

Praise for *Travelling to Infinity*



“Stephen Hawking may think in 11 dimensions, but his first wife has learnt to love in several.”

The Times

“Jane Hawking has written a book about what it was like to be pivotal to her husband’s celebrated existence... but it is much more a shout from the outer darkness.”

The Daily Telegraph

“What becomes of time when a marriage unravels? And what becomes of the woman who has located her whole self within its sphere? For Jane Hawking, the physics of love and loss are set in a private universe.”

The Guardian

“Jane describes the final, painful years of her marriage in candid detail.”

The Independent

“Jane Hawking’s harrowing and compelling account... rings very true.”

Irish Times

“This is not a vindictive book, although the agony she went through is palpable; if Stephen’s struggle to keep his mind clear is heroic, so is her determination to balance his escalating needs and those of their three children.”

Independent on Sunday

“Jane writes about her former husband with tenderness, respect and protectiveness.”

Sunday Express

TRAVELLING TO
INFINITY

MY LIFE WITH STEPHEN

JANE HAWKING



ALMA BOOKS

ALMA BOOKS LTD
London House
243–253 Lower Mortlake Road
Richmond
Surrey TW9 2LL
United Kingdom
www.almabooks.com

Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen is a revised version (with new material) of *Music to Move the Stars*, first published by Macmillan in 1999

Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen first published by Alma Books Limited in 2007

First paperback edition published in 2008

This new paperback edition published in 2010

Copyright © Jane Hawking, 1999, 2007

All rights reserved

Jane Hawking asserts her moral right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

ISBN: 978-1-84688-115-2

Printed in Great Britain by CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, Berkshire

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

Contents

Part One	11
Part Two	115
Part Three	219
Part Four	353
Postlude	479

For my family

*La parole humaine est comme un chaudron
fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire
danser les ours quand on voudrait attendrir
les étoiles.*

– Gustave Flaubert

Human expression is like a cracked kettle
on which we beat out music for bears to
dance to, when really we long to move the
stars to pity.

Part One

1

Wings to Fly

The story of my life with Stephen Hawking began in the summer of 1962, though possibly it began ten or so years earlier than that without my being aware of it. When I entered St Albans High School for Girls as a seven-year-old first-former in the early Fifties, there was for a short spell a boy with floppy, golden-brown hair who used to sit by the wall in the next-door classroom. The school took boys, including my brother Christopher in the junior department, but I only saw the boy with the floppy hair on the occasions when, in the absence of our own teacher, we first-formers were squeezed into the same classroom as the older children. We never spoke to each other, but I am sure this early memory is to be trusted, because Stephen was a pupil at the school for a term at that time before going to a preparatory school a few miles away.

Stephen's sisters were more recognizable, because they were at the school for longer. Only eighteen months younger than Stephen, Mary, the elder of the two girls, was a distinctively eccentric figure – plump, always dishevelled, absent-minded, given to solitary pursuits. Her great asset, a translucent complexion, was masked by thick, unflattering spectacles. Philippa, five years younger than Stephen, was bright-eyed, nervous and excitable, with short fair plaits and a round, pink face. The school demanded rigid conformity both academically and in discipline, and the pupils, like schoolchildren everywhere, could be cruelly intolerant of individuality. It was fine to have a Rolls Royce and a house in the country, but if, like me, your means of transport was a pre-war Standard 10 – or even worse, like the Hawkings, an ancient London taxi – you were a figure of fun or the object of pitying contempt. The Hawking children used to lie on the floor of their taxi to avoid being seen by their peers. Unfortunately there was not room on the floor of the Standard 10 for such evasive action. Both the Hawking girls left before reaching the upper school.

Their mother had long been a familiar figure. A small, wiry person dressed in a fur coat, she used to stand on the corner by the zebra crossing near my school, waiting for her youngest son, Edward, to arrive by bus from his preparatory school in the country. My brother also went to that school after his kindergarten year at St Albans High School: it was called Aylesford House and there the boys wore pink – pink blazers and pink caps. In all other respects it was a paradise for small boys, especially for those who were not of an academic inclination. Games, cubs, camping and gang shows, for which my father often played the piano, appeared to be the major activities. Charming and very good-looking, Edward, at the age of eight, was having some difficulty relating to his adoptive family when I first knew the Hawkings – possibly because of their habit of bringing their reading matter to the dinner table and ignoring any non-bookworms present.

