

Light

“Monsieur Monet, can you please come here for a moment and talk to this gentleman regarding the payment? Monsieur Monet?”

“Oscar?”

Oscar Claude Monet’s eyes were glued to the face of his dead wife in the coffin. His beloved Camille. The contours could be blurred. And maybe the white gown could be done in different blues. The hue of her face would look beautiful with the contrast. Blue against the dead flesh! He couldn’t wait to get to his canvas with the colours. He’d compose her face on the upper part of the painting. The centre.

“Come back later. We should leave Monsieur Monet alone for a while.” Auguste Renoir, his friend, was one of those rare blends who was good at dealing with people, and yet sensitive enough to empathize with the situation.

But Claude couldn’t hold himself any longer. Dusk was approaching and this was the last chance he got. The last time he’d get to spend with his Camille. She looked more beautiful than ever. He rushed to his room and came back with a canvas, paint, linseed oil, palette, brushes, and a small wooden tool. The easel was already in the room. Everyone was shocked. While they had taken his silence as mourning, this was the last thing they had expected of him. He was painting his dead wife in her coffin! Shameless.

People stood amazed, as Claude quickly used his colours on the canvas. The crowd in the room seemed like an enchanted audience. And Claude? He was the conductor of this concert. This was a stunning performance. There was absolute silence in the room. The initial murmurs of judgement had faded. Now it was just a roomful of charmed onlookers. But Claude’s concern was the fleeting time. He had to capture the moment. He didn’t see people anymore. He saw colours, he saw shades. And in his head, he’d only recreate them as paintings all the time. There was nothing sacred or profane about this. Of course he loved Camille. Of course he could never forget the torture he made her go through. The coward he had been, to abandon her and go back to his rich father. But he was always the prodigal son. The prodigal husband. Their marriage. And then their days of struggle. Their beloved first son Jean. And then the prosperity that slowly, steadily built up. And Camille’s health, that slowly, steadily deteriorated.

But the painting had to be finished. The colours had almost captured what his mind’s eyes had seen. The crowd would have almost clapped, had it not seemed so inappropriate. They came back to their murmurs. Some of them sympathised, some criticised. Everybody judged him. Some tried to justify how this was his coping mechanism to deal with such a huge shock. Renoir put his hand over his shoulders. “Are you trying to hold on to her, Oscar? You know we have to let go. What are you trying to preserve with such care?” Claude finally broke his silence.

“The light.”

P.S.: This is an imaginary story based on the circumstances under which *Camille Monet on her deathbed*, 1879 might have been painted by the impressionist painter Claude Monet.