



Author's Note

The legend of Aimée Dubucq de Rivery, the young French convent girl stolen by pirates and given to the Sultan of Turkey, has survived on three continents for more than two hundred years. There is no disputing the fact that such a girl was indeed born on the island of Martinique in the year 1763, along with one Marie-Josèphe-Rose Tascher de La Pagerie, who later became the Empress Josephine Bonaparte. The latter claimed Aimée as a cousin and told a bit of her story to Marie Le Normand, a noted French spiritualist of the time.

All of the other main characters lived during the eighteenth century, interacted together and participated in the events that are described. I took the liberty of creating some minor characters to help fill in parts of the story that had been lost, and chose the words they spoke.

The prediction of Euphemia David is documented in *Mémoires historiques et secrets de l'impératrice Joséphine* by Marie A. Le Normand, published in France in 1820 and in America as *Historical and Secret Memories of the Empress Josephine* by John Potter and Company in 1847.

When you have finished reading, I hope the story inspires you to do some research and detective work of your own about these two women, and that you let me know what you find.

I personally choose to believe that Aimée did in fact live the life I have put down on these pages, and that her story, as well as that of Marie-Josèphe-Rose Tascher de La Pagerie, was more extraordinary than fiction.

Excerpt: The Stolen Girl

by Zia Wesley

Aimée opened her eyes. She was lying on a narrow bunk in an unfamiliar cabin. Afraid to move, she scanned the small quarters with her eyes, making sure she was alone. She was, indeed. Her hands shook as she ran them over her body to see if her clothing and person were intact. Everything seemed to be in order, except that her heart was pounding madly and she was beginning to panic. She remembered the pirates rushing into the ship's salon, looking into one of their faces and seeing the devil himself. She must have fainted. *How long have I been unconscious—and where am I?*

She sat up slowly, feeling slightly dizzy, and swung her legs over the side of the bunk. Feeling the ship under sail and moving quite fast, she tiptoed quietly to the porthole to look out upon an endless expanse of open sea. Engulfed by the enormity of her situation, she slumped

down onto the floor, covered her face with her hands and wept. She did not know where she was, where she was going, or what would happen to her. *And what happened to Mr. Braugham and the other passengers? Why did he not save me?* No answers came to assuage the fear and panic she felt. The prophecy was coming true. She had been stolen by pirates and would surely be powerless against them. Her eyes searched the small cabin for something to use as a weapon to defend herself. *Dear God, what shall I do?*

Aimée dug her fingernails into the palms of her hands in an attempt to make herself stop crying. Lost and alone, with no hope of escape, she began to fear that the men who had abducted her would return soon to rape her. The panic made it difficult for her to take in full breaths. She trembled uncontrollably, as the last of the day's light receded from the small, dirty cabin in which she huddled, alone and more frightened than she had ever been in her life.

In another cabin, the pirate captain, along with his first and second mates, sat on cushions, smoking hookahs and reveling in their good fortune. The young captain released a long stream of smoke.

"What a little jewel she is, an infidel with golden hair and eyes the color of sapphires. Never have I seen such a thing."

The other men agreed, and the second mate moved his hand to his groin.

"I say we take a little taste right now, eh?"

Abruptly the captain slammed his hand on the table top making a loud noise that startled the others. "Do you have four thousand pieces of gold to pay for her, fool? Don't be an idiot. No one goes near her."

"Four thousand?"

"She is a gift worthy of a sultan," the captain added. "When have we ever come upon a treasure that would bring such a price? She wears no ring of marriage and may even be a virgin. That's how I will sell her anyway."

Both of the men silently considered this enticing possibility, then nodded their heads in agreement and settled back to smoke.

"I will sell her to Baba Mohammed," the captain said.

At the mention of the name both men ceased smoking. Baba Mohammed Ben Osman, the Dey of Al Djazāir, was the absolute ruler of all civilians, soldiers and pirates in the infamous port. Appointed by the Sultan to rule for life, he had governed the port autonomously for over thirty years. His reputation for cruelty was legendary, especially amongst Europeans, whose ships he had ravaged for three decades. The kings of Spain, France and Portugal had all placed substantial bounties on his head.

