

## Richard E. Brown /

# CUBES IN ARMS: A PLAY IN ONE ACT

[Quoted passages come from works by Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas and are used by permission of the Estate of Gertrude Stein.]

*Characters:*

*Terry: an assistant professor of art with short cut hair, dressed in a gray sweatshirt and bluejeans.*

*Babette: younger, more feminine in appearance, dressed in a bright pink bathrobe.*

*Mabel: Babette's aunt, dressed in a flowered housecoat.*

*Viola: plump and barefoot.*

*Carl: Mabel's husband, dressed in slacks and an undershirt.*

*The play takes place in winter, late at night.*

*The livingroom and bedroom of a modern apartment are connected by a door. From the bedroom, other doors lead to bathroom and closet. Off the livingroom a door opens to the building corridor. Chairs, tables and lamps are shaped as cubes. The bed has a square look to it. Windows are fitted with shades or screens rather than curtains. Colours are somber brown and gray, with accents in maroon, charcoal or dark blue—the palette of much early Cubist painting. Spoiling the order, however, are scattered books and papers. On the walls hang posters of famous Cubist paintings: Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, *Three Women*, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, *Weeping Woman* (1937) or Braque's *Large Nude* (1907-08). Twentieth-century atonal chamber music may be played before the performance. The volume increases as the lights dim. After a moment of darkness, the light suddenly comes up onstage; the music ends on a discord, extended by a woman's scream.*

*Terry is sidling about the livingroom, making gestures with her arms that describe the sides and points of an invisible cube, which she holds before her as an airy package. Her movements continue rhythmically as she speaks. Babette answers from the bedroom.*

- TERRY That's right, scream! Anyone who gets calls like that should scream.
- BABETTE It's not because of the calls!
- TERRY Empty-headed little dyke. Picked you up in the laundry room. Fingering your underwear. Now she can't stop phoning. . . .
- BABETTE You can't stop us. . . .
- TERRY Nothing but ringing, and screaming, and more ringing.
- BABETTE *On her way into the livingroom, she nicks herself on a corner of the bed.* Terry! Can't you stop that?
- TERRY Someone's got to make cubes, and it's obviously being left to me. Gertrude and Alice have waited long enough.
- BABETTE Gertrude and Alice are dead. And nobody has to make cubes with their hands.
- TERRY They're *not* dead, no thanks to you. Nearly smothered them with bell-ringing. Already twice tonight.
- BABETTE The problem isn't that I'm getting phone calls from downstairs. . . .
- TERRY "There is no authority for the abuse of cheese."
- BABETTE What?
- TERRY Cheese is a mammary product! Gertrude tells us that in *Tender Buttons*. That little Button downstairs has no authority!
- Terry freezes when the phone rings. On her way to answer it, Babette nicks herself on a chair. Keeping an eye on Babette, Terry starts her rhythmic cube-making again.*
- BABETTE Hello? Oh Button, I do, too! I'm wearing your robe. Besides, you couldn't tell from my voice if I was naked. I can do a whole wardrobe with my throat. Want to hear my feather boa? Mmmmm. . . . What's that noise? Viola is what? Cracks walnuts at 11 p.m.? How nice. *Lowering her voice.* I'll tell you about crazy sometime. No, not violent, but practically unbuttoned. We're on the verge of the Big Conversation. . . .
- Terry jerks out of her rhythm, sweeps the receiver from Babette's hand and hangs up.*
- TERRY I asked for no abuse. We can abuse third parties, but not each other. Our cube's too tight.
- BABETTE Terry, people don't do that!

TERRY     What about desertion? Where does it say we can do that? Gertrude knows: "Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third, alas a dirty third, alas a dirty bird." The dirty third is Button!

BABETTE   That's clever, in a maniacal sort of way. I do remember that's Gertrude Stein's description of a chicken. Also from *Tender Buttons*. Amusing reading for the sane, but disturbing to the disturbed.

*The phone rings. Terry still possesses it.*

TERRY     Ring. Scream. Ring. Scream. *She speaks into the receiver.* We're having a literary conversation. The world will learn the outcome in good time. Don't call again. *Hangs up.*

BABETTE   I really am trapped inside a cube with you! But now you're going to hear me out, with no more quotes from *Tender Buttons*. . . .

TERRY     *Pointing to the phone.* No, Button is not tender. . . .

BABETTE   Because I've got a lot to say. I've been taking notes.

