

Miss Pussy & Miss Stein

a play by Stanley Rutherford

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Playwright's note

Miss Pussy & Miss Stein is based on selected biographical information about the lives of Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. Much of the play, however, is fiction—conversations, intimate thoughts and actions, psychological motives, emotional concerns, many of the lesser events—and it in no way attempts to be a reliably fact-based biography. Using a collage of factual fragments as core material, I do hope, however, to have captured something of the spirit of Miss Stein's thoughts and writings, and conveyed some idea of the lives of these two elegantly original human beings, in spite of the great license I've taken and the distorted lens I've employed in interpreting their lives. There is a wonderfully audacious absurdity about Miss Stein's writing, as well as her life, which this theater piece hopes to emulate. I respectfully apologize to Miss Toklas and Miss Stein.

Source materials I relied upon include: Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Everybody's Autobiography*, and *Wars I Have Seen*; Alice Toklas's *What is Remembered* and *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*; the biographies: *Charmed Circle* by James R. Mellow and *The Third Rose* by John Malcolm Brinnin; articles by Janet Malcom: "Gertrude Stein's War" and "Someone Says Yes To It," published in *The New Yorker*, June 3, 2003 and June 13 & 20, 2003 respectively; and the introduction by Kay Turner to *Baby Precious Always Shine, Selected Love Notes between Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas*, edited by Ms. Turner. I have quoted brief fragments of Miss Stein's *How to Write* and *Miss Furr and Miss Skeene*. There are several quotes from *Everybody's Biography*, as well as paraphrases of some of Miss Stein's edicts from her own writing or quoted in the biographies mentioned above. The vast bulk of the statements made by the "Gertrude" and "Pussy" characters in this play, however, are of my own invention. I would like to acknowledge Mr. Mellow's biography for the play's final scenic image—the bare walls of the apartment on the rue Christine, showing only the rectangles of color where the famous paintings had hung. Recipes throughout are from Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.

Miss Pussy & Miss Stein

The characters

- Gertrude:* Gertrude Stein
The play spans the length of her relationship with Alice Toklas, but it would probably work best to choose an actor of late middle-age. The actor's commanding "presence" is the key characteristic required; physical resemblance is secondary.
- Miss Pussy:* Alice Toklas
- Hélène:* Servant and cook to Gertrude and Miss Pussy. Very French with a pronounced French accent. Probably younger than her employers.

The setting

A suggestion of the studio of 27 rue de Fleurus. The wall of paintings. The Renaissance table. The Renaissance chairs. The objet d'art. (See any number of the photographs by Man Ray). The paintings need to be removable and movable. Most scenes call for a very enlarged painting or map that slides into and recedes from the scene. Strict realism is definitely not required, nor probably desired. There is another higher table down stage right, which serves in some scenes as a kitchen prep table.

The style

Everything is stylized: the speech, the movement, the mannerisms—all reflecting the repetitiveness and rhythmic insistence of the dialogue. (Playwright's hope: Anne Bogart will direct a production of the play and use her wonderfully physical actors and stylized effects to realize the author's intent.) An idea: During each scene, someone—Hélène or Pussy—periodically moves an object, a painting, a chair for no obvious reason. Typically, shortly after Hélène moves something, Pussy moves it again, Hélène moves it back, and at some point Gertrude move it somewhere else. Everything is moving, always moving.

Running time

Approximately 90 minutes

Act One

The studio of 27 rue de Fleurus. The wall of paintings. The Renaissance table. The Renaissance chairs. The object d'art. An enlarged painting—Cézanne's portrait of his wife—dominates. Gertrude is seated at the table, pondering her writing. Pussy is seated primly somewhat away from the writing table, hands folded. There is another higher table down stage right, set with pots, cooking implements, a bowl of eggs, herbs, asparagus, bitter greens, etc.

Gertrude: The sentence...

Pussy: Every day....

Gertrude: ...subject, verb, object, direct, indirect...

Pussy: ...just after 2:00 p.m., quite precisely, the postman approaches, hat off, moustache, soft voice...

Gertrude: If we strip the sentence to its elements, repeat the elements, add elements to other elements...

Pussy: ...and the wife follows discretely behind, a shrunken woman, a pale woman, no voice.

Gertrude: The meaning is the rhythm, and everyone is defined by one's own rhythm, and the rhythm of one provides a counterpoint to the rhythm of the other, and everything is fine.

Pussy: And now I shall make the Sauce Rémoulade. **[She rises]**

Gertrude: **[Sighing]** Miss Stein has lost her purse and lost her mind.

Pussy: Miss Stein is more inside than outside.

Gertrude: Miss Stein has lost her purse and her purse was not a purse because her purse had no money and unless there is money the purse is not a purse.

Pussy: **[Standing at the cooking table, addressing an audience]** To create the Sauce Rémoulade we create a sauce that is not unlike the Sauce Tartare, but unlike the Sauce Tartare, the Sauce Rémoulade is a regular mayonnaise, rather than a mayonnaise made with hard yolks.

Gertrude: **[Studying the painting]** Everything began with Monsieur Cézanne.

Pussy: Watercress leaves, parsley leaves, tarragon, and chervil.

Gertrude: Miss Stein and the brother of Miss Stein went to the dealer Vollard on the rue Lafitte and there were the works of Monsieur Gauguin and Monsieur Cézanne.

Pussy: Chopped finely, torn if you prefer.

Gertrude: And Miss Stein and the brother of Miss Stein purchased the yellow *Sunflowers* of Monsieur Gauguin and *Three Tahitians* of Monsieur Gauguin, a pair of *Bathers* by Monsieur Cézanne, the apples of Monsieur Cézanne, two Renoirs, *Le Divan* by Monsieur Toulouse-Lautrec, and Cézanne's portrait of his wife, Hortence, red chair, blue dress, and no one was buying these things, and so Miss Stein and the brother of Miss Stein did.

Pussy: Would Miss Stein prefer the asparagus or the bitter greens?

Gertrude: Miss Stein would prefer the asparagus.

Pussy: Then we shall have the bitter greens.

They both laugh, finding this very amusing

Gertrude: Would Miss Pussy like a little spanking?

Pussy: I shall butcher the lamb and I shall butcher the bitter greens.

Gertrude: Perhaps a little spanking before the butchering?

Pussy: Perhaps a little spanking after the butchering and before the serving of the cheese.

Gertrude: Miss Stein and Miss Pussy have so much fun.

Pussy: Miss Stein and Miss Pussy have had so much fun since Miss Pussy met Miss Stein, and Miss Stein met Miss Pussy.

Gertrude: We will meet the soldiers.

Pussy: We will feed the soldiers.

Gertrude: And then the soldiers will die.

Pussy: The beautiful soldiers will die.

Gertrude: They will come here.

Pussy: They will fight here.

Gertrude: They will be killed here.

Pussy: The boy from Tennessee will die.

Gertrude: The boy from Nebraska will die.

Pussy: The boy from Vermont, the boy from Kansas...

Gertrude: All the boys will die.

Pussy: **[As she he opens the lid of a pot]** Mon dieu!

Gertrude: There is a problem?

Pussy: **[Looking inside the pot]** There is a....a...a nose!

Gertrude: The nose of the rabbit?

Pussy: The nose of the human.

Pussy crosses and shows Gertrude the pot with the nose.

Gertrude: Mon dieu.

Pussy: I did not...I did not realize that within the pot...

Gertrude: Mon dieu.

Pussy: ...and no one has...has someone? did someone? **[Suspiciously]** Did Miss Stein...?

Gertrude carefully reaches in the pot and pulls out the ear. She holds it up. They look at it.

Pussy: Mon dieu.

Gertrude: It is a nose.

Pussy: A very...robust nose.

Gertrude: It is the nose of Monsieur Cézanne.

Pussy: Mon dieu.

Gertrude: Cézanne has given us his nose.

They examine it.

Pussy: What will we do with the nose of Monsieur Cézanne?

Gertrude: Perhaps it would be nice with the Sauce Rémoulade.

They both laugh, finding this very amusing.

Gertrude: Miss Stein and Miss Pussy have so much fun.

Pussy: I shall prepare a cassoulet with the lamb and the nose of Monsieur Cézanne.

They both laugh, finding this very amusing.

Pussy: The cassoulet is often the dish of choice to prepare with the carcasses of the geese who have offered their livers to become the foie gras.

Gertrude: Miss Stein loves Miss Pussy.

Pussy: The cassoulet requires the dry white beans and the meat of one's choice, the lamb or the geese or the nose of Monsieur Cézanne.

Gertrude: Will the spanking be through the clothes of Miss Pussy or will the derrière of Miss Pussy be exposed?

Pussy: Perhaps Miss Stein will expose the derrière of Miss Pussy and invite the guests to come around to give the derrière of Miss Pussy a beautiful slap.

They both laugh, very amused.

Gertrude: What ever did Miss Stein do before she met Miss Pussy?

Pussy: Miss Stein was not Miss Stein until she met Miss Pussy.

Gertrude: **[Observing the painting]** Monsieur Cézanne saw each side of the object...

Pussy: The beans of the cassoulet will be the lovely white beans of Pamiers, and one will drop the lovely white beans of Pamiers, into boiling water and boil for precisely two minutes, and then one shall remove the lovely white beans of Pamiers from the heat and let the beans soak in the water for precisely one hour.

