Purveyors of Leeches

by Bill Yarrow

I.

In "Resolution and Independence" Wordsworth admired the firm mind of the old leech gatherer on the moor.

To me, he's the emblem of the writer walking into the scummy pond of life waiting for the vile leeches of heartache, the stinging leeches of heartbreak, the slimy leeches of broken hope to attach themselves, like dust to a mirror, to his torso, legs, and arms.

At home, he'll pick the sticky pieces off him and put them in a water jug to sell to all those suppurating souls desperate for relief from bleakness of spirit, or illness of body, or torpor of mind. "Who'll buy my leeches?" cries the poet with several squirming in his hand. "Who'll buy my leeches?" cries the novelist, bending under the weight of hundreds in a sack.

"Leeches for sale! Leeches for sale!"

I am a purveyor of leeches. All my friends are purveyors of leeches. We meet weekly to compare our wares. She buys my leeches, and I buy his leeches, and he buys her leeches, and we attach them to each other, and they suck out

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all the vileness of living alone, of living in groups, of living in pairs, in short, of living, and, for a while, we are healthy and happy until someone comes along and explodes our hopes or extinguishes our hearts and then we ache and bleat for sticky leeches, for where else can succor be found?