TERRY     *I've* been taking all the notes lately. Your note-taking has completely stopped, as far as I can see.

BABETTE   If you don't let me say what's on my mind, I'll leave now.

TERRY     *Hand over lips.* No. *Sits.*

BABETTE   Because your deliberate misunderstandings, your lines from Gertrude and Alice, are a device to block the truth. I used to think your talk was brilliant; I didn't mind if I never got to finish a sentence. But we're not playing around now.

TERRY     Losing, I'm losing.

BABETTE   We owe each other a clean break. I'm about to walk out of this apartment; my work on my dissertation has completely stopped. . . .

TERRY     This wouldn't happen if you'd tell that little nymph to stop ringing us!

BABETTE   Face facts! The problems started long before I stumbled into Button. Look at this apartment! Only you could live here and be happy as a square clam. You constructed it! You even did historical research for it, by god! You looked up photos of Gertrude Stein's Paris apartment in 1906, and wept because they weren't in colour. You checked out books on Picasso to get ideas for the furniture. One

thing I suspect: you squared the edges of our mattress with little blocks of wood. Because I keep hitting my ankles on the points when I get into bed. What a place for love-making! Designed by a professor of art who has squares for her eyes and a block for her head. *Sees Terry is about to burst, so she pauses.* Talk! But keep it short.

TERRY But they're pure forms! You agreed the cubes are pure forms. And these paintings, you agreed they're woman in the purest sense. I was making a place to inspire us. Our love and our work can grow here. . . .

BABETTE I'll try to explain. We've both looked at a lot of women—the same parts, rearranged, over and over. Occasionally we might have thought: yes, that angle or that squared limb was what gave a particular woman her glory; that little bit of a cube about her was the part we wanted to touch. But we never saw a woman like these girlfriends of Picasso! Where did he kiss them? You'd get your nose bloody if you stuck it into a face like that. . . . But the posters I can ignore. What about these rooms full of pointy arms, ready to jab me as I walk past? Or the kitchen cabinet, filled with those little square bowls I eat my Wheat Chex out of? Terry, Cubism isn't a way of living. It was only a theory to help some painters think about forms on canvas: our little arrangement here proves that. Consequently, our writing project is a sham. That's why I've stopped taking notes for it.

TERRY If we've failed, maybe we went about it wrong. But I'm trying my best. Gertrude said it: "Any little one will kill himself for milk." How can you doubt there's such a thing as Cubist love? Listen: Gertrude bought Picasso's first paintings, and they became friends. Naturally he began to form a conception of her, which he treasured. After he had purified it, he made it into a portrait—with that angular nose and sharp cheekbones—because it was the idea of her, not her flesh. But Gertrude wasn't a painter. Her chance came when she met Alice. They set out to form a pure couple, a pattern of husband and wife. . . .

BABETTE You repeat yourself. You gave that speech on the night we met, outside the library.

TERRY Oh, I give Gertrude full credit. She and Alice created the model for love in our time. Our work is simply to learn

how to repeat them. That's why you've come to help me, in this pregnant environment. . . .

BABETTE Pregnancy comes in the form of a large curve. That should tell you something: the cube is not the essential female shape. But there's another thing I've put off telling you. My dissertation advisor has withdrawn her consent. So my chapters of the book, even if I wrote them, couldn't earn me a doctorate.

TERRY She wants to write it herself!

BABETTE Hardly. If we're lucky, she'll cover the idea with silence, so you won't become a public joke.

TERRY If she's been laughing. . . .

BABETTE Last week she and I had a talk. I'd been having doubts, but she helped focus them. She asked precisely how Gertrude and Alice were like a Cubist picture. So I repeated what you said: they saw one another in an idealized way. And she said, "Yes, but how did they *behave* that showed purity of form? Or Picasso, or anyone else, to prove there's a Cubist pattern of life distinct from the ordinary, making it important to us anthropologists?" And I had no answer.

Because I'd been thinking over their messy lives, and they sure didn't look idealized to me. Gertrude and Alice may have loved one another, but they fought like devils, just out of earshot of their famous houseguests. And those houseguests bothered me, too. Gertrude and Alice did have a conception of how they were supposed to behave; they were supposed to worship Gertrude Stein. Only she never told them, so eventually they all forgot. Then Alice got on the phone and forbade them to come around any more. Or they met Gertrude in the park and she looked the other way. Well, what's Cubist about that? It's just stupid and unfair, like it always is when you try to impose on someone.

