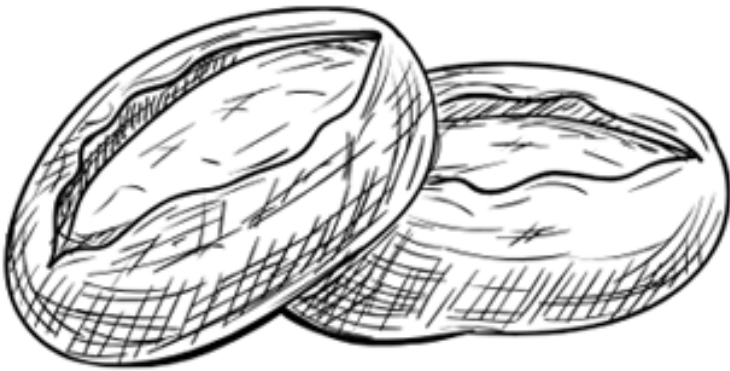


# BREAD & ROSES

Part Two

Poetry and readings offering  
company, comfort and connection.



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# About this anthology

The Reader is a charity which usually brings people together to listen to stories, extracts and poems in free, weekly Shared Reading groups.

In the challenging times in which we find ourselves as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, our aim as an organization continues to be to help humans survive and live well. To this end we are providing two services – food to keep the body alive for those in most need, and literature for the spirit of all.

In the words of the early female unionists of the US, who recognised that life was not only about basic breadline necessities but also about the ineffable beauty of the world, 'give us bread, but give us roses'.

We hope you can find within the pages of this anthology sustenance for the spirit and aid in glimpsing the roses.

Whether you're used to doing this or not, you may also like to have a go at reading the words of a poem or a story out loud to yourself.

Although it may feel strange to begin with, this is a great way to make the words present when our minds are distracted and full. The final few lines from Wordsworth certainly call to be read aloud and might just offer you a lift.

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# from *Jane Eyre*

## (chapter 9)

### by Charlotte Brontë

*Jane is at Lowood, 'an institution for educating orphans'. She has learned much from her friend, Helen Burns, since becoming acquainted with her at the school. But after some months in her new residence, an infection takes root and many of the girls start to become ill with typhus. Jane is one of those who manages to escape the disease. But Helen has been hidden away by the household staff, for she has fallen ill not with typhus, but with the deadly consumption. Jane hears one evening that she has suddenly got very bad, but is told that it is too dangerous for her to visit Helen in her room.*

It might be two hours later, probably near eleven, when I—not having been able to fall asleep, and deeming, from the perfect silence of the dormitory, that my companions were all wrapt in profound repose—rose softly, put on my frock over my night-dress, and, without shoes, crept from the apartment, and set off in quest of Miss Temple's room. It was quite at the other end of the house; but I knew my way; and the light of the unclouded summer moon, entering here and there at passage windows, enabled me to find it without difficulty. An odour of camphor and burnt vinegar warned me when I came near the fever room: and I passed its door quickly, fearful lest the nurse who sat up all night should hear me. I dreaded being discovered and sent back; for I must see Helen,—I must embrace her before she died,—I must give her one last kiss, exchange with her one last word.

Having descended a staircase, traversed a portion of the house below, and succeeded in opening and shutting, without noise, two doors, I reached another flight of steps; these I mounted, and then just opposite to me was Miss Temple's room. A light shone through the keyhole and from under the door; a profound stillness pervaded the vicinity. Coming near, I found the door slightly ajar; probably to admit some fresh air into the close abode of sickness. Indisposed to hesitate, and full of impatient impulses—soul and senses quivering with keen throes—I put it back and looked in. My eye sought Helen, and feared to find death.

Close by Miss Temple's bed, and half covered with its white curtains, there stood a little crib. I saw the outline of a form under the clothes, but the face was hid by the hangings: the nurse I had spoken to in the garden sat in an easy-chair asleep; an unsnuffed candle burnt dimly on the table. Miss Temple was not to be seen: I knew afterwards that she had been called to a delirious patient in the fever-room. I advanced; then paused by the crib side: my hand was on the curtain, but I preferred speaking before I withdrew it. I still recoiled at the dread of seeing a corpse.

"Helen!" I whispered softly, "are you awake?"

