

Pearse Hutchinson

**AT LEAST
FOR A WHILE**



Gallery Books

At Least for a While
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 12 June 2008.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 85235 448 0 *paperback*
978 1 85235 449 7 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.



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Simple Pleasures

Glad to escape the weather
he relapses into his armchair —
neither too deep nor too
stiff-backed, then
whisking his dark-blue German seaman's cap off
he flings it across like a quoit or a skimming stone
to four-and-a-half paces away
a low and armless chair piled high with books
where it lands on the top and settles down for the night.
This gives him pleasure.
A quite inordinate pleasure
each time he gets home from the weather.

Perfection in Amsterdam and Barcelona

A music shop in Amsterdam
In the exact centre of the window
a small perpendicular book
and in the exact centre
of its all-white cover
a meticulous dark-brown drawing
of the most perfect violin ever invented

the book held in place
by some invisible support

A hatter's window in Barcelona
Nothing at all in the shop window
except, in the centre,
made by the most famous hatter
in all the principality
the skeleton of a shapely hat
entirely constructed of wire

and hanging by
an almost invisible thread

Senhor Mascarenhas

Return my early my Lisbon rapture.

— Denis Devlin, 'Welcome My World'

It was fun spending money in the sunlight of the foreign city.

— *Tender is the Night*

Mascarenhas sat on a high chair
at a high desk
in the splendid hall of the Irish Embassy
but there seemed nothing 'high' or 'splendid'
about his place in the pecking order:
he announced, he ushered,
untiring he wrote away
in what looked like a ledger, he wore

the same coffee-coloured suit
every time I saw him, namely twelve,
and his black hair was thinning.
He was civil, nothing more,
but it was real, not put-on.

Day after day I sweated up
the seven hills of Lisbon
from the cheap, kind, patient
lodging house near the Tagus,
penniless past posh
sidewalk cafés, desperate
for the good news from home.

Two days before it came, as I
head down was trudging past
that high desk of his, Mascarenhas
stopped me and stepping down from
his high chair shook his head
in query and I nodded

and he said, in English:
'I know what it's like to be short of money
in a foreign country'
and pressed a loan upon me —
not that it took much pressing —
and I went off downhill again
and drank and ate his health.

Lisbon 1951/Dublin 2007

Midnight

Italy is where we all belong.

— Noel Griffin

Under a soft strong April indigo night
no silence to beat Milan
my last night in Italy
one of La Madonnina's courtiers
keeps me company at
the one still open
sidewalk café

He's drinking black coffee
I'm lingering over
a glass of red wine, can't yet
tear myself away from where
I too have often felt we all belong

We've talked a lot already
The silence invades us too
It doesn't matter, the spring night
and Italy — that's enough

The waiter, a soul of courtesy,
is dog-tired, leaning on the doorway,
waiting for us,
the last in the house,
to go

when suddenly round the 'far' corner
of the short broad empty street
a drunk man appears
weaving his glass limbs from side to side

Reaching level with us, not looking
at us at all but up at the heavens

he steadies himself and shouts:
Il vescovo di Milano é un ladro
(the bishop of Milan is a thief)
and disappears round the next corner

His echo dies away

We drink up, settle up, go.