TERRY You're a little younger. You don't know the games dissertation advisors play. She doesn't want you writing a book with me. She has her own project for you. . . .

BABETTE Everybody's trying to steal me away, aren't they? Because it couldn't be that you're driving me away!

TERRY You're the driver now! "A white hunter is nearly crazy."

BABETTE I remember a couple of Gertrude's lines myself: "Let no one think that anything has come to stay." And, "Act as if the table has no centre"—because there isn't any centre, Terry. You don't understand Gertrude and Alice. They were totally unpredictable. Their friends never knew what they'd say next.

TERRY The white hunter, driven and driven. . . .

BABETTE You must see: that's what excites me about Button. I watch her face move, as her eyes play different tricks. Or when I come into the room, seeing her turn around in the light: every second it's a new body. A surprise.

TERRY *Softly.* You're an impressionist, then.

BABETTE And her mind's like that, her talk is. Every sentence seems new.

TERRY *Suddenly.* I can see why she'd be more fun than me. We Cubists are so rigid; all we do is make commitments. I take a leave of absence to spend full time on our research. I tie us to a book contract, which I don't see how we're going to meet now. I even put down money on a Paris flat for next summer, so I can show you the places in Cubist history we're writing about.

BABETTE I have to pack an overnight case, so please let me finish. I've been thinking how you tie everything together: apartment, research project, vacation to Paris. You show a genius for making things fit. Except me. At first I was dazzled, but Terry, you never relax! What a relief to find a little girl who just nuzzles me at night, and doesn't call me her wife!

TERRY *Recites softly.* "Certainly it is very difficult to be certain just how completely one is frightened in being living."

*Babette returns to the bedroom, nicking herself on a table as she passes. Suddenly Terry notices she has left.*

TERRY What are you doing?

BABETTE I'm blasting off. *Throwing things around in the closet.* I'm getting out my square-toed shoes—and my



pants with the square pockets—and the blouse with the little dice for buttons—and I'm stuffing them into my block-shaped suitcase—and I'm stepping into the real world—which could be trouble, since I hear it's some really crazy shape. *Makes a globe with her arms.*

TERRY

*Taking up her jerky cube-making.*

“‘He had heard of a third and he asked about it it was a magpie in the sky’

Black magpie in the sky, oh why?

‘Pigeons in the grass alas’

Pigeons in the dirt are hurt

Pigeons on the ground abound

Pigeons up a tree knock knees

Magpies in the air don't care”

*The doorbell rings. Both women move toward the hall door.*

*Terry is closer and opens it.*

TERRY

A dirty bird.

*Mabel is there. Surprised, Terry lets her enter. Babette shuts herself in the bedroom. While the other two converse, she finishes packing and changes from the pink robe into casual clothes.*

MABEL

I'm sorry it's late. I know I'm butting in.

TERRY

*Her mind elsewhere.* You're her aunt.

MABEL

Look, Babette's closed the door. Now you're stuck with me.

TERRY

Night's your bad time.

MABEL

Night's only good for lovers. Of course, the reason our floozie calls so late is that the rates go down. She has to cut corners so she can afford moisturizers. She's almost as old as me, but, being a floozie, her job is to look 15 years younger, minimum.

TERRY

Carl tells you a lot about her.

MABEL

Oh, she and I talk. If Carl's in the toilet when she calls, we shoot the breeze till he gets out. She sent me a card at Christmas. For a floozie, she's very correct.

TERRY

Imagine a floozie like that. I thought they all wore wretched pink and were free of guilt. . . .

MABEL

My sons' floozies are like that.