Gertrude: ...each side of the structure of the object...

Pussy: One may pace the floor, one may retire to the garden, weather permitting.

Gertrude: ...obliterating the perspective of the Renaissance, obliterating the narrative, seeing everything all at once, the red, the blue, the woman, everything moving, everything alive.

Pussy: Or one may write a letter to the difficult aunt in Philadelphia who is locked in a romance with death and who lives on to receive the letters of Miss Pussy telling the stories of her days with Miss Stein.

Gertrude: And Monsieur Cézanne began to see things in a new way and Miss Stein began to see things in a new way and so everyone began to see things in a new way.

They both face forward, the lights shift, the space becoming darker, the painting by Cézanne recedes and an enlargement of Matisse's Femme au Chapeau, emerges. Gertrude and Pussy move, changing locations in the space, Gertrude stands studying the painting, Pussy is seated manicuring her nails. The servant, Hélène, enters and sits, the lights then shift again, the space becoming lighter, the color/lighting of the room subtly changed.

Hélène: **[Looking through a cook book]** Sole á la dieppoise...avec les moules, avec les crevettes, in a sauce Parisienne...**[doubting]** I do not think **[turns page]**...coquilles St. Jacques...non, non, absolument non...

Gertrude: **[Observing the art]** The figure of a woman in a hat...

Hélène: **[Skimming through page]** I do not like the tuna, I do not like the swordfish.

Gertrude: ...*La Femme au Chapeau* by Monsieur Matisse, using his wife as his model.

Hélène: Perhaps the fish is the incorrect idea, perhaps not les poisson.**[turns page]**

Gertrude: **[Indicating]** And here Monsieur Matisse has attacked the figure of a woman in a hat with great slashes of shocking color, a daring audacity of technique, transgressing the conventions, incurring the outrage and ridicule of the public and critics alike.

Pussy: I was twenty-nine years old and my mother had died, and I went to Paris, and knocked on the door of Miss Stein one Saturday night, and she invited me in...paintings, paintings, rows of paintings, a naked woman, another naked woman, and Miss Stein asked:

Gertrude: “What is the answer?”

Pussy: ...and I did not know the answer and so I said nothing, and after a silence she asked:

Gertrude: “Well, then, what is the question?”

Pussy: And I did not know the question, and we walked in the Luxembourg Gardens...

Gertrude: ... and ate praline ices.

Pussy: ...and she asked me to type her manuscripts and help her in her life, and we walked in the Luxembourg Gardens...

Gertrude: ...and ate praline ices.

Hélène: **[Looking up from the cook book]** I do not think the poulet en cocotte bonne femme is correct for the woman of the nature of Miss Sitwell, but I, Mademoiselle Hélène, believe, as did the mother of Mademoiselle Hélène, that the poulet en cocotte bonne femme is a beautiful dish and a dish that is a beautiful dish for any occasion and for any sensibility, but perhaps not for Miss Sitwell.

Gertrude: We purchased *La Femme au Chapeau* and became friends with Monsieur Matisse and the wife of Monsieur Matisse.

Pussy: At first we liked the wife of Monsieur Matisse and then we no longer liked the wife of Monsieur Matisse.

Gertrude: The *Femme au Chapeau* is “the nastiest smear of paint I have ever seen” said the brother of Miss Stein.

Pussy: We no longer speak to the brother of Miss Stein.

Gertrude: The brother of Miss Stein took with him the apples of Cézanne.

Hélène: The brother of Miss Stein chewed each mouthful of food precisely thirty-two times, thirty-two times, each mouthful, the brother of Miss Stein, thirty-two times.

Gertrude: Miss Stein will now play the piano.

Pussy: Please, my darling lamb chop.

Gertrude: Miss Stein will now play the sonatina on the piano.

Pussy: Miss Stein is a barbarian.

Gertrude: Miss Stein will now play the sonatina on the piano, but only on the white keys of the piano, Miss Stein does not like the black keys.

Pussy: The head of Miss Stein is too big.

Gertrude: **[Nodding/agreeing]** The head of Miss Stein is too big.

Hélène: **[Nodding/agreeing]** The head of Miss Stein is too big.

Gertrude: Miss Stein looks in the mirror and sees a head that is bigger than the body.

Pussy: **[Nodding/agreeing]** Miss Stein looks in the mirror and sees a head that is bigger than the body.

Gertrude: The body is big, the head is bigger.

Hélène: **[Nodding/agreeing]** The body is big, the head is bigger.

Pussy: **[Referring to the painting]** The figure of the woman in a hat is the figure of anger.

Gertrude: The figure of the woman in the hat is the figure of anger because the figure of the woman in a hat is the putative subject of the painting and yet she is not the subject. The slashings of color and the smearing of the line annihilate the figure of the woman, and thereby *become* the subject, and the figure of the woman is denied.

Pussy: The wife of the postman has no voice, the wife of the postman does not smile.

Gertrude: We shall drive to Belley.

Hélène: **[Standing at the cooking table]** We shall braise the calves brains, but first we will blanch the brains by placing them in a saucepan and covering them with two inches of water and salt and lemon juice and vinegar, and we will heat the water just to the simmer and simmer the brains for twenty minutes, then set them aside to cool.

Gertrude: We shall explore the streets of Belley the shops, the market, we shall meet the people of Belley and sample the cuisine of Belley at the restaurant of the Hotel Pernollet.

Hélène: **[As she opens the lid of a saucepan]** Mon dieu.

Gertrude: There is a problem?

Hélène: There is a...a...a toe.

Gertrude: The toe of the calf?

Hélène: The toe of the human. **[She shows the saucepan to Gertrude and Pussy]**

Gertrude: **[Looking in]** Mon dieu.

Gertrude slowly withdraws the toe from the saucepan and holds it up. They study it.

Hélène: It is a toe of great experience.

They scrutinized it.

Pussy: It is the toe of Monsieur Matisse.

Gertrude: It is the big left toe of Monsieur Matisse.

Hélène: We shall blanch the big left toe of Monsieur Matisse in the water of salt and lemon juice and vinegar, and then sauté the big left toe of Monsieur Matisse in a 10-inch enamel skillet with butter and finely diced carrots and onions and celery and diced ham and a medium herb bouquet.

Gertrude: Miss Stein is gravely melancholy.

Pussy: Miss Stein's head is bigger than her body.

Gertrude: The soldiers will die, the wife does not speak.

Hélène: ...and simmer for 15 minutes.

Pussy: We shall write the difficult letter to the spinster aunt in Philadelphia, who may or may not possess considerable wealth.

Gertrude: Will Mr. Faÿ be coming to lunch?

Hélène: Miss Sitwell will be coming to lunch, and the brother of Miss Sitwell will be coming to lunch.

Gertrude: I thought Mr. Faÿ ...

Hélène: Next week Mr. Faÿ will be coming to lunch, and Mr. Van Vechten will be coming to lunch...

Pussy: ...and Monsieur Picasso will be coming to lunch, and Mister Hemingway will be coming to lunch and Monsieur Guillaume Apollinaire will be coming to lunch, and we will speak about matters of food and the garden and the barbarism of Miss Stein.

Gertrude: I shall play for Miss Sitwell a sonatina.

Pussy: Please, my darling lamb chop.

Gertrude: A beautiful sonatina on the white keys and only one note at a time.

Pussy: Miss Stein does not play the piano.

Gertrude: Miss Stein plays the piano brilliantly.

Hélène: Miss Stein does not play the piano.

Pussy: The guests are mortified by the sonatinas of Miss Stein, they cast their eyes to the floor, and it is a great humiliation for Miss Pussy who must sit silently smiling with deep anger as Miss Stein plays the notes on the piano.

Gertrude: The *white* notes.

Pussy: The notes are arbitrary and Miss Stein smiles mindlessly, eyes closed, humming as she plays the white notes one at a time and the guests cast their eyes to the floor.

Gertrude: The eyes of Miss Pussy are beautiful, dark and beautiful.

Pussy: The eyes of Miss Pussy are angry and sad.

Gertrude: The eyes of Miss Pussy are the eyes of a beautiful little piece of pâté de canard en croûte.

Pussy: The eyes of Miss Pussy are angry and sad, the eyes of a woman whose love is deep.

Gertrude: I have lost my purse.

Pussy: You have lost your mind.

Hélène: The wife of postman does not speak.

Gertrude: I have lost my purse and I am not a person without a purse.

Pussy: The beautiful soldiers will die.

Gertrude and Alice both stand, face forward, the lights shift, Hélène exits. The space becomes darker, the painting by Matisse recedes, a large, antique, distressed, 18th/19th century map of France emerges, pale, aged colors, place

names in French. Gertrude and Pussy move, changing locations in the space, the lights then shift again, the color/lighting of the room is different, darker, ominous.

