

Vona Groarke

**JUNIPER
STREET**



Gallery Books

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J U N I P E R S T R E E T

The Return

The bricked-up door still comes as a surprise
though the new roof struts, like a punchline
to an old one about a slack gable and rain.
I know this house: I wrote our summer here
into words that closed over years ago, and still
I'm back to pick over the same grass as though
I've just come up from the lake with my hair all wet
and you are waiting for me on the porch.
Even your hand stops as I unhook the gate
and there it is, our young day, like the blue of your eyes,
a noticed, simple thing that leaves me dumbfounded
in a half-hearted ruin. My hand on the door admits me
to those months where our lives bedded down in layers
I could no more uncouple now than your wrist
could turn some key or other and have us both
walk out beyond this final door, into the glare
of our release, another headlong day.

The Stain

A spray of waiters flecks the afternoon
just as you appear behind the glass, quizzical, alone,
as though nothing could keep you further off,
not the drifting window nor the table turning
on a sixpence of regret; not the glint of silver
lighting on whatever it is we're likely to do next.

I could have done with seeing how you coped.
Instead, there was your mouth outlining the stain
my plate offered the cloth; your hands printing
the one wine glass with telltale promises.
So what of the linen and its complete sweep:
what are we to do with so much hope?

The Round House

The hump and clatter of an older sister's sex,
the father putting out to sea in a burlap sleep;
the heft of pelt that is ridden with lice and a spoor
of excrement or semen or caked blood;
the wheeze of that most distant cousin,
the slump of one persistent grandmother;
the general accretion of foul breath:

post holes for the home that draws itself
from the inside out and round again, from the hub
of the hearth to radial sleepers under their communal skins,

out over the heads of the banded oaks reeling in
the dog-legged flight of geese that knows its way
by the grain of the wood in the centre post

where the circle kinks when the child turns over
once in his sleep so his arm slumps
on his mother's side, as though to clasp
or to sweep up these relatively parabolic lines
and to brush them clean away into the corners
that come later on with their allowances, reprieves,
and their straightforward (if too pointed) pecking order.

Chinese Lacquer

Was it you who left the mandarins here
on a table laced with mynah birds
and lotus blossom and, behind them,
the kind of night I could scoop
with an open hand and set down
on a lake so full of itself
it tucks a hem of shadow
into layer on layer of an obvious gloss
and its opacity?

I think I see the mark of your hand
in how the scald of orange upbraids
its pitch and how the sun rebuts it,
hones it to a pointed gold that rims,
like a misplaced ducat,
this oh-so-ravenous depth.

Not even your mandarins perplex it,
nor the fuss of those cankerous, dim birds
or, least of all, that lotus blossom kindling
the warning it had so usefully rehearsed.

It too forgets itself: it gives nothing away.