- TERRY *Shouting toward the bedroom.* Did you hear, Babette?  
Mabel got a Christmas card from Carl's floozie.
- MABEL Yes, but Floozie got Carl for Christmas. Right now they're on the phone making plans for Washington's birthday. George, not Martha. That's why I say, lucky you.
- TERRY Little pigeon under glass.
- MABEL Independent, educated, you get grants to fly to Europe and look at pictures. Don't ever get married. A floozie can knock your stomach out.
- TERRY I never moisturize. Babette does, though. Hear that, Babette, you and Carl's floozie have something in common.
- MABEL Oh, don't compare her. . . .
- TERRY *At bedroom door.* I thought Button was the floozie around here, but if you moisturize and wear her bathrobe, maybe you're *both*. . . .
- Babette opens the door, nightcase in hand.*
- BABETTE Going to spill it all in front of my aunt, are you? Sure, she'll be glad to call my mom and report the dirty secret about me and that strange lady professor I was living with.
- MABEL What secret?
- TERRY *Calling after Babette.* You floozies! Floozie dykes!
- BABETTE *Ignoring this.* I'll be back tomorrow for the rest of my things. And I don't want to see any of my relatives when I come. *She leaves.*
- MABEL Terry, is she moving out on you? . . . She's left you for somebody else, hasn't she?
- TERRY *Moving now in jerks and starts rather than in full cubes.* Gertrude had such words for it: "There is no use at all in smell, in taste, in teeth, in toast, in anything, there is no use at all and the respect is mutual. . . ." "Elephant beaten with candy and little pops and chews all bolts and reckless reckless rats. . . ." "Seat a knife near a cage." "Silence the noon and murder flies. . . ." "A jack in kill her, a jack in, makes a meadowed king, makes a to let." *She fades through the bedroom door, swings it closed, and sinks onto the bed. She will lie motionless awhile.*



*Mabel has concentrated on Terry intensely; she registers the closing of the door as a physical shock. After a moment she goes to the door and speaks.*

MABEL Terry? We could talk. I could talk. Funny, I never guessed that you and my niece were . . . lovers. I don't even know the signs. How did you find each other? Two women— seems like they'd know what hurts, and wouldn't do it. I hope you're not crying; there's no relief in it. You've got to outlast her. She said she'd be back tomorrow, so that's your first chance. When she comes, just make a twisted smile, so she can't tell what you're thinking: you can knock her flat. My mother, Babette's grandmother, knew how to do that. The sneer, the arched eyebrow. She practiced all day on the farm: "take that, you chicken!" "Oh, you think so, you pig!" By the time my dad got in at night, she was ready. And it paid off. A bitter old woman, I admit, but her husband came crawling back in the end. "Lorrie," he said, "take me into your bed, my floozie is a no-good woman." It's hard without the livestock to practice on. Still, I stick the knife in Carl whenever opportunity knocks. . . .

*A knock. Silence from the bedroom. Another knock. Mabel answers. Viola is there.*

MABEL Yes?

VIOLA *Entering.* Why honey, you're skin and bones. It's weird, isn't it? They've spent two weeks in bed, and we don't know one another by sight.

MABEL No, we don't.

VIOLA It's crazy what they said about you. Jealousy, I imagine. They didn't even get your age right. You can do a lot with grey hair.

MABEL You can dye it, if you have any reason to.

VIOLA It's intellectual. Button told me you're writing a book, or did she get that wrong, too?

MABEL I'm Babette's aunt. Terry's in the bedroom.

*Viola smiles wonderfully, strolls past and taps at the bedroom door.*

MABEL She's had a shock; she needs to be alone.

VIOLA I expect she'll want to see me.

*Meanwhile, when Mabel opened the door, Terry had stirred and sat up. She pulled a box off a chest near the bed and opened it, then ceremoniously raised it above her head and upended it, sending a flood of buttons onto the blankets. The noise of this cascade occurs an instant after Viola taps on the door, prompting her to listen and then push the door open like a cat. Terry sits on the bed, preoccupied. Viola steps into the room. Mabel follows her to the door.*

MABEL      What's your name? Do you live downstairs with a girl called Button?

*Without looking back, Viola shuts the bedroom door and locks it. From the other side, Mabel tries to listen, then brings a chair and sits staring at the door. Inside, Viola sits on the bed as she speaks. Terry concentrates on moving her buttons around and doesn't acknowledge the intruder.*

VIOLA      So you're just as butch as they say. . . . I'm Viola. I'm afraid I'm at your mercy. Thrown into the cold—not even wearing shoes this time. *Lifts her feet, laughing for effect.* I should keep a backpack by the front door; then I'd be ready for Button's next trick to show up. You're not used to Babette fooling around, are you? Where'd they meet? The laundry room, wasn't it? That's Button's main hunting ground: the churning and blowing really excite her. Of course, you wouldn't think she could find so many tricks in one apartment house. Seems like 12 stories full of lesbians! *A beat.* Hey honey, this is nothing. Every couple of months Button throws me out for a night. When they're through, I'll bounce right back. It's just awkward now because I need a place to sleep.