- Pussy: The war came one day, quietly. **[She is lighting candles, setting them around the room.]**
- There is the distant sound of a bomb, a beat, then a second sound of a bomb.**
- Gertrude: No one believed there would be a war.
- Pussy: We were visiting in London.
- Gertrude: The paintings lined the walls of the studio on the rue de Fleurus...
- Pussy: No one believed there would be a war.
- Gertrude: ... the portrait of the wife of Cézanne, the Renoir, two rows of paintings by Matisse, a harlequin by Picasso...
- Pussy: ...and Dr. Whitehead and Mrs. Whitehead invited us to stay a week...
- Gertrude: No one believed there would be a war...
- Pussy: ... and so we stayed for six.
- Gertrude: ...two Gauguins, a great nude by Vallotton, a Toulouse-Lautrec, a little Daumier...
- Pussy: The Germans invaded Belgium...
- Gertrude: ...the portrait of Miss Stein by Picasso and they said that Miss Stein did not look like the portrait of Miss Stein by Picasso, and Picasso said that it didn't matter, because one day she would.
- Pussy: The Germans invaded France...
- Gertrude: We worried about our home...
- Pussy: ...but were stopped just kilometers outside of Paris.
- Gertrude: ...the paintings, the furnishings, the writings of Miss Stein, because there were no other copies of the writings of Miss Stein.
- Pussy: We returned to Paris.
- Gertrude: Miss Pussy will hold Miss Stein now. **[Pussy does so]**
- Pussy: The streets, otherwise empty, were filled with soldiers.
- Gertrude: Young men going to the front, young men returning from the front...
- Pussy: ...faces grayed...

Gertrude: ...eyes aged...

Pussy: ...vacant, watchful....

There is the distant sound of a bomb, a beat, and then a second sound of a bomb. The lights flicker.

Gertrude: The zeppelins.

Pussy: This was the first war.

Gertrude: There will be the second war.

There is the distant sound of a bomb, a beat, and then a second sound of a bomb. The lights go out.

Gertrude: Taxicabs have been mobilized to carry the troops to the front, the great battle of the Marne has begun.

Pussy: Coal and wood are scarce, many stores are closed.

Gertrude: The German cockroach has swept through Belgium, which for a century, by treaty, had been neutral, a treaty, which the Kaiser had declared to be a "scrap of paper."

There is the distant sound of a bomb, a beat, and then second round of a bombs.

Gertrude: **[Reaching out holding hands with Pussy]** Are you scared, my dear pussy, is Miss Pussy scared?

Pussy: I am scared, I am not scared.

Gertrude: I am scared, I am not scared.

Pussy: I will knit socks and sweaters.

Gertrude: Miss Aldrich has gone to the front.

Pussy: She has moved to the front, she is making tea for the soldiers.

Gertrude: Mrs. Whitehead has come from London to go to the front to bring her son a good wool overcoat.

Pussy: Miss Aldrich is serving tea to the soldiers and talking to the soldiers and writing a book about living in a cottage overlooking the Marne. Miss Aldrich is a woman of great style.

Gertrude: We sit in a parlor of fear with the great paintings.

Pussy: I talked about the painting of the face with Mademoiselle Mars.

Gertrude: My writings are received by a campaign of ridicule.

Pussy: There is the femme décorative, the femme d'intérieur, and the femme intrigante.

Gertrude: My writing is my writing and because it is my writing it not some else's writing.

Pussy: Fernande Picasso is a femme décorative, Madame Matisse is a femme d'inérieur.

Gertrude: It is writing that is not like any one else's writing and therefore it is new, and the new is always received by a campaign of ridicule.

Pussy: Miss Stein does not drink.

Gertrude: All the artists drink, Miss Stein does not drink.

Pussy: I have sat with many wives.

Gertrude: I am not scared.

Pussy: We shall go to the front.

Gertrude: I shall learn to drive.

Pussy: We shall I learn to drive forward, but not backward.

Gertrude: We shall drive to the front.

Pussy: We shall work in the supply depots.

Gertrude: We shall visit the wounded soldiers.

Pussy: We shall talk to the wounded soldiers.

Gertrude: We shall drive to the Marne, we shall drive to Chateau Thierry, we shall drive to Verdun, forward always forward, never in reverse.

There is the sound of a bomb.

Pussy: I am not scared.

Gertrude: We drove an automobile made by Mr. Henry Ford.

Pussy: Miss Stein drives and I knit socks for the soldiers.

Gertrude: I do not like the way you look at Miss Mars.

Pussy: I do not like the way *you* look at Miss Mars.

Gertrude: Miss Mars is harmless.

Pussy: But is Miss Pussy harmless?

Gertrude and Pussy burst into laughter.

Gertrude: Miss Pussy is a femme intrigante.

Pussy: Miss Stein is a femme intrigante.

Gertrude: Would Miss Pussy like to sit on the lap of Miss Stein?

Pussy: Miss Pussy would like to curl up in the lap of Miss Stein and purr while the bombs are dropping and the men are dying at the front and Miss Aldrich is serving them tea. **[She sits on Gertrude's lap]**

Gertrude: **[As she strokes Pussy as though stroking a cat]** Miss Stein and Miss Pussy have so much fun.

Pussy: Even during the war, Miss Stein and Miss Pussy have so much fun.

Gertrude: Even while the Germans invade and kill and set the towns aflame, Miss Stein and Miss Pussy have so much fun.

Pussy: **[Nuzzling Gertrude]** We have fun on the white keys, but not the black keys.

Gertrude: We have fun only one note at a time.

Pussy: Miss Stein is a very bad girl.

Gertrude: *Miss Pussy* is a very bad girl.

Pussy: Miss Stein places her hands and fingers in places that make Miss Pussy purr with great delight.

Gertrude: Miss Pussy is a pussy is a very bad pussy.

There is a barrage of distant bombs.

Gertrude and Pussy both stand, change position, the lights shift, the space becomes darker. The map of France recedes, and two enlarged paintings by Picasso emerge—his portrait of Miss Stein and a cubist painting of a woman. The lights slowly rise as Pussy is arranging and rearranging the Renaissance chairs. Gertrude is studying her portrait.

Gertrude: Pablo is a genius.

Pussy: Everyone is in Paris.

Gertrude: I sat for him for nine months every afternoon, while Fernande read to me the works of La Fontaine.

Pussy: Mr. Hemingway is Paris, Mr. Fitzgerald is in Paris, Mr. Sherwood Anderson is in Paris.

Gertrude: And then he left for Spain and stayed three months and then returned and painted out the entire face of Miss Stein and then painted it in again all from memory, finally satisfied, and that was that.

Pussy: Miss Beach has opened her bookshop, and everyone from everywhere has come to meet us, to drink with us, to eat with us, to investigate us, to lie to us.

Gertrude: I do not like punctuation.

Pussy: I always talk to the wives.

Gertrude: If the words are the right words and the right words are in the right order the words make sense and one understands the meaning of the words and nothing else needs to be said.

Pussy: The brother of Miss Stein has left and taken up with a model named Nina who has an uninteresting body and an uninteresting face and none of the artists want to paint her.

Gertrude: Pablo is doing everything and he is doing everything one after another, which is the only way everything can be done.

Hélène enters and approaches Pussy

Hélène: **[With a bit of a curtsy]** If I may interrupt.

Pussy: Please.

Hélène: The dog of the postman is at the door.

Pussy: The dog of the postman is lost.

Hélène: The dog of the postman is whining and whimpering.

Pussy: The dog of the postman is lost.

Gertrude: The postman is lost.

Hélène: If Miss Sitwell is to have the mussels meuniere, we shall not be able to serve the lamb.

Pussy: We shall serve the mussels meuniere *and* the lamb.

Hélène: The budget does not permit.

Pussy: One can exceed the budget when one wants to exceed the budget.

Gertrude: I love murder.

Hélène: I cannot condone extravagance.

Gertrude: Pablo loves murder, and now he slices the knife slowly down the nose and rearranges the nose and slices the mouth and places it... Braque is doing the same thing with violins.

Hélène: A finger has been found in the flour bin.

Gertrude: Precisely.

Hélène: Another finger has been found wrapped in a cloth next to the cask of the fromâge bleu.

Pussy: Are they the fingers of the Postman?

Hélène: Very large fingers, very strong fingers.

Gertrude: Fingers of the artist?

Hélène: Very virile, very...erect.

Gertrude: The fingers of Picasso.

Hélène: There is also the thumb.

Gertrude: Picasso's finger, Picasso's thumb.

Pussy: At first we liked Monsieur Picasso...

Gertrude: ...and then we no longer liked Monsieur Picasso.

Gertrude and Pussy laugh finding this very amusing.

Hélène: The wife of the postman has run off with the husband of the fishmonger and the postman has taken to drink and the dog is lost.

Pussy: The wife of the postman is a small shrunken woman, who does not smile and does not speak.

Gertrude: The digits of Monsieur Picasso will complement nicely the toe of Monsieur Matisse and nose of Monsieur Cézanne.

Pussy: **[Adjusting a chair]** If one were to place the Renaissance chairs away from the table...here, there, and then Miss Sitwell...

Hélène: If we serve the potage of asparagus, and omit the mussels meuniere...

Gertrude: **[Indicating the cubist painting of a woman]** The artist is eviscerating the model and eviscerating himself and placing the nose of the model here, the mouth of the model there, and the digits of the artist in a cloth next to the cask of the fromâge bleu.

Hélène: The arrangement of the Renaissance chairs will not have any effect on the budget.

Gertrude: If one has arranged the chairs and the arrangement is the proper arrangement then the conversation will be good conversation and the artists will be seated across from an enchanting woman who is someone other than his wife.

Pussy: We will place the artists so they are facing their art.

Gertrude: Miss Pussy is a genius.

Pussy: If the artists sit facing their art then they will be content.

Gertrude: Monsieur Juan Gris will sit next to Miss Sitwell.

