***Jane Eyre***

***Chapter 9***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Short Summary:***

In spring, it is pleasant, with lots of flowers and pleasant weather, but typhus breaks out and many girls sicken. Those who are healthy are left to fend for themselves. Helen is quite ill, but with consumption, not typhus. Jane does not understand the seriousness of the disease. Jane learns of how ill Helen is, which shocks Jane into thinking about death and what it means to die. Jane visits Helen and they talk about Helen's death and what she expects to find after death. As the two sleep, Helen passes away. She is buried in Brocklebridge Churchyard.

***Short Analysis:***

The grim atmosphere of Lowood has turned deadly as typhus overtakes the campus and more than half of the students there become sick. This tragedy and grimness of death is contrasted with the brightness of the spring and coming summer. However it is in this chapter that Jane again learns the reality of death and the pain of losing someone she loves. Helen dies of consumption, not typhus like the other students. Even in death she is different and set apart from them. Jane sneaks out to see Helen one last time and her friend dies in Jane's arms.

***Summary in detail:***

In the spring, life at Lowood briefly seems happier, but the damp forest dell in which the school resides is a breeding-ground for typhus, and in the warm temperatures more than half the girls fall ill with the disease. Jane remains healthy and spends her time playing outdoors with a new friend, Mary Ann Wilson. Helen is sick, but not with typhus—Jane learns the horrific news that her friend is dying of consumption. One evening, Jane sneaks into Miss Temple’s room to see Helen one last time. Helen promises Jane that she feels little pain and is happy to be leaving the world’s suffering behind. Jane takes Helen into her arms, and the girls fall asleep. During the night, Helen dies. Her grave is originally unmarked, but fifteen years after her death, a gray marble tablet is placed over the spot (presumably by Jane), bearing the single word Resurgam, Latin for “I shall rise again.” Spring arrives at Lowood, and the privations lessen. With new growth comes hope. Jane finds beauty in the natural world surrounding Lowood, a beauty that had been masked by winter's frosts. But within this pleasure, there is also pain. The forest dell that nurtures the school, the "low wood," also brings a pestilence bred by dampness — typhus. Combined with semi-starvation and neglected colds, the dampness causes forty-five of the eighty students to fall ill with this dangerous disease. The few who are well, including Jane, are allowed to play outside without supervision. Jane notes the contrast between the death within the school and the beauty of May outside its doors.

While Jane is enjoying nature's beauty with her new friend, Mary Ann Wilson, Helen Burns is slowly dying, not of typhus, but of consumption. Jane doesn't realize the seriousness of this disease until she learns from the nurse that Helen will soon die. Jane feels she must embrace Helen one last time before she dies and sneaks into Miss Temple's room, where Helen has been staying during her illness. During the two friends' final conversation, Helen insists she is happy, because she will escape great suffering by dying young. Helen dies in Jane's arms, while the two girls sleep. Fifteen years later, Jane marks Helen's grave with a gray marble tablet labeled "Resurgam."

***Analysis in Detail:***

Like the previous few chapters, this one emphasizes the contrast between the spiritual and material worlds through the characters of Helen and Jane. The chapter opens with the brilliance of spring: The world becomes green and fertile, bursting with "wild primrose plants." While Jane and her new friend, Mary Ann Wilson, happily enjoy this luxurious natural world, Lowood School has become marked with pestilence: Typhus is quickly killing half the girls in the school. Jane vividly contrasts life and death, showing Lowood as the begetter both of May's brilliance and of typhus' deadliness. Pain and pleasure are necessarily twinned.

While Jane is innocently reveling in nature, her friend Helen Burns lies dying of consumption. Jane hasn't forgotten her old friend in her new pleasures. After spending a beautiful day outdoors, Jane suddenly imagines, for the first time, how sad lying on a sickbed would be, how awful to be in danger of dying; Jane finds the mundane world pleasant and isn't ready yet to die. This revelation leads her to recognize that the present is the only moment we have: Both the past and the future are "formless cloud and vacant depth." Following this revelation, Jane learns of Helen's imminent death, and her meditations provide her with understanding of what death means; for Jane, it means "tottering, and plunging amid that chaos." But death has a very different meaning for Helen.