*No response, but Terry is having trouble with her buttons.*

VIOLA      *New idea; new energy.* I hear you and Babette are writing a book! It's about Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas and their poodle dog, Basket. Babette was showing us pictures. And it's about how love is like a box. I didn't understand: everybody lives in a box or thinks like a box. How could that be?

*Terry devotes herself elaborately to her buttons.*

VIOLA *Turns over a book she finds on the bed.* Oh, here's Alice B. Toklas now. Her cookbook. I take cookbooks to bed myself. *Leafing through it.* These recipes look French. You can never get the ingredients. . . . Ah, pork: this'll be fun. This recipe looks like solid lard. It's called "Rillettes." *Pronounces the "ll" as though English.*

TERRY "Rillettes." *Pronounces as French.*

VIOLA Huh?

TERRY They're pronounced "rillettes."

VIOLA Sounds sexy. I think fat is appealing, don't you? A little grease around the lips. Alice B. Toklas must have thought so, too. She sure picked a fat girl to love! So naturally she'd write a cookbook; these are her aphrodisiacs! Look, here's proof: it says that in the summers, she and Gertrude Stein lived in a French town called Belly!

TERRY "Belley." *She accents the last syllable.*

VIOLA "Belley." My mistake. . . . I don't know what I'm talking about. You're depressed, and I'm tired, and this bed is cold. I'd like to sleep on your sofa if you don't mind, if that skinny lady won't be there all night.

TERRY *Looking past Viola.* Alice's cookbook is good reading for tonight. You could read me the chapter called "Murder in the Kitchen," where she tells about smothering six little doves with her hands. You put your thumb here *(demonstrates on her own neck)* and wait. Later, she kills a carp with a knife to its spine.

VIOLA That's grotesque for a cookbook.

TERRY *Smiles.* You do have some good instincts about Alice. Mostly, her recipes are about marriage, about the miracles she performs with milk and butter and eggs—all that fat from the female body. She takes something masculine—a muscle or a seed—and suspends it in the feminine. And always, in her skillet, the butter turns to a golden glaze, smooth as a windowpane.

VIOLA My god! You're very good at . . . cooking. But you'll have to teach me: what does this have to do with the squares?

TERRY What do you mean, what does it have to do?

VIOLA Well, over here you have some sort of boxes, and over here you have this pork chop floating in butter. So... how does it work?

TERRY I refuse to see what you mean.

VIOLA You don't put the pork chop in the box, do you? It'd get yucky in there, wouldn't it?

TERRY Are you making some point?

VIOLA Babette and Button made jokes about boxes, so I thought they were important, that's all.

TERRY Did they send you up here to torment me?

VIOLA What?

TERRY Because this is exactly how they'd tell you to drive me over the edge: get me talking and then find some inconsistency.

VIOLA I don't see the inconsistency. Gertrude and Alice liked to eat, and they made boxes. Of some sort. They sound just like anybody else.

TERRY What's your name—Viola? You see, Viola, what's so cunning about your line is, once I admit they're like everybody else, I'm lost.

VIOLA Lost? We may not know what to do, honey, but we sure know where we are. We're two floors up from Button and Babette. Next door a hungry old lady is listening through the keyhole. And we're sitting on this bed... which feels like a box, actually... (*laughing at her discovery*), surrounded by these little... *Picks up a handful*. Why, they're buttons! All different coloured buttons... Is this coincidence?

TERRY Only you. If you weren't sent up on purpose.

VIOLA And—I'm trying to understand—are these because of my Button?

TERRY No, these were first; yours came after. Tonight I'm wondering if that's even her real name.

VIOLA But then, what are these for?

TERRY I don't suppose your two coaches told you about a book by Gertrude Stein called *Tender Buttons*? It's a book of pure sounds; the words mean only their sounds, nothing else, no stray associations. Gertrude was trying to reduce them to order, you

see. But then I learned that she used to sit arranging real buttons by the hour. Suddenly I understood how a life could *cohere*. I've tried to get at least two of each kind. I let them mix up good in the box. I can always match them up again... except tonight, none of them has a mate.

VIOLA *Slowly reaching to touch Terry's stomach.* Well, that made perfect sense. You're not crazy, are you? You just like to fit things together. So here on this bed, we've got everything we need: buttons and a box. And our cookbook; we can imagine we're eating rillettes. And we've got the night time. *Her finger reaches Terry's navel.* And look, Gertie must be with us, because here's a tender button.

