

THE LOAN—upon viewing *Jeune fille au chat* (Girl  
with a Cat) by Pierre-August Renior

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*Nikki Herbst*

She read her poem  
the first real words between us  
all the time before measured in near misses, we  
almost  
listened (same line)  
came close to speech. She looked at the girl and the  
cat  
in the painting, then at me.

Let us measure the time from one veering off to the  
next  
from her meaning to my meaning  
and back to hers  
and mine again.  
That time in its jagged line, was it wasted?  
The time between the artist's glance and the  
rendering  
of the cat's parallel paws, empty?

Or could it be borrowed  
might I have drawn nearer to her  
while the image of the tufted red chair and the  
striped  
socks (same line)  
the rough blue skirt, drooping white blouse  
and dark eyebrows warped prettily  
in the artist's mind?  
And could the painter have added a bit of pink to  
the white shoulder  
while she and I made small talk?