the house where your brothers lived. Your troubles have been hard to bear, I know, for extreme sensibility struggles in you with a great understanding. But some day they will be a glory, not to be lamented. You must not be crushed by them, Keats, though they are heavy, or you would not have spoken out, for I know your spirit is lofty to a degree of pride. And as such a feeling is temporary I will consider that I have not heard you speak in that way.”

“Your cursed optimism,” muttered Keats into his handkerchief; but he let himself be relieved by his outburst and by the even flow of Hunt’s condolence.

“The elements of existence are like the air which we breathe, and which would otherwise crush us—so nicely proportioned to one another within and around them, that we are unconsciously sustained by them, not thoughtfully oppressed. And so I know that you will find a compensation as life goes on.”

“I know it. *You* are right, you will not be deceived. Oh, I could weep with rage at myself and my own despondency. Do you think I am myself?”



## CHAPTER III

He was strong enough to walk over to Wentworth Place, but he dared not; he was not strong enough to bear flashes of light and return to gloom again. While he brooded over the different aspects of countenance of his dearest one, her actions and dress, saw her meet him at the window, it was strange to know that she was feeling bitterly towards him for that mad letter. She complained that he ill-treated her in word, thought and deed. He was sorry; the words had been wrung from his agony—and then there were her strange cold letters to read over.

His friends, she said, laughed at her. He would find out who they were, and they never would be his friends again. If they would spy and be tattlers and inquisitors of a secret he would rather die than share with anybody's confidence, he could not wish them well or care to see them again. He writhed to think of their loves being put under the microscope of a coterie, and wrote proud words to Fanny: "If I am the Theme, I will not be the Friend of Idle Gossips." But she should not let his name pass between her and these laughers. Let her only love him and life and health would be heaven in that knowledge, and death itself to be borne.

She complained of his hurting her, of the concessions he had forced from her and the hurt to her pride. God knew he had little pride in his heart when thinking of her. Her prim ways accused him plainly of being a vulgar fellow—a drowning man! Yet even after reading his letter she begged him to come to see her. She had talked in a doubting way of his apparent wish to leave her. If he would have any choice in that! God help them both!

Everything else but the image of her was chaff in his mouth. Never would he taste one minute's content until it pleased chance to let him live with her for good. Yet to be happy required a luckier star than his. The last two years tasted like brass upon his palate. He was sickened with the brute world she was smiling with. Wherever he might be next winter, in Italy or nowhere, Brown would be living near her with his indecencies. In Rome, he would see her as in a magic glass, going to and from town at all hours. . . . He was glad there was such a thing as the grave, sure that he would never have

any rest till he got there. If he could not be in her arms full of faith, let a thunderbolt strike him.

These people who called themselves friends would not let him be; Haslam and Severn called and he received them almost rudely, leaving dulcet discourse to Hunt. Dilke called, and began some long story he had from his father. Brown, last autumn, had barely called there; but, they had learned, heaven knew how, had gone to Ireland for the whole three weeks and had an affair with some servant girl there. Lies, of course! But he did not spring at Dilke's throat as he might have done a year ago. If people did not do evil they spoke evil, and if they chose to slander one another, it was no affair of his. But then—what of those four letters of his to different addresses, which Brown claimed to have received in a bunch? Dilke was judicious about the book: "I am anxious to see what success your new poems have. I promise myself the ascendancy in any case. If the public cry you up as a great poet, I will henceforth be their humble servant; if not, then the devil take the public."

Words, words, words.

There was no letter. He inquired of the unamiable servant-maid and received her "No, sirs" until he hated her. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Mrs. Hunt too had lost patience with her, and she went that day. Saturday, young Thornton handed Mr. Keats a letter with the seal broken. Mrs. Hunt began to question Thornton. The maid, he told her, had given it him before she left, and impressed upon him not to show it until now. Mrs. Hunt scolded Thornton, and abused the servant. Keats went wearily to his room.

His own room! He had no room, no friends, nothing, and no means of winning anything. The son of man had not where to lay his head. It was too much, the last straw. Fanny's letter, for which he had been waiting for days, wondering, thinking, praying, giving her up for lost. . . . It was too much. The world was too brutal for him. Never would he have any confidence of human nature infused into his heart again. He wept as he had wept for rage only, as a boy. Would he were in his grave!

Hunt came up the stairs and began his old practised soothing. Keats would not lift his head from the pillow or say anything but that he would leave

that house. Hunt tried to reason: had there been anything of importance in the note which it would do him an injury to have made public? Of course not. Then why . . . ? Keats rose, and wiped his streaming face, found his hat, pressed his friend's hand. "Good-bye, Hunt!" The tall man stood at the door looking after him.

Blindly he stumbled towards Hampstead. Vendors stuck their trays under his nose, jarveys cursed him when he crossed the streets under their horses' shafts; loose women—there seemed scores—jeered. At last he found himself at Wentworth Place.

Mrs. Brawne must have seen him coming, for she hurried out of the house and into John Street to help him; and Fanny met them at the door. She was pale and anxious, and looked at him as though he were an apparition; but when she learned that he was not taken ill, was delightfully pleased. Mrs. Brawne bustled about, saw to his comfort, had fresh tea prepared. Then, almost feeling himself, Keats told his story. He intended, he said, to go to the Bentleys' that night and take his old room.

"I shall not let you leave this house," said Mrs. Brawne decidedly. "Fanny and I shall take care of you now until you leave England."

Keats was thunderstruck; but Fanny looked at her mother with an unsurprised approbation. Again his eyes filled with tears.

"I'm become such a burden to my friends," he murmured. Fanny rose and came to him, with gay indignation chided him. Mrs. Brawne rose.

"You must accept my wishes as orders. I shall not permit you to excite or tire yourself. As soon as you have had your tea you must retire and get a good rest." She left to prepare his room herself.

Serenely and joyfully Fanny was talking to him. Keats scarcely replied; he was bewildered to think how this good fortune had come about. It could not be true that he was to be near Fanny—under the same roof with her all the time. After tea he was led to his new room. It seemed his weary head had no sooner touched the pillow than he discovered morning sunlight.

What was this strange feeling? Some insoluble and worrying problem had been taken from him, and he was free to rest. He dozed again, then came



broad awake. Fanny's house! Sunlight on walls and floor, the window open, and birds singing on Hampstead Heath. Then, O magic, the nightingale, the same nightingale, surely, in that plum-tree in the garden. His mind made no effort to recapture his own lines, but he dwelt in the emotion from which had sprung that draught of song to stead the opiate of sorrow. He would relive his best days here. He would love Fanny as never before. She loved him! Her mother was a fine woman, and would be his mother.

He could have lain half the morning basking in his good fortune, but he had to make sure of it. It was still early when he came down; no one was about but Fanny. She explained that it was Sunday morning and the others were not risen yet. It was a marvel, no less, to sit alone at breakfast with Fanny. He forgot the doctor's injunction and ate a soft-boiled egg as though he had been well. From Fanny's calm when he told her he suspected that she had not forgotten, but had her own ideas regarding diet for consumptives.

When Mrs. Brawne and Margaret and Sam had gone to church, and Fanny and Keats were talking at intervals while she read Milton to him, Hunt came. He seemed relieved to learn that Keats was not worse, and made no mention of searching for him elsewhere. For some reason Keats did not mind.

"You didn't see the *New Times* review of your book, did you? Charles Lamb wrote it. It is not signed, but, *sub rosa*, I know it was he."

"No. What does he say of *Hyperion*?"

"I don't think he mentions it. But hear this, the gem of the review; it will be nettles and wormwood to our foe the *Blackwood* gang: 'We recur again, with a warmer gratitude, to the story of Isabella and the pot of basil, and those never-cloying stanzas which we have cited, and which we think should disarm criticism, if it be not in its nature cruel; if it would not deny to honey its sweetness, nor to roses redness, nor light to the stars in heaven; if it would not bay the moon out of the skies rather than acknowledge she is fair.'"

"That is splendid," said Fanny. "Oh, I am sure it is going to have a good reception."

“Let me see it. Good old Lamb!”

“I am glad to see you so well this morning, Keats. When Mrs. Hunt asked to be remembered, she told me to be sure to tell you how welcome you will be at any time you may come to us.” With the *New Times*, Hunt left the *Monthly Review*, and the last two numbers of his own *Indicator* with two miscellanies on the *Lamia* book, and a letter, from which Keats pulled the seal. “From Italy!” Fanny picked out the *Indicator* to read.

The letter was from Shelley, who said that Mrs. Gisbourne had given him an account of his consumptive appearance.

“Now you have a chance to judge of Mr. Hunt speaking, and Mr. Hunt writing, Fanny.”

“He’s a kind man,” remarked the girl diffidently.

“I was not angry at him; but I would not return to his house. When I brood upon a moment’s annoyance it becomes in time a theme for Sophocles. But this was your letter I might have lost.” Even while he spoke he felt that the last few weeks were no more than a nightmare in his present well-being. “This letter is from Mr. Shelley who lives in Italy. He tells me that I shall enjoy myself at Pisa, and sends me his and his wife’s invitation.”

Fanny turned pale. “How kind of them! Shall you accept it?”

