

Slices of Matisse

by gerard varni

We had not yet finished talking of love,
Had not yet even touched upon its most
Sacred vestige, immutability.
Here in this room with arms stretched across
A dark table, our fingers entwined like
An ivory blossom flourishing in
Shaded soil, she whispers the name of
A painter: The one who drew with scissors,
Who captured light in glowing colors,
Roiling dark rhythms, lively and violent.
Love sustains the artist, she says, and it is not
Discord, but love that begets creation.
And all the while blue fingers of water
Slip beneath the door, creep across the tile,
Rise to drain the room of its essential light.
Yet neither water nor waning light
Constrains the wordless confession
In which for a moment we feel ourselves
To be free, and the splendor of a sigh
Seems to endure beyond measure.
In the barely perceptible movement
Of her finger I find a lasting joy.

We had not yet finished musing on love,
Mourning its frailty, marveling at its
Recondite truths, inexhaustible depths.
Destiny, she says, not *Icarus*,
Not *Pierrot*, but *Destiny*,
Two lovers clinging opposite the black
Menace of a mask,
Is love precisely rendered.
Ominous yet irresistible,
Dissonant and dazzling,

Starkly certain.
Still the water's insurrection continues,
Transforming the room into a silent
Crucible whose pure liquid melts our
Voices and surges above our heads.
And she, like a deity with sinuous
Hair swirling in the pale light,
Closes her eyes against the stinging tide.
I hold fast to her trembling hand, clinging,
Having not yet finished dreaming of love.

