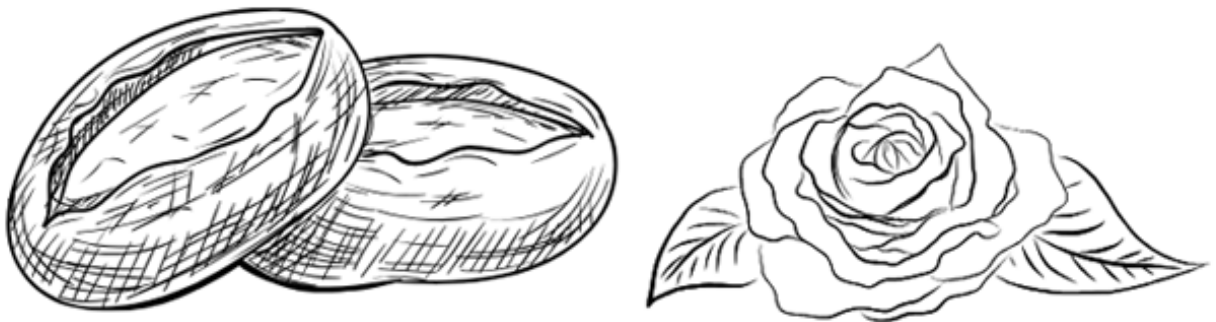


BREAD & ROSES

Part Four

Poetry and readings offering
company, comfort and connection.



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 The
Reader

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.

During 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 – from our HQ at Calderstones Mansion House, in Liverpool, food to keep the body alive, and by as many means as possible – phone, internet and paper – 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.

In the final two editions of Bread and Roses, parts 3 and 4, pieces have been chosen to help us reflect not only on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives and communities, but also on the changes we all need to make to help end racism.

We want to make sure that the literature we promote reflects the perspectives of diverse people with diverse experience. We hope that the range of texts and authors included in this edition will give you, along the way, something new to discover.

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Lost Time (from *Gitanjali* or *Song Offerings*)

by Rabindranath Tagore

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time.

But it is never lost, my lord.

Thou hast taken every moment of my life in thine own hands.

Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into
sprouts,

buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness.

I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed

and imagined all work had ceased.

In the morning I woke up

and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.



A Reader Says...

“ ‘An idle day.’ This brings to mind laziness and passivity, long days of nothing. We are used to such a fast-paced society that when we are still and inactive, it can often be thought of as idleness. I don’t usually subscribe to this idea and yet I have found myself in recent months comparing my seeming lack of activity to the tireless efforts of front-line workers. I can most certainly relate to this idea that time has been ‘lost’ – feeling that somehow, by not being quite as industrious or active as I was before, I’m not being useful or making the most of my life. The idea of having ‘grieved over lost time’ makes me wonder: what really is grief? – and is this something that we can all relate to?

‘Hidden in the heart of things’ leads me to think about flowers, or perhaps other things too, ‘ripening ... into fruitfulness’ in more than just the literal sense. Although the person in the poem had ‘imagined all work had ceased’, the discovery of the ‘garden full with wonders of flowers’ makes me question our understanding of the term ‘work’. How can a garden be ‘full ... of flowers’ when the person has been sleeping on their ‘idle bed’? Is it possible that even when we may think of ourselves as inactive, there is still something deeper working away both internally and outside of us, ‘nourishing seeds into sprouts’? Although they are often described as opposites, I begin to wonder how we might all find rest in work and work in rest.

For me, the very act of pausing to look at the world around me has nourished some of my own seeds and I have found myself becoming less muddled and more creative; finding more ideas of how to spend my time. Whilst we are aware of awful and tragic things happening even in our midst, this poem has reminded me of the ‘wonders’ that we might still find hidden and waiting for us when we allow ourselves to slow down. Even when I am feeling at my most frustrated, idle, or inarticulate, the thought that the world is still turning, that things in nature are still growing, and that we are all continuing to ‘blossom’ in our different ways provides me with a sense of comfort – and also with hope.”