She stirred herself, put back the curtain, and I saw her face, pale, wasted, but quite composed: she looked so little changed that my fear was instantly dissipated.

"Can it be you, Jane?" she asked, in her own gentle voice.

"Oh!" I thought, "she is not going to die; they are mistaken: she could not speak and look so calmly if she were."

I got on to her crib and kissed her: her forehead was cold, and her cheek both cold and thin, and so were her hand and wrist; but she smiled as of old.

"Why are you come here, Jane? It is past eleven o'clock: I heard it strike some minutes since."

"I came to see you, Helen: I heard you were very ill, and I could not sleep till I had spoken to you."

"You came to bid me good-bye, then: you are just in time probably."

"Are you going somewhere, Helen? Are you going home?"

"Yes; to my long home—my last home."

"No, no, Helen!" I stopped, distressed. While I tried to devour my tears, a fit of coughing seized Helen; it did not, however, wake the nurse; when it was over, she lay some minutes exhausted; then she whispered—

"Jane, your little feet are bare; lie down and cover yourself with my quilt."

I did so: she put her arm over me, and I nestled close to her. After a long silence, she resumed, still whispering—

"I am very happy, Jane; and when you hear that I am dead, you must be sure and not grieve: there is nothing to grieve about. We all must die one day, and the illness which is removing me is not painful; it is gentle and gradual: my mind is at rest. I leave no one to regret me much: I have only a father; and he is lately married, and will not miss me. By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault."

"But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?"

"I believe; I have faith: I am going to God."

"Where is God? What is God?"

"My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created. I rely implicitly on His power, and confide wholly in His goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me."

"You are sure, then, Helen, that there is such a place as heaven, and that our souls can get to it when we die?"

"I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgiving. God is my father; God is my friend: I love Him; I believe He loves me."

"And shall I see you again, Helen, when I die?"

"You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty, universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane."

Again I questioned, but this time only in thought. "Where is that region? Does it exist?" And I clasped my arms closer round Helen; she seemed dearer to me than ever; I felt as if I could not let her go; I lay with my face hidden on her neck. Presently she said, in the sweetest tone—

"How comfortable I am! That last fit of coughing has tired me a little; I feel as if I could sleep: but don't leave me, Jane; I like to have you near me."

"I'll stay with you, dear Helen: no one shall take me away."

"Are you warm, darling?"

"Yes."

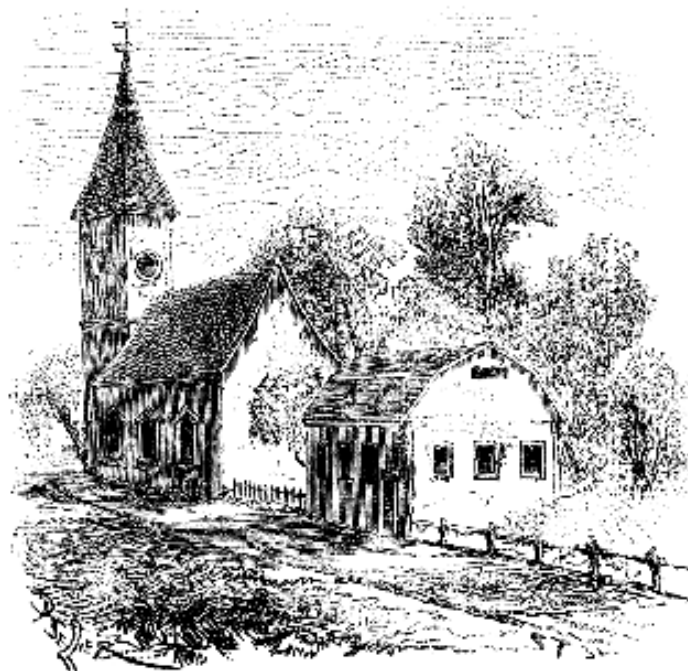
"Good-night, Jane."

"Good-night, Helen."

She kissed me, and I her, and we both soon slumbered.

When I awoke it was day: an unusual movement roused me; I looked up; I was in somebody's arms; the nurse held me; she was carrying me through the passage back to the dormitory. I was not reprimanded for leaving my bed; people had something else to think about; no explanation was afforded then to my many questions; but a day or two afterwards I learned that Miss Temple, on returning to her own room at dawn, had found me laid in the little crib; my face against Helen Burns's shoulder, my arms round her neck. I was asleep, and Helen was—dead.