The final conversation between the two girls emphasizes their different understanding of the world. While Jane finds pleasure and beauty in the natural world, Helen longs for the release of heaven. Helen assures Jane that her mind is peaceful, but her final words also contain a hint of sadness. Here we learn, for example, that Helen has no family to mourn her, because her father has recently married and will not miss her. Helen feels that an early death will save her from great suffering. Because she has no father in the earthly world to mourn her, Helen looks to God, the "mighty universal Parent" to comfort her. Jane, on the other hand, wonders, "Where is God? What is God?" Uncertain of spiritual salvation, Jane comforts her friend in the best way she can: by hugging her tight, providing corporeal comfort. Despite her courage, Helen seems to find comfort in Jane's arms, asking her friend to remain with her while she sleeps. The chapter gives insight into Helen's spiritual nature: She rejects an earthly world that offers her little love and few chances for a better future. While Helen's resignation allows her to die with dignity, Jane's courage leads her to face life with zest. The chapter emphasizes Jane's inability to put her faith completely in either God or his heaven. For Jane, heaven exists here on earth, in the beauties of a May day. Chapter nine opens with Jane's almost rapturous descriptions of springtime at Lowood. At first glance, it seems things might really be better for her, but if we look a little closer we can see the dark reality underneath. For instance, Jane is excitedly telling us about the beautiful flowers blooming in the countryside, which she describes as 'a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded.' How lovely. But then she goes on to say that these things 'lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden.' Wait...what?! The school is surrounded by tall walls with spikes on top?! Sounds more like a prison.

Jane tells us initially that the 'privations' at Lowood have lessened with the coming of spring, but then she corrects herself, saying instead that it's the 'hardships' that have lessened. The word privation expresses a lack or deprivation of something. Hardship means trial or struggle. To say that the latter has lessened but not the former suggests that there still existed lack and deprivation, but that it was just easier to bear. Warmer temperatures would make it easier to get along without proper clothes. And the food...well, that privation is mitigated by a very dark source, indeed...

***Typhus***

It's easier to have enough to eat when more than half the students are sick and/or dying with typhus. Sick people don't eat much and dead ones don't eat at all, so by default there would be more food for the others. Furthermore, because the outbreak at Lowood is so severe and so widespread, the healthy girls are left largely to their own devices and are encouraged to spend as much time as possible outside. It is a sad state, indeed, if an outbreak of typhus can actually improve one's living conditions.

Despite Jane's childish appreciation of the freedom and extra portions of food this rash of illness brings to her, the outbreak further illuminates the actual conditions at Lowood. Typhus is a bacterial infection that is carried by parasites such as lice or fleas. It is not communicated in any other way. Therefore, we can conclude that Lowood, among its other charms, also has lice and fleas to offer these girls. Additionally, as Jane points out, 'semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection.'

So despite its lovely spring flowers, Lowood is still a terrible place. In fact, as Jane observes, the flowers are 'all useless for most of the inmates of Lowood, except to furnish now and then a handful of herbs and blossoms to put in a coffin.'

***Helen***

In the midst of all the change and disorder brought by the typhus outbreak, Jane notices only in stages that her dear friend Helen is also dangerously unwell. We are reminded of the cough that haunted her earlier in the novel when Jane is told Helen does not suffer from typhus like the other girls, but instead has 'consumption,' which is what people used to call tuberculosis -- an infectious disease characterized by fever, cough, and weight loss. It usually targets the lungs.