“If I muster up enough courage to go. It is like marching up to a battery. He talks of my poetry. (He writes verses too.) And gives me directions how to proceed in that path. For example, he advises me to avoid system and mannerism. As for himself, he is the victim of any current system for perfecting the world and its inhabitants. Hunt calls him an angelic character. Poor Shelley. He is too magnanimous. I think I shall advise him to curb that quality in himself, and be more of an artist, and load every rift with ore. I should like to hear Dilke and Shelley. They would agree so well about arguing that it would not matter what difference they chose to argue of. The truth about life is hard enough to express by being true to it, but when you try to fetter it in a system of your own, it flies away.”

“Why, he must be a silly man,” said Fanny. “But you will see him, and perhaps find diversion in an argument with him! Now, dear, I think you had

best lie down until dinner-time. Too much talk and discussion will harm you.”

Fanny was an angel. Now when he thought of the dark future, he had only to call or to walk into another room, and Fanny was there. He knew her every movement from morning to night. She never thought, it seemed, of going to town alone. She was willing at all times to sit with him, talk or read or sing to him, while he took in “draughts of life from the gold fount of kind and passionate looks”, as he had written. Wonder and sadness came over him only when he tried to think why such happiness could not last but had to pass away tracelessly in an eternal parting.

Fanny Keats had to be written to as many times as possible, poor girl. No doubt some of his friends would consent to go and cheer her up, if he could bring himself to ask them. In a few days she wrote and told him that Mr. Abbey had consented to her coming to see him before he left for Italy. He would not have called upon her now, perhaps, but avoided the parting.

He wrote to Brown, asking for his company to Italy; perhaps Brown would get word in time to come from Scotland if he cared to. A few days later he wrote again. He ought to be off at the end of that week; August was coming to a close, and the cold winds blew towards evening. Or they were cold to him. Sickness was humiliating in the way it twisted men’s minds, and whisked their pride from them like straw. Not one of the friends he had given up—Hunt, because of his mawkishness, Haydon because he would not pay his debts, Bailey because he had jilted Mariane Reynolds, Dilke because of his argumentativeness and his gossip, Brown, though Brown did not know it, because he had flirted with Fanny Brawne—not one of them but would have been welcome companions to him now could he but have had the certainty of staying in England with health, and hope of Fanny. And Fate with grim nudges, like parents to quarrelling urchins, forced him to go to them and “make up”. Yet, when in health, how many equivocal actions of his friends he had passed over. There was Haslam who had torn one of George’s American letters to a hundred bits. But Haslam had owed George money. Haslam now could write for him to George. The more he thought of the money that should be his now for his own needs, the more difficult it became to write to George.

Haydon came one afternoon when he was resting on the bed and reading after a doze, and told him that he should buckle himself together and show only his spikes to his enemies, like the porcupine. If he had had nothing more than his enemies to worry him, Keats returned, he should have been happy. As it was, he thought he had answered them.

“Then you may devoutly thank your Maker, and set about getting well. I look to the day when you will undertake a task of magnitude worthy your gift.”

“If I cared for reputation as I have done, I would gladly take the trouble to unwrite my earlier work—but not for any reason appreciable by those who spit upon it. The brute stupid world has had its due of me, and if it will let me die in peace I shall ask no more of it.”

“But what of the next world? I would have you with Shakespeare, Milton, if you believe.”

“I would gladly believe in immortality, Haydon, for many reasons. When I see how man from earliest ages has rebelled against his fated death and dreamt of another life, I cannot but hope that his wish really makes his dream true. I cry to dream too.”

“But surely you do not mean to say you are an agnostic?” Haydon got up to pace the floor for his harangue. Keats raised his hand.

“Don’t speak of it. I am unwell. A person I am not used to coming into the room chokes me.”

Haydon was not to be deterred, however, and when he had done Keats muttered that if he did not soon get better he would take his own method of egress from the world. Haydon went away shaking his head sadly.

When Fanny called him down to tea, seeing him ruffled, she told how Sam had been laughing at the comic rough man who called. When Margaret and her brother had been sent away, the lovers talked with Mrs. Brawne until dusk, and when the mother went they talked together: plans, questions, wonderings, despairing love. For many days these things were not to be kept out of their communings; but now they shared them with Mrs. Brawne.

She was to live with them when they were married—when he would have returned well from Italy.

It came about that they discussed immediate marriage. Fanny made light of the sacrifice this would mean to her, and Mrs. Brawne, without consenting outright, appeared to put nothing in the way. But Keats, after an unimaginable hour, refused to ask that of her. It might mean life to him, but it meant a chance of causing her to know death, as he had known it with Tom. He would present that cup to no one, above all not to one he loved.

They came to silence; silence was best, in the candlelight before the fire lit for the chill hours. The ineffable silence of lovers.

Notes to and from Taylor increased. The good publisher, who had been in the country when the *Poems* was printed, was doing all in his power to expedite matters for an early departure. A vessel was making the voyage to Naples about the middle of September, a small brig, the *Maria Crowther*. Keats was to come to his house a few days before embarking, so as to be in readiness for a fair wind. Dr. Lamb was giving him a letter of introduction to a Dr. Clarke in Rome. But who was to go with him, or was he to go alone?

One night Haslam dropped in for a few minutes, and learning that no companion had been secured yet, cast about for a suitable one. There was Severn. It would be a good thing for him to study and paint in Rome. Perhaps he could win the Royal Academy's travelling scholarship, and that would give him another year there. Hadn't he won its gold medal? It was an inspiration, and he went directly to Severn, who consented. The time was very short.

It could not be too short, Keats felt. All his happiness and tranquillity with Fanny had vanished, in the knowledge of the imminence of parting. He did not know whether he dreamed or woke. Yet all the time one part of his mind was busy with preparations, his collecting of his few possessions, even with anticipation. Fanny was to keep for him that portrait of Shakespeare he had found in the passage of the lodging in the Isle of Wight, with the tassels Georgiana had knitted for it in days never to return. His Spenser, his Dante

had been given, and a specially bound copy of his new poems, inscribed for her and for no prying eyes: "From J. K. to F. B."

The day came. Fanny stayed in her room. Mrs. Brawne bustled at last-minute preparations; her eyes were red, though she shed no tear. She would have busied herself so for as many hours as he might have. All too soon he had his meagre luggage together, and the cab with Severn waited at the gate. Fanny came downstairs. Mrs. Brawne kissed him, and he took Margaret and Sam by the hand. They three vanished. Fanny's eyes like stars.

"Always remember that I am loving you, Keats." Her voice seemed loud and shrill. Where were the brave smiles with which she had parted from him at other times?

"This once, if I die," he muttered, and kissed her and held her, aching as though his heart would burst. "Good-bye."

"Don't go," she said. Then she waved her handkerchief.

"Good-bye, Fanny!"



## CHAPTER IV

Severn expelled his breath in a whistle upon the silence which carried them. "Whew! Rome and art ahead, but what a struggle! My father seemed to take my resolve to go to Italy as he did my purpose to become a painter—as an insult to himself. When I was all packed and ready, I asked him to lend a hand in moving my trunk. He was so incensed he felled me like an ox. I wish I had your pugnacity."

"I have little now, Severn. If I last the voyage, I shall not return."

"Of course you will. You won't leave merrie England like that. And besides, think of that fair damsel to whom you just bade adieu."

"Yes, I will think of her," said Keats automatically. The mortal wound had not yet reached his heart, and he was scarcely conscious that he had received it. Why, parting was not unbearable at all. He listened and replied to Severn's inane chatter with consideration.

Taylor received them hospitably. The sale of the book had not been great, but it had attracted very favourable comment. The most important had been a review in the *Edinburgh*. Jeffrey had spoken at last, impelled by the combination of enmity against *Blackwood's* and the consensus of London writers. It was just as Keats had feared, he could praise *Endymion* now: "We are very much inclined to add, that we do not know any book which we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm." Moreover, the *New Monthly Magazine*, edited by that venerable bard, Thomas Campbell, deposed that if he proceeded in the high and pure style he had chosen, he would attain an exalted station among English poets. And Taylor handed him the Stamford *Mercury* paper in which his new unmet friend Clare had had the *Autumn* reprinted. Posthumous life! Once such things could have stirred him. But these gentlemen were very kind, he murmured.

"I must tell you, Keats," continued Taylor, "that I have had a skirmish with the captain of these moss-troopers of the Blackwood magazine myself. Mr. Blackwood came in, we shook hands and went into the back shop.



After asking him what was new at Edinburgh, and talking about Clare, 'Peter Corcoran' and our other authors, I observed that we had published another volume of Keats's poems on which his editors would have another opportunity of showing their malevolent wit. He said they were disposed to speak kindly of Mr. Keats this time."

"He did, he did! Quite mad!" interposed Severn.

"At that, I attacked him for inconsistency, and on the score of their personal animadversions. 'Oh, it was all a joke, the writer meant nothing more than to be witty,' he said. 'It was done in the fair spirit of criticism.'—"It was done in the spirit of the Devil, Mr. Blackwood,' I said. 'Why should not the manners of gentlemen continue to regulate their conduct when they are writing of each other as when they are in conversation?' We went it for a great while."

"You are a strong champion. Thank you for taking my part."

