

Jacqueline Kolosov

*Julie Manet Walks with Renoir: A Sketch
In the Luxembourg Gardens*

Black and white are not colors.
Black is a hoarding of light,
white its utter refusal.

So Renoir explains, pausing
every now and again to observe
the sunlight suspended in the leaves,

or a butterfly's velvet dark,
more violet than black
against the bright head of marigold.

Since her mother's death,
when Julie woke to December
sunshine and the surprise of

just-fallen snow enfolding
the new sky's greens and yellows,
Julie has come to see

black and white as absolutes.
The morning light left her
mother's eyes, black

became absence. But white—
Julie envisions the chartreuse
reflection of light on snow,

light like those childhood

mornings she and her mother drew
copper teapots, a bowl of peaches

ripening in sun, the blackbird's
glossy wing. White became
the glimmer on a silver jar,

the sheen of a pomegranate seed,
a baby's tooth, the taste of pearl.
White became hope ...

No, my dear, Renoir says gently.
White reflects light away from it.
White absorbs almost no light.

White has a black heart.
Julie listens, for she loves Renoir
and his smiling, happy pictures.

Julie loves Renoir, though she prefers
Degas and his obsessions;
and admires above all Manet,

her father's brother, and the great
love, the only love, of her mother's life.
(Why Julie cannot like him.)

But Manet's art... Berthe Morisot
with a Bouquet of Violets.
Swathed all in black lace, her mother

sits, her gaze luminous and blue
as the Magdalene's robes,
though Manet painted Berthe Morisot's

eyes black, not their actual green,
like cut jade, that secret color,
suggestive of gardens.

Renoir gestures towards a bed
of yellow poppies. Yellow is the light
in nature, her mother taught her,

teaching Julie to distinguish
between turmeric and marigold,
mango and variegated saffron.

So many yellows. Julie loves
the earthy amber most, its ancient
sense of land as a living being

returning her to that steep, wild place
she and her mother visited that last
August before Julie, and then her mother,
Jacqueline Kolosov

became ill. Wandering away
from the sunlit meadow, they entered
the cool dark of forest—

a shadow is a veil.
There violets bloomed beside ochre-
capped mushrooms. Violet, the last

color in the rainbow spectrum.
Violet, where the known ends,
and the unknown begins.

Is it true, Julie asks Renoir now,
bending to examine the butterfly,

surprised by the hints of crimson
along the wing—how easily reds fade—
that butterflies can see purple but not red?
Funny girl, what makes you think of that?

I read it somewhere. In a scientific journal.
I don't know.
I don't have an answer.

Shadows always have a color.
A shadow is a veil.
Julie smiles.

She clasps Renoir's hand more tightly.
She listens more carefully.
She believes it must be true,

just as she believes violet
to be the last color of the rainbow,
a belief that brings her mother,

dressed in Manet's violet blacks,
closer, the bouquet of violets
pinned to her bodice becoming

neither intimate or familiar,
but just near enough
for a daughter to beckon.

Rereading The Velveteen Rabbit at 37 Weeks

Just six days until Christmas,
and our first fir tree perfumes the air.
Adorned with bracelets of colored light
and a single seam of white twined around
its middle, I cannot look at that tree
without thinking of you. Even the glossy
green leaves that frame the deep pink lilies,
the blossoms opening now; and the snow
on the neighboring rooftops, the pulse
of ice falling from the rafters—
are made new by your coming.

This morning, curled beneath the afghan,
the dog a stout parcel beside me,
I read *The Velveteen Rabbit* straight through,
all the while imagining
the day I would read the story to you.

What is Real? asked the Rabbit.

You become. It takes a long time.
That's why it doesn't often happen to people
who break easily, or have sharp edges,
or who have to be carefully kept.

How often I've been told mine is an old soul,
vessel or star-streaked planet bearing
echoes of other lives. Always,
I believed this to be true,
though only now I understand how much
more Real my life has become

because I carry you, whose face
I cannot yet capture, whose petal fingers
will soon curl around my own.
In this ninth month, even the memory
of my body before you has grown thin
as the velveteen of the Rabbit's hide.
Still, I know I once walked through a day
without you.

When a child loves you...then you become Real.

Does it hurt? asked the Rabbit.

Sometimes...When you are Real
you don't mind being hurt.

Real is not just become,
but a constant becoming
real as your rhythmic paddling.
Head down, held by my pelvis,
this lightening is the sign of your coming,
your becoming. How many times
—waking to the ebullience of lily
braced against December's cold—
have I conjured the moment when
they will place you in my arms,
umbilical cord, that life-line joining us
since the beginning, about to be severed,
as you are born into a new life,
your coming defined by hospital lights
and by faces I, too, do not yet know.

Does it hurt?

Never again will the days—

yours and mine—be so self-contained.
Even now, my breath moves
inside you, my unborn child
unfamiliar still with wind and cold,
but also with the caress of lip,
the touch of hand.

Does it hurt?

How soon before they lay you
close to my heart still bearing traces
of the journey I cannot imagine,
no matter how often I try, the truth
of your coming as unreal to me still
as the hind legs the Velveteen Rabbit
finds turned to flesh and blood, the hind
legs he comes to recognize as his own.

As I will recognize you.