*After a dreadful instant, Terry rises and begins to harry Viola from the room.*

TERRY *With sweeping motions.* You greasy slut! Gertrude says, "Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider stop the muncher, muncher munchers."

VIOLA *Opening the door and backing into Mabel.* What do you mean muncher?

TERRY *Pursuing.* That bed's not for you. Gertrude knows that: "The reason for bed is this, that a decline, any decline is poison, poison is a toe a toe extractor, this means a solemn change. Hanging."

MABEL *To Viola.* What did you do to her?

VIOLA I just made an ordinary pass.

MABEL What you did was an affront.

VIOLA It was natural after that talk about food. She encouraged me.

MABEL You should leave.

VIOLA *To Terry from behind Mabel.* Every one of your buttons is round!

TERRY That's a lie! I've got lots of square ones.

VIOLA Round, round! Their eyes are round too!

MABEL My god, why don't you leave!

TERRY I've got them like ice cubes.

VIOLA What's more, Alice's cookbook has nothing to do with boxes!

TERRY I've got them like little concrete blocks.

VIOLA Nothing matches, you know! It's all random!

MABEL What are you doing to her?

*Terry has run back to the bed and heaps up buttons.*

- VIOLA I'm telling her we've only got this one night. Button's going to take me back tomorrow. We've got one night, and I'd figured her out and decided I could take her anyway, and now she's not ready. *Heaving.* So I'm telling her to forget her goddamn buttons and her goddamn boxes and get laid and then let's eat!
- MABEL *Reasonably.* You need someone who's more used to these things.
- VIOLA Whoever heard of a dyke that's not used to fooling around?
- MABEL I have a suggestion. Upstairs, apartment 702. A man is just getting into bed. He'd like to see you.
- VIOLA A man? That's not really my line. I'd have to think about it.
- MABEL He'll be alone. His wife is sick. He has lips like a flower.
- VIOLA *Moving toward the hall door.* At least I could sleep up there.
- MABEL Apartment 702.
- VIOLA 702.

*Viola leaves; Mabel locks the door.*

- TERRY *Has been watching Viola depart.* Why did you do that?
- MABEL I told you before. I'm looking out for opportunities.
- TERRY She was right; most of these buttons are round. What's even crazier, the square ones have round eyes. Who'd design a button like that?
- MABEL It's like a torture in hell: he can't help making passes, and she can't help refusing.
- TERRY I don't think they sent her up here. She was too desperate at the end. But then, how could she have noticed about the buttons so quickly, when I never saw it?
- MABEL This is the sort of thing you should arrange.
- TERRY *Focusing on Mabel.* What? After she's through with Button, I should fix her up with Carl?
- MABEL Not specifically, but you should be looking out for a good chance.
- TERRY For revenge, you mean?
- MABEL My dear daughter, yes! *Enters bedroom.* You're a little preoccupied, I can understand. But you must start planning. . . .



TERRY *Rising.* You give excellent advice, both of you! First Button's roommate offers me her greasy lips, then you offer to help me poison Babette!

MABEL Terry, I mean to help.

TERRY Babette's walking out is not the only thing going on tonight, you know! Maybe you didn't hear me before: most of these buttons are round! Maybe it can't be done! "A puzzle, a monster puzzle, a heavy choking a neglected Tuesday." *Attentive to what she's recited.* Is that what Gertrude means, after all? Listen: "They like a little dog to be afraid to have a nightingale be told a chicken is afraid and it is true he is she is and where whenever there is a hawk up in the air. Like that. It makes anybody think of sailboats."

MABEL Sailboats?

TERRY Of course, sailboats. They were chosen particularly, because they make no sense!

MABEL *Suddenly.* Don't cast me off, Terry. I want the same thing you do!

TERRY Do you? *She sits beside Mabel.* I want to know if Babette was right about Gertrude. *Looks at Mabel, impatient, but soon becomes lyrical.* Of course you don't know . . . about change. All Gertrude's aphorisms about clouds moving across the sky, and about changing names, "because in every space there is a hint of more."

MABEL Are we going to talk philosophy?

TERRY The problem isn't hard to understand; it's just hard to imagine a person accepting it so painlessly. Could she love the forms without trying to live them, after all?

MABEL *Yawning.* That's likely.