Hélène: Will Monsieur Juan Gris be cutting off his finger?

Gertrude: We shall invite Monsieur Le Douanier Rousseau.

Hélène: Will Monsieur Rousseau be cutting off his finger or his toe?

Pussy: Miss Mars has dyed her hair a harrowing red-orange and has taken up with Miss Squire and together Miss Mars and Miss Squire sit together at the Deux Magot and drink absinthe and discuss the weather.

Gertrude: One corner of the painting is as important as every other corner and the composition must not have a beginning and it must not have an ending, it must have a continuous being where everything is everywhere and everywhere is everything.

Hélène: The position of the nose does not help with the position of the chairs. The position of the finger does not help the postman's dog.

Pussy: We shall place Monsieur Juan Gris next to Miss Sitwell, and Monsieur Picasso across from Miss Sitwell and Monsieur Matisse on the other side of Miss Sitwell, and Monsieur Cézanne next to him.

Gertrude: I have collected geniuses rather than mere masterpieces.

Pussy: I worry about the dog.

Hélène: The dog cannot find the postman and unless the dog can find the postman the dog cannot be the dog.

Gertrude: I have lost my purse.

Pussy: I have lost my keys.

Hélène: The model has lost her nose.

Gertrude: The artist has lost his finger, his toe, his nose.

Pussy: I have lost my keys, I have lost my scarf, I have lost my name.

Gertrude: Miss Pussy loses everything.

Pussy: I shall pray to Saint Anthony of Padua.

Gertrude: I shall write an opera about St. Teresa of Avilla and she shall say a word and then another word.

Pussy: **[Arranging chairs]** If we move the Renaissance chairs and make room for a chair for Monsieur Le Douanier Rousseau between the chair of Miss Sitwell and the chair of Monsieur Juan Gris.

Gertrude: We do not have a painting by Monsieur Le Douanier Rousseau.

Pussy: I do not particularly care for Monsieur Le Douanier Rousseau.

Hélène: He is a small old hairy man, not an attractive man, and he plays the violin.

Gertrude: We cannot afford a painting by Monsieur Le Douanier Rousseau.

Hélène: I cannot afford the mussels Meuniere and the lamb.

Pussy: We shall place Monsieur Braque next to Monsieur Matisse.

Gertrude: We shall place Madame Matisse next to Monsieur Juan Gris.

Hélène: We shall place Monsieur Juan Gris next to Monsieur Michelangelo, and Monsieur Michelangelo next to Monsieur Raphael and Monsieur Raphael across from Madame Rubens and Madame Rubens next to Monsieur Renoir, and we shall have the potage velouté aux champignons and the potage crème de cresson, we shall have the coquilles St. Jacques à la Parisienne and the fricassée de poulet à l'estragon, we shall have the boeuf à la catalane, and the cassoulet de porc et de mouton and the crêpes à la levure and the tarte au fromage fraie et aux pruneaux, I am French and you are American, and I do not like art and I do not like artists.

Hélène turns and exits.

The lighting shifts. Gertrude and Pussy change positions, The two paintings by Picasso recede. Pussy sits at a typewriter. Gertrude stands behind her. An enlarged page of Gertrude's handwriting emerges and dominates.

Pussy types, Gertrude paces and watches.

Pussy: I am having...

Gertrude: Yes...

Pussy: **[Indicating]** This word.

Gertrude: **[As she looks over Pussy's shoulder]** Ourselves.

Pussy: Ah...**[she types some more, then...]** And this?

Gertrude: **[Looking]** Beginning.

Pussy: Of course. **[She types some more, then...]** It is very difficult.

Gertrude: My pussy is so very beautiful this morning.

Pussy: It is so very hard on my nails, my darling.

Gertrude: We must eliminate the contrivance of the story, my darling pussycat... we must have pure dialogue, a continuous present-ness of words, just words, pure words.

Pause, as Pussy types some more, then...

Pussy: My darling...? **[indicating a word]**

Gertrude: **[Looking]** Children.

Pussy: Your handwriting, my love.

Gertrude: Large, expansive, beautiful like a child's. I use very simple words.

Pussy: **[Examining her nails]** I worry about my nails. I pick the fraises des bois for Miss Stein, I type the manuscripts for Miss Stein with the beautiful simple words, a continuous present-ness of words, and I must maintain my nails.

Gertrude: I have been a very bad lamb chop.

Pussy: A very bad lamb chop must be punished.

Gertrude: Will Miss Pussy spank her very bad lamb chop?

Pussy: I will spank my very bad lamb chop, I will dig my nails deeply into the back of my very bad lamb chop, and I will scar the arms of my very bad lamb chop, the legs of my very bad lamb chop, and I will show no mercy.

Gertrude: I have committed murder.

They laugh, delighted

Gertrude: I have murdered the 19th century.

They laugh, delighted

Gertrude: I have committed the great murder of the century by murdering the century.

Pussy: Miss Pussy loves murder.

Gertrude: Miss Stein loves murder.

Pussy: **[Indicating]** What is this word, my darling?

Gertrude: **[Looking]** Murder.

Gertrude and Pussy laugh, delighted.

Pussy: Did you murder Mr. Hemmingway?

Gertrude and Pussy laugh, delighted.

Gertrude: I taught Mr. Hemmingway about the bullfight and I taught Mr. Hemingway how to write, and then Mr. Hemingway claimed that *he* taught *me* about the bullfight and that *he* taught *me* how to write, and *then* I murdered Mr. Hemmingway.

Gertrude and Pussy laugh, delighted.

Pussy: We dismissed Mr. Hemmingway.

Gertrude: I took a card and wrote on the card, "Miss Stein and Miss Pussy no longer require the company of Mr. Ernest Hemmingway."

Pussy: The head of Mr. Hemmingway became too big.

Gertrude: It was big to begin with but then it became bigger.

Pussy: We did not like Mr. Fitzgerald.

Gertrude: His head was too small.

Gertrude and Pussy laugh, delighted.

Pussy: You took a card and wrote on the card, "Miss Stein and Miss Pussy no longer require the company of Mr. Scott Fitzgerald."

Gertrude: I took a card and wrote on the card, "Miss Stein and Miss Pussy no longer require the company of Mr. Virgil Thompson."

Pussy: You took a card and wrote on the card, "Miss Stein and Miss Pussy no longer require the company of Monsieur and Madame Juan Gris."

Gertrude: We make friends with people, we murder people.

Pussy: I discovered my nails as a young girl, because as a young girl I was not thought to be attractive, and I wanted to discover what it was that made me attractive, and therefore I discovered by nails.

Gertrude: I wrote the great play, "Counting Her Dresses" and nobody noticed.

Pussy: You wrote the great play, "Turkey and Bones and Eating," and nobody noticed.

Gertrude: A play is a landscape, a ceremony of the imagination, a continuous ritual of movement with nothing to resolve.

Pussy: I have murdered the cow, the duck, the goose, the pig...I have strangled the neck of the goose, broken the neck of the duck, slashed the throat of the pig, eviscerated the beautiful carp with the huge kitchen knife, very sharp, wham, slash, bang, dead. Before we can cook we must murder.

Gertrude: They will write about us.

Pussy: They will write what they want to write about us, not what we want them to write about us.

Gertrude: They will call it biography and it will be a lie.

Pussy: Biography is a lie.

Gertrude: We will write our own biography and the lies will be our own lies.

Pussy: I have smothered a pigeon, I have cracked open the head of a dove.

Gertrude: We will write our own biography and then we will go to America and be famous in America.

Pussy: Our biography *is* the biography of America.

Gertrude: I shall write the autobiography of Miss Pussy and I shall write about the beautiful nails of the pussycat, the beautiful mouth of the pussycat, the beautiful naked bottom of the pussycat, and I shall tell about what Miss Pussy saw and what she did and what she said and then people will know that there is no beginning, middle, and end.

Pussy: You lied.

Gertrude: Please, my pussy...

Pussy: You lied about Miss Bookstaver.

Gertrude: My darling...

Pussy: The romance with Miss Bookstaver, you wrote about it, changing the names.

Gertrude: Please, my darling...

Pussy: And now I have found the manuscript and read the manuscript.

Gertrude: **[Hands over her ears]** Please, my darling, please,

Pussy: **[An angry crescendo]** And I have found the letters from Miss Bookstaver and I have read them and *ripped* them and *burned* them and *spat* upon them and I have screamed and I have cried. **[Beat]** The mystery always begins with a dead body, but then there is always another dead body.

Gertrude: **[Near tears]** Please don't be cruel to me, my pussy, I can't bear it when you...

Pussy: You have had correspondence.

Gertrude: **[Pleading]** Miss Bookstaver may be able to publish the brilliant unreadable 900-page book of Miss Stein that no one has wanted to publish.

Pussy: I will not speak to you for 80 days.

Gertrude: Please, my darling pussy.

Pussy: The body of Miss Bookstaver has been found dead, her tongue removed.

Gertrude: When the autobiography of Miss Pussy has become a great success, perhaps Miss Bookstaver will be able to publish the brilliant unreadable 900-page book of Miss Stein that the others are too afraid to publish.

Pussy: Perhaps the brilliant unreadable 900-page book of Miss Stein, which Miss Pussy typed with her own beautiful hands, will never be published. Miss Pussy will not speak to Miss Stein for 80 days.

Gertrude: La Gloire, Miss Pussycat, Miss Stein must have La Gloire.