Her grave is in Brocklebridge churchyard: for fifteen years after her death it was only covered by a grassy mound; but now a grey marble tablet marks the spot, inscribed with her name, and the word "Resurgam."



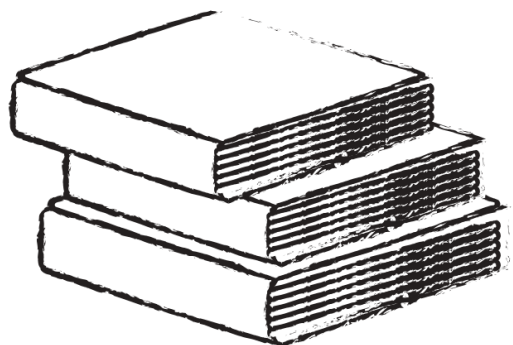
# from *Affliction*

## Sir John Davies

If aught can teach us aught, Affliction's looks,  
    (Making us pry into ourselves so near),  
Teach us to know ourselves beyond all books,  
    Or all the learned schools that ever were.

This mistress lately plucked me by the ear,  
    And many a golden lesson hath me taught;  
Hath made my senses quick and reason clear;  
    Reform'd my will, and rectify'd my thought.

So do the winds and thunders cleanse the air:  
    So working seas settle and purge the wine:  
So lopp'd and pruned trees do flourish fair:  
    So doth the fire the drossy gold refine.



# from *Little Ida's Flowers*

by Hans Christian Andersen  
translated by H. P. Paull (1812-1888)

"My poor flowers are quite dead," said little Ida, "they were so pretty yesterday evening, and now all the leaves are hanging down quite withered. What do they do that for," she asked, of the student who sat on the sofa; she liked him very much, he could tell the most amusing stories, and cut out the prettiest pictures; hearts, and ladies dancing, castles with doors that opened, as well as flowers; he was a delightful student. "Why do the flowers look so faded to-day?" she asked again, and pointed to her nosegay, which was quite withered.

"Don't you know what is the matter with them?" said the student. "The flowers were at a ball last night, and therefore, it is no wonder they hang their heads."

"But flowers cannot dance?" cried little Ida.

"Yes indeed, they can," replied the student. "When it grows dark, and everybody is asleep, they jump about quite merrily. They have a ball almost every night."

"Can children go to these balls?"

"Yes," said the student, "little daisies and lilies of the valley."

"Where do the beautiful flowers dance?" asked little Ida.

"Have you not often seen the large castle outside the gates of the town, where the king lives in summer, and where the beautiful garden is full of flowers? And have you not fed the swans with bread when they swam towards you? Well, the flowers have capital balls there, believe me."

"I was in the garden out there yesterday with my mother," said Ida, "but all the leaves were off the trees, and there was not a single flower left. Where are they? I used to see so many in the summer."

"They are in the castle," replied the student. "You must know that as soon as the king and all the court are gone into the town, the flowers run out of the garden into the castle, and you should see how merry they are. The two most beautiful roses seat themselves on the throne, and are called the king and queen, then all the red cockscombs range themselves on each side, and bow, these are the lords-in-waiting. After that the pretty flowers come in, and there is a grand ball. The blue violets represent little naval cadets, and dance with hyacinths and crocuses which they call young ladies. The tulips and tiger-lilies are the old ladies who sit and watch the dancing, so that everything may be conducted with order and propriety."

"But," said little Ida, "is there no one there to hurt the flowers for dancing in the king's castle?"

"No one knows anything about it," said the student. "The old steward of the castle, who has to watch there at night, sometimes comes in; but he carries a great bunch of keys, and as soon as the flowers hear the keys rattle, they run and hide themselves behind the long curtains, and stand quite still, just peeping their heads out. Then the old steward says, 'I smell flowers here,' but he cannot see them."

"Oh how capital," said little Ida, clapping her hands. "Should I be able to see these flowers?"

"Yes," said the student, "mind you think of it the next time you go out, no doubt you will see them, if you peep through the window. I did so to-day, and I saw a long yellow lily lying stretched out on the sofa. She was a court lady."

"Can the flowers from the Botanical Gardens go to these balls?" asked Ida. "It is such a distance!"