Stairways

by Hazel Hall*

Why do I think of stairways
With a rush of hurt surprise?
Wistful as forgotten love
In remembered eyes:
And fitful as the flutter
Of little draughts of air
That linger on a stairway
As though they loved it there.

New and shining stairways,
Stairways worn and old,
Where rooms are prison places
And corridors are cold.
You intrigue with fancy,
You challenge with a lore
Elusive as a moon's light
Shadowing a floor.

You speak to me not only
With the lure of storied art –
For wonder of old footsteps
Lies lightly on my heart:
And more than the reminiscence
Of yesterday's renown –
*Laughter that might have floated up,
Echoes that should drift down.*

* Following a bout of scarlet fever, Hazel Hall was confined to a wheelchair from the age of 12. Her days were spent in an upstairs room of a large house in Portland, Oregon, which she never left. She lived with her mother and sister, and took up needlework to support the small family.

To Toussaint L'Ouverture

**Leader of the African Slaves of San Domingo,
Imprisoned by Napoleon †
by William Wordsworth**

Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men!

Whether the whistling rustic tend his plough

Within thy hearing, or thy head be now

Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den; –

O miserable Chieftain! where and when

Wilt thou find patience! Yet die not; do thou

Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:

Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,

Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind

Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;

There's not a breathing of the common wind

That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;

Thy friends are exultations, agonies,

And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

† A formerly enslaved man, Louverture rose to the rank of Governor-General of Saint-Domingue, a French colony. He led his armies against the British, French and Spanish, but in 1802 was arrested by Napoleon's forces. The following year, two months after the publication of this poem, he was to die in prison in France.

from The History of Mary Prince ‡

ed. Thomas Pringle

Born into slavery in the West Indies, Mary narrates to the reader the story of her life so far: a story of being separated from her family, and passed from one owner to another, while being subjected to the cruellest treatment from almost every one of them. After years of unceasing labour, Mary falls ill with rheumatism, and struggles with this illness for a long time. When her owners ultimately bring her to England to provide childcare while they visit their older children, Mary has hope that this might not only assist her recovery, but also provide her with an opportunity to win her freedom.

When we drew near to England, the rheumatism seized all my limbs worse than ever, and my body was dreadfully swelled. When we landed at the Tower, I shewed my flesh to my mistress, but she took no great notice of it. We were obliged to stop at the tavern till my master got a house; and a day or two after, my mistress sent me down into the wash-house to learn to wash in the English way. In the West Indies we wash with cold water--in England with hot. I told my mistress I was afraid that putting my hands first into the hot water and then into the cold, would increase the pain in my limbs. The doctor had told my mistress long before I came from the West Indies, that I was a sickly body and the washing did not agree with me. But Mrs. Wood would not release me from the tub, so I was forced to do as I could. I grew worse, and could not stand to wash. I was then forced to sit down with the tub before me, and often through pain and weakness was reduced to kneel or to sit down on the floor, to finish my task. When I complained to my mistress of this, she only got into a passion as usual, and said washing in hot water could not hurt any one;--that I was lazy and insolent, and wanted to be free of my work; but that she would make me do it. I thought her very hard on me, and my heart rose up within me. However I kept still at that time, and went down again to wash the child's things; but the English washerwomen who were at work there, when they saw that I was so ill, had pity upon me and washed them for me.

After that, when we came up to live in Leigh Street, Mrs. Wood sorted out five bags of clothes which we had used at sea, and also such as had been worn since we came on shore, for me and the cook to wash. Elizabeth the cook told her, that she did not think that I was able to stand to the tub, and that she had better hire a woman. I also said myself, that I had come over to nurse the child, and that I was sorry I had come from Antigua, since mistress would work me so hard, without compassion for my rheumatism. Mr. and Mrs. Wood, when they heard this, rose up in a passion against me. They opened the door and bade me get out. But I was a stranger, and did not know one door in the street from another, and was unwilling to go away. They made a dreadful uproar, and from that day they constantly kept cursing and abusing me. I was obliged to wash, though I was very ill. Mrs. Wood, indeed once hired a washerwoman, but she was not well treated, and would come no more.