A school friend of mine, Diana King, had experienced this particular Hawking habit – which may have been why, on hearing some time later of my engagement to Stephen, she exclaimed, “Oh, Jane! You are marrying into a mad, mad family!” It was Diana who first pointed Stephen out to me in that summer of 1962 when, after the exams, she, my best friend Gillian and I were enjoying the blissful period of semi-idleness before the end of term. Thanks to my father’s position as a senior civil servant, I had already made a couple of sorties into the adult world beyond school, homework and exams – to a dinner in the House of Commons and on a hot sunny day to a garden party at Buckingham Palace. Diana and Gillian were leaving school that summer, while I was to stay on as Head Girl for the autumn term, when I would be applying for university entrance. That Friday afternoon we collected our bags and, adjusting our straw boaters, we decided to drift into town for tea. We had scarcely gone a hundred yards when a strange sight met our eyes on the other side of the road: there, lolling along in the opposite direction, was a young man with an awkward gait, his head down, his face shielded from the world under an unruly mass of straight brown hair. Immersed in his own thoughts, he looked neither to right nor left, unaware of the group of schoolgirls across the road. He was an eccentric phenomenon for strait-laced, sleepy St Albans. Gillian and I stared rather rudely in amazement but Diana remained impassive.

“That’s Stephen Hawking. I’ve been out with him actually,” she announced to her speechless companions.

“No! You haven’t!” we laughed incredulously.

“Yes I have. He’s strange but very clever, he’s a friend of Basil’s [her brother]. He took me to the theatre once, and I’ve been to his house. He goes on ‘Ban the Bomb’ marches.”

Raising our eyebrows, we continued into town, but I did not enjoy the outing because, without being able to explain why, I felt uneasy about the young man we had just seen. Perhaps there was something about his very eccentricity that fascinated me in my rather conventional existence. Perhaps I had some strange premonition that I would be seeing him again. Whatever it was, that scene etched itself deeply on my mind.

The holidays of that summer were a dream for a teenager on the verge of independence, though they may well have been a nightmare for her parents, since my destination, a summer school in Spain, was in 1962 quite as remote, mysterious and fraught with hazards as, say, Nepal is for teenagers today. With all the confidence of my eighteen years, I was quite sure that I could look after myself, and I was right. The course was well organized, and we students were lodged in groups in private homes. At weekends we were taken on conducted tours of all the sights – to Pamplona where the bulls run the streets, to the only bullfight I have seen, brutal and savage, but spectacular and enthralling as well, and to Loyola, the home of St Ignatius, the author of a prayer I and every other pupil at St Albans High School had had instilled into us from constant repetition:

Teach us, O Lord,
to serve Thee as Thou deservest,
to give and not to count the cost...

Otherwise we spent our afternoons on the beach and the evenings out down by the port in restaurants and bars, participating in the fiestas and the dancing, listening to the raucous bands and gasping at the fireworks. I quickly made new friends outside the limited St Albans scene, primarily among the other teenagers on the course, and with them, in the glorious, exotic atmosphere of Spain, experimented with a taste of adult independence away from home, family and the stultifying discipline of school.

On my return to England, I was whisked away almost immediately by my parents who, relieved at my safe return, had arranged a family holiday in the Low Countries and Luxembourg. This

was yet another broadening experience, one of those holidays in which my father specialized and which he had been arranging for us for many years – ever since my first trip to Brittany at the age of ten. Thanks to his enthusiasms we found ourselves in the vanguard of the tourist movement, travelling hundreds of miles along meandering country roads across a Europe in the process of emerging from its wartime trauma, visiting cities, cathedrals and art museums, which my parents were also discovering for the first time. It was a typically inspired combination of education, through art and history, and enjoyment of the good things of life – wine, food and summer sun – all intermingled with the war memorials and cemeteries of Flanders’ fields.

Back in school that autumn, the summer’s experiences lent me an unprecedented feeling of self-assurance. As I emerged from my chrysalis, school provided only the palest reflection of the awareness and self-reliance I had acquired through travelling. Taking my cue from the new forms of satire appearing on television, I, the Head Girl, devised a fashion show for the sixth-form entertainment, with the difference that all the fashions were constructed from bizarrely adapted items of school uniform. Discipline collapsed as the whole school clamoured for entry on the staircase outside the hall, and Miss Meiklejohn (otherwise known as Mick), the stocky, weather-beaten games mistress on whose terrifyingly masculine bark the smooth running of the school depended, was for once reduced to apoplexy, unable to make herself heard in the din. In desperation, she resorted to the megaphone – which usually only came out for a blasting on Sports Day, at the pet show, and for the purpose of controlling those interminable crocodiles we had to form when marching down through every possible back street of St Albans for the once-termly services in the Abbey.

