

notions of motion

by Marya Sea Kaminski

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the play.

There is a clothesline strung across the stage. There is a laundry basket USL filled with white sheets.

Girl walks on stage, carrying a chair.

By whose invitation do you come?

By whose invitation do you come?

She places the chair DSC.

Alice Toklas will answer the door, smells of warm sugar cookies and thick tobacco peeking over her shoulder, and she will insist,

By whose invitation do you come?

well, you see,

i was sipping some wine
having a very nice time
with a chipper and kind
guy with a mind
that was sharp and refined
and a cute-looking behind
and he took a shine
to the way i designed
a phrase and a line
and he told me to find
him just after nine
here in the company of miss gertrude stein.

Alice will pass me a long sideways glance and let me enter

the parlor
tall walls
stacked with frames and canvases
excited brushes of color
abstract angles dressing
melancholy nudes

and there they will sit
beneath a profound backdrop of japanese prints and penetrating portraits
gertrude and pablo

furiously talking
about iberian masks and the constructs of the written word, about brothers and mistresses
and bakeries and unfinished paintings and unstarted stories
constantly sketching
something between them.
something that begins with a word or a challenge or a joke and
spirals between them
picking up speed
ideas in motion
movement
yes movement.

and i will sit between them
with a sense of how tiny we are
we three
might be the tiniest parts you've ever seen
of a great big something swelling between us

and i might turn to gertrude
thank her for the tea.

and i might bum a smoke from picasso

while we stare for a moment
at his portrait of her, gertrude,
that took a hundred sittings to finish.

it doesn't look like her,
i'll confess.

"it will."
is all he'll reply.

Before all this.
Before now and now and now and now and now.
And all this silence.
This muffled grief.
There is a first part.

Girl crosses upstage and begins hanging sheets on the line.

let us go then, you and i,
when the evening is spread out against the sky
like a patient etherised upon a table;
let us go, thru certain half-deserted streets,
the muttering retreats
of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
and sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
streets that follow like a tedious argument
of insidious intent
to lead you to an overwhelming question...
oh, do not ask, 'what is it?'
let us go and make our visit.

let us go there. you and me.

you see, i've been developing my character.
no. my actual character.

while he slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
and seeing that it was a soft october night,
curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

i have strong hopes of restoring faith in the world someday.
i never noticed it until it was gone.

before october i would have told you about fearlessness and possibility. I would have told you that there are forces in this world that protect what is good. i would have told you about karma. i would have told you to relax.
i would have told you that there will be time.

there will be time,
to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet
there will be time to murder and create,
and time for all the works and days of hands
that lift and drop a question on your plate;
time for you and time for me,
and time yet for a hundred indecisions,
and for a hundred visions and revisions

i would have told you about my visions,
about how i lie in bed at night and sense something so great,
so massive, i am warm under it's weight. i
huddle under the covers
facing the sky
where the stars hang
enormous gatherings of powerful gasses
you and me
we
are smallsmall parts of something very big.
enormous. and perfect.
stretching further than we can reach with light or sound or sense
and i can sense
the planets
spinning on their axes,
swirling on their paths, lulling me.

SOUND: GUNSHOT

until it stops.
the world, i mean.
where is he?
paralyzes the heart for a beat.
holds your breath.
wakes mama from a sound sleep
and makes the dogs restless
silences an anxious audience.
rings through the house.
you can hear the faucet drip
in the upstairs bathroom.
it shakes the earth.
we stand our ground and quickly, quietly

brace against it.
i can't move as i pound my fists
against it. leaving bruises.
all over this too, too gentle flesh.
and huge gaping holes in the canvas
i have been so preciously detailing with sense
my sense flaps in the wind. undone.

and then what?

do i dare disturb the universe?
in a minute there is time
for decisions and revisions
which a gunshot will reverse.

do i dare squeeze it all
into a ball
and roll it to some overwhelming question?

to be or not to be that is the question
whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer
the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
or to take arms against a sea of troubles
and by opposing end them. to die -- to sleep
no more; and by a sleep to say we end
the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
that flesh is heir to: tis a consummation
devoutly to be wished. to die, to sleep;
to sleep, perchance to dream -- ay, there's the rub:
for in that sleep of death what dreams may come
when we have shuffled off this mortal coil
must give us pause -- there's the respect
that makes calamity of so long life.
for who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
the pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
the insolence of office, and the spurns
that patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
when he himself might his quietus make
with a shotgun?

the body's abandoned, and the spirit escapes.
into the unknowable something.

Apart. Two.

