

Alexandra Liew,
Based on a black and white print of Renoir's oil on canvas painting, *La Loge*.

Pink Roses

It's done. It's finished. And it's beautiful.

I want to remember this painting the way it is now, paint still wet, fresh and new. The fumes of the paint floating in the air. The feelings it invokes. Yes, I want to remember it like this. Beautiful.

I can almost feel her hair, her soft, beautiful hair. Curling a little, wisps dancing around her perfect face. Her smooth ivory skin. She was like a porcelain doll, adorned with roses. Her eyes sparkling impudently at me, making me want to kiss her, to hold her.

Oh, yes. I will remember.

I'd seen her at the theatre one Wednesday night. I sometimes went to plays when I felt I wanted to begin another painting. They provided me with poetry and emotion I needed.

She was with a man who I assumed to be her husband. She was dressed extravagantly and I'd passed her by, not paying much attention. One of the flowers attached to her wrap-around tickled me and as I brushed it aside it fell to the ground. It was a yellow rose. I had picked it up and handed it to her and she smiled at me. I'd thought she suited pink roses more than yellow. It would match the faint flush in her cheeks.

I saw her again a week later, at the theatre again, without flowers. I'd thought she was quite pretty, but she didn't seem quite right without the roses. I went down the street to the flower girl and bought a few roses. I'd handed them to her while her husband was talking with some other men. I told her I thought she'd dropped them and left before she could say a thing.

I watched her leave after the play with the man. He looked as though he was marching home, stiff and starched. "You look positively ridiculous tonight. Roses absolutely everywhere! Flowers, indeed! Pink ones, at that! Where did they come from? You weren't wearing them earlier today." Her husband had questioned as they stood at the entrance to the theatre. "Flowers!" she'd replied pertly. "Roses! I know you don't like them. But I wouldn't wear anything else tonight."

It was then that I decided that she was more than a prettyish woman. She was an exquisite woman. A woman of roses.

I began to see plays on Wednesday regularly.

She usually wore pink roses, now. They suited her perfectly, as I had thought they would. Sometimes she would notice me and smile, absently touching one of her flowers. Her husband would demand she tell him what she was smiling about. He didn't like the roses she wore – he thought them frivolous. I heard him say so, once. She would shake her head and tell him that she was just remembering something delightful, smiling for no important reason.

It was more than admiration now, I knew. I wanted to embrace her and buy her a thousand roses, to throw them into the air and have them fall around her, petals landing in her hair. She'd catch a few and place about her, pin them to her dress. And she'd smile at me and no one else.

I thought about her often. I remembered her smiles and roses, that she loved the flowers, delighted in them. I knew her husband disliked them because they were unnecessary and silly, an extravagance, a waste of money. Oh, him! He was the kind that made life prosperous. She made it beautiful.

How jealous I was of that man! I remembered the way she laughed, her lilting laughter echoing down the street, her voice, saying words meant for his ears. I remembered the way he scowled, paying attention to the play and other men and not her, the way he treated her as though she were an embarrassment.

But I hated him most when I heard him tell another man that he was moving to the capital. My heart skipped a beat, and he laughed. She stood behind him, eyes downcast with a slight smile on her face. Her hands plucked and smoothed her dress down repeatedly. She glanced up and saw me. Her eyes were reluctant and a bit sad.

She didn't want to leave.

That's when I made my mind up. I couldn't stop them leaving – how could I? Walk up to them and tell her husband that I cared for his wife? Convince them to stay, so that I could buy her roses and have her secret smiles to myself? No. I would do the only thing I could; paint.

She would forever be known, forever admired. I would fit her into the world of art, to be gazed upon and praised.

I painted her. I made her eternally beautiful, as she would always be to me. I painted her flawless skin, her lovely hair. I placed her husband in the background. He does not look at me, or her. His eyes are elsewhere, peering through binoculars. She sits with him, in a box at the theatre, just as I remember. But though she is with him, she wears pink roses and looks out at me. Our roses, hers and mine.

I used ivory for her wonderful skin, mixed with a soft pink and faint yellow. Her light, curling hair was a mixture of raw sienna and burnt umber with tints of some sort of red, washed so it wouldn't dominate her. Her lips I painted to be red and sweet, alizarin crimson and other colours, both vibrant and soft, to achieve that natural rosebud look. Her clothes would be the same as when I first had seen her. She would be looking at me. I used the darkest brown I could find. And when I was done, she was perfect.

The painting will grow dull and dusty in time. Maybe future generations will wonder who she is. They would never know. But I would.

I would remember the woman who wore pink roses.