That term long ago in the autumn of 1962 was not supposed to be about putting on shows. It was supposed to be about university entrance. Sadly it was not a success for me in academic terms. However great our adulation for President Kennedy, the Cuban missile crisis that October had well and truly shaken the sense of security of my generation and dashed our hopes for the future. With the superpowers playing such dangerous games with our lives, it was not at all certain that we had any future to look forward to. As we prayed for peace in school assembly under the direction of the Dean, I remembered a prediction made by

Field Marshall Montgomery in the late Fifties that there would be a nuclear war within a decade. Everyone, young and old alike, knew that we would have just four minutes' warning of a nuclear attack, which would spell the abrupt end of all civilization. My mother's comment, calmly philosophical and sensible as ever, at the prospect of a third world war in her lifetime, was that she would much rather be obliterated with everything and everyone else than endure the agony of seeing her husband and son conscripted for warfare from which they would never return.

Quite apart from the almighty threat of the international scene, I felt that I had burnt myself out with the A-level exams and lacked enthusiasm for school work after my taste of freedom in the summer. The serious business of university entrance held only humiliation when neither Oxford nor Cambridge expressed any interest in me. It was all the more painful because my father had been cherishing the hope that I would gain a place at Cambridge since I was about six years old. Aware of my sense of failure, Miss Gent, the Headmistress, sympathetically went to some lengths to point out that there was no disgrace in not getting a place at Cambridge, because many of the men at that university were far inferior intellectually to the women who had been turned away for want of places. In those days the ratio was roughly ten men to one woman at Oxford and Cambridge. She recommended taking up the offer of an interview at Westfield College, London, a women's college on the Girtonian model, situated in Hampstead at some distance from the rest of the University. Thus one cold, wet December day, I set off from St Albans by bus for the fifteen-mile journey to Hampstead.

The day was such a disaster that it was a relief at the end of it to be on the bus home again, travelling through the same bleak, grey sleet and snow of the outward journey. After the uncomfortable exercise in the Spanish Department of bluffing my way through an interview which seemed to hinge entirely on T.S. Eliot, about whom I knew next to nothing, I was sent to join the queue outside the Principal's study. When my turn came, she brought the style of a former civil servant to the interview, scarcely looking up from her papers over her horn-rimmed spectacles. Feeling exceedingly ruffled from the fiasco of the earlier interview, I decided it was better to make her notice me even if in the process I ruined my chances. So when in a bored, dry voice, she asked, "And why have you put down Spanish rather than French as your main

language?”, I answered in an equally bored, dry voice, “Because Spain is hotter than France.” Her papers fell from her hands and she did indeed look up.

To my astonishment, I was offered a place at Westfield, but by that Christmas much of the optimism and enthusiasm that I had discovered in Spain had worn thin. When Diana invited me to a New Year’s party which she was giving with her brother on 1st January 1963, I went along, neatly dressed in a dark-green silky outfit – synthetic, of course – with my hair back-brushed in an extravagant bouffant roll, inwardly shy and very unsure of myself. There, slight of frame, leaning against the wall in a corner with his back to the light, gesticulating with long thin fingers as he spoke – his hair falling across his face over his glasses – and wearing a dusty black-velvet jacket and red-velvet bow tie, stood Stephen Hawking, the young man I had seen lolling along the street in the summer.

Standing apart from the other groups, he was talking to an Oxford friend, explaining that he had begun research in cosmology in Cambridge – not, as he had hoped, under the auspices of Fred Hoyle, the popular television scientist, but with the unusually named Dennis Sciama. At first, Stephen had thought his unknown supervisor’s name was *Skeearma*, but on his arrival in Cambridge he had discovered that the correct pronunciation was *Sharma*. He admitted that he had learnt with some relief, the previous summer – when I was doing A levels – that he had gained a First Class degree at Oxford. This was the happy result of a viva, an oral exam, conducted by the perplexed examiners to decide whether the singularly inept candidate whose papers also revealed flashes of brilliance should be given a First, an Upper Second or a Pass degree, the latter being tantamount to failure. He nonchalantly informed the examiners that if they gave him a First he would go to Cambridge to do a PhD, thus giving them the opportunity of introducing a Trojan horse into the rival camp, whereas if they gave him an Upper Second (which would also allow him to do research), he would stay in Oxford. The examiners played for safety and gave him a First.