"I am perfectly sure he will never call upon me again. Keats, I have a letter here which I did not take the trouble to forward, as you were coming. If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I shall obtain something for us to drink."

"You've chosen the right publisher!" whispered Severn. The letter was from a John Aitken, who seemed to admire the poems of Keats beyond bounds; he entreated a long visit, promising tranquillity in which to work, "soothing affection", and the use of a library "select and extensive". Keats told Severn, tickled more than he had been by anything else that day. "It would make a horse laugh." He felt in these matters a certain anodyne. Woodhouse came in that evening, and after supper there was a round of cards. Next morning, Severn went out to collect some money owing him, and Taylor came to that oppressive problem.

George had sent nothing back, but Taylor understood that John's investment with him would have returns shortly. Meanwhile he would give £30 as the balance of £100 for the *Poems*, and a letter of credit for £150, from which if necessary Keats could draw while in Italy. "We are out of pocket at present," Taylor concluded, "but that may be reduced by future sales. You will do well to publish again as soon as you have the power to produce anything, and the success, you may rely upon it, will in every

instance increase. I hope to see you as rich and renowned as you deserve to be.”

On Saturday Keats’s passport arrived, a portentous document with coat of arms fore and aft and the ambassador’s name in Italian. There was still much to be discussed, it seemed, when he found himself in the cab with Taylor, Sunday morning. It was a bleak and drab atmosphere the old town had, as though the buildings were painted against the cold morning sky. Severn came to the dock with his brother Tom. Then Woodhouse, Haslam, and lastly Hunt. Keats chaffed and chattered, while his eyes roved. At last the mate came and told the gentlemen they should disembark; the tide were changing. They stood on the dock, hallooing and advising and wishing luck, but it did not have the significance it would have had if Haslam and Woodhouse had not stayed to go as far as Gravesend. At a quarter to eleven the *Maria Crowther* glided out from the tier of ships and into the current of the Thames. Keats stood leaning upon the rail and looking beyond his hat-waving friends. There was no one. There was only the sombre and massive houses like old fortresses piled in disorder, and reflected light-bluish silhouettes in the distance, as on that day of spring when he had stood on London Bridge waiting for Clarke to call on Hunt. There was no one.

Haslam and Woodhouse had dinner with them and the captain. Captain Walsh was not of the most amiable countenance, but seemed to thaw in the company of the friends. He asked which, Severn or Keats, was the sick man. Severn, pale, and suffering from his liver, laughed delightedly. It occurred to him that he had not his passport. The captain assured him that he must have it before the ship left Gravesend to-morrow. Friend Haslam volunteered to see to it. The hours seemed minutes, yet it was late afternoon when they docked at Gravesend and the last of the friends had to go. Woodhouse asked if he might cut off a lock of hair. It was a splendid idea, Keats agreed, to leave something of himself in England. Why had he not thought of that for Fanny?

“You are leaving a name that will be immortal,” said Woodhouse gravely. “But for your friends’ sake and quite independently of that you must take care of yourself and come back to enjoy it.”

Why should so many minutes be spent in prolonging an agony? Keats wanted to turn from the rail and hide himself in the cabin. Instead he waved and called until they had vanished. While, no doubt, they were climbing into the diligence, he read the letter Woodhouse had left, offering him money assistance if he should need it in Italy, say in six months, when his own finances were a little recruited. Good Woodhouse! But it was enough to owe Taylor.

Severn was talking to a thin, middle-aged woman, very pleasant-spoken, whom the captain introduced as Mrs. Pidgeon. She presided at tea, which the steward had set in the cabin, a room with the dimensions of a well, when you had taken off sundry cupboards, lockers, and six berths. The captain's cat appeared, and Keats declared her fur as soft as when in youth she had entered the lists on glass-bottled walls. The ship was barely rocking, with a dreamlike motion. Relaxed and content, the two young men listened to the talk of the lady, their heads leaning against the wall. Soon Keats started; he had been dozing. Severn was going him one better by snoring. One had been in a shoemaker's shop, the other in a wine-cellar, pretty well half-seas over. But soon both were in their bunks.

In the morning Keats wakened to see Severn looking in at him. At eight Mrs. Pidgeon appeared officially. She had a little room at one side for her needs. The friends had been on deck, talking to a sailor.

"Smack 'ere, there was," he had said, "from Dundee way, 'long about the start of my watch. She went on to Lunnun wi' the tide." Keats thought of that over the eggs, jelly and new bread. The captain came down.

"Good morning, madam. Good morning, sirs. We are all shipshape for breakfast, I see. You must sing out if there's anything I can do to increase your comfort. If I can make you happy, *my* object is served, you know."

Keats suggested that if they were to be in port all day Severn might go ashore and get some fresh fruit and other things. "You shall go ashore in my gig," said the captain. "I s'll try to buy a goat. The milk would do your friend good. Then, we can all stand a bit of it in our tea."

With relief Keats looked after the boat carrying Severn and the captain and Mrs. Pidgeon, the sailors rowing. The melancholy which had been waiting

for solitude awoke in him. Turning his back and spreading his arms along the rail at either side, he looked up at the rigging of the ship. Seen near at hand it had no life of its own, no soul as you might fancy in a ship seen half-way to the horizon. It had no intentions in regard to taking him to Italy or the bottom of the sea; it was beams and canvas.

Stitch shrouds together for a sail, with groans  
To fill it out, bloodstained and aghast.

He had omitted the lines from the *Ode on Melancholy*. Why?

Before dinner, came the boatload back. No goat, but a couple of friends of the captain. Keats was full of waggery, and ate as fast as he joked. Everyone remarked upon how the sea air improved their appetites. Later Severn handed out the medicine. Keats had ordered a bottle of laudanum. He had brought with other dainties a score and a half of apples, two dozen biscuits.

At six o'clock, Severn's passport arrived, and the second lady passenger, Miss Cotterell. Keats felt a rush of blood to the heart, seeing in her face Tom, himself, nay, Death boarding the ship before it made sail from England. She was emaciated, with large, helpless eyes and a high colour upon her cheekbones. But Severn, in spirits because of his passport, plied her with gallant pleasantries, and Keats rivalled him. Miss Cotterell began to laugh and be herself; but she still brought to Keats a dull foreboding. Next morning when they were at last out to sea, she fainted, and from his bunk he directed ministrations. They were all in the throes of sea-sickness. But the following day, when they had recovered, a storm arose, and by afternoon the ship was tossed incessantly upon the piling seas. They retired to their berths, there to be rolled with frenzied motion. Trunks slid across the floor, water poured in from the skylight. Severn staggered and fell when he attempted to go up on deck. "How are you, ladies?" he shouted.

"Oh, my God, have mercy! I shall die!" They moaned indistinctly, but could not get a sentence out for their contortions. Severn climbed the companionway. He reported waves like a mountainous country upon the

horizon. But the ship gave beautifully to each sea, and if they would balance themselves—!

With dusk there was no surcease; water began to rush in from an opening in the planks high above the normal waterline, pailfuls. Severn was speaking rather plaintively as he got out to save some wearing apparel of the ladies. “Here’s pretty music for you!”

“Water parted from the sea,” said Keats. His mind repeated the phrase while he revisited that room in Hastings and a pleasant lady and a well-pleased youth. A death at sea now, that would be as good as any. Better for Fanny perhaps; certainly for himself. No lingering horrors, no need for an overdose of laudanum. But the storm’s commotion gathered the faculties to an intentness upon its every phase. The pumps were working, the sails squalling and whistling, as Keats could hear, with the confused shouts of officers and sailors, when the hatch was opened. The captain and a mate came down, struck a light, and raised clothes and books and Severn’s drawing-desk from the floor. The ship would have to tack about.

At three o’clock in the morning Severn returned from the deck once more to tell them he had been able to see the moon through the clouds. Keats felt his mind soothed and calmed as though by strains of softest music. The moon, his old goddess, “maker of sweet poets”! “O Moon! far-spooning Ocean bows to thee”, he had written. The storm would soon be past; he slept a little, he knew not how. At six o’clock it was plain that the storm was over, but the tremendous surge and heave of the sea would not let them forget it.

They had been driven back twenty miles, and the next vicissitude was a calm so complete that they went ashore to stretch their legs, on a flat gravel bank. While the captain went into the nearest house, an excise man suspiciously demanded what Severn and Keats were about. They speculated why was it always the midget-minded who wore the garb of officialdom?

This was Saturday, and it was the following Thursday before they reached Portsmouth. It was only seven miles to Bedhampton, so away went the young men in a carriage to see the Snooks, relatives of Dilke, where Keats

had spent a winter holiday with Brown and written part of *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

“I am glad of this interlude, Keats. Captain and crew are getting on each others’ nerves, not to mention the passengers. That Miss Cotterell with her constant faints is the worst. But no, Mrs. Pidgeon is worst. She is actually jealous of our attention to poor Miss Cotterell.”

Keats smiled, half amused. These annoyances were almost pleasing to him, in so far as they kept his mind from something beyond the sphere of such matters. But he agreed sympathetically: “She’s worse than the worst. But Miss C.’s faints are not fainting. Suppose we set off for London! I should delight in it—for the sensation merely. What should I do there? I could not leave my lungs or stomach or other worse things behind me.”

