

# The Awakening of Henrietta Waterman

## by Gill Lewis

**Sonder:** The profound realisation that each random passer-by is living a life as vivid and complex as your own, populated with their own ambitions, friends and routines and worries. (*From the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*)

To understand another person, we have to be able to 'step into their shoes', to see life from their perspective. In my novel, ***The Closest Thing to Flying***, Henrietta, a twelve-year-old girl living in a wealthy privileged family in late Victorian times, awakens to the realisation that the family's housekeeper, Mrs Tindall, has her own thoughts and ambitions. Mrs Tindall, a cake-maker extraordinaire, confesses in a rare moment that she has her own dream of owning a teashop and serving her delicious cakes to paying customers. Henrietta's awareness of Mrs Tindall's dreams opens her eyes to the injustices around her, injustices that have benefitted Henrietta's own family.

### From Henrietta's diary:

*I went to my room full of such confusing thoughts. I had never given much concern for the thoughts of the Mrs Tindalls of the world. I had assumed they were happy with their lot, honoured even, to serve our family. But now I realise how stuck we all are in society. Some are stuck by their birthright and others stuck by their fear of change or giving up power and privilege. Suppose Mrs Tindall could run her own restaurant. She would be free to choose her own path. All the Mrs Tindalls of the world could have their hopes and dreams. And it made me think something else too. If so many people think the same, then it only takes one brave person to open up the way ahead. It takes one to be as brave as a lion, like my own dear Kitty.*

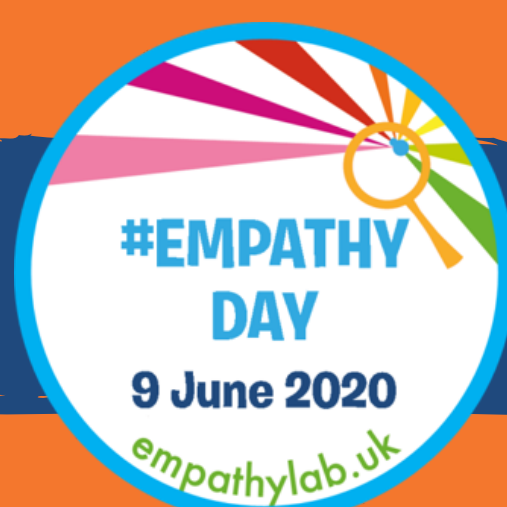
Just sitting here writing this blog, makes me wonder about the intricate and complex lives of the people I can see and hear from my window; the builders working next door, the people driving past my house, and even you, reading this blog!

Sonder is a beautiful bitter-sweet word somehow. How do we see into each other's lives? We can listen, we can try to understand, and in doing so, we are hearing someone else's story. Our shared stories can help to build a society where everyone can be heard.

Perhaps this is the most magical thing about books – black squiggles on paper, squiggles that transport us into different lives, and enrich our world.



#EmpathyDay



#ReadforEmpathy