"Oh yes," said the student "whenever they like, for they can fly. Have you not seen those beautiful red, white, and yellow butterflies, that look like flowers? They were flowers once. They have flown off their stalks into the air, and flap their leaves as if they were little wings to make them fly. Then, if they behave well, they obtain permission to fly about during the day, instead of being obliged to sit still on their stems at home, and so in time their leaves become real wings. It may be, however, that the flowers in the Botanical Gardens have never been to the king's palace, and, therefore, they know nothing of the merry doings at night, which take place there. I will tell you what to do, and the botanical professor, who lives close by here, will be so surprised. You know him very well, do you not? Well, next time you go into his garden, you must tell one of the flowers that there is going to be a grand ball at the castle, then that flower will tell all the others, and they will fly away to the castle as soon as possible. And when the professor walks into his garden, there will not be a single flower left. How he will wonder what has become of them!"

"But how can one flower tell another? Flowers cannot speak?"

"No, certainly not," replied the student; "but they can make signs. Have you not often seen that when the wind blows they nod at one another, and rustle all their green leaves?"

"Can the professor understand the signs?" asked Ida.

"Yes, to be sure he can. He went one morning into his garden, and saw a stinging nettle making signs with its leaves to a beautiful red carnation. It was saying, 'You are so pretty, I like you very much.' But the professor did not approve of such nonsense, so he clapped his hands on the nettle to stop it. Then the leaves, which are its fingers, stung him so sharply that he has never ventured to touch a nettle since."

"Oh how funny!" said Ida, and she laughed.



## A Reader Says...

There's something quite unsettling about the first experiences of things being transient - in whatever shape or form this comes. It feels as if adolescence and adulthood make us more used to it and to the rational reasons behind things changing. However, in this fairy tale, the young student doesn't tell Ida how it really is. Instead he creates vision of a world in which flowers attend balls, and dance during the night. What do we ourselves make of this imaginary world? Could it be important, I wonder, to sometimes enjoy and go with what in this story is described as 'amusing stories and pretty pictures?' Might this help us as adults as well?

One day this week, I was sat in my backyard incredibly bored. I felt like I had read enough, watched enough, cleaned enough, spoken to people on the phone enough. It took me back to childhood and the feeling of being so bored that you'd actually say it out loud in the hope that someone would come to the rescue. In this case, no one did. Instead, I caught a glimpse of snail and suddenly these random questions popped into my mind: 'Are snails born with their shell? And if so, does it grow bigger as they grow bigger?'. For the rest of the day, I withheld from Googling and instead I asked some friends for their thoughts. One suggested that maybe there is a ceremony in the back alley once a year where they receive their shell. A bit like confirmation. I now have a fantastic image of this in my head. It makes me laugh and want to build on it even further.



# ***from Resolution and Independence*** **by William Wordsworth**

My former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;  
And hope that is unwilling to be fed;  
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;  
And mighty Poets in their misery dead.  
—Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,  
My question eagerly did I renew,  
“How is it that you live, and what is it you do?”

He with a smile did then his words repeat;  
And said that, gathering leeches, far and wide  
He travelled; stirring thus about his feet  
The waters of the pools where they abide.  
“Once I could meet with them on every side;  
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;  
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.”

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,  
The old Man’s shape, and speech—all troubled me:  
In my mind’s eye I seemed to see him pace  
About the weary moors continually,  
Wandering about alone and silently.  
While I these thoughts within myself pursued,  
He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.

And soon with this he other matter blended,  
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,  
But stately in the main; and, when he ended,  
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find  
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.  
“God,” said I, “be my help and stay secure;  
I’ll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!”

## A Reader Says...

Wordsworth has been going for a walk, and feeling quite good, when he finds himself troubled by 'dim sadness – and blind thoughts'. In this state, occupied with these thoughts, he comes upon a very old man – almost as old as Wordsworth could imagine a man to be. The man is bent double. Wordsworth is intrigued by the man, and greets him, asking him what occupation he has in this 'lonesome place' that there are both in. The man explains that he makes a living by gathering leeches. But Wordsworth is quite shaken by what he observes of the man and the life he leads.

