

Jazz 2023

Written by Karen-Nicole Mitchell

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Man, this ragtime music is where it's at, man.

Wow. Bebop, pee-bop, she-bop. Wow!

(whirls woman by the waist)

The painter stands in a nightclub.

Lights are low and dimming further.

Cigarette smoke and the smell of clove wafts through.

Thick bourbon glasses tinkle along the board of bar.

Wedgewood.

His blue suit crumples some as he dances a mambo.

Shuffling leather-soled feet along the dance floor.

The night mysteriously passes on.

The moon lingers through the heavy drapery,

making a presence known by the angles of white and
yellow moon beam snaking along the floor, through the
air, mingling with cigarette smoke.

He yells then laughs aloud.

"How did I get here?!"

"Wow. This life. What a life. Time will tell me where I've

been to soon enough. But for now. . ."

He slowly shuffles slides toward the woman.

Bent akimbo at the waist. Blue suit dipping to meet his thin, snatched waist.

He wraps an arm around her, enfolding her long, wave-filled, thick, ombre hair within the embrace.

They dance. Mirroring each other.

Shuffle glide. Shuffle glide.

Their movements mirrored back through the window on the bar back.

Shuffle glide. Shuffle glide.

Mirror-back.

They move silently and in sync with each other's air, breath, limbs, and movement.

Each glide another step into one another's past.

A move behind the mask that once held one another captive.

The mask melting, like snow. A glaze revealing the insides of their thoughts for one another.

Her hazel-brown eyes twinkle.

Laughter inside of their orbs.

Thick red lips smile knowingly as they mamba across the floor.

Together.

And one.

Silently meeting the other's grasp,
the other's motion, with a spirited lilt, lift, and
movement.

The gazes along the floor
not revealing what can't be said.

He said.

She did.

They did.

You knew.

They knew.

Silently, gliding, moonlighting along a floor,
that held the story that could not be told.

Their gazes would end.

Their mamba would stop.

The night would curtain like so many other nights had.

Eclipsing on the moon.

Giving way to sun.

Unearthing the reality of this time.

She walked away.

He let her leave.

They glided to separate bathrooms.

Separate rooms.

They glided into anachronisms of history.

Centuries wept.

Their children, unborn and undiscovered.

As they moved to separate but unequal lives.

Separate and unequal realities.

Separate and unequal spaces.

Places where chess pieces don't mingle.

Checkers don't get played.

Plates and platters don't mingle side to side.

Their food.

Our food.

Their school.

Our school.

Their time.

Our time.

Is one.

No one wins in this abusive capitalistic set up.

No one loses either.

But no one wins.

They glide across the floor.

Separated.

And unequal.

Together.

And apart.

Poetry written by Karen-Nicole Mitchell.

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Artist: Lee Simonson, 26 Jun 1888 - 23 Jan 1967

Sitter: Lee Simonson, 26 Jun 1888 - 23 Jan 1967

Date: c. 1912

Painting oil on canvas

Credit: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution;
gift of Karl and Jody Simonson; frame conserved with
funds from the Smithsonian Women's Committee

Object Number: NPG.77.239

Provenance: Karl Simonson, New York, son of artist; gift
1967 to NPG; received and accessioned 1977

Data Source: National Portrait Gallery

Exhibition: Bravo!

On view: NPG, South Gallery 321 Mezzanine

Photo reference:

https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.77.239