

The Secret of White

Pierre Bonnard: La Nappe blanche (The White Tablecloth)
After an essay by Jacqueline Munck

Think *luminous*,
the way light from an unseen source
moves across this simple table,
plates, serving dishes, a compotier
holding fruit, the artist holding us captive
by *the adventure of the optic nerve*,
swaths of blue, purple, yellow trapped
in the white tablecloth,
colors of crocus, their open throats,
how you feel hunger and satiety
at the same instant.
Cold butter melting on the tongue.
Perfume of summer berries.

Think *unease*.
Have you been in a room this unsettled,
everything off-balance, objects and shadows
bleeding together, table threatening
to topple its contents onto the floor,
splinters of glass, bruised plums,
splattered pears at your feet?
Marthe, the artist's wife, enmeshed
in the fiery red walls, while a ghostly figure
slides out of focus.

Think *shimmer*,
the next time you enter a room.
Notice how randomly your eye works.

Notice peripheral vision,
how you see both everything,
and at the same time, nothing.

Glints like stray voltage.

Embrace this indecision
for a moment: Light is a shiver
that holds things, then lets them slip away,
how once the chairs quivered slightly,
how the plates held guilt
in their vermilion shadows.