

from *The Complete Letters of Jane Austen*. Edited by Deirdre Le Faye, 4th ed., Oxford University Press, 2011.

CEA/I. *From Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight*

Sunday 20 July 1817

Winchester Sunday

My dearest Fanny—doubly dear to me now for her dear sake whom we have lost.

She *did* love you most sincerely, & never shall I forget the proofs of love you gave her during her illness in writing those kind, amusing letters at a time when I know your feelings would have dictated so different a style. Take the only reward I can give you in my assurance

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that your benevolent purpose *was* answer'd, you *did* contribute to her enjoyment. Even your last letter afforded pleasure, I merely cut the seal & gave it to her, she opened it & read it herself, afterwards she gave it me to read & then talked to me a little & not uncheerfully of its contents, but there was then a languor about her which prevented her taking the same interest in any thing, she had been used to do. Since Tuesday evening, when her complaint returnd, there was a visible change,¹ she slept more & much more [*p.* 2] comfortably, indeed during the last eight & forty hours she was more asleep than awake. Her looks altered & she fell away, but I perceived no material diminution of strength & tho' I was then hopeless of a recovery I had no suspicion how rapidly my loss was approaching.—I *have* lost a treasure, such a Sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed,—She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow, I had not a thought concealed from her, & it is as if I had lost a part of myself. I loved her only too well, not better than she deserved, but I am conscious that my affection for her made me sometimes unjust to & negligent of others, & I can acknowledge, more than as a general principle, the justice of the hand which has struck this blow. You know me too well to be at all afraid that I should suffer materially from my feelings, I am perfectly conscious of the extent of my irreparable loss, but I am not at all overpowerd & very little indisposed, nothing but what a short [*p.* 3] time, with rest & change of air will remove. I thank God that I was enabled to attend her to the last & amongst my many causes of self-reproach I have not to add² any wilfull neglect of her comfort.³ She felt herself to be dying about half an hour before she became tranquil & apparently [*sic*] unconscious. During that half hour was her struggle, poor Soul! she said she could not tell us what she sufferd, tho she complaind of little fixed pain. When I asked her if there was any thing she wanted, her answer was she wanted nothing but death & some of her words were "God grant me patience, Pray for me Oh Pray for me". Her voice was affected but as long as she spoke she was intelligible. I hope I do not break your heart my dearest Fanny by these particulars, I mean to afford you gratification whilst I am relieving my own feelings. I could not write so to any body else, indeed you are the only person I have written to at all excepting your Grandmama, it was to her not your Uncle Charles I wrote on Friday.—Immediately after dinner on Thursday I went into the Town to do an errand which your dear Aunt was anxious about. I returnd about a quarter before six & found her recovering from faint: [*p.* 4] :ness & oppression, she got so well as

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to be able to give me a minute account of her seizure & when the clock struck 6 she was talking quietly to me. I cannot say how soon afterwards she was seized again with the same faintness, which was followed by the sufferings she could not describe, but M^r Lyford had been sent for, had applied something to give her ease & she was in a state of quiet insensibility by seven o'clock at the latest. From that time till half past four when she ceased to breathe, she scarcely moved a limb, so that we have every reason to think, with gratitude to the Almighty, that her sufferings were over. A slight motion of the head with every breath remained till almost the last. I sat close to her with a pillow in my lap to assist in supporting her head, which was almost off the bed, for six hours,—fatigue made me then resign my place to M^{rs} J. A. for two hours & a half when I took it again & in about one hour more she breathed her last. I was able to close her eyes myself & it was a great gratification to me to render her these last services.⁴ There was nothing convulsed or which gave the idea of pain in her look, on the contrary, but for the continual motion of the head, she gave me the idea of a beautiful statue, & even now in her coffin, there is such a sweet serene air over her countenance⁵ as is quite pleasant to contemplate. This day my dearest Fanny you have had the melancholly intelligence & I know you suffer severely, but I likewise know that you will apply to the fountain-head for consolation & that our merciful God is never deaf to such prayers as you will offer.

[p. 5] The last sad ceremony is to take place on Thursday morning, her dear remains are to be deposited in the Cathedral—it is a satisfaction to me to think that they are to lie in a Building she admired so much—her precious soul I presume to hope reposes in a far superior Mansion. May mine one day be reunited to it.—Your dear Papa, your Uncles⁶ Henry & Frank & Edw^d Austen instead of his Father will attend, I hope they will none of them suffer lastingly from their pious exertions.—The ceremony must be over before ten o'clock as the Cathedral service begins at that hour, so that we shall be at home early in the day, for there will be nothing to keep us here afterwards.—Your Uncle James came to us yesterday & is gone home to day—Uncle H. goes to Chawton tomorrow morning, he has given every necessary direction here & I think his company there will do good. He returns to us again on Tuesday evening. I did not think to have written a long letter when I began, but I have found the employment draw me on & I hope I shall have been giving you more pleasure than pain.

Remember me kindly to M^{rs} J. Bridges (I am so glad she is with you

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now) & give my best love to Lizzy & all the others. I am my dearest Fanny

Most affect^{ly} yrs
Cass. Elizth Austen

I have said nothing about those at Chawton because I am sure you hear from your Papa.

Miss Knight
Godmersham Park
Canterbury

CEA/2. From Cassandra Austen to Anne Sharp

Monday 28 July 1817

My dear Miss Sharp

I have great pleasure in sending you the lock of hair you wish for, & I add a pair of clasps which she sometimes wore & a small bodkin which she had had in constant use for more than twenty years. I know how these articles,¹ trifling as they are, will be valued by you & I am very sure that if she is now conscious of what is passing on earth it gives her pleasure they should be [*p.* 2] so disposed of.—I am quite well in health & my Mother is very tolerably so & I am much more tranquil than with your ardent feelings you could suppose possible. What I have lost, no one but myself can know, you are not ignorant of her merits, but who can judge how I estimated them?²—God's will be done, I have been able to say so all along, I thank God that I have.—If any thing should ever bring you into attainable distance from me we must meet my dear [*p.* 3] Miss Sharp.—

Beleive me very truly

Y^r affect^{te} friend
Cass. Elizth Austen

Chawton July 28th
Miss Sharp

CEA/3. From Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight

Tuesday 29 July 1817

Chawton Tuesday

My dearest Fanny,

I have just read your letter for the third time & thank you most sincerely for every kind expression to myself & still more warmly for