

GENEVA MONOLOGUE

Excerpt from Bringing Back Josephine

by Gail Parrish

GENEVA

Do you smell that...? You can't smell that?? I don't know why you....(pause) It's just like... It smells just like..

(pause)

Seems like I smelled smoke all that night. I thought it was just the burning leaves, you know, outside my window. They was always burning those leaves in the fall. It'd get all in my nostrils. All in my clothes, even. But it didn't matter. Nothin mattered to me 'cause finally...finally I was dancing my first solo!! Me!! Geneva Lorraine Sweet. Dancing my first stage show solo at the Club Phoenix, October 1945!! OOOOh, and I was ready! Couldn't tell me nothin. Couldn't even tell I had a baby. Stomach just as *tiiight*. It was 9 o'clock and I was all dressed. My bag was packed and I was ready to go. Lila was set to go to Miss Brady's, as usual. I remember her sitting on the sofa in her little blue pajamas with the panda bears, holding that little stuffed animal of hers and sucking her thumb. She was half sleep but she liked to watch me get my makeup on. She say, "Pretty mama...Mama pretty." And I say, "Baby girl pretty. Mama baby girl the pretty one," and I dab some powder on her nose and she laugh.

I wrapped her in her coat and we started out the door. Right then wouldn't you know the phone rang. It was Miss Brady saying she was sick, and she didn't think we should come over. Didn't want to risk giving nothin to Lila. Well, Marlene was outa town and with James gone, there wasn't nobody else to watch her. That's when I thought about stayin home. For just the quickest, little minute it flashed through my mind. I coulda stayed. Nobody was forcing me to go. Lucille Jenkins was dying to go on and she knew the routine just as good as me, so I coulda let her go. I could have. But..... (pause) It was this strange feeling I was feeling right in my chest, right here (she holds hand to her chest). It was

hot right in here. No, not just hot...burning. Burning like ten thousand fires. Like ten thousand fires on **top** of ten thousand fires. And it kept getting hotter. And hotter. It was burning so hot inside a me that by the time I held Lila in my arms and watched her drop off to sleep there wasn't nothin ... not hell, high water or the devil himself coulda made me stay home that night.....

(Geneva acts out all of the following).

So I carried Lila over to the bed, laid her down, and kissed her cheek.

I knew I wouldn't be gone no more than an hour. That's all it would take. Not even an hour. And I left. And I daaaaanced!!!! Oooowee, like I never danced before. Five splits, no hands, Shim Sham, Suzie Q, and even some steps I made up on the spot after everybody started cheering. I felt so good that night, I swear it was like heaven come down to earth and spread all over my body.(She wraps her arms around herself, remembering the feeling) I ain't never felt that good before and I never have since.

(pause, as she realls) It was right then I smelled the smoke. I don't know how... we lived three blocks away, but I did. Then I heard the sirens. (sound of sirens) Loud, so loud, one after the other. (she covers her ears) That's when I knew. I just knew. It was my baby!(she screams) LILAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!! I was runnin and screamin and prayin the whole way home. (She pants and prays intensely) Oh, please God, please don't take my baby...just don't take my baby. I'll do anything, anything, Lord Jesus. Please. Please, God. Anything you say, anything you want me to do, I don't care, just spare her, Lord. Just let me keep her. And if you do, Lord Jesus, if you let me keep my baby, God, I promise, I swear with everything that's in me and of me, I promise I'll never, ever dance... or feel that way...that good... again. (long pause. She composes herself) Well... God kept his promise. Lila's here. And I kept mine.