The Snooks had a piece of news: Brown was at Chichester, ten miles away. He had come to London by a smack from Dundee. They could not reach him; and probably he would not wish to go to Italy in any case. Keats rattled on about his voyage, the four fighting-cocks—three sick, and one thin woman—and the captain. Everyone was surprised at his health and spirits after the news they had had previously. He confessed to what Severn had not known: he had put a blister on his chest as soon as they had set sail. They parted cheerfully from the portly Snook and his amiable Mrs. Snook; the voyage and its anxieties had been broken.

Head winds met them, and they had to tack continually. Then, Saturday, off Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, a calm. Lulled, Keats thought of the letter he should write to Brown. There was no one else to confide in—not George. Why not relieve his spirits of the weight he carried on this insane expedition?

When he sat down to write, feeling seemed to flow from his pen. Where were the days when his letters contained some grain of reflection, some ray of fancy? Now what he wrote was one cry: “The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I dare say you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping—you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for

death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever.”

When he had done, the fever swiftly vanished from him. Why write and send such a letter? Yet Brown had been his best friend, and should relieve him by knowing. He had told Brown in so many words the thought of leaving Miss Brawne was beyond everything horrible, gave him a sense of darkness coming over him, as he eternally saw her figure eternally vanishing. And he had asked Brown to befriend her when he should be dead, and though he thought she had many faults, for his friend’s sake to think she had not one. Brown had not flirted with Fanny—not seriously; that anger had been for her amiability to one who undervalued her. . . . Alas, life itself was an indignity not to be resented.

Once more a calm; it allowed them to land at Lulworth Cove. Keats almost gave way to his spirits and ran up on the rocky beach and through the caverns. It would be a splendid way to die—much to be preferred to long sickness or laudanum. These grottoes and cathedral-sounding rocks were better than the Giant’s Causeway with its rock organ-pipes. Some dim words of his father’s made him wonder whether this country was not his birthright. He was so much himself that back on the ship he opened his Shakespeare at the blank page facing *A Lover’s Complaint*, and wrote a sonnet for the unsuspecting Severn, a sonnet composed in happier times for another.

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art—  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,  
The moving waters at their priest-like task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

No, Fanny was not to be written to, he saw now. He could not write without giving her pain; and no sacrifice of feeling would deceive her.

The voyage already seemed long, but long dragging days and nights were ahead, in which the five people in the cabin were to see enough of one another to come to loathing. Mrs. Pidgeon would pay no attention to Miss Cotterell's fainting fits, and Severn had to attend her. When she was better she and Keats compared symptoms and tried to encourage each other, with opposite results. She fainted if the cabin windows were not open to give her air, and sometimes remained unconscious five or six hours. But if the portholes were opened, Keats was taken with his old cough, sometimes a spitting of blood.

There was a perfect calm again off Cape St. Vincent, and the sea was cleft by bands and streaks of different colours, pale blue, blue-green, and green, like vast ribbons of satin. When a whale came up and spouted a lacy rainbow into the sky, Keats could not contain his delight.

"Where's the captain?" he asked petulantly. "I am sorry for one to whom these marvels are no marvels."

"Shaving, below." Severn looked up from his drawing. "What ho!"



A grim-looking ship to starboard was approaching, signalling as it came. Foreign voices were heard. Their mate did nothing but watch it, and the *Maria* drifted on. Suddenly a shot boomed out, and a cannon-ball was sent across their bows. Keats stared. Was he going to witness a real battle? Severn, white, found his legs to dash below, and met the captain coming up the companionway with impetus enough to send him sprawling. With lather on his face, Captain Walsh bellowed at the other ship. They were Portuguese, an evil-looking set, and inquired whether any privateers had been sighted.

“Privateers!” muttered Captain Walsh after the other ship. “They’re having a revolution, and they want to intercept any aid, or they may be revolutionists themselves.” That afternoon, coming within hailing distance of a British sloop of war, he gave an account of the incident, whereupon the sloop of war set off in pursuit of the Portuguese ship.

Next morning Keats had Severn wake him early, and before dawn they passed the towering black shape of Gibraltar. They could look back as the rising sun lit it; and lit, later, the coast of Africa, red with sandstone, the gate of a mystery as old as the history of man. Keats could not take his eyes from it, and lay on a bench while Severn sketched. Were it not for Mediterranean days like these, when he stored up sea air, and his food and rest agreed with him, he would have said that with misery and miserable surroundings he was worse. Still, he was not prostrated, and when the *Maria Crowther* sailed into Naples harbour, with the beautiful city outspread before her, he was overjoyed so that he thought he might after all write to Fanny.

Alas, there were two thousand ships in the harbour, they were told, and when theirs had slipped into her place little was to be seen of the city. Moreover, she was at once put into quarantine. An English lieutenant and six men, coming on board to make their acquaintance, were detained. Lieutenant Sullivan was a gallant and accommodating fellow, but his presence did not add to the none too commodious quarters of the cabin. Then Mr. Charles Cotterell was rowed over, and also detained. He was a member of a firm of bankers in the city, and, learning of the aid Keats and Severn had given his sister, did what his means enabled him to do to add to

their comfort. Keats never tired of admiring and eating the luscious peaches and nectarines; but the voluptuous flowers made him long for a sight of a wayside dog-rose bush covered with pink blossoms.

The porthole could not be opened because of the rain, and only occasionally could they go on deck and watch the natives pull up one after another little fish like anchovies. There was a rivalry of wit among the fellows, and Keats was sure he made more puns in these ten days of duress, of waking nightmare, than in any other ten of his life. The constant brushing with strangers had taken from his susceptibilities that rawness which had caused his shocks in the summer, but he felt keyed beyond his strength. At last, on his birthday, they were permitted to land. It was chilly, with fog and rain. They would have been better in England, he grumbled to Severn. The city seemed muddy, uproarious and ill-kempt. After having their passports registered with the Department of Public Security, they parted from their fellow-voyagers, and went to the Villa da Londra, in the Strada di Santa Lucia, to which they had been directed by Charles Cotterell.

Once alone in their room, Keats broke down. He confessed that he was broken-hearted, and had no expectation of returning to England. Severn showed contrition at not having realized all that he had gone through; but even their release from the squalid hole that had contained them for six weeks into a strange and daunting city was not reassuring. Keats felt that his body could sleep for three days on end; waking next morning he saw Severn at the window weeping copiously, and closed his eyes again. At last the other was partly awake to the situation.

The room was spacious, with a view of Vesuvius, and talking of the kind treatment they had received, the friends cheered one another. After dinner in the hotel they talked of plans until Keats was asleep. He woke suddenly in mid-afternoon, found Severn gone, and began to unpack his trunk. The horror that weighed upon him in sleep might be faced and put to rout. But no. Oh, God! God! God! Everything in that trunk reminded him of her. The silk lining she had put in his cap would scald his head if he wore it. What comfort could he have in putting the knife she gave him in a silver case, the hair in a locket? He saw her and heard her—eternally vanishing—at every moment. What could he do? Die, for if he had been well this would have

killed him. Oh, that something fortunate had ever happened to himself or his brothers! Then he might hope.

They went in the evening to the San Carlo Theatre. The singing was not good, and the acting indifferent. But Severn admired a clever representation of two armed sentinels at either side of the stage. Keats would have it that they were sculptured, Severn that they were painted upon the wings. But when at the end of the act these sentries began to strut about authoritatively, Keats rose, and they went, with curses against the debasement of national character. They would leave at once for Rome. It would give him anguish, Keats said, to die and be buried amid such despotism.

Severn busied himself at the Bourbon Museum, but Charles Cotterell brought a carriage and took Keats out on the road leading up to Capo di Monte and the Ponte Rossi. There were late roses blooming; in front of one villa the rose trees were so gorgeous that Cotterell stopped and obtained a bouquet. "What an exquisite climate where roses bloom in November," said Keats; then he threw the bunch down on the opposite seat. "Humbugs! They have no scent! I would not give a penny for a shipload of such roses. What loyalty is in a man or woman is scent in flowers!" The day seemed spoiled, until they came to a group of labouring men near the Capuan Gate before a stall with a fire and a cauldron, who were disposing of their macaroni with gusto, in long unbroken strings. Keats stopped the carriage to watch them and give them some *carlini*.

In his room, his chief occupation was reading *Clarissa Harlowe*, and the nine volumes were done in fewer days. What engrossing dullness! Yet every letter had the minute reality of those of a person one knew. It was a clever dodge to make a novel unskippable—and interminable. Then it was not altogether displeasing to see a woman suffer in love. He was impatient to be off to Rome, not only because of Dr. Clark, but that Severn had come for the purpose of studying and painting. Shelley again invited him to Pisa, but not to the Shelley house this time.

Cotterell would not let them go without a farewell dinner, and invited a squad of people. There was plenty of excellent wine, for Cotterell and Company were wine merchants as well as bankers. What an evening, in the city before Vesuvius, this would have seemed three years ago!