TERRY Maybe it's all just like Viola, knocking around barefoot in the night.

MABEL Quite likely.

TERRY Do you think most gay women trick?

MABEL *Roused from approaching sleep.* What?

TERRY I thought they had long monogamous relationships.

MABEL Believe me, I have no idea.

TERRY Who could be faithful to Babette, now that she's so changed?

MABEL If Carl comes for me, tell him I'm having an affair.

*Sags into sleep. Quiet, Terry musing. A knock. Terry opens to Carl, who enters abruptly.*

CARL Is my wife down here?

TERRY She's asleep. Keep your voice down.

*Carl goes to shake Mabel. Terry catches his arm.*

TERRY What are you doing, oaf?

CARL There's some crazy dame conked out on my bed and I can't wake her. Mabel's got to get her out of there. I need my rest, you know.

TERRY Did you make a pass, or did the crazy dame find the bed by herself?

CARL *Over Mabel.* Look at the old girl: wheezes in and out like a horse. You shouldn't keep her up so late. I don't know why she comes down here anyway. Her place is with me. Hate to wake her now. I'll come back tomorrow and we'll call a doc about a check-up. Her sons'll be very sorry to hear this.

TERRY *Wholly earnest.* You're not going up and sleep beside that dame, are you?

CARL Not *with* her. Over a lot on the far side. *He starts to leave.*

TERRY Carl, you lout. Wait a minute, I've changed my mind. *Touches Mabel.* Mabel, Carl's here to take you home.

MABEL Carl?

TERRY He wants you to go up and sleep in your own bed.

MABEL *Bleary; looking at Carl.* So how did you like her? I thought she was just your type.

CARL Do you know that broad, Mabel? It's not decent for you to know her. Now come up and get her out of the bedroom.

MABEL Terry's alone tonight. She needs my company.

TERRY No I don't.

CARL You've got to take care of yourself, doll. You look weak. Come throw that awful person out so we can get to bed, all clean and cozy.

MABEL Terry, I'm embarrassed before you. I practice my speeches to the toaster, but then Carl pops up. . . . *Bites her lip. Rises and leans against Carl. Smiles to Terry.* Forget revenge. Get her back any way you can.

*Mabel and Carl leave.*

TERRY     *Closing the door.* Sleep well, Mabel. But don't send Viola back here. Let her try her luck in the laundry room. I have to consult a cookbook. *Turns out the livingroom light, enters the bedroom, picks up the book and leafs through it.* The story about the spider. Here: "A charming story of wifely and husbandly devotion was that of two of our friends. She did not wish her husband to be bored, annoyed or worried. When they were first married she allowed him to believe that she was very much afraid of spiders. Whenever she saw him disturbed she would call him with a wail, 'Darling, a spider; there darling—don't you see it.' He would come flying with a handkerchief, put it on the spot indicated, and, gathering up the imaginary spider, would throw it into the garden. The wife would uncover her face and with a sigh say, 'How good and patient you are, dearest.'" So perfect. But perhaps only the French—or perhaps only a man—would be so stupid. . . . Babette would never be so stupid. . . . The good thing, though, is that some of Gertrude's mysterious words, like the sailboats, didn't make sense, but now they're seeming fascinating. "A hurt mended stick, a hurt mended cup, a hurt mended, hurt and mended is so necessary that no mistake is intended." Oh, hurt and mended Viola, plunging down the elevator now, on her way to find some solitary woman, sitting before the dryers—hurting and mending as well? Well. *Begins to prepare for bed.* Nearly finished the note-taking, in spite of Babette. Have to plan a chapter on Gertrude's *non-sequiturs* though, now that I'm following them. The cubes have been done. A cube's three-dimensional, like time. Cut off the past and future; only one dimension left. Can we be doing it, living in the present only? This spring will tell. *A pause.* If I work weekends, maybe

I'll still be bringing in the book on time. A good outline, that's the key; nail it all down, then I won't be going astray. If you're writing about Gertrude, you must be very sure. *Recites with pleasure.* "She was quite regularly gay. She told many then the way of being gay. She was living very well, she was gay then, she went on living then, she was regular in being gay, she always was living very well and was gay very well and was telling about little ways one could be learning to use in being gay, and later was telling them quite often, telling them again and again." Quite an act to be following. I shall have to be completely gay.

*Climbs into bed. During her final words the bedroom darkens. She pulls up the covers and turns out the last lamp.*