Stephen went on to explain to his audience of two, his Oxford friend and me, how he had also taken steps to play for safety, realizing that it was extremely unlikely that he would get a First at Oxford on the little work he had done. He had never been to a lecture – it was not the done thing to be seen working when

friends called – and the legendary tale of his tearing up a piece of work and flinging it into his tutor's wastepaper basket on leaving a tutorial is quite true. Fearing for his chances in academia, Stephen had applied to join the Civil Service and had passed the preliminary stages of selection at a country-house weekend, so he was all set to take the Civil Service exams just after Finals. One morning he woke late as usual, with the niggling feeling that there was something he ought to be doing that day, apart from his normal pursuit of listening to his taped recording of the entire *Ring Cycle*. As he did not keep a diary but trusted everything to memory, he had no way of finding out what it was until some hours later, when it dawned on him that that day was the day of the Civil Service exams.

I listened in amused fascination, drawn to this unusual character by his sense of humour and his independent personality. His tales made very appealing listening, particularly because of his way of hiccupping with laughter, almost suffocating himself, at the jokes he told, many of them against himself. Clearly here was someone, like me, who tended to stumble through life and managed to see the funny side of situations. Someone who, like me, was fairly shy, yet not averse to expressing his opinions; someone who unlike me had a developed sense of his own worth and had the effrontery to convey it. As the party drew to a close, we exchanged names and addresses, but I did not expect to see him again, except perhaps casually in passing. The floppy hair and the bow tie were a façade, a statement of independence of mind, and in future I could afford to overlook them, as Diana had, rather than gape in astonishment, if I came across him again in the street.

2

On Stage

Only a couple of days later, a card came from Stephen, inviting me to a party on 8th January. It was written in a beautiful copperplate hand which I envied but, despite laborious efforts, had never mastered. I consulted Diana, who had also received an invitation. She said that the party was for Stephen's twenty-first birthday – information not conveyed on the invitation – and she promised to come and pick me up. It was difficult to choose a present for someone I had only just met, so I took a record token.

The house in Hillside Road, St Albans, was a monument to thrift and economy. Not that that was unusual in those days, because in the postwar era we were all brought up to treat money with respect, to search out bargains and to avoid waste. Built in the early years of the twentieth century, 14 Hillside Road, a vast red-brick three-storey house, had a certain charm about it, since it was preserved entirely in its original state, with no interference from modernizing trends, such as central heating or wall-to-wall carpeting. Nature, the elements and a family of four children had all left their marks on the shabby façade which hid behind an unruly hedge. Wisteria overhung the decrepit glass porch, and much of the coloured glass in the leaded diamond panes of the upper panels of the front door was missing. Although no immediate response came from pressing the bell, the door was eventually opened by the same person who used to wait wrapped in a fur coat by the zebra crossing. She was introduced to me as Isobel Hawking, Stephen's mother. She was accompanied by an enchanting small boy with dark curly hair and bright blue eyes. Behind them a single light bulb illuminated a long yellow-tiled hallway, heavy furniture – including a grandfather clock – and the original, now darkened, William-Morris wallpaper.

As different members of the family began to appear round the living-room door to greet the new arrivals, I discovered that I knew them all: Stephen's mother was well known from her vigils by the

crossing; his young brother, Edward, was evidently the small boy in the pink cap; the sisters, Mary and Philippa, were recognizable from school, and the tall, white-haired, distinguished father of the family, Frank Hawking, had once come to collect a swarm of bees from our own back garden. My brother Chris and I had wanted to watch, but to our disappointment he had shooed us away with a gruff taciturnity. In addition to being the city's only beekeeper, Frank Hawking must also have been one of the few people in St Albans to own a pair of skis. In winter he would ski down the hill past our house on his way to the golf course, where we used to picnic and gather bluebells in spring and summer and toboggan on tin trays in winter. It was like fitting a jigsaw together: all these people were individually quite familiar to me, but I had never realized that they were related. Indeed there was yet another member of that household whom I recognized: she lodged in her own self-contained room in the attic, but came down to join in family occasions such as this. Agnes Walker, Stephen's Scottish grandmother, was a well-known figure in St Albans in her own right on account of her prowess at the piano, publicly displayed once a month when she joined forces in the Town Hall with Molly Du Cane, our splendidly jolly-hockey-sticks folk-dance leader.