They set forth next morning in a tiny *vettura*, so slowly that Severn got out and walked alongside, conversing cheerfully upon the keenness of the Neapolitans. It was nineteen posts to Rome—about one hundred and forty miles. The inns at which they stopped provided execrable food, of which he complained loudly, though it did not seem to affect his digestion as it did that of Keats. On they plodded, through villages whose names seemed romantic before they saw them, and appropriately squalid after they had tried their accommodations: Capua, Santa Agata, Mola, and Foudi. After four nights they came to Terracina, and the boundary between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Papal States, where their passports had to be viséd once more and their luggage examined. Only seventy miles had been passed. They chose the road over the Pontine marshes, in spite of the danger of the malaria, at which Keats scoffed.

He was more animated as they neared the Eternal City, and at last caught a glimpse of it. They entered the Wall through the Lateran Gate. Soon the vine-covered Colosseum rose before their eyes, from piles of refuse. About the ruins of Ancient Rome were groves of cane-reed twelve feet high, arid knolls, patches of withered garbage, here and there a half-cultivated vineyard. “I would not care to be the degenerate cultivator in such a scene of grandeur.”

“We must get to the modern town. Whew, it smells like a mountain of manure!”

They came to fair pavements, and the Piazza de Spagna, where a three-story house stood at the foot of flights of steps leading to the Trinità dei Monti. Severn left the carriage and found Dr. Clark’s house, across the square. The doctor returned with him, a tall Scotchman of about Hunt’s age. The house before which they had stopped was the one where rooms had been engaged. The doctor looked concerned as they helped Keats from the *vettura*.

The sitting-room and bedroom were comfortable and well lighted. There was a fireplace, but they were to have their meals sent in by the *trattoria*. Dr. Clark told them a little of himself, how he had read law, but soon turned to surgery. At twenty he had become a member of the College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and immediately entered the Navy as an assistant

surgeon. At the end of the war he returned on half pay and studied at Edinburgh University. After getting his degree he came to Switzerland with a consumptive patient. Did he die? Keats asked. They talked awhile, and hearing that Severn had only one letter of introduction, to Canova, Clark offered him another to an English sculptor, John Gibson.

As for diagnosis, Dr. Clark saw clearly that Keats's stomach was not right, and placed the seat of the disorder there, though he admitted to some suspicion of a disease of the heart and, it might be, the lungs. Keats was to let his mind rest easy—not apply himself to poems or any thought of them. And he was to get a horse to ride. Severn became almost his old careless sanguine self again.

The meals sent in were not satisfactory. "They call it macaroni in Naples," said Severn, "and I agree that it needs a different name here. But I'm not sure it should be called *minestra*. There's more oil than butter in this, and less meat than cheese!" But, as the meals became worse and worse, it was Keats who finally took action, emptying the dishes one after another out of the window and handing them back to the porter.

The horse was a small lethargic beast who scarcely opened his eyes to look at his new master. Keats every morning ate his breakfast with relish, and getting a leg-up from Severn, off he rode at the pace of a tortoise about the Pincio and even outside the city walls, ambulating along the banks of the Tiber. He smiled whimsically at his pleasure in looking down upon the hats of men of ordinary stature. Dr. Clark had forbidden his accompanying Severn on sightseeing tramps about the city and the art galleries. But he had the streets, the Roman women with white veils folded flat upon the head, red embroidered jackets and variegated petticoats. Occasionally he rode his pony through long green aisles leading to the ruins, and sat awhile picturing Virgil and Horace walking about here, and Cicero in the Forum. If he could have talked to Fanny! He was annoyed by a kind of bagpipe called the *cornmuse*, which seemed to pursue him. It was only too appropriately wild and mournful.

Severn seemed dilatory about starting his painting. He said he would be kept away from his friend too much and too regularly. Keats had to tell him of hearing three artists last winter making light of his abilities and saying

that he had tried many times for the medal and that it had been given him that time out of pity. He had flung the lie in their teeth and himself out of the room. Severn, aghast, consented to start.

When Dr. Clark learned that Severn was to be absent a good deal, he introduced another patient, Lieutenant Elton. When they had taken a stroll together, Keats saw that this was not a bad fellow, notwithstanding his strange profession. Sure that he had the consumption, he carried himself as though still in uniform. One afternoon as they made the promenade of the Pincian Hill, Keats noted a dark-eyed beauty, no longer young, turning flirtatious eyes upon his tall, good-looking companion.

“That is Pauline Bonaparte, Princess Borghese.”

“Ah, indeed. Then a fondness for the martial is doubly natural.”

“What do you think of Italian women, Keats? They make our women look like prudes, eh? How gracefully they walk or dance! They are as free and lively out of doors as ours are in the house.”

“I have better material for thought, in my state of health.” Yet Keats did think of the lieutenant and—not the princess, but Fanny. What a curse to have the spell broken by a word, a glance, rather. There was his star predominant. Next day he told Severn he would like to hear him play, if they had music. The outcome was that they hired a piano, and Dr. Clark lent music. Entranced, Keats listened. He was hearing Charlotte Reynolds, he was hearing the lady at Hastings, he was reliving vital moments of life. When Severn stopped he exclaimed: “This Haydn is like a child, there is no knowing what he will do next.”

“Keats, I was in Canova’s studio the other day, and he was finishing a statue of Pauline Bonaparte, in the nude. He asked me to come and see it.”

“You should invite Lieutenant Elton. The Princess ogles him when she sees him on the Pincian Hill.”

The following day the three came forth from Canova’s studio anxious to hear one another’s opinion. “It’s beautiful bad taste,” said Severn. “It is not done in the classic style at all; it is too much a reproduction. The Princess cannot have very good taste herself.”

“Oh, perhaps not,” said Elton. “What does a woman need with taste, when she has a body like that? I am talking quite independently of art, you know. What do you say, Keats?”

“I would name that statue, ‘The Æolian Harp’.”

“Hush,” said Severn. “Isn’t this she?”

The three young men walked by demurely. But they could not help seeing that the Princess had not lost her preference for the lieutenant. “I have had enough,” declared Keats. “Henceforth you and I will not walk here.” If only he had been well. Then, the knowledge of contrast, the feeling for light and shade in humanity, all the primitive essence which informed a soul at one with itself, would work to the creation of a poem, instead of troubling him in idleness. Sometimes reading disturbed him because it reminded him of his old ambitions, sometimes because it awoke memories still sadder. It was not the time to write pleasant letters. There had been one from George, with the good news that his little girl, who had been ill during his visit home, was now recovered. And George wrote: “If we meet a safe opportunity for England we will send Miss Brawne an India crêpe dress or merino shawl or something scarce with you, but cheap with us. She has our thanks for her kindness during your illness.” Admirable frugality!

On the tenth of December he rose in good spirits and after breakfast was talking gaily, when a cough laid hold upon him, and he vomited nearly two cupfuls of blood. Severn was out of the house as soon as he had laid him on the bed, and Dr. Clark was back in another moment, to take blood—black and thick—from his arm, until it amounted to eight ounces. He was as silent as Keats, who kept shaking his head slightly. “Doctor—”

“You must not talk, or move from the bed. Mr. Severn here will gladly attend to all your wants.”

“I had better die,” thought Keats. “It is going to be worse than anything I have known before. It all comes back. The misery will be just enough not to kill. I will not endure it. . . . Hours, hours, hours . . .”

He knew he was on his feet. The doctor had gone, and Severn was in the sitting-room for a moment.

“This day shall be my last,” he shrilled, rushing from the bed.





## CHAPTER V

“Poor Severn! Nine days, and you have not slept at all. What a deal of trouble and danger you have run into for me.” Keats spoke languidly, almost negligently, his tongue seeming to run half separate from his mind. He had just awakened from the sleep so long denied him, and he felt light in mind and body. He kept on talking, half amused by his own weakly maundering voice. Now that he could, it was just as well to keep Severn from his long condolences, promises of betterment, and absurd plans for a return to England.

“Fanny used to say she never saw you serious ten minutes. . . . I am keeping you up from revenge, Severn. You took everything from my reach that first day, and even searched out my bottle of laudanum. It is mine, I tell you. You have no right. Clark has no right—but never mind. I shall find it some time when you are out.”

“Keats, how can you talk so? You know I do everything for the best.”

“I have had five bleedings in these days you have not slept, not to mention the five hæmorrhages. And you will not feed me; and what you do feed me will not digest. The doctor is right about my stomach. It seems twice its size, and yet keeps me hungry, famished. Oh, the torture! Oh, if I could take a bit of bever with George or Tom. You know, George—Severn, when I wrote one of my poems in the morning after being up all night, Tom got up and went out and brought us such a delicious breakfast. Severn! My poor little sister, why did I neglect her so? Fanny! Fanny! There alone, no brother near at all. Nobody to care what her troubles may be. You must write to Mrs. Dilke or Mrs. Brawne at once, and ask them to go and see her. She lives at Walthamstow, tell them. Severn, you’ll do that? Why won’t you look at me? Are my eyes glassy? Yours are full of tears.”

“I shall write and tell them, Keats.”

“You are a good fellow, Severn. Oh, what a long time! We cannot be created for this sort of torture. It is my stomach, you know, my lungs and my stomach. If I could eat something and digest it, it would be one way of passing time, wouldn’t it, Severn? . . . Can’t you smile, Severn? You might,

when you are not being tortured. You are torturing me. I shall starve on one anchovy and a piece of toast.”

