

∞ READING ROUND ∞

My Reading Habits

Amaal Said

MY RELATIONSHIP with reading is an interesting one. At one point I felt it relied on how my mental state was. I would lose the ability to read a single thing when I felt sad and disconnected. At the beginning of 2022 I decided I was going to have a great reading year after one of barely reading. I set myself a goal of reading twenty books and ended the year having read thirty-three. Looking back now, I see that those books kept me company at a time when I was figuring out what I was doing with my photography career. As things started to slow down, I reached for the books. From collections of essays and short stories, to novels, I went back to my bookshelf and reached for books I'd long abandoned.

It wasn't always like this: long stretches away from the books. I was an obsessive reader as a child. I remember being part of a book club in year Four and Five and reading in my lunch break. I remember the break room at Sixth Form and using the time between classes to read. The sofa I made my own. The stories I'd write in response to the ones I was reading. The living rooms in all of our homes always had a spot for my books and I. You could find me with a book wherever I was. I remember the first one I bought with money I had saved up. *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave. I read it in one sitting. The Uxbridge Waterstones where I'd hold my reading sessions on a weekend. I'd find a quiet corner and sit amongst the books with a caramel Frappuccino from Starbucks across the road. Sometimes I would bring a friend. Sometimes I wanted my own company. That journey of finding a book and letting it take you elsewhere was a special one and I cherished it.

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The earliest fascination I can remember was reading books about true crime. Now I think about it, there was always something that fascinated me about the terror and fear. My Year Five teacher called my mum and asked if she knew what I was reading. An uncle had passed me *Ugly* by Constance Briscoe and I was hooked. My teacher was worried. Little did she know I frequented the True Crime shelves in the local library when my mum took my siblings and I. The joy of slipping in and out of the shelves and taking out the maximum number of books the library card allowed.

The tube journeys where reading calmed my social anxiety and I didn't need to hide from people's eyes. I was busy in my own world. Then the university reading that always ended up being done on the commute to class thanks to learning about speedreading. The sadness that threatened the reading again and again. The sadness that took away any attention span I had. Now I'm learning to be gentle with myself. The books aren't going anywhere. They're here when I'm ready and wanting to be moved.