

## JOSEPHINE AND I

### Cush Jumbo

GIRL: She was originally called Tiny Tears. Do you know what I mean by Tiny Tears? Right, well, I'd begged my parents for a Tiny Tears. I'd been staring at her wistfully in the Argos catalogue for months because ... there was something about her face ... I thought she looked like Ginger Rogers. You know, like a classic old movie star? It was her nose, or maybe her mouth ... She looked like Jean Harlow, or Marilyn Monroe or something. You may find it strange that an eight-year-old girl born in the eighties knew the names of those actresses, but I was fascinated by them. I just wanted to sit inside by myself on Sunday afternoons and watch old movie stars. They were the most beautiful, glamorous, sassy, well-dressed, soft-haired, porcelain white things I'd ever seen. Untouchable glittering stars. And I decided that I wanted to be a star too. So, when the film was over I used to put a sweater on, take my arms out of it, pull it back over my head like it was blonde silken hair and prance around the front room. Taking bows, blowing kisses, ordering imaginary men about, pretending that I was beautiful, and glamorous, and sassy, and well-dressed, and soft-haired, and porcelain white ... except I wasn't. Then. This one Sunday afternoon for the first time ever I see an old movie star that looks just like me, I mean really like me and I'm like, 'What?!' I see Josephine Baker. (*She picks up the DVD of the movie Zou-Zou*). Josephine Baker stars in Zou Zou! It was this French movie. And there was this woman looking just like me, singing and dancing and looking just like me, and wearing dazzling dresses and looking just like me, surrounded by a cast of completely white people who didn't seem to notice at all. And, she wasn't the maid. She was the star. And it suddenly became apparent that Tiny Tears was in need of an extreme makeover. So I started trying to get hold of anything I could find to help me do the Tiny-Tears-to-Josephine-Baker makeover. Car-boot sales, markets, I'd look everywhere. Over the years I found more movies (*She holds up movies*) although Zou Zou in my opinion is still the best. Books (*She holds up books*) some of which I got for birthday or Christmas presents. Music (*She holds up CDs*) some original show programmes, like these ones. I love this one. (*She carefully holds up a show programme*). It's from the Folies Bergère in Paris. I found this in a charity shop in Haggerston of all places. This is one of the most special things I have (*She holds up a piano score*). This is one of her original piano scores. And she's actually signed it. This is my scrapbook (*She holds up the scrapbook and flicks through it*). This was for newspaper cuttings and magazine articles and outfit designs for my Josephine doll. These are my cut-out Josephines in a chain -She holds up the string of cut-outs. I called it my Jose-chain. But this is by far my favourite thing (*She holds up a zoetrope*). My Josephine Baker zoetrope (*She spins the zoetrope*). My dad helped me make it. Bet you didn't know what one of these was called. Well, it's called a zoetrope. 'Zoe' from the Greek meaning life, 'trophe' meaning turn. The wheel of life.

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But not the wheel of fortune, that's different. I wanted to know everything about Josephine. Where she lived, who she married, what she liked, what she didn't like, how she sat, how she stood, how she posed, how she sounded. And it's amazing because she sounded however she needed to sound for each particular occasion. She's like a woman of a thousand voices.