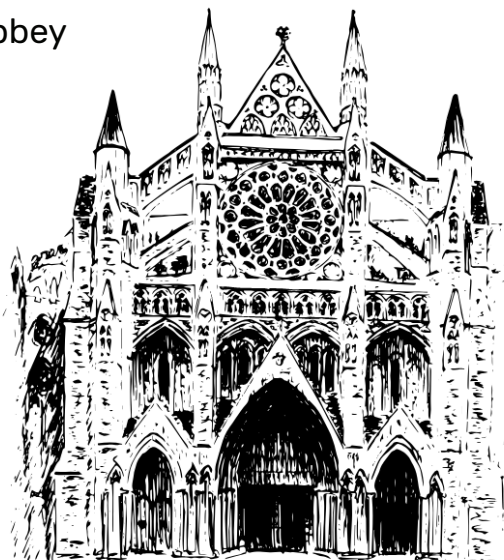
As we come to the four stanzas above which conclude the poem, I am struck by what Wordsworth is carrying: 'hope that is unwilling to be fed', a 'longing to be comforted'. I wonder why that word 'unwilling' is there? It seems strange how it is not Wordsworth who is unwilling, but actually the hope itself.

In this poem Wordsworth seems to need to look to another human being, to look outside himself and his own sense of the state of things. But what do you make of this figure, the leech-gatherer?

## I Am Reminded of These Lines...

that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened

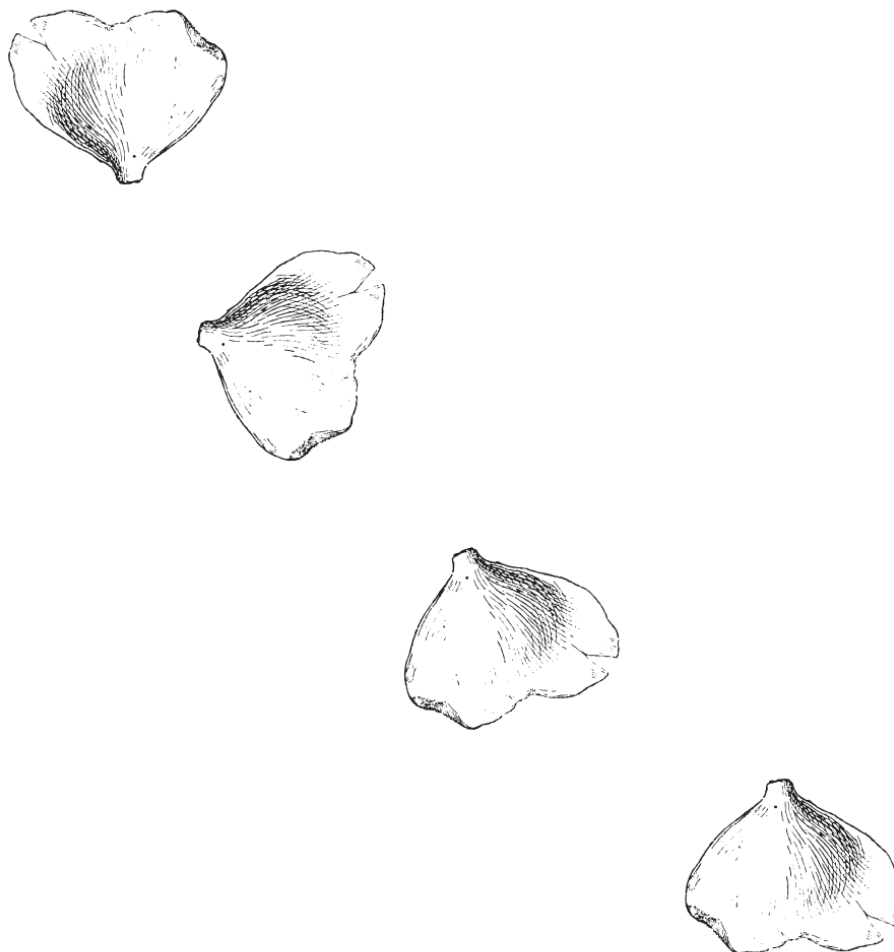
from Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey  
by William Wordsworth



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You may also be interested in The Reader's magazine, relaunched this spring with Issue 71. Along with personal, passionate recommendations and discussion of great literature, the magazine showcases more of the stories and poems that have been read in Shared Reading groups. It also includes essays and articles which show how reading together builds meaning and connection, and helps with inner life, mental health and soul troubles.



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