“Mrs. Clark cooks for you with her own hands, and the doctor brings you what he thinks you should have. Yesterday, you remember, he went all over Rome to get you that special kind of fish; and Mrs. Clark had it all delicately prepared, then you were taken with your spitting of blood, and went back all you had gained. You know you have to be kept as low as possible to check the blood. It is no wonder you are weak and gloomy. I should be dead. It shows a marvellous organization that you are well as you are after all you have been through. It shows your constitution will not easily submit, and you shall yet get well. Your spirit is what you have most to rely on, for you can do wonders even when the body is apparently giving way, if you keep your heart up. Shall I read to you now? Let me cool your forehead with this damp cloth.”

“Don’t leave it on my head, the plaster will set—take it off. No, you wouldn’t let me free myself. You want to torture me. Three mortal months you have put me to torture, when I might have taken the laudanum in the ship and been free and troubled none. Nothing can be meted out to you too cruel. You deserve torture for it yourself. You have tried to make me forget her—”

“Keats!”

Silently Keats looked at the bowed head of his friend. It was strange—what was the fellow so gloomy about? He stretched his hand out. Severn rose, and after vanishing for an instant in the sitting-room, reappeared with a book. He read aloud, on and on until night fell—*Paradise Lost*—then replenished the fire in the living-room, for the evening meal. The chimney did not have a good draught, and the smoke came puffing out. His kettle fell from its tripod on to the burning sticks, and spilled. Keats heard the hissing, and Severn’s whispered exclamation. He called, to ask for a substantial supper this time; then the door-bell rang. A woman’s voice—their landlady’s. She was telling Severn she had reported to the police that an Englishman was dying in her house, and everything in the room he occupied would have to be burned. Severn was talking Italian as rapidly as he could, trying to assure her that his friend would get well. Poor fellow;

he should not know that this had been overheard. There was silence, save for the struggle with the fire and the cooking. Some time he would surprise Severn by rushing into the room and gobbling everything. But his strength would not suffice to raise him from his bed now. At last Severn appeared with a cup of tea and the bit of toast and anchovy, which he set on the chair beside the bed while he lifted his friend up on the pillow; he held cup and plate while Keats ate, with trembling and haste. "I must have more, Severn. I am starving. I shall die of hunger if you bait me this way."

"Now, Keats, let us not begin that old quarrel again. You know you would not have had that spitting of blood yesterday, and could have eaten the fish if I had not weakly let you disobey orders by eating too much."

Keats looked at Severn a minute. "And you call yourself my friend! Yet you would try to starve me in this way, when I am helpless."

"Oh, Keats, if you knew how dreadful this is for me! The doctor tells me I will kill you if I give you more than he allows. And you rave of hunger."

"Take my word for it. I am a doctor, and I know, besides, how I feel. Come, I will take all the blame."

"You're not yourself. Dr. Clark has been so kind, coming over four and five times a day. He left word at twelve this morning to call any time."

"Then call him now, that I may talk to him, since you have no heart."

Severn took the dishes away. It would hurt him to remind him that he was enjoying a privilege he was denying a poor sufferer. But he should be hurt.

"Severn, Severn!"

The other appeared at the door, his mouth full. Keats looked at him.

"You shall have another cup of tea, and that is all."

The long evening, and the longer night, set in. Once more Severn read aloud, from the *Faerie Queene*. At half-past eleven Keats fell into a dozing vision of those days of the love of loveliness. Even then he must have known; the simple youth had written of partings for Endymion:

Now am I of breath, speech and speed possest,  
But at the setting I must bid adieu  
To her for the last time. Night will strew  
On the damp grass myriads of lingering leaves.  
And with them I shall die; nor much it grieves  
To die, when summer dies on the cold sward.  
Why I have been a butterfly, a lord  
Of flowers, garlands, love-knots, silly posies,  
Groves, meadows, melodies, and arbour roses;  
My kingdom's at its death, and just it is  
That I should die with it: so in all this  
We miscall grief, bale, sorrow, heartbreak, woe,  
What is there to plain of?

Even then was his star predominant.

“Severn. Do you remember that walk we took in the country, so long ago, beyond Hampstead and Caen Wood, and how we watched the tide of the oats field, the long rippling waves in the breeze. The tide! The tide!”

“Yes.” Severn was looking away from the paper, to make Keats forget he was writing. “I wondered whether we ever should see Rome. If I had known—”

“You shall see it all again. . . . You are writing to Brown. Severn! Don't forget to tell him about my sister. He is a good sort of man, Brown. Oh, I have had wonderful friends, Severn. There was Mathews and you, and Haslam, and Rice, and Reynolds. All, all good fellows, Severn. None of them better than yourself, or so kind; and I have done more for them than for you.”

“You mustn't talk like that.” Severn's voice was shaking.

“Do you remember the concerts we used to hold, each one of us playing some fancied musical piece? What a jolly pandemonium we used to make. And Tom and George. Wells was there. Wells deceived poor Tom most fiendishly, and all the time I was watching him die. Why is it, Severn, that

men are so . . . Why should Wells try to kill Tom while I was trying to keep him living? . . . I was spending myself for the greater glory of English poesy, as I thought. But I discovered what the world thought I was trying to do. I was committing a crime not to have remained an apothecary's apprentice, and in daring to attempt to give pleasure with my verses—I was committing a crime to dare to exist at all. Perhaps they will free me on that count. I lost George before I lost Tom. Oh, everything might have been different if George had remained in England, and Georgiana with him. Everything became different when they went away. She was a lovely girl, so simple and loyal and real. George came back to England for more money, and took all I could give him. That was not right of him, was it?"

"No, it was not right. Tell me more about the happy times you had."

"My happy times were when I was a boy, swinging on the springy branches of an elm, or watching the little fish from the bridge over the stream at Edmonton. No—I was not happy then. I had lost my mother. I thought and thought and took to books. No, I did not feel happy. When I was with Dr. Hammond I used to get free afternoons and went back to school to see Clarke. Oh, I was happy then, reading Spenser in the arbour. Spenser opened the gate of heaven. . . ." He was silent a moment. "If I could believe in happiness like that I could believe in heaven. No, 'twas a deception. My happiness was a creation of my mind, and merest anodyne. For me there is no such thing. I see others who appear to be happy, but that is because I do not see into their minds. Misery, pain, oppression, fill the world, Severn. Women have cancers, youths are cut down bloodily. Do you think there is such a thing to be found?"

"You will answer that yourself when you are well. You must not vex your mind with such things now. Shall I read to you again?"

"No, you don't believe it. No man can, when he has seen the misery and heartbreak of the world. And he will be no man until he has seen that. Yet there is a contentment men gain when they blind themselves. Why should I not have it? Is it because I always tried to do good in the world? Always I was trying for some fellow-creature's benefit. Perhaps that is the reason I have been loaded down with misery and horror. One must sink oneself into the slough like the veriest swine, then one is rewarded with contentment. If

a man love his fellows he can never be happy. I did not use to think much of these matters, content with the feel of having done well, and the joy I had in creating new beauty. But you don't think I would do differently now?"

"You would always be the same kind, modest John Keats."

"Modest? Perhaps I was modest, in being a man with cinder-sifters or dukes. I thought I was only being real. The world laughs at simplicity, and every man tries to gild his own emptiness. I was humble too, in hoping that the love and nurture of years in my mother-tongue might give me to utter something acceptable to after-times." His voice died away.

"What you have done will live in the hearts of your friends, Keats." Severn once more wrung out a rag and placed its moistness on his patient's brow. Keats started.

"No," he exclaimed, "they went too far, callous-hearted villains. Their injustice may have been one thing that made me die. But my dying will make my poetry live. It will, won't it, Severn? Never mind: 'Time's glory is to calm contending kings.'"

Severn was reading; his voice grew more even and soothing. Keats closed his eyes. Occasionally he opened them and met the glance of his friend, who hastened on. At last he kept them closed so long that Severn seemed to think he had fallen asleep and stopped reading.

"You see, it has all led up to this, Severn. My father dying, my mother, my grandmother, leaving me the oldest of four orphans, a little boy. Then my dreary apprenticeship as apothecary, then the fight to leave it. Then my first book and the unlucky friendship I had for Hunt, poor man. Then all the slander and attacks, and Tom dying, and that girl . . . and George leaving me. Any hope I ever had has been blighted. I must stoop my head and kiss death's foot. . . . And all the time I was toiling, lying awake nights seeing visions, doing my best for everyone who came near me. My own means and comfort were the last things always, and always expended in vain. The story is all of a piece; it should end here in this way. Now I lie racked with agony, and pay for every good deed I ever did. Every pang of sensitive feeling I ever expended upon another comes back to me in giant agony. And love is the greatest torturer of all. If I were strong I might bear it, but

it shall be one of the causes of my death. Did I tell you, Severn, that I am in love and know I can never return to England? Oh that I could believe in immortality; oh that I could believe I might see her again. I never shall. These eyes have seen her for the last time.” His teeth began to chatter.

“Never again shall I behold her! There will be no other fields beyond this world for us to meet and wander in. . . . Miserable wretch that I am. This last cheap comfort that every rogue and fool has, is denied me in my last moments. Why is this? Oh, I have served everyone with my utmost good. Why is this? I can’t understand this—this . . . Oh, God!”

