

Andrew Jamison

STAY



Gallery Books

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The Reading

Early mornings, long mornings of low heart rate,
softened shoulders, strong supermarket tea,
the sofa. Days of pages and page silence.
Months mingled with traffic and talk from the street
through the opened window as you read.
As you read you notice the fig plant,
parts of it dying, parts of it flourishing
exponentially — you've read that word recently.
The reading is teaching you to leave such things
alone, to keep the TV off, forgo
the internet searches for property;
interest rates, share prices will still be in flux
when you return after reading. Reading
so long that the light has changed, that it's time
to put on the lamps so you can read some more
about the family trying to get work
in nineteenth-century California
as fruit pickers. Reading, remembering
you've forgotten to eat. Reading on and freed
from the millstone of your own ego — *phew*.
Reading when you're not reading: reading the sky
on a Sunday at half-seven in August
when someone you love is making you dinner
and you're late. Reading a kiss, reading a body
in the summer in the morning
before you start reading about the boys who've escaped
on horseback and are heading south, Mexico way.
Reading the next line before you've finished
the one you're on. Reading the last
line by accident and spoiling it for yourself.
Reading that bit all over again and again.
On a nudist beach in a foreign country,
reading, despite the fascinating array
of genitalia parading up
and down the tide line; reading instead

a scene in which a woman who has nothing,
not even her stillborn child, gives suck
to a septuagenarian who hasn't eaten
for so long he's skin and bone. Indoors,
reading, on the hottest day of the year, trying
to read all the reading you can humanly read
in the life you have left to read it in.

Words for Summer

I've wondered if there are words for it,
the end of August, all this loving you.
Blackberries at Burrington, the sea at Brean,
a half of something local at The Plough,
in its garden in the sun in the heat,
or trying to learn to dance, where to stand,
how not to grip your hands too tightly in the hold,
the right amount of tension in the arms.

I've wondered if there will be words for it
again, now summer's over, and life,
the working world, with timetables and terms,
is calling our names in its register
to which we must respond with 'here' or 'present'
even if we're not, thinking only
of garden and picked fruit, The Plough and the sea,
of hands and of arms and of holding.

The Night You Became a County

Not even a week away and it's been tough
to see a thing as a thing in itself
without seeing something of you. Take the Mournes
visible from a Killyleagh hill,
how their undulations took on your skin and bones,
each Slieve contouring into the next, anatomical;
your shoulder seemed so much like Donard,
your neck The Devil's Bite, your elbow Binnian.
And what was the water, Strangford Lough itself,
but your language, your words, your speaking voice,
not your whistling or your song — too good —
but your plain speech, telling me things:
words I wanted to hear, and words that were true.
Your accent went forgotten
until there was sight of the shoreline drawing
away to the north; and your breath, your breath,
your breath was the water of where I'm from.

Stay

I do not come from here, bay windows, Bath stone,
Georgian terraces, and I wish I had the words

like others to pin down this unbelonging
spindrift soul in me, unsettled,

always only half here. The sea at Sand Bay
washes up nothing but questions,

tired of themselves, like the question
of returning, to which the same answer returns.