Pussy: You are a very bad lamb chop.

Gertrude: I am a very bad lamb chop.

Pussy: I have very beautiful nails, very sharp.

Gertrude: Will you murder me later, my beautiful pussy? I want you to smother me like a pigeon.

Pussy: I will flay you like a flounder.

Gertrude: I will make you immortal.

Pussy: You will slide your tongue along the belly of the pussycat and down her thigh, and you will make her wet with the juiciness of your simple lovely perfect words.

Gertrude: La Gloire, my lovely, we must have La Gloire.

Blackout

End of Act One

Act Two

Pussy and Hélène are busy packing steamer trunks. Gertrude stands downstage staring out. A large colorful map of America dominates.

Hélène: It will be cold and you will require the woolens.

Pussy: It will be winter and then it will be spring, we will be in the north and we will be in the south.

Hélène: You will require additional trunks.

Gertrude: I would rather have America in my head than have my head in America.

Hélène: You will require an additional railroad car. **[She turns and exits]**

Pussy: I shall worry about the dogs.

Gertrude: My head is bigger than America, my head contains all of America, but America is too small to contain my head. We shall not go.

Pussy: My darling...

Gertrude: Miss Stein prefers to remain at 27 rue de Fleurus.

Pussy: Mr. Van Vechten and Mr. Fay have made the arrangements, New York is waiting, Chicago is waiting, all of America is waiting, whether the head of Miss Stein will fit or not.

Gertrude: They are more interested in me than they are in my work.

Pussy: There is no difference.

Gertrude: They do not think you exist.

Pussy: All the more reason to go.

Gertrude: They think I made you up.

Pussy: Perhaps you did.

Hélène: **[Returning with more piles of clothes]** The items of lingerie, the petticoats, the skirt of corduroy, the skirt of wool tweed, the skirt of corduroy, the skirt of wool tweed, the skirt of corduroy, the skirt of wool tweed, the woolen stockings, the woolen stockings, the woolen stockings, the bizarre hat that looks like a deerslayer's, that all of America will laugh at. **[She turns and exits]**

Gertrude: I shall remain with the dogs, and you, my love, and Hélène will go to America.

Pussy: We shall sail on the S.S. Champlain and arrive in New York and see the statue of the woman in the harbor holding a torch over her head and we will see the buildings and the buildings and the buildings, and the headlines will blare: "Gertie Stein is home back home Gertie Stein is home."

Hélène: **[Entering]** The shoes of sensibility but lacking in style, the shoes of sensibility but lacking in style, the shoes of sensibility but lacking in style, the shoes of sensibility but lacking in style. **[She turns and exits]**

Gertrude: I shall stay home and diagram sentences.

Pussy: We shall visit Philadelphia, we shall visit Chicago and Hollywood and eat hot dogs with mustard and experience this thing called the five-and-dime.

Gertrude: In grade school I ate apples and read and diagrammed sentences, sentences I love, and diagramming them I love, and apples I love, but I do not want the outside to become the inside.

Pussy: I shall knit and I shall talk to the wives and I shall file my nails.

Gertrude: The sentences of America are wonderful spacious free-flowing sentences, word then word then word then word, and the words form a line and the line becomes the present moving into the future, and only the American sentence moves forward always forward.

Pussy: They think that I am you, and only exist because you invented me and no one believes that I exist.

Gertrude: There are two kinds of people: the independent dependant and the dependant independent.

Hélène: **[Entering in a rush]** I am very upset, I am very in love, in love with the postman, I have always been in love with the postman, and the postman has a wife who does not speak, and the wife who does not speak has run off with the fishmonger, and now the postman and I can be in love, but the postman has started to see the sister of the man who no one knows but everyone talks about.

Gertrude: Everyone talks about the man who no one knows, and everyone talks about him because they don't have anything else to talk about.

Hélène: The postman is in love with his sister.

Pussy: I am the shadow of Miss Stein and the only reason anyone acknowledges me is because Miss Stein is Miss Stein and she is in love with Miss Pussy.

Hélène: I hate the postman, I am in love with the postman.

Gertrude: If we took the dogs to America then we would not have to worry about the dogs.

Hélène: The dog of the postman is lying at the back door, waiting for the dogs of Miss Stein and Miss Pussy to leave for the afternoon walk, because the dogs of Miss Stein and Miss Pussy are males of the species and the dog of the postman is a bitch. **[She turns and leaves]**

Pussy: I shall not go to America. I shall stay with the dogs.

Gertrude: We shall go to America and I shall lecture in New York and Cambridge and Chicago and Miss Pussy will sit next to me and so will the dogs.

Pussy: They will think I am a dog too.

Gertrude: We shall meet Mrs. Roosevelt.

Pussy: I do not like Mrs. Roosevelt.

Gertrude: The sentence of America is spacious because America is spacious and the sentence of America proceeds in a long spacious line because America is a country with an endless frontier and at first everyone was using the Russian sentence or the German sentence or the Spanish sentence or the English sentence and then I invented the American sentence and now everyone is using it and everything will be fine. **[She turns and studies the map of America]**

Pussy: There is a pain in my heart.

Hélène: **[Entering]** There is a pain in my heart, in my gut, in my side, in my head.

Pussy: I was inside but now I am outside and everything has changed.

Hélène: I was unhappy before I fell in love with the postman and now I am unhappy because I fell in love with the postman.

Pussy: The people of America think that they know me but they do not know me, they know only the creation of Miss Stein.

Hélène: If you wear the skirts of corduroy of an unfashionable length, the people of America will think that that is what the women of France are wearing and they will be wrong.

Pussy: The people of America do not think.

Hélène: There is blood on the dining room floor.

Pussy: The people of France do not think.

Hélène: The blood of the finger of Monsieur Picasso, the blood of the toe of Monsieur Matisse, the blood of the nose of Monsieur Cézanne, the blood of the tongue of Miss May Bookstaver, the blood of the broken heart of Mademoiselle Hélène. **[She starts weeping]**

Pussy: I have murdered the cow, the duck, the goose, the chicken, the lamb, the carp, the trout, the beautiful lovely pale blue trout, I have murdered the

artist, I have murdered the artist and cooked the artist in a broth of white wine, tarragon and butter.

- Gertrude: **[Turning from the map]** The genius of writing has become now the American genius of writing because the writing of America is now the writing of Miss Stein, and the writing of Miss Stein is the writing of expansion, and the writing of Europe is the writing of compression, whereas American always expands.
- Hélène: There is blood on the dining room floor and the postman is seeing the sister of the man who nobody knows but everyone talks about.
- Pussy: I shall needlepoint the seat cushion for the chair with the design that has been created for me by Monsieur Picasso.
- Gertrude: The writing of America has no beginning, middle, and end and the painting of France and Spain is striving to leave its frame.
- Pussy: I shall have new shoes.
- Gertrude: The writing of America is striving to leave its frame, and the painting of America remains confined to its frame.
- Pussy: I shall wear each day a different pair of gypsy earrings, and I shall wear the brooch that belonged to the difficult Aunt from Philadelphia who gave it to me and then decided she wanted it back.
- Hélène: I have left a note for the postman.
- Gertrude: We shall travel with Mr. Van Vechten and Mr. Faÿ, and we shall stay with Mr. Thornton Wilder, and I shall speak on the idea that the name of a person is essential to his character and that the place of origin of a person is essential to his character and that the writing of America has no beginning, middle, and end.
- Hélène: I hide when the postman approaches, I cannot bear to see the postman, but I have left a note for the postman explaining that the picture is trying to leave its frame and that the story has no beginning, middle, and end.
- Pussy: Please do not speak of intercourse.
- Hélène: I was not speaking of intercourse.
- Pussy: In America we do not speak of intercourse,
- Hélène: The intercourse of Mademoiselle Hélène and the Postman is a very beautiful intercourse.
- Pussy: **[Sharply]** Please, Hélène.
- Hélène: **[Beat]** In France we fuck with our eyes open, in America you fuck with your eyes closed.

Pussy: In France you fuck the postman who is also fucking the sister of the man who nobody knows and everyone talks about.

Hélène: In America you fuck Mr. Roosevelt's dog.

Gertrude: I shall speak and we shall travel by train and by aeroplane and we shall fly over the farmlands and see the green squares of the fields, the crops planted in rows, and we shall see the art that is confined to its frame, and the outside will become the inside, and we shall return to Paris and we shall never see America again.

The lighting shifts, Gertrude and Pussy shift positions, Hélène exits, the map of America recedes, the tables are piled high with the hand-bound manuscripts of Miss Stein, which she looks through, sighing, disturbed. Pussy is calmly manicuring her nails. An enlarged page of Gertrude's handwriting emerges and dominates.

Gertrude: I cannot write.

Pussy: I was tortured.

Gertrude: I could always write, but now I cannot write.

Pussy: I was tortured in the life before this life, and I am still tortured.

Gertrude: I wrote *The Autobiography of Miss Pussy* and now I shall never write again.

Pussy: *The Autobiography of Miss Pussy* was a great success, my beautiful darling, and now Miss Stein has toured America and is famous in America and all of the books of Miss Stein will be published and I will be tortured.

Gertrude: I cannot write.

Pussy: We have collected the manuscripts of Miss Stein, and carefully bound the manuscripts of Miss Stein and stored them unpublished for decades in the armoire, and now they will be a success.