***Critical Study:***

The forbidding winter landscape gives way to flowers and sunshine, but spring also brings a typhus epidemic. More than half the students fall ill, and Lowood is transformed into a hospital. [Helen Burns](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Jane-Eyre/character-analysis/#Helen_Burns) is stricken with consumption (tuberculosis). Jane underestimates the severity of Helen's condition until one night, when she learns that Helen is dying and is being cared for in Miss Temple's room. Longing to see Helen, Jane finds her way to Miss Temple's room, guided by the light of the moon through the windows. Helen assures Jane that she's "very happy" and ready to die. Jane asks if Helen is "sure ... there is such a place as heaven, and that our souls can get to it when we die" and whether she will see Helen again there. Helen assures Jane that she one day "will come to the same region of happiness" and "be received by the same mighty, universal Parent." Privately Jane doubts whether such a "region" exists, but she clasps her arms around her friend and they fall asleep. When Jane awakens in the morning, a nurse is carrying her back to her room. She later learns that Helen died during the night. Fifteen years later a gravestone is placed on Helen's grave, presumably by Jane, inscribed with Helen's name and the word r*esurgam*. Throughout the story detailed descriptions of the landscape help establish the setting. Such details add drama and importance to events and reflect characters' emotions. The stormy night and howling winds during the red-room incident, for example, heightened the drama of Jane's experience. The bright spring reinforces Jane's brighter prospects from the end of the previous chapters but also provides a contrast to the sadness associated with Helen's impending death. The moon is a nature motif that often signals an important change in Jane's life. In this chapter the moon lights the way for Jane as she goes to Helen to say good-bye.

Helen's Christian beliefs about the afterlife help her to accept her untimely death with serenity and even joy. Jane finds Helen's spiritual beliefs appealing, but she still has doubts. The Latin word resurgam on Helen's gravestone means "I shall rise again." If Jane is responsible for the inscription, it could indicate that she eventually resolves her doubts and comes to believe as Helen did. Or it could simply be an indication of the respect that Jane has for Helen's beliefs and spirituality.

***Significance:***

As spring arrives, Lowood becomes a more pleasant place. However, the warmer temperatures and dampness of the neighboring forest are ideal for breeding disease, and more than half the girls at the school fall ill with typhus. The disease is particularly bad because of the neglectful care that the students receive at the school. Jane, one of the healthy students, enjoys the outdoors, all the more so because Mr. Brocklehurst no longer visits the school. Jane is shocked to learn that Helen is dying, not of typhus, but of consumption. She is not allowed to visit Helen in Miss Temple's room, but Jane sneaks in at night, hoping for one last conversation. Helen accepts her impending death and place in heaven, and tells Jane not to grieve for her; she is happy to be entering heaven. Jane falls asleep in her arms, and Helen dies during the night. Her grave is unmarked at first, but fifteen years later, a marble tablet is placed over it inscribed with the Latin word "Resurgam," or "I will rise again." Helen maintains her Christian beliefs to the moment of her death, and she fulfills her representation as a Christ figure for Jane, dying so that Jane can learn more of what it means to be a Christian. Although Jane’s devotion to Helen is moving, she continues to question Helen's unshakable faith; she wonders, though does not speak aloud, if heaven truly does exist. Although Jane is not willing to accept fully everything that Helen espouses, the "Resurgam" tablet on Helen’s grave (placed by Jane, it seems) indicates that she has adapted Helen’s beliefs to her own ideology.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Spring brings better weather, but the dampness of the school grounds results in an epidemic of typhus that infects more than half of Lowood's students. Many are sent home. Many others die. [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre), meanwhile, is encouraged to wander outside for her health, and she takes great pleasure in the lush scenery and flowers. In the midst of spring's renewal, Jane contemplates death for the first time.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The Lowood epidemic recalls Brontë's own sisters' deaths, and illustrates the plight of poor women. The contrast of spring's rebirth with death wakes Jane up to life's contradictions. Spring is a transitional time, and Jane is transitioning out of her youth.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) soon learns that [Helen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) is also deathly ill. Helen suffers from consumption (tuberculosis), not typhus, and is being held in quarantine in [Ms. Temple](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters)'s room.

***Analysis Part 2:***

In Victorian literature, characters like Helen who are too sensitive or pure for the harsh world often died of consumption.

***Summary Part 3:***

One night [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) sneaks to Helen's bedside. [Helen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) assures Jane that she is not scared of dying because she will be leaving behind the suffering of the world and going to her God. They fall asleep in each other's arms. By morning, Helen is dead.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Helen's profound faith in an afterlife teaches Jane to give up on some of the petty struggles of life. The girls' bond is unbreakable, even by death.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Helen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) is buried in an unmarked grave. But 15 years later, someone (probably [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre)) places a headstone on the grave that is carved with the word "Resurgam"—Latin for "I will rise again."

***Analysis Part 4:***

The gravestone's inscription extends the novel's comparison of Helen to Christ.