My master quarrelled with me another time, about one of our great washings, his wife having stirred him up to do so. He said he would compel me to do the whole of the washing

‡ *Appearing in 1831, this is the first narrative of a black woman to be published in Britain.*

given out to me, or if I again refused, he would take a short course with me: he would either send me down to the brig in the river, to carry me back to Antigua, or he would turn me at once out of doors, and let me provide for myself. I said I would willingly go back, if he would let me purchase my own freedom. But this enraged him more than all the rest: he cursed and swore at me dreadfully, and said he would never sell my freedom--if I wished to be free, I was free in England, and I might go and try what freedom would do for me, and be d----d. My heart was very sore with this treatment, but I had to go on. I continued to do my work, and did all I could to give satisfaction, but all would not do.

Shortly after, the cook left them, and then matters went on ten times worse. I always washed the child's clothes without being commanded to do it, and any thing else that was wanted in the family; though still I was very sick--very sick indeed. When the great washing came round, which was every two months, my mistress got together again a great many heavy things, such as bed-ticks, bed-coverlets, &c. for me to wash. I told her I was too ill to wash such heavy things that day. She said, she supposed I thought myself a free woman, but I was not: and if I did not do it directly I should be instantly turned out of doors. I stood a long time before I could answer, for I did not know well what to do. I knew that I was free in England, but I did not know where to go, or how to get my living; and therefore, I did not like to leave the house. But Mr. Wood said he would send for a constable to thrust me out; and at last I took courage and resolved that I would not be longer thus treated, but would go and trust to Providence. This was the fourth time they had threatened to turn me out, and, go where I might, I was determined now to take them at their word; though I thought it very hard, after I had lived with them for thirteen years, and worked for them like a horse, to be driven out in this way, like a beggar. My only fault was being sick, and therefore unable to please my mistress, who thought she never could get work enough out of her slaves; and I told them so: but they only abused me and drove me out. This took place from two to three months, I think, after we came to England.

When I came away, I went to the man (one Mash) who used to black the shoes of the family, and asked his wife to get somebody to go with me to Hatton Garden to the Moravian Missionaries: these were the only persons I knew in England. The woman sent a young girl with me to the mission house, and I saw there a gentleman called Mr. Moore. I told him my whole story, and how my owners had treated me, and asked him to take in my trunk with what few clothes I had. The missionaries were very kind to me--they were sorry for my destitute situation, and gave me leave to bring my things to be placed under their care. They were very good people, and they told me to come to the church.

When I went back to Mr. Wood's to get my trunk, I saw a lady, Mrs. Pell, who was on a visit to my mistress. When Mr. and Mrs. Wood heard me come in, they set this lady to stop me, finding that they had gone too far with me. Mrs. Pell came out to me, and said, "Are you really going to leave, Molly? Don't leave, but come into the country with me." I believe she said this because she thought Mrs. Wood would easily get me back again. I replied to her, "Ma'am, this is the fourth time my master and mistress have driven me out, or threatened to drive me--and I will give them no more occasion to bid me go. I was not willing to leave them, for I am a stranger in this country, but now I must go--I can stay no longer to be so used." Mrs. Pell then went up stairs to my mistress, and told that I would go, and that she could not stop me. Mrs. Wood was very much hurt and frightened when she found I was determined to go out that day. She said, "If she goes the people will rob her, and then turn her adrift." She did not say this to me, but she spoke it loud enough for me to hear; that it might induce me not to go, I suppose. Mr. Wood also asked me where I was going to. I told

him where I had been, and that I should never have gone away had I not been driven out by my owners. He had given me a written paper some time before, which said that I had come with them to England by my own desire; and that was true. It said also that I left them of my own free will, because I was a free woman in England; and that I was idle and would not do my work--which was not true. I gave this paper afterwards to a gentleman who inquired into my case.

I went into the kitchen and got my clothes out. The nurse and the servant girl were there, and I said to the man who was going to take out my trunk, "Stop, before you take up this trunk, and hear what I have to say before these people. I am going out of this house, as I was ordered; but I have done no wrong at all to my owners, neither here nor in the West Indies. I always worked very hard to please them, both by night and day; but there was no giving satisfaction, for my mistress could never be satisfied with reasonable service. I told my mistress I was sick, and yet she has ordered me out of doors. This is the fourth time; and now I am going out."