Gertrude: Doctor William Carlos Williams has suggested that I select the best of the manuscripts and burn all of the rest.

Pussy: The eyeballs of Doctor William Carlos Williams have been found gouged out of their sockets, sitting in a saucer in a rapidly congealing pool of blood. **[As the dialogue proceeds, she stands, crosses to the piles of manuscripts]**

Gertrude: I was a failure and everyone in America is a failure, it is a land known as the land of success but in the land of success everyone is a failure and I was a failure because I am American and then I became a success, and now that I have become a success, I am lost, completely lost, I have lost my personality, I have lost my mind, I am no longer the I who was I, and the outside has become the inside, and inside there is nothing.

Pussy: **[Reading from the manuscript “How to Write”]** “When a dog is no longer a lap dog ...there is a temporary inattention. I was astonished to learn she was led by her head **[beat]** ...and her head was not with her head her head was leading when her heart stood still.”

Gertrude: **[Laughing heartily]** That is very good, very good indeed...“her head was not with her head her head was leading when her heart stood still”... that is very very good. **[She laughs more]**

Pussy: La Gloire, my darling, lamb chop, La Gloire.

Gertrude: I was interesting and now I am not interesting, and for every work one must create a new language or else it is the same work as the previous work.

Pussy: **[Reading from another manuscript, “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene”]** “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene were gay there...they were both regular in being gay there. Miss Furr was gay there, she was gayer and gayer there and really she was just gay there, she was gayer and gayer there, that is she found ways of being gay there, to be regularly gay was to do every day the gay thing they did every day, they ended every day in the same way, at the same time, and they had been every day regularly gay.”

Gertrude: **[Sighing]** It take so much time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing.

Pussy: Please, my darling, beautiful sentences, expansive beautiful American sentences...

Gertrude: The people who come now are people who come because we are famous.

Pussy: The people who come now are not as interesting as the people who came before we were famous.

Gertrude: In America the capital of the country is a city that is not the principal city of the country and the capitals of the states are cities that are not the principal cities of the states, whereas in Europe the capitals are always the principal cities, the Rome, the Madrid, the London, the Paris...

Pussy: And we went to Oakland to visit the house where Miss Stein had lived as a girl.

Gertrude: And the house had been torn down.

Pussy: The gardens had been demolished.

Gertrude: And the there that was there was no longer there, there was no there there and now I must invent a new language.

Pussy: **[Reading from “How to Write”]** “What is a sentence. A sentence is an imagined masterpiece. A sentence is an imagined frontispiece.”

Gertrude: Please, Miss Pussy.

Pussy: **[Reading]** “A sentence is an anniversary...”

Gertrude: I cannot take it, Miss Pussy, I cannot bear to hear the words, the words assault me.

Pussy; I am tortured, when Miss Stein is tortured.

Gertrude: Perhaps Miss Pussy would like sit on the lap of Miss Stein?

Pussy: Miss Pussy would very much like to sit on the lap of Miss Stein as long as no one else is allowed to sit on the lap of Miss Stein.

Gertrude: Oh, please, Pussy, please, please, my darling, please sit on the lap, I cannot write,

Pussy: Will Miss Stein let Miss Pussy bounce up and down on the lap of Miss Stein, wiggle around a bit on the lap of Miss Stein?

Gertrude: Oh, please, my pussy, come to me, come to me, sit on me please, let me hold you, feel you, I will feel you, may I feel you?

Pussy slowly stands and crosses and very seductively sits on Gertrude’s lap.

Gertrude: We are so happy aren’t we, Miss Pussy?

Pussy: I am Miss Pussy and you are Miss Stein.

Gertrude: I will rock you, my little baby, my little pussy baby.

Pussy: Will you touch me the way I like to be touched?

Gertrude: I will touch you again and again.

Pussy: I will kiss you and I will kiss you.

Gertrude: I will touch you and I will touch you, and I will stroke you in the private places that you like to be stroked and we will spend the hours and the days and the days and the weeks and the years and the lifetime and the lifetime and the lifetime making beautiful love.

Hélène suddenly enters

Hélène: Miss Sitwell has sent a note to say that she will be unavoidably detained and that the brother of Miss Sitwell will be unavoidably detained and that the capitals of Europe will soon face complete annihilation.

Pussy: It would perhaps be best if Mademoiselle Hélène would perhaps clear her throat before she enters into the room.

Hélène: The eyeballs of Doctor William Carlos Williams have been found gouged out of their sockets, sitting in a saucer in a rapidly congealing pool of blood.

Gertrude: Peace is always more terrifying than war.

Gertrude and Pussy burst into gales of laughter.

The lighting shifts darker. Gertrude, Pussy, and Hélène shift positions. The enlarged page of Gertrude's handwriting recedes. The room is piled with packing boxes. Gertrude is pacing back and forth, restless, anxious. Hélène and Pussy are busy packing things. A number of the paintings have been removed from the wall, and lie stacked together on the floor. The lighting shifts. Throughout the scene Pussy takes paintings from the wall and stacks them, Hélène continue to wrap objects, pack them.

Pussy: We must move.

Hélène: I do not want to move.

Pussy: We must move.

Hélène: I do not want to move.

Gertrude: **[With resignation]** The past is consumed by the present, the present contains the past, we shall move to the rue Christine.

Hélène: I do not want to move.

Pussy: The son of the landlord who has married the young woman from the Dordogne is taking over the pavilion and the studio and we must move.

Gertrude: The past is on the inside, the past is not on the outside.

Pussy: We shall wrap the paintings carefully, we shall wrap the Renaissance chairs...

Hélène: **[Sighing]** We shall pack the pots, the dishes, the pans, the books, the clothes, the lives will be folded and placed in the boxes and the boxes and the boxes...

Pussy: ...and the dishes and the pans and the books and the clothes and the lives and the lives and the lives and the boxes and the boxes will move to the rue Christine. **[She continues removing paintings, stacking paintings]**

Hélène: I do not like the rue Christine.

Gertrude: There will not be another war.

Hélène: The rue Christine is dark.

Gertrude: There has been a war and another war and another war, and once you have had a war and another war and another war there is no need to have a war again.

Hélène: The rue Christine is cold.

Gertrude: If it can be done, why do it?

Hélène: I do not like the trees of the rue Christine, I do like the people of the rue Christine, I do not like the sounds and the odors of the rue Christine. The rue de Fleurus is our life, we are who we are because we inhabit the rue de Fleurus, everything has happened here, everything has been said here and done here.

Gertrude: If it has been done before, why do it again?

Hélène: I have no home, there is no home, I will never have a home, I will never have a husband, I will never have a child, I will never and I will never and I will never.

Gertrude: An event is an event is an event.

Hélène: I am less than a dog.

Gertrude: And an event and an event and an event form a pattern, but an event and an event and an event do not create a story.

Hélène: I try to create the meals of taste and excitement and adhere to the budget that is the appropriate budget and not the extravagant budget, and I try to create the meals of taste and excitement for each of the guests at the rue de Fleurus whether or not I know that they are coming or not coming, and whether we are speaking to Monsieur Thompson or not speaking to Monsieur Thompson or whether we are having an argument with Monsieur Picasso or not having an argument with Mr. Picasso, and I await the arrival of Miss Sitwell and worry about the arrival of Miss Sitwell and what will we serve to Miss Sitwell once there has been the arrival of Miss Sitwell, and I have to improvise the creation of the meals of taste and excitement using the eggs or the cheese or the green peas that I purchased in excess because they were beautiful green peas and reasonably-priced green peas, and at the rue de Fleurus I know *where* to get the beautiful green peas and eggs and cheese, and at the rue Christine I do not know anything and I do not want to know anything.

Gertrude: I shall write the history of everyone.

Hélène: We shall move to the rue Christine and die.

Pussy: We shall die whether we move or not.

Hélène: I do not want to die.

Gertrude: I shall write the history of everyone and tell what everyone has said and what everyone has done and the event and the event and the event will create the heaven of the continuous present, and everything will be fine.

Pussy: Our lives were big and now they are smaller.

Hélène: Our lives were big and soon they will disappear.

Gertrude: I talk all the time and I listen all the time and everyone says the same thing over and over again and once you have heard everyone say everything over and over again you know their rhythm and the rhythm is the core of who they are and the rhythm is the story and there is no past.

Hélène: Collected on the top of the Renaissance table are the horseshoe nails, the pebbles, the cigarette holders, the seashells, the pieces of bone, the buttons, the matchboxes, the bits and the pieces of things and things that have been found and gathered by Monsieur Picasso and Miss Stein.

Pussy: We shall carefully wrap and pack the horseshoe nails, the pebbles, the cigarette holders, the seashells, the pieces of bone, the buttons, the matchboxes, the bits and the pieces of things and things that have been found and gathered by Monsieur Picasso and Miss Stein.

Hélène: And then at the dreary and dark rue Christine, we shall carefully unpack the horseshoe nails, the pebbles, the cigarette holders, the seashells, the pieces of bone, the buttons, the matchboxes, the bits and the pieces of things and things that have been found and gathered by Monsieur Picasso and Miss Stein.

Pussy: We shall display the paintings in a different arrangement on the walls of the rue Christine.

Gertrude: I do not care about the paintings. I am tired of art.

Pussy: Miss Stein is bored with art.

Gertrude: I murdered Picasso, I murdered Matisse.

