

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Paris 1925

by Sue Hitchcock

“Josephine, voici du cafe et un croissant.” Georges Simenon usually spent the morning writing, then towards twelve, he would wake her and slip into bed with her, but not this morning.

“It’s almost twelve. You must get dressed. You know Pablo arranged for us to see Gertrude Stein today.”

“Do we have to?”

“It’s quite a privilege. You know she only enjoys the company of talented people.”

“But do they enjoy her company?”

“Let’s find out.”

Josephine pouted. In the afternoon she usually relaxed and ate a good meal to sustain herself during her nightly performance at the Folies Bergere. Georges put his arm around her shoulders and nuzzled her neck.

“I hate white American women!”

“Are they different to French women?”

“Yes, there is always the implication that a negress should be in the kitchen, that she has no brain, or any right to a voice.”

“I can’t imagine Gertrude or her partner, Alice, will be like that.”

“She has a partner, a lover?”

“So they say.”

“Oh well, I’ll go.”

Josephine dressed in a slim, yellow frock which reflected on her black skin, making the shadows in her elbows look purple in contrast. Matching shoes and a little toque hat with the kiss-curl on her brow poking out, reminded Georges of her banana-themed dance, which she sometimes performed wearing only a skirt of imitation bananas. She certainly turned heads as they walked along the few streets to the rue de Fleures where Gertrude and Alice lived.

After checking that they were expected, the cook who acted as guardian, showed them into the drawing room, where Gertrude greeted them.

“You must be Josephine Baker. How could you be anyone else, you are obviously a dancer, so lithe, so beautiful and you, Monsieur, are a writer?”

“Georges Simenon, Madame.”

“Please call me Gertrude. Now please meet mon amie, my dear friend, Alice.”

She turned and introduced them to a woman sitting by the balcony window. The midday sun was dazzling outside, reflecting bright stars off the plane tree leaves.

Alice’s face was dark, shaded further by a brimmed hat. Josephine squinted at her, “Please forgive me, I can hardly see you, against the window.”

“It is a lovely view. I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it.”

Josephine realised that Alice, now over fifty years of age, did not enjoy the scrutiny which bright light made possible. It comforted her that this was a place, where social conventions did not apply. She would be welcome.