Dancing and tennis had been just about my only social activities throughout my teenage years. Through them, I had acquired a group of friends of both sexes from various schools and differing backgrounds. Out of school we went everywhere in a crowd – coffee on Saturday mornings, tennis in the evenings and socials at the tennis club in summer, ballroom-dancing classes and folk dancing in the winter. The fact that our mothers also attended the folk-dance evenings along with many of St Albans' elderly and infirm population did not embarrass us at all. We sat apart and danced in our own sets, well out of the way of the older generation. Romances blossomed occasionally in our corner, giving rise to plenty of gossip and a few squabbles, then usually faded as quickly as they had bloomed. We were an easygoing, friendly bunch of teenagers, leading simpler lives than our modern counterparts, and the atmosphere at the dances was carefree and wholesome, inspired by Molly Du Cane's infectious enthusiasm for her energetic art. Fiddle on her shoulder, she called the dances with authority, while Stephen's grandmother, her corpulent frame upright at the grand piano, applied her

fingers with nimble artistry to the ivories, not once allowing the sausage bang of tight curls on her forehead to become ruffled. An august figure, she would turn to survey the dancers with a curiously impassive stare. She, of course, came downstairs to greet the guests at Stephen's twenty-first birthday party.

The party consisted of a mixture of friends and relations. A few hailed from Stephen's Oxford days, but most had been his contemporaries or near contemporaries at St Albans School and had contributed to that school's success in the Oxbridge entrance exams of 1959. At seventeen, Stephen had been younger than his peer group at school, and consequently was rather young for university entrance that autumn, especially as many of his fellow undergraduates were not just one year older than him, but older by several years because they had all come up to Oxford after doing National Service, which had since been abolished. Later Stephen admitted that he failed to get the best out of Oxford because of the difference in age between him and his fellow undergraduates.

Certainly he maintained closer ties with his school friends than with any acquaintances from Oxford. Apart from Basil King, Diana's brother, I knew them only by repute as the new elite of St Albans' society. They were said to be the intellectual adventurers of our generation, passionately dedicated to a critical rejection of every truism, to the ridicule of every trite or clichéd remark, to the assertion of their own independence of thought and to the exploration of the outer reaches of the mind. Our local paper, *The Herts Advertiser*, had trumpeted the success of the school four years earlier, splashing their names and faces across its pages. Whereas I was just about to embark on my undergraduate career, their student years were now already behind them. They were, of course, very different from my friends, and I, a bright but ordinary eighteen-year-old, felt intimidated. None of this crowd would ever spend their evenings folk-dancing. Painfully aware of my own lack of sophistication, I settled in a corner as close to the fire as possible with Edward on my knee and listened to the conversation, not attempting to participate. Some people were seated, others leant against the wall of the large chilly dining room, where the only source of heat was from a glass-fronted stove. The conversation was halting and consisted mostly of jokes, none of which were even remotely as highbrow as I was expecting. The only part of it I can remember was not a joke,

but a riddle, about a man in New York who wanted to get to the fiftieth floor of a building but only took the lift to the forty-sixth. Why? Because he was not tall enough to reach the button for the fiftieth floor...

It was some time before I saw or heard of Stephen again. I was busily engaged in London following a secretarial course in a revolutionary type of shorthand, which used the alphabet instead of hieroglyphs and omitted all vowels. Initially I accompanied my father to the station at a sprint to catch the 8 a.m. train every morning, until I discovered that I was not required to be at the school in Oxford Street quite so early. I could travel at a more leisurely pace than my dedicated, hard-working father, so I ambled to the station for the nine o'clock train and met a completely different commuting public from the jam-packed, harassed-looking, middle-aged breadwinners in dark suits. Rarely did a day go by when I did not meet someone I knew – unhurried and casually dressed, either going back to college after a weekend at home or going up to London for an interview. This was a welcome start to the day, because for the rest of it, apart from a short break for lunch, I was confined to the classroom, surrounded by the clatter of massed old-fashioned typewriters and the chatter of ex-debs whose main claim to distinction seemed to be the number of times they had been invited to Buckingham Palace, Kensington Palace or Clarence House.

The revolutionary form of shorthand was easy enough to pick up, but the touch-typing was a nightmare. I could see the sense of the shorthand, for that was going to be useful for note-taking at university, but the typing was tiresome in the extreme and I was hopeless at it, still struggling to reach forty words a minute when the rest of the class had finished the course and mastered all the additional skills of the secretarial art. Actually the shorthand would be of short-term value while the typing skills would prove themselves over and over again.