Girl crosses DSC and sits on the lip of the stage.

there is no such thing as nothing.
even when a star collapses in on itself and space and time are shrunk and disarmed, there is still force. movement. motion. a vacuum of power.

there is no such thing as nothing.
there is space. there is space between these electrons tricking us into matter.
tricking us into thinking things matter.

an atom, and thus all matter, is mostly empty space. thus, there is more empty space in the girl standing in front of you, than there is girl. the electrons in the atoms of this girl are moving so fast, they give an illusion of solid matter. but she's not. solid. she's just an illusion. if all her electrons would stop moving for even an instant, she would not just crumble into dust, she would disappear. poof.

we've been tricked.
into thinking touch is made of concrete
and you can build on what you see
when it's all just a registration of electrons colliding.
electrons moving so fast, working so hard, that if they were to stop...
matter as we know it
as we see it and touch it and taste it and stand on it and
hold its hand and feel it breath would disappear.
as though it never existed.
as though it were nothing at all.
ah, but a wise girl once said

there is no such thing as nothing.
there is space and light and a thing called time that we can only understand in minutes and the occasional moment.
there is force. there is weightless mass.
it's not the matter that matters
but the motion.
the movement.

Part Three.

i turn to movement.
movements.
to the beats and the bauhaus, the surrealists and the romantics,
and as a girl in the
now

She moves the chair offstage.

and now and now and now and now and now,
i take refuge
in the modernism that moved
out from the center of gertrude
stein's salon in paris.
24 rue de fleures.

i should have been a pair of ragged claws
scuttling across the floors of silent seas

or i should've lived in paris
at the turn of the century.

now, i am not gertrude stein,
nor was meant to be.
am an attendant girl, one that will do
to swell a progress, start a scene or two...

some fiesty american runaway
that weedles her way
into 24 rue de fleuroo
because she heard word
of a picasso and an isadora
a fitzgerald and a hemingway

and i want to see for myself
what they might say
on the topics of space and time and
death and breath and birth-
days. and art. yes. art.
movement.

She crosses behind clothesline and peeks over the top.

i check my reflection twice before i ring the bell
and try to look serious.

She lifts one of the sheets and enters the stage from beneath the clothesline.

By whose invitation do you come?

excuse me?

by whose invitation do you come?

well, you see,
i was sipping some wine
having a very nice time

with a chipper and kind
guy with a mind
that was ...
mine.
by my own invitation.
i've invited myself.
i hope you won't mind.

alice passes me a slow sidelong glance and lets me enter

the parlor
tall walls
stacked high with frames and canvases
excited brushes of color
abstract angles dressing
melancholy nudes

and there they sit
beneath a profound backdrop of japanese prints and penetrating portraits
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about iberian masks and the constructs of the written word, about brothers and mistresses
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something between them.
something that perhaps begins with a word or a challenge or a joke
spirals between them
picking up speed
ideas in motion
movement
yes movement.

i turn to gertrude
thank her for the tea.

i bum a smoke from picasso
while we stare for a moment
at his portrait of her, gertrude,
that took a hundred sittings to finish.

it ...
is
beautiful.

as the evening spreads out

i can hear noises drift up from the cafes down below
i look to gertrude, long and slow,

should i, after tea and cakes and ices,
have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
but though i have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
though i have seen my head brought in upon a platter,
i am no prophet -- but this is some great matter,
i can see the moment of my greatness flicker,
and in short,

i am afraid.

tell me about faith, gertrude.
picasso, please, speak to me of faith

and what will they say?
the woman who fled america in search of another home,
the man who painted a guernica large enough to swallow you.

gertrude picks up my phrase and develops it, ranging it through a process of continuous
association until we seem to ascend through the seven persian heavens and in the process
turn our personalities inside out.

alice looks up from her book and speaks softly of suffering through her brother's suicide.

picasso looks at me.
and looks at me. and looks at me.

“give up on these antics, you sad, silly girl.
and go home.
would it have been worth it, after all,
after the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
would it have been worth while,
to have bitten off the matter with a smile,
to have squeezed the universe into a ball
to roll it toward some overwhelming question

to say, speak to me of faith picasso,
to be or not to be indeed
when you know as well as me
it is not the thing that will be
important, but the idea of the thing
that you mean.

to ask what it is, is to suppose it exists.
something has brought you all this way,

what is that something? what is it?
you already know what you're looking for,
that is the finding. that is the finding and to ask for more,
is to bury your time chasing something that won't ever be caught.
you ought
to go home. faith is waiting for you there.”
and i storm out of the room with a huff.

and it takes me two days to get quiet enough
to hear what he said.
and to lie in my bed
warm under the weight of the universe
spinning.
beginning
to understand my own capacity
for motion and movement
beginning to understand
it is not the emotion
but the notion
of faith
that moves us forward
toward
the now and now and now and now and now.

END OF PLAY.