And so I came out, and went and carried my trunk to the Moravians. I then returned back to Mash the shoe-black's house, and begged his wife to take me in. I had a little West Indian money in my trunk; and they got it changed for me. This helped to support me for a little while. The man's wife was very kind to me. I was very sick, and she boiled nourishing things up for me. She also sent for a doctor to see me, and he sent me medicine, which did me good, though I was ill for a long time with the rheumatic pains. I lived a good many months with these poor people, and they nursed me, and did all that lay in their power to serve me. The man was well acquainted with my situation, as he used to go to and fro to Mr. Wood's house to clean shoes and knives; and he and his wife were sorry for me.

About this time, a woman of the name of Hill told me of the Anti-Slavery Society, and went with me to their office, to inquire if they could do any thing to get me my freedom, and send me back to the West Indies. The gentlemen of the Society took me to a lawyer, who examined very strictly into my case; but told me that the laws of England could do nothing to make me free in Antigua. However they did all they could for me: they gave me a little money from time to time to keep me from want; and some of them went to Mr. Wood to try to persuade him to let me return a free woman to my husband; but though they offered him, as I have heard, a large sum for my freedom, he was sulky and obstinate, and would not consent to let me go free.

This was the first winter I spent in England, and I suffered much from the severe cold, and from the rheumatic pains, which still at times torment me. However, Providence was very good to me, and I got many friends--especially some Quaker ladies, who hearing of my case, came and sought me out, and gave me good warm clothing and money. Thus I had great cause to bless God in my affliction.

When I got better I was anxious to get some work to do, as I was unwilling to eat the bread of idleness. Mrs. Mash, who was a laundress, recommended me to a lady for a charwoman. She paid me very handsomely for what work I did, and I divided the money with Mrs. Mash; for though very poor, they gave me food when my own money was done, and never suffered me to want.

In the spring, I got into service with a lady, who saw me at the house where I sometimes worked as a charwoman. This lady's name was Mrs. Forsyth. She had been

in the West Indies, and was accustomed to Blacks, and liked them. I was with her six months, and went with her to Margate. She treated me well, and gave me a good character when she left London.

After Mrs. Forsyth went away, I was again out of place, and went to lodgings, for which I paid two shillings a week, and found coals and candle. After eleven weeks, the money I had saved in service was all gone, and I was forced to go back to the Anti-Slavery office to ask a supply, till I could get another situation. I did not like to go back--I did not like to be idle. I would rather work for my living than get it for nothing. They were very good to give me a supply, but I felt shame at being obliged to apply for relief whilst I had strength to work.

At last I went into the service of Mr. and Mrs. Pringle, where I have been ever since, and am as comfortable as I can be while separated from my dear husband, and away from my own country and all old friends and connections.



from Hamlet

by William Shakespeare

To be or not to be – that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And, by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep –
No more – and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to – 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep –
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?

Readers Say...

Perhaps you can imagine you're joining the group yourself as you read the comments below from readers who took part remotely in an online Shared Reading session:

'To be or not to be' (line 1)

"He feels there are only two choices."

'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer' (line 2)

"Does he believe that you should you keep suffering to yourself, that he should be a silent receiver of what life throws at him?"

"Why does being 'noble' matter? Could he be embarrassed by what he is suffering/feeling; trying to justify it, make it seem brave somehow?"

'The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' (line 3)

"He is under attack!"

"Could 'fortune' mean the passing of time / events?"

"Outrageous fortune – he's fallen far from where he wanted to be?"

'the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to' (lines 7-8)

"That sounds like he feels emotional pain as almost physical?"

"Natural shocks – they happen in the world around him."

'perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub' (line 10)

"He could be haunted by upsetting memories or thoughts he has been trying to escape."

'For in that sleep of death what dreams may come' (line 11)

"Perhaps he's questioning whether his conscience will feel clear. Will he be satisfied he's made the right decision?"