Pussy: Once you know what everyone has said and what everyone has done they are murdered.

Gertrude: I murdered Cézanne.

Pussy; You murdered Rousseau.

Gertrude: I murdered Picabia, and Monsieur Juan Gris.

Pussy: I murdered the duck, the goose, the pheasant, the goat, the cow, the hen, the carp, the lovely pale blue-skinned trout.

Gertrude: The cancer has started, the cancer has spread, and no one will speak of it.

Pussy: We shall spend more time in Bilignin.

Gertrude: We shall move to Bilignin in the early spring.

Pussy: We shall remain in Bilignin through the summer and into the fall.

Gertrude: There will be another war.

Pussy: We shall live in Bilignin during the next war.

Hélène: The postman of the rue de Fleurus was seeing the sister of the man who no one knows but everyone talks about, but now the postman of the rue de Fleurus has been leaving notes of an amorous intent for Mademoiselle Hélène saying that in his heart of miserable hearts he has always been in love with Mademoiselle Hélène and very much wants to engage again in the intercourse with Mademoiselle Hélène, but Mademoiselle Hélène must now move to the rue Christine.

Gertrude: The brother of Miss Stein has left and taken the apples of Cézanne.

Pussy: The cassoulet is often the dish of choice to prepare with the carcasses of the geese who have offered their livers to become the foie gras.

Gertrude: They said that Miss Stein did not look like the portrait of Miss Stein by Picasso, and Picasso said that it didn't matter, because one day she would.

Pussy: The wife of the postman does not speak.

Hélène: There is blood on the dining room floor.

Pussy: Miss Sitwell is dead.

Gertrude: Monsieur Hemingway is dead.

Hélène: At the rue Christine the nose of Monsieur Cezanne and the toe of Monsieur Matisse and the finger and thumb of Monsieur Picasso will be tastefully displayed on the Renaissance table with the horseshoe nails, the pebbles, the cigarette holders, the seashells, the pieces of bone, the buttons, the matchboxes, the bits and the pieces of things and things that have been found and gathered by Monsieur Picasso and Miss Stein.

Gertrude: The beautiful soldiers are dead.

Gertrude and Alice both stand, face forward, the lights shift, Hélène exits. The space becomes darker. A large, 20th century map of Europe emerges, place names in French. Gertrude and Pussy move, changing locations in the space, the lights then shift again, the color/lighting of the room is different, darker, ominous. Only a couple of paintings remain on the wall.

Gertrude: There will be no war.

Pussy: The German cockroach has invaded Poland.

Gertrude: There will be no war.

Pussy: The German cockroach has invaded Denmark and Norway.

Gertrude: There will be no war.

Pussy: The German cockroach has invaded Belgium, the Netherlands, brutally bombing Rotterdam, sweeping across the north of France surrounding the soldiers of Britain and France, who escaped by small boats in the dark of the night at Dunkirk...

Gertrude: There will be no war.

Pussy: ...followed by the invasion of Paris.

Pussy starts lighting candles, setting them around the room, as the dialogue continues.

Gertrude: Hitler is a man of the 19th century and I have murdered the 19th century and since I have murdered the 19th century, Hitler has declared war on the 20th century.

Pussy: They are taking the Jews away in the night.

Gertrude: But the past does not murder the present, the present murders the past, and the 20th century will prevail, and so shall I.

Pussy: They are taking the Jews away in the night packed like cattle in railroad cars.

Gertrude: Marshall Pétain has declared that further resistance is useless.

Pussy: We have ten pounds of Chinese tea, dried fruits and chicory and a hundred cartons of cigarettes. We shall survive.

Gertrude: German soldiers have appeared in Belley. German tanks have appeared in Belley.

Pussy: Mr. Cerf has cabled to say we must leave.

Gertrude: We shall leave, we shall not leave, we shall leave, we shall not leave.

Hélène enters

Hélène: The Germans have requisitioned the 20-year-old horse of the old woman at the market, she is in tears, she could not prove the old horse's age, they have taken the 20-year-old horse, the woman is in tears. The sons of the two widows whose husbands were killed in the first war have now been killed in the second war, and they were friends and one had just transferred to be in the same company as the other, and now both of them are dead.

Gertrude: War is so inconvenient.

Hélène: The sons of the two widows whose husbands were killed in the first war have now been killed in the second war, and they were friends and one

had just transferred to be in the same company as the other, and now both of them are dead.

Pussy: We shall grow the string beans, we shall grow the beets and the tomatoes.

Gertrude: I shall cut the box hedges, I shall chop the wood.

Hélène: The mayor of Belley has called to say that the two American ladies must for the sake of their own lives leave.

Gertrude: We shall leave, we shall not leave, we shall leave, we shall not leave.

Pussy: Mister Faÿ has close connections with Marshall Pétain, he has assured us that the officials of the Vichy regime will protect us.

Gertrude: Our names are not on the list.

Pussy: Our names were on the list, but they have been removed from the list.

Gertrude: Who is a Jew, what is a Jew?

Gertrude: War is so inconvenient.

Hélène: I am very afraid. **[She exits]**

Pussy: I am very afraid.

Gertrude: The cancer has started, the cancer has spread, the malignancy growing, daily growing, invading each organ, growing, destroying each organ, growing, and no one will speak of it.

Pussy: The Luftwaffe is bombing Britain each night, the cockroach has invaded Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

Gertrude: I shall read Tolstoy.

Pussy: The cockroach has invaded Yugoslavia and Greece.

Gertrude: I shall read Shakespeare and Dickens, Byron and Keats.

Pussy: I have hidden away four pounds of citron, candied orange and lemon peel, and when we are free and I shall make a Liberation fruit cake.

Gertrude: We are at the center of the world, we are at the center of history.

Pussy: We are living and others are not living.

Gertrude: We are living and we should be dead.

Hélène enters

Hélène: The official has informed that the German contingent of officers will be requisitioning the house of Miss Stein and Miss Pussy for a period of

weeks, and in the village there is great concern that the ladies from America are in danger, great danger.

- Gertrude: We shall stay in the rooms upstairs, we shall speak French.
- Pussy: Mademoiselle Hélène will prepare the meals and deliver them upstairs to Miss Pussy and Miss Stein.
- Hélène: The contingent of German officers will take over the house and dirty the house and try to lift up the skirts of Mademoiselle Hélène.
- Pussy: I shall give Mademoiselle Hélène cartons of cigarettes and Mademoiselle Hélène will give the contingent of German officers the cartons of cigarettes that Miss Pussy has hidden and everything will be fine.
- Hélène: The old Jewish couple who sold the fabrics of linen and wool have disappeared, the officials have taken them away in the night.
- Gertrude: War is so inconvenient.
- Pussy: Mr. Faÿ has assured us that we shall be protected from harm.
- Hélène: Mr. Faÿ will be convicted as a collaborator after the war, and imprisoned for many years.
- Pussy: Mr. Faÿ is our friend.
- Gertrude: We shall sell the portrait of Madame Cézanne for food.
- Hélène: The officials at Vichy are swine.
- Pussy: The officials at Vichy are necessary swine.
- Gertrude: We shall sell the portrait of Madame Cézanne for food and everything will be fine.
- Pussy: We can only live in the way we can live and if there is nothing we can do there is nothing we can do and if we can do nothing then the important thing is to survive.
- Gertrude: I am not feeling well, my pussycat.
- Pussy: What is wrong, my love?
- Hélène: The sky is aglow with a large red moon.
- Gertrude: When one is the youngest daughter in a family of five one is privileged and protected, and that is a feeling that is a good feeling, yes a good feeling, a very good feeling, but the feeling I have now is not.
- Hélène: It is the season of the large red moon.
- Gertrude: I am dying, the world is dying, and the moon is large and red.

Hélène: Each night there is a large red moon and the dogs do not bark and and the Vichy swine are arresting the people who manage to survive by dealing in the black market, and the neighbor of Madame Berrard reported Monsieur Berrard to the officials and they have taken him off to prison, and the situation of the ladies from America is very grave. **[She exits]**

Gertrude: I walk 12 kilometers to town to obtain the provisions and I talk to Madame Pierlot and we talk of the time before the Germans came and we talk about the time when the Germans will leave and they say that I should be afraid and I am afraid, I am very afraid, and to be afraid is the happiest time of my life.

Pussy: Madame Pierlot has died from the cold, the cold of the winter without any heat, and others have died, and we have survived with coal that was arranged for by Mr. Faÿ.

Gertrude: This is the happiest time of my life.

Pussy: The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor, the Americans have entered the war, the allies have invade Italy, the allies have landed on the Normandy coast and the moon is large and red.

Gertrude: The Americans will come and they will liberate Gertrude Stein.

Pussy: When the Americans arrive, I shall prepare trout in aspic, chicken à l'estragon, tomato and lettuce salad, chocolate soufflé, and black coffee.

Gertrude: A feeling on the inside of the malignancy growing...

Pussy: ...daily growing,

Gertrude: ...invading each organ...

Pussy: ...growing...

Gertrude: ...destroying each organ...

Pussy: ...growing.

Gertrude: Will Miss Pussy please hold the hand of Miss Stein?

Pussy: **[Holding Gertrude's hand]** America is Miss Stein, and Miss Stein is America.

Gertrude: Will you stay with me to the end?

Pussy: My mother died of cancer when I was twenty.