After four more weeks, it seemed that the hæmorrhages had ceased. Keats lay quiet for hours without speaking, persuaded that he had only a few days or weeks to wait until it would all be over. Severn made the beds, lit the fire, swept the room, emptied the slops. There was no night or day to his diligence. He and Dr. Clark agreed that this calm in the patient was an improvement, and thought to cheer him still more by moving him from the bedroom to the sitting-room for a few hours. Severn bustled about, put clean things on him, arranged the sofa, and at last carried him carefully, gently, a step at a time. How heavy one felt, and how strange the air seemed after lying down so long! The sofa was strange, but it was not so strange as that short ride through the air, hanging about his friend’s neck. Here were his and Severn’s books, the rented piano, Severn’s painting things, all interesting to look at. And Severn was talking about his painting in a low unhopeful voice. “Soon you will be well enough that I can go out and get some—do some work.”

“Get some work? I should think your *Death of Alcibiades* would be enough. Do you mean portraits? We have money enough that you do not need to do that.”

“I mean my picture, of course. I could get someone to stay with you part of the time.”

“I need no one. . . . But, Severn, you are uneasy. Are you disturbed about something? It can’t be money, for with that draft we should have sufficient. You talk in hushed tones. Do you think someone is listening?”

“Well,” Severn laughed weakly. “The landlady lives on this story.”



Keats paused. It would do no good to speak. Yet he knew now that Severn expected what he expected, that he would die. "I remember now. The Italians consider the consumption a contagious disease. They would burn everything in the room if they learned I had been in it, after I am dead."

"Keats, how can you speak so!" For once Severn was almost angry.

"We will be very quiet, then. If I am like a mouse, you shall be a cat!" He tried to make his eyes twinkle. The turn of Severn's face was lank and ghostly. "Severn, you must rest. This has been too much for you."

Severn's reply was to burst into tears, which made his face absurd, and his tall shaking form was farcical, like a poor actor's. Keats, quiet, turned his eyes to the window. . . . "I can't bear the face of a stranger, Severn, that's why I am so stubborn about your painting. I will try to be better."

It was the hour to prepare another meal. Keats ate docilely, not complaining of its meagreness. The January darkness came on, and the fire had to be kept up. It was warmer here than in the bedroom, but Keats was not used to the sofa, which was narrow and might permit a draught, so that he had to be moved. He could not breathe when he lay once more in bed. The sheets were cold. "I seem to myself not to have much lungs—not for my personal use, at least. I spit as much phlegm as ever. Oh, I am a useless creature; why should the attempt be made to prolong my life?"

"You are too valuable to your friends to lose. The letters from Haslam and Brown and the others all say so. I shall never be able to look them in the face if you die. You must live for us."

"Brown—what does Brown say? Did I tell you to put the letter by? I would like to read it now. No—only to hear his news. What is it?"

"Brown says he would like to come to Rome, but knowing how little good it would do, and how hard it would be to let his house, and the heavy additional expense . . . He is glad you are getting better. Of course if he thought he could help—but he seems to consider me a better nurse than himself."

"Ah!" So that was Brown. Not a word about Fanny. It did not sound right. But no; it could not be. It was the way Severn summarized the letter. Fanny

was his, so long as he should live. His to leave, torturing himself and her. She wrote and wrote, and Severn knew her writing after the first, and laid the letters away for him. He never could read all of them. Oh, the thousand deaths he had died for her! “Drear, drear has our delaying been.”

“Keats, I have got a volume of Jeremy Taylor. Let me read some to you this evening.” Severn spoke hesitatingly. “It is Sunday.”

“Let it be *Holy Dying*, then. Bailey and Mariane Reynolds wandered in no grove but Jeremy Taylor’s, but then he jilted her and married the bishop’s daughter.”

Severn pulled the candle nearer, and read steadily until after eleven. At last Keats fell asleep, and the other fell on his knees beside the bed. Keats woke and whispered, “Praying,” and let his hand stray to his friend’s head. “Praying.”

And he could pray too, if he thought it would give him immortality, with Fanny and Tom and his mother. . . . Where was the phantasm of philosophy he had gained? Lost in this; the agony had been too great. The vale of soul-making might pitch its ordeals too tightly, and be a vale of soul-destruction. Mind and heart might be destroyed while they struggled to fruition. The heart might be the mind’s Bible, but how could the mind read when its Bible was destroyed? His heart was gone.

Through the night he watched and dozed, and Severn came to him when he had difficulty with the phlegm, or wanted a drink. How many more dawns would he wait for? The doctor came once more, inquired, gave medicine.

“How long will this posthumous life of mine last, Doctor?”

“Why, you are mending now.” He promised to bring some food from his wife’s kitchen across the square at the dinner hour. It did not matter. That hunger was a bearable torture now. When he had gone Severn stood staring out of the window, his hands behind his back. The sky was dull. Blue skies of Italy, a mockery like all else!

“Severn, I can see under your quiet look immense twisting and contending. You are enduring more for me than I’ll have you. What is it happening?”

“Nothing beyond what you see. It is a dull day, and that is enough to make me dull too. I am so stupid now. We two are getting into a fine way. We shall kick up our heels with the best of them when this is over. We must study patience, contentment. I wish you could understand your fortunes, and glide into them. Surely some angel of goodness will guide you through this dark wilderness.”

“Aye,” said Keats stonily. “You think I don’t know my unlucky star, and how it has been predominant from the first?”

“You can bear talk of your misfortunes? Perhaps it will relieve you of their weight.” Keats nodded. “It quite astonishes me that you have lived so long without the—almost essence of human life—I mean that sometimes calm of mind to keep the human machinery going. You have described to me all the various changes of your life, all moving to this restless ferment; no doubt all the emotions of your life, even to your happiest sensations, have brought you to this dreary point—from which I pray God speedily to lift you up.”

“True, true. But I speak because I can no longer keep silent. You must not bring it all back when I do not.”

The door-bell rang. Severn returned in an instant with a letter.

“It is from Taylor. Let me see it. Good Taylor!” Tears were in Keats’s eyes, filling them so that he could not read the page held before him. He saw the one word “bill” and turned his head, weeping most bitterly.

Severn seemed relieved as he read the letter, and said that he would attack his picture now. . . . When the sobs had ceased he went out to mend the fire. Wild anger filled Keats. The fellow thought he had forced belief in his lies, lies he told every day. “Severn! Quick, I’ll jump up, I’ll—”

“John—are you mad?” Severn’s stamps, his pale face came through the dusk.

“Severn, no treatment, no torture can be bad enough for you, seeing how you torture me. Four wretched mortal months you have kept me in misery, and how many more? Did you give my bottle of laudanum to Clark? What right has he or you—” Keats’s voice was becoming more furious each instant.

“I shall ask him about it. You will have another hæmorrhage, Keats. Be patient, while I get your supper. Your candle’s lit, and all.”

When coffee was brought, Keats threw it on the floor. In a few minutes Severn appeared with a second cup. This Keats tried to aim at the wall; it fell on his bed. Severn went away again and appeared with a light meal. He seemed to remember that Keats had taken no breakfast. Poor fellow! How could he be so patient? “Thank you, Severn. Take it away. I am not hungry.”

“Come, come. It is as good as I can make it.”

“No, Severn, I do not hold wi’ eating, as the old folks say.” But though Keats put him off again, he submitted in the end to Severn’s unwearying patience. After supper he lay calm. He should behave more pleasantly; but he would be pestered no longer by this faithful fellow, or anyone, least of all by himself. “You must remember, Severn,” he said mildly and earnestly, “that the hope of death is my only comfort. The only possibility of ease is there. The thought of eternal rest is like soothing honey upon my tongue. The thought of recovery is beyond everything dreadful to me. I cannot bear anything that has the ‘smell of mortality’.”

Severn, his face grey beyond the candle, said, “Let me read to you.”

“No, I cannot bear books. They ‘smell of mortality’. I want nothing, ask nothing, but death. Do not read to me, dear Severn, but let me rest. I will not trouble you with talking to-night.”

Presently Severn went to the sofa and lay down. Two or three times he got up when Keats called him or he felt that the fire should be mended. Keats slept, but obscure horrors moved through his dream. How many deaths he had seen Fanny die! How many times he had rescued himself and her! He twitched and his eyes opened upon the candle-lit room. There was Severn! He closed his eyes, then opened them again to look on Severn, drawing him, then closed them to sleep once more.

Before dawn he woke and watched the coming of the new day and cursed his star. How much toil, how many days. It seemed long hours before Severn woke, but he would not call him. He would be calm and good to-

day. Severn was putting a paper away. "Is that a drawing you made of me? Let me see it . . . A sorry-looking beard! Neither one thing nor another. And the nose. Well, I suppose as the rest of the face falls away I shall appear with more prow." But how large and heavy-lidded the eyes, darkly shadowed the hollows of the cheeks, the deep curve beneath the lower lip, and the dank hair straggling across the large brow. "Give me the cornelian, Severn, and after breakfast play me a sonata of Haydn."

