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## JOHN KEATS

### *From Endymion*

#### From *Book IV*<sup>1</sup>

##### O SORROW

“O Sorrow,  
 Why dost borrow  
 The natural hue of health, from vermeil lips?—  
 To give maiden blushes  
 150 To the white rose bushes?  
 Or is it thy dewy hand the daisy tips?

“O Sorrow,  
 Why dost borrow  
 The lustrous passion from a falcon eye?—  
 155 To give the glowworm light?  
 Or, on a moonless night,  
 To tinge, on siren shores, the salt sea-spray?<sup>2</sup>

“O Sorrow,  
 Why dost borrow  
 160 The mellow ditties from a mourning tongue?—  
 To give at evening pale  
 Unto the nightingale,  
 That thou mayst listen the cold dews among?

“O Sorrow,  
 165 Why dost borrow  
 Heart’s lightness from the merriment of May?—  
 A lover would not tread  
 A cowslip on the head,  
 Though he should dance from eve till peep of day—  
 170 Nor any drooping flower  
 Held sacred for thy bower,  
 Wherever he may sport himself and play.

“To Sorrow,  
 I bade good-morrow,  
 175 And thought to leave her far away behind;  
 But cheerly, cheerly,  
 She loves me dearly;

1. The lines reprinted here are part of a remarkable lyric sung by the Indian maid, which expresses Keats’s repeated theme of the inseparability of sorrow from the height of human enjoyments, and the

divided attitude which in fact sometimes makes us cling to sorrow as to a joy. See his *Ode on Melancholy*.  
 2. Sea spray.

She is so constant to me, and so kind:  
 I would deceive her  
 180 And so leave her,  
 But ah! she is so constant and so kind."

Apr.–Nov., 1817

1818

## In Drear-Nighted December

## 1

In drear-nighted December,  
 Too happy, happy tree,  
 Thy branches ne'er remember  
 Their green felicity:  
 5 The north cannot undo them  
 With a sleety whistle through them;  
 Nor frozen thawings glue them  
 From budding at the prime.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

In drear-nighted December,  
 10 Too happy, happy brook,  
 Thy bubblings ne'er remember  
 Apollo's<sup>2</sup> summer look;  
 But with a sweet forgetting,  
 They stay their crystal fretting,  
 15 Never, never petting<sup>3</sup>  
 About the frozen time.

## 3

Ah! would 'twere so with many  
 A gentle girl and boy!  
 But were there ever any  
 Writhed not of passéd joy?  
 The feel of *not* to feel it,<sup>4</sup>  
 When there is none to heal it  
 Nor numbéd sense to steel it,  
 Was never said in rhyme.

December, 1817

1829

1. The earliest period; hence, spring.

2. I.e., the sun's.

3. Complaining.

4. This version of line 21, from a recently discov-

ered autograph copy, is adopted in preference to the earlier version in the printed form of the poem: "To know the change and feel it."

On the Sonnet<sup>1</sup>

If by dull rhymes our English must be chained,  
 And, like Andromeda,<sup>2</sup> the Sonnet sweet  
 Fettered, in spite of painéd loveliness;  
 Let us find out, if we must be constrained,  
 5 Sandals more interwoven and complete  
 To fit the naked foot of poesy;  
 Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress  
 Of every chord,<sup>3</sup> and see what may be gained  
 By ear industrious, and attention meet;  
 10 Misers of sound and syllable, no less  
 Than Midas<sup>4</sup> of his coinage, let us be  
 Jealous of dead leaves in the bay-wreath crown;  
 So, if we may not let the Muse be free,  
 She will be bound with garlands of her own.

April, 1819

1848

1. In a letter including this sonnet, Keats wrote that "I have been endeavoring to discover a better sonnet stanza than we have," objecting especially to the "pouncing rhymes" of the Petrarchan form and the inevitable tick of the closing couplet in the Shakespearean stanza. This and the two following poems exemplify Keats's experiments with varia-

tions upon these conventional sonnet patterns.  
 2. Andromeda was chained to a rock in order to placate a sea monster, but was rescued by Perseus.  
 3. Lyre-string.  
 4. King Midas was granted his wish that all he touched should turn to gold.