

∞ READING ROUND ∞

My Reading Method

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AS A YOUNG, UNEMPLOYED ACTRESS, I heard that theatres paid you to read scripts, so I applied and began to receive the hopes of human beings, printed on paper, carefully fastened together. It was then that I heard of the ‘seven-pillow method’ for script reading. This was back in 1993, before the internet, when sharing something meant you photocopied an article from a newspaper and posted it, with a stamp. This article was written by a professional reader, so I paid attention. Step one: *Be physically comfortable while reading.* And he advised seven pillows.

I was taken aback. The instruction to ‘sit up straight at your desk’ was drilled into me from infant school (‘Sit upon your sit upon’ sang Miss Cashmore.) That was what work looked like. Of course I’d passed a wet Sunday with a textbook lying on the storage heaters (*Warning! Do not cover*) but that was illegal. And yet, didn’t the words go in just as well, perhaps more, as my back gently toasted?

So, the day I read about this method, I took a blanket and the six scripts I was paid to read to the park. Seven pillows were too much — I couldn’t find seven pillows, let alone carry them. I would lie in the sun and work (for £6 a script but hey, early nineties). My job was to think about the words on the page, and doing that without tension or distraction would only improve my focus.

I don’t just read for money, I read when I’m sad or when I’m happy; I read to learn something new or to forget about something else. To read

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is to escape, for a while, and the best way to do that – bear with me Miss Cashmore – is to relax. This is a real joy of reading; It's a solitary pursuit, so you can get really comfy. You can shuffle closer to the fire, you can balance the lamp on the top of the armrest, you can use a rolled-up pair of jeans as a pillow on the beach, because it's just you and your book. In fact, a book is the handy *Do Not Disturb* sign — on a train, for example. It says *I am not available, this is my boundary, my border.*

Reading lifts me from the tedious business of jobs and bills and the getting of meals. I enter another world, another life. And while I travel, I must prepare to relax into the journey, however many pillows it takes.