He lay picturing Fanny while he fingered the oval white seal she had given him, and the memory was bearable when infused with piano notes, falling like drops of dew upon his soul. He fell into a doze, a dream of happiness, of Cynthia, the moon, his goddess, all his, sensuous and ideal, and heard his own words:

To Sorrow,  
I bade good-morrow,  
And thought to leave her far away behind;  
But cheerly, cheerly,  
She loves me dearly;  
She is so constant to me, and so kind:  
I would deceive her  
And so leave her,  
But, ah! she is so constant to me and so kind.

He seemed to wake to the music once more, and knew that he had recovered what was better than life, the love which had filled his heart when he had been himself; the love of life, the love of good and ill as it made up life. Was it not all beautiful? The truth of it was beauty; its beauty was truth. He had been right in not sending a letter to Fanny Brawne. She would know and would conquer this happiness too. She would come to know the beauty of life, that he had known and almost lost in the rending torture of his soul and body. He had realized and played his part. Time now to endure his going hence as his coming hither—ripeness was all. He would be with Shakespeare. Ah, vanity, pride! (The piano was sounding mournful thirds now.) How could he be cruel to Fanny? Did her blue eyes of heaven

alive with fate shine at him through all the murk, calling him? . . . How could he be anything but cruel? Where was the truth of all this? Better to listen, to dream of dozing beneath trees beside a summer stream, of Fanny soothing her lips with a rose-leaf folded round her taper finger.

Severn played on and on. Clark came in without knocking. Keats saw him at once—before Severn! “Ah, doctor, when will this posthumous life of mine end?” The doctor shook his head gravely. It was full time, he said, they had a nurse. Mr. Severn was worn out. He talked for a time, and went at about eleven, telling Severn once more that if needed he was to be called. Then in the sitting-room they talked in low tones. Clarke, he felt, was telling Severn that his friend could not hold out another fortnight. Severn was telling how he was beating about in the tempest of the sick man’s mind, and how strange it was.

It was time for the post—and there was the door-bell. Severn came back with a letter in his hand. “From Mrs. Brawne.” Another day he had read aloud how she regretted that Keats ever had left England, and how glad she would have been to help in nursing him. “Let me see it,” said Keats now. Severn broke the seal, spread the sheets, and handed them.

“*My dearest*,” the letter began, and the form of those letters nearly burst his heart. He closed his eyes upon a sensation of falling. When he opened them the letter was gone. Fanny was thinking of him, calling him her dearest love, suffering God knew how much—more than himself. Severn sat down, looked at a book, then went away. The piano could be heard. Toward dusk, Keats said: “I would like you to place that letter in my coffin, with the purse and my sister’s letter, which is unopened too.”

“If the time comes, be sure I shall do that.”

“It will come,” said Keats listlessly. “You know a great cause of illness in me was my own love, the exciting and thwarting of my passion. I was not strong enough to bear love and frustration in love. How could it have been different? The world is very young and in an ignorant state. If she had made a sacrifice, it would not have been love, but not even sacrifice, save of suburban decorum. And when she became rich enough to love me wholly, it was too late. Never blame her.”

Severn was silent.

“Yet if I had married, not too, too late, I might have been happy. For she understood, in the end. I have been dreaming, Severn, and my dreams are pleasant. Perhaps your playing has had something to do with it. There are no more nightmares. I have been thinking of many things I would have you do when I am gone; and the first of these is an inscription for my tomb. Let it be this line. Remember now:

*“Here lies one whose name was writ in water.”*

And Severn promised. Keats talked easily and calmly until he seemed to fall asleep at the sound of his own voice. Severn was bowed in the chair. In the night Keats woke, and all was dark. But Severn was there—why this agitation? Let him rest. There was a queer little glow where the candle had been, and a climbing hairlike ember. Would this change to a dream of Fanny’s hair in the Inferno? Then suddenly the candle was alight.

“Severn, Severn!” he cried out. “Here’s a little fairy lamplighter—”

Severn was revealed rubbing his eyes. “I tied a thread from the bottom of the first candle to the wick of the other,” he said.

Time went on, eight weeks, nine weeks from the time of the first hæmorrhage. Severn could hold up no longer, and an English nurse was found. She was dark and cheerful. Keats liked her calm brown eyes. For three or four days the love of books returned, and Severn read aloud constantly, then it passed. He was more calm every day, more certain of coming into his own at last. He told Severn not to put *that* haunting letter in his coffin, then changed his mind once more. Always he held the oval white cornelian, until it sank into the palm of his hand, and his fingers could not be loosened. One day, contented with his nurse, he sent his friend to look at the place in the English Cemetery where he was to be buried, and listened eagerly to its description. Near the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, violets overgrew it, and a flock of goats and sheep were near by, and a young shepherd. One kindness would bless his fate. He sent Severn again

another day. In the evening he gave the last instructions. Fanny Brawne's letters, all of them, were to be inside the winding-sheet, upon his heart.

"Did you ever see anyone die, Severn? No? Well then, I pity you, poor Severn. But don't tremble. I do not think I shall be convulsed. What trouble and danger you have got into for me! Now you must be firm, for it will not last long—I shall soon be laid in the quiet grave. Thank God for the quiet grave. Oh, I can feel the cold earth upon me. Oh, for the quiet! It will be my first."

But when the morning came once more, he lost his tranquillity. "How bitter to grieve at sight of the dawn. Oh, my infelicity has years too many." Severn's face was grey and ghostly, his eyes sunken in his head.

It was Friday, February twenty-third, half past four.

"Severn—I—lift me up, for I am dying. I shall die easy. Don't be frightened. Thank God it has come." The phlegm rattled in his throat and he could say no more. Severn lifted him upright in his arms. Until eleven he sat there, and save for a shiver when the phlegm threatened to choke him, did not move. Then he became more quiet, and quiet.

THE END



## Transcriber's Notes

Page 12. unmatched single quote' added. Now reads: "Heigho, 'Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king',"

Page 21. missing " added to close dialogue. Now reads: "Oh, John, that's just what *I've* been thinking too. Only I hated . . ."

Page 23. beoming changed to becoming. Now reads: Keats was becoming more and more angry.

Page 32. . added to complete sentence. Now reads: At last John broke the news that after taking the examination he was going to Margate.

Page 40. I—No changed to I— No.

Page 42. Tiptoe replaced with Tip-toe. Now reads: "I stood Tip-toe" to match usage in other cases of this poem title in book.

Page 43. ' changed to " to match opening quote. Now reads: "But it cannot be helped. I'd rather be a successful surgeon than an unsuccessful poet."

Page 70. detestable changed to detestable. Now reads: "As for that detestable religion,

Page 71. unambitious changed to unambitious. Now reads: "was simply another tyrant. An unambitious slave.

Page 72. composition changed to composition. Now reads: I may be very uneasy in the composition of it, and no good companion.

Page 81. sacrificed changed to sacrificed. Now reads: Tom and George had sacrificed to the vast unborn poem,

Page 118. gone changed to done Now reads: There were too many petty things to think about, too many petty errands to be done,

Page 119. similar OED: 'simulated' refs: 1612 Shakespeare 'Cymbeline', 1847 Emerson. not to those who hungered after a similar truth.

Page 125. , replaced with . Now reads: and would very much like to meet Mr. Wordsworth.

Page 130. seemd replaced with seemed. Now reads: not that it seemed to concern Haydon.

Page 148. extra ' Removed. Now reads: And Bentley, 'e does all 'e can being aw'y all day

Page 148. (Query dimity?) (Publisher's note in book) 'there blossom'd suddenly a magic bed of sacred ditamy' (Query dimity?) But see Modern English Language Notes, James Hinton. pp440-441. Vol32. No. 7. 1917. "ditamy was a word used in Keat's Endymion, it appears that his source may have been Lempriere's 'Classical Dictionary'."

Page 148. missing ' . Now reads: and he looked up to the 'lidless-eyed train of planets'

Page 152. " removed. Now reads: Next day came a copy of

Page 155. Keat to be replaced by Keats. Now reads: "Aye, there's the rub," muttered Keats,

Page 161. reverxed? Noted. Keats shrugged impatiently and hardly listened while Hazlitt reverxed the old question. Not in OED. Could be typo but for exactly what unclear, could, though, be similar to Page 148. above (ditamy).

Page 174. — changed to – Now reads: I, who might write the poem—I would not have another write it

Page 209. Fannny replaced by Fanny. Now reads: He read again from the little volume and handed it to Fanny.

Page 209. thè replaced with the. Now reads: I am to keep the book? Always?"

Page 233. ; replaced by : Now reads: Out of a full heart he wrote: To match other punctuation instances preceding poetry quotations.

Page 259. " added. Now reads: "You are not wont to be idle and thoughtless like this.

Page 260. botle replaced with bottle. Now reads: "Ah! No doubt with a bottle of claret in me

Page 274. ” removed to match style of passage on previous page. Now reads: I kiss you—O! the torments!

Page 286. Learn to be replaced by learn. Now reads: He seemed relieved to learn that Keats was not worse,

Page 286. “ added, Now reads: “You didn’t see the *New Times* review of your book,

Page 286. ,; changed to ; Now reads: if it be not in its nature cruel;

[The end of *My Star Predominant* by Raymond Knister]