'Th'oppressor's wrong ... The insolence of office' (lines 16-18)

"It's interesting that there's this list of injustices, to do with abuse of power, because Hamlet himself is a prince, and yet even he is feeling particularly powerless in the situation he is in."

'the dread of something after death, / The undiscovered country' (lines 23-24)

"The 'undiscovered' invites exploration, and yet fear of the unknown is also constraining him. He is uncomfortable with his persistent doubts."

I Am Reminded of These Lines...

by Emily Dickinson

I am alive – I guess –
The Branches on my Hand
Are full of Morning Glory –
And at my finger's end –

The Carmine – tingles warm –
And if I hold a Glass
Across my Mouth – it blurs it –
Physician's – proof of Breath –

And here's one more...

by Emily Dickinson

Wild nights – Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

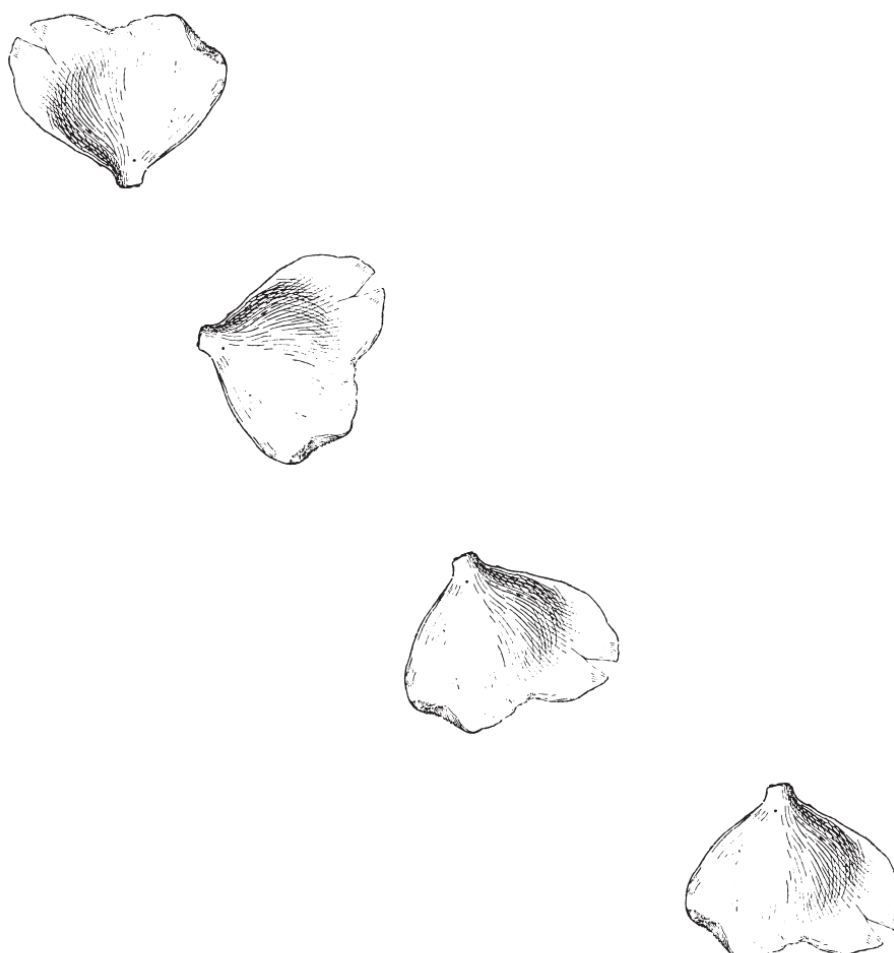
Futile – the winds –
To a Heart in port –
Done with the Compass –
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden –
Ah – the Sea!
Might I but moor – tonight –
In thee!

Keep reading, stay connected with The Reader at Home.

If you enjoyed this anthology, visit www.thereader.org.uk or call 0151 729 2250 for more reading materials, activities, videos and online events. There are four parts to Bread and Roses, which can all be found on The Reader's website.

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. Issue 72 will be due out in September 2020.



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