At weekends I could forget the horrors of typing and keep up with old friends. One Saturday morning in February, I met Diana, who was now a student nurse at St Thomas's Hospital, and Elizabeth Chant, another school friend, who was training to become a primary-school teacher, in our favourite haunt, the coffee bar in Greens', St Albans' only department store. We compared notes on our courses and then started talking about our friends and acquaintances. Suddenly Diana asked, "Have

you heard about Stephen?” “Oh, yes,” said Elizabeth, “it’s awful, isn’t it?” I realized that they were talking about Stephen Hawking. “What do you mean?” I asked. “I haven’t heard anything.” “Well, apparently he’s been in hospital for two weeks – Bart’s I think, because that’s where his father trained and that’s where Mary is training.” Diana explained, “He kept stumbling and couldn’t tie his shoelaces.” She paused. “They did lots of horrible tests and have found that he’s suffering from some terrible, paralysing incurable disease. It’s a bit like multiple sclerosis, but it’s not multiple sclerosis and they reckon he’s probably only got a couple of years to live.”

I was stunned. I had only just met Stephen and for all his eccentricity I liked him. We both seemed shy in the presence of others, but were confident within ourselves. It was unthinkable that someone only a couple of years older than me should be facing the prospect of his own death. Mortality was not a concept that played any part in our existence. We were still young enough to be immortal. “How is he?” I enquired, shaken by the news. “Basil’s been to see him,” she continued, “and says he’s pretty depressed: the tests are really unpleasant, and a boy from St Albans in the bed opposite died the other day.” She sighed, “Stephen insisted on being on the ward, because of his socialist principles, and would not have a private room as his parents wanted.” “Do they know the cause of this illness?” I asked blankly. “Not really,” Diana replied. “They think he may have been given a non-sterile smallpox vaccination when he went to Persia a couple of years ago, and that introduced a virus to his spine – but they don’t really know, that’s only speculation.”

I went home in silence, thinking about Stephen. My mother noticed my preoccupation. She had not met him, but knew of him and also knew that I liked him. I had taken the precaution of warning her that he was very eccentric, in case she should come across him unannounced. With the sensible assurance of the deep-seated faith which had sustained her through the war, through the terminal illness of her beloved father and through my own father’s bouts of depression, she quietly said, “Why don’t you pray for him? It might help.”

I was astonished therefore when, a week or so later, as I was waiting for a 9 a.m. train, Stephen came sauntering down the platform carrying a brown canvas suitcase. He looked perfectly cheerful and pleased to see me. His appearance was more

conventional and actually rather more attractive than on past occasions: the features of the old image which he had doubtless cultivated at Oxford – the bow tie, the black-velvet jacket, even the long hair – had given way to a red necktie, a beige raincoat and a tidier, shorter hairstyle. Our two previous meetings had been in the evening in subdued lighting: daylight revealed his broad, winning smile and his limpid grey eyes to advantage. Behind the owlsh spectacles there was something about the set of his features which attracted me, reminding me, perhaps even subconsciously, of my Norfolk hero, Lord Nelson. We sat together on the train to London talking quite happily, though we scarcely touched on the question of his illness. I mentioned how sorry I had been to hear of his stay in hospital, whereupon he wrinkled his nose and said nothing. He behaved so convincingly as if everything were fine, and I felt it would have been cruel to have pursued the subject further. He was on his way back to Cambridge, he said, and as we neared St Pancras, he announced that he came home quite often at weekends. Would I like to go to the theatre with him sometime? Of course I said I would.

We met one Friday evening at an Italian restaurant in Soho, which in itself would have been a sufficiently lavish evening out. However Stephen had tickets for the theatre as well, and the meal had to be brought to a hasty and rather embarrassingly expensive conclusion to enable us to make our way south of the river to the Old Vic, in time for a performance of *Volpone*. Arriving at the theatre in a rush, we just managed to throw our belongings under our seats at the back of the stalls when the play began. My parents were fairly keen theatre-goers, so I had already seen Jonson's other great play *The Alchemist* and had enjoyed it thoroughly; *Volpone* was just as entertaining, and soon enough I was totally absorbed in the intrigues of the old fox who wanted to test the sincerity of his heirs but whose plans went badly wrong.

Elated by the performance, we stood discussing it afterwards at the bus stop. A tramp came by and politely asked Stephen if he had any loose change. Stephen felt in his pocket and exclaimed in embarrassment, "I'm sorry, I don't think I have anything left!" The tramp grinned and looked at me. "That's all right, guv'," he said, winking in my direction, "I understand." At that moment the bus drew up and we clambered on. As we sat down, Stephen turned to me apologetically, "I'm terribly sorry," he said, "but