Gertrude: My mother died of cancer when I was fourteen.

Pussy: I have been protected ever since.

Gertrude: Everyone has always helped me that is what everyone has always done, when I need, someone takes care, whatever I need, someone takes care... Miss Pussy is Miss Pussy and if there were no Miss Pussy there would be no Miss Stein.

Pussy: The moon is very large and very red.

Gertrude: Life is filled with moving, yes, moving, this is what life is, moving, always moving.

Pussy: Miss Stein is always moving.

Gertrude: Life is always moving.

Hélène enters, excited, near tears.

Hélène: I can hear someone singing the Marseillaise.

Pussy: Paris has been liberated.

Gertrude: **[Listening]** Someone is singing the Marseillaise.

Hélène: The Americans are at Grenoble.

Pussy: **[Listening]** Someone is singing the Marseillaise.

Hélène: The Americans have arrived at Coluz.

Gertrude: **[Listening]** Someone is singing the Marseillaise.

Pussy: We shall meet the Americans and ride in the jeep of the Americans.

Gertrude: We shall meet the Americans and we shall shake hands in the good old way that Americans shake hands and we shall learn about who they are and where they are from and it will be a day that they will always remember when America won the war and the soldiers liberated Gertrude Stein.

Pussy; We shall meet the Americans and we shall shake their hands and we shall invite them to dinner, and we shall ride in the jeep of the Americans and we shall talk and laugh and we shall learn about who they are and where they are from and we shall eat the chicken à l'estragon and the Liberation Fruitcake.

Hélène starts softly, tearfully singing the Marseillaise, and slowly she is joined by Gertrude and Pussy, and gradually they sing louder and happier and, with joined hands, finish the singing exuberantly, joyfully, tearfully.

The lighting shifts and becomes darker. Hélène exits. Pussy and Gertrude shift positions. Pussy sits downstage center, alone. Gertrude sits far stage right; she is

dead. The lighting shifts again, suggesting the separate realities. . There are no paintings on the wall, only the rectangles of color where the paintings had hung

Pussy: I found a gentle place.

Gertrude: She wouldn't speak.

Pussy: A very gentle place.

Gertrude: One night she wouldn't speak.

Pussy: A deep-inside, very quiet place, and I found it again and again.

Gertrude: Wouldn't speak.

Pussy: Deep inside.

Beat

Pussy: She died.

Gertrude: Gertrude Stein died.

Pussy: A great pain in the stomach, couldn't stop moving.

Gertrude: Back and forth.

Pussy: From window to window.

Gertrude: Life is always moving.

Pussy: On the train coming back to Paris, she couldn't sit.

Gertrude: I asked her, what's wrong, talk to me, what's wrong, talk to me, pussy, my pussy, what's wrong, please my beautiful pussycat, and she wouldn't speak.

Pussy: Her nephew met us at the train with an ambulance, and took her to the hospital and the doctor said they must operate and they did operate and she died.

Gertrude: Gertrude Stein died.

Pussy: I found a comfortable place, a very comfortable place, a deep-inside silent and reassuring place.

Gertrude: She was two, not one, one loving, one hateful, now loving, now hateful, and I said, please, Miss Pussy, and the hateful one would not speak.

Pussy: I met her older brother Michael in San Francisco, just after the great quake, and the next year I went to Paris and I met her, and she was dressed in a brown corduroy suit, a large coral brooch around her neck, just returned from Tuscany, golden brown glowing skin, and she asked:

Gertrude: "What is the answer?"

Pussy: And I did not know the answer and so she asked:

Gertrude: "Well, then, what is the question?"

Pussy: We walked in the Luxembourg Gardens.

Gertrude: And ate praline ices.

Pussy: And she asked me to move in with her at 27 Rue de Fleurus, and so we began our life.

Gertrude: The loving one was loving.

Pussy: The hateful one would not speak.

Gertrude: One could not pin down who she was or how she came to be and through the years I never could pin down who she was or how she came to be and once you know everything there is to know about someone you murder them and I never knew everything there was to know about her and I then I died.

Pussy: She created the world in her own image.

Gertrude: And then she died.

Pussy: The world was the world and then Gertrude Stein recreated it in her own image, and the world became Gertrude Stein.

Gertrude: Gertrude Stein died, the world died.

Pussy: When you have been tortured in the life before the life that is now you find a gentle place, a deep-inside gentle place, and whatever has happened on the outside, and many things have happened on the outside, on the inside I exist in a gentle place, a deep-inside quiet peaceful place.

Gertrude: Please talk to me, my lovely pussycat, I will stroke you, I will love you, I will spank your beautiful little bottom until you are crying out, "please, please, please..."

Hélène enters bringing Miss Pussy a cup of tea.

Hélène: **[Serving Pussy the tea]** The nephew of Miss Stein has taken away the paintings of Miss Stein that were to be the paintings of Miss Pussy for as long as she lived, because the nephew of Miss Stein claims that Miss Pussy has not been taking appropriate care.

Pussy: I no longer see.

Hélène: Miss Flanner called to see if Miss Pussy would care for a visit.

Pussy: I cannot see the paintings and I do not care about the paintings.

Hélène: Mr. Thompson called to see if Miss Pussy would care for a visit.

Pussy: Miss Stein is dead and so is the world.

Gertrude: Death is very nice.

Hélène: Would Miss Pussy care for a bowl of the potage velouté aux champignons?

Pussy: I do not care.

Gertrude: Death is so like life.

Hélène: **[With a curtsy]** If I may be excused.

Hélène exits

Pussy: Then there was the day that Madame de Clermont-Tonnerre came to visit Miss Stein, and Madame de Clermont-Tonnerre had cut off her beautiful exuberant hair, and Miss Stein liked very much the appearance of Madame de Clermont-Tonnerre, and so Miss Stein asked me to cut off her braids.

Gertrude: Please, pussycat, cut off my braids, please, pussycat, I love you.

Pussy: I was reluctant.

Gertrude: Please, my beautiful pussycat.

Pussy: I combed out her hair...I cut off a bit... hesitantly...and Miss Stein said:

Gertrude: More.

Pussy: And I cut off a bit more hesitantly...and Miss Stein said:

Gertrude: More.

Pussy: And I cut off a bit more hesitantly, and Miss Stein said:

Gertrude: More.

Pussy: And I cut off a bit more hesitantly, and the more I cut the more pleased she was, and throughout the afternoon, I cut hesitantly and I cut hesitantly and I cut hesitantly, until her hair was very very short and formed very close to her magnificent head.

Gertrude: The head of Miss Stein is too big.

Pussy: She was curious.

Gertrude: She was suspicious.

Pussy: We met everyone, knew everyone, everyone came to the door of 27 Rue de Fleurus.

Gertrude: I wanted to know everything about everybody, anything and everything.

Pussy: They all heard about her, they all wanted to meet her.

Gertrude: I wanted to hear what they said and how they said it, the rhythms of how they said the same things again and again.

Pussy: I didn't speak to her for 80 days.

Gertrude: She was brutal to me, said horrible things to me, vicious, hateful, inhuman...

Pussy: Friendship is a form of murder.

Gertrude: **[Agitated, looking around]** Pussy, where is my purse? Pussy, where is my...I've lost...please, Pussy, I've lost...I've lost...please....

Pussy: I always say that you cannot tell what a picture really is or what an object really is until you dust it every day, and you cannot tell what a book is until you have typed it and proof-read it.

Gertrude: I have lost my purse, I have lost my walking stick, I have lost my hat and my cape, Miss Pussy always takes care of me, where is Miss Pussy? I have lost myself, my darling pussy...I cannot find myself...my darling, please... do you know where I am? Can you help me? Please?

Pussy: **[After a long beat]** We had wonderful times, summers in Bilignin, tomatoes, beans, bitter greens.

Gertrude: I cut the box hedges, she made raspberry jam.

Pussy: Trips to Avila, Granada, Palma de Mallorca.

Gertrude: Loving conversations, laughter.

Pussy: Always laughter.

Gertrude: Tears of joy, great joy.

Pussy: Each day great joy.

Gertrude: And in the Midwest there were the dancers, entrancing, ghost-like beautiful dancers.

Gertrude: Couples holding each other.

Pussy: Leaning on each other.

Gertrude: Supporting each other.

Pussy: Dancing slowly through the night.

Gertrude: Dancing slowly through the day.

Pussy: Holding, leaning, dancing through the nights and the days.

Gertrude: Shadows clinging, moving slowly.

Pussy: They hadn't slept for weeks, dancing, shuffling, barely staying alive as they danced.

Gertrude: Dancing to stay alive, one leaning on one, the other leaning on the other, it was beautiful.

Pussy: Terrifying.

Gertrude: Living is beautiful, dying is beautiful.

Pussy: Then they told me they must operate.

Gertrude: The pain of joy is great.

Pussy: They must operate immediately.

Gertrude: The pain of joy is very great.

Pussy: I am afraid.

Gertrude: I am very afraid.

Pussy: And she asked me:

Gertrude: "What is the answer?"

Pussy: And I did not know the answer, so she asked me:

Gertrude: "Well then, what is the question?"

Pussy: And she touched me and I touched her and she held me and I held her, and we could no longer speak, tears in our eyes, and then they came and took her away through the swinging metal doors to the operating room...
[Beat] And I never... saw her... again.

Blackout

End of play

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