"Baba Mohammed, you say?" asked the first mate. "He will split her in two. They say his *alet* is the size of a full-grown horse's."

"For four thousand pieces of gold, he can split her into as many pieces as he likes," the captain shrugged. "But if he is the wise old goat I know him to be, he will use her very carefully so that she will fetch *him* a good price as well."

Both men laughed and continued to smoke.

A lascivious smile spread across the second mate's face. "If he does not use her for his own sport, he is not the devil I know him to be. I have heard of *how* he enjoys women."

The captain considered this. "It makes no difference to me what he does with her, as long as he pays my price."

"Baba Mohammed," the first mate mused. "I'll wager she'll be dead before the end of her first day with him."

They all continued smoking, each enjoying their own private fantasies of what would happen to the girl in the demon's hands.

The captain imagined what *he'd* like to do to her with his own hands, wishing he could keep her for himself. Unfortunately, he was in no position to throw away so much gold. "While she is on this ship no one goes near her. She is worth much less damaged. Understood?"

The men nodded in agreement, while silently resenting the loss of the exotic little jewel they would never possess.

Up on the ship's deck, the sailors were tearing through the personal belongings they had stolen from the passenger ship. They had opened and finished a keg of Madeira wine, and were drunkenly tossing clothing, linens and small items onto the deck or overboard as their desires dictated. Jewelry, coins and other valuables went into a large trunk that had been previously emptied. Halfway through a leather traveling bag, from which an extravagant feather hat had been pulled and then discarded, a sailor extracted a small portrait in an ornate gold frame. After discerning that the frame was merely gilded wood, he was about to toss it overboard, when he realized that the image was of their young, female captive. He proudly displayed his find to the other sailors, who showed no interest in the worthless keepsake. But for some reason the sailor thought the captain might want it. Holding it to his breast, he took his find below and danced unsteadily into the captain's quarters.

"What?" the captain asked.

Proudly, the sailor held the painting before him at arm's length.

"Ah, the girl." He reached out and took the painting. "I hope this is not the most valuable thing you've found," he added. Then he dismissed the sailor with a wave of his hand, and continued studying the delicate image that looked back at him. *Were I not so greedy I would take you for myself.*

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Aimée had not moved from where she sat crumpled on the floor beneath the porthole. She had been crying for hours when she noticed that the sky and the cabin were both completely dark. She crawled across the tiny space to the bunk and climbed up, then curled into a fetal position beneath the filthy blanket. The rough, straw mattress smelled of mold and sweat, and she pulled the blanket to her face to muffle her sobs. Exhausted but too afraid to sleep, she held onto the little cross around her neck and prayed for deliverance. *Why is God allowing this to happen to me? Mother Superior was right. This must be His retribution for seeing the old obeah woman. But I made penance and am a good Catholic. How can God abandon me for one sin?*

She lay there and wept until it seemed she had no more tears to cry. Fearing what might happen, she did not allow herself to fall asleep.

As the first light of dawn began to illuminate the room, she cast her sleepless eyes around its meager circumference. It was sparsely furnished with dirty, worn, roughly woven cushions strewn on the floor and one small, low wooden table. She could not identify a blackened object that sat to one side of the low table, and quietly slid down from the bunk to take a closer look. Sitting on the floor next to the table, she gingerly picked up a long hose that extended from a brass vessel that looked rather like a vase. A pungent, burnt odor rose from it, and she noticed charred bits in the brass bowl. Sniffing them, she identified tobacco and concluded that it must be a device for smoking. She turned her attention to the small table, running her hands over the hammered brass tray that held an oddly shaped copper pot with a long, wooden handle and two

small, badly chipped china cups.

The sound of her cabin door slowly opening startled her. A swarthy man, garishly dressed in a combination of Arabian and Spanish garb, took a step into the room. She grabbed the small copper pot by its handle, raised it above her head, and shouted, "Do not come closer! Do not!" The room was too dim for her to see him clearly, but he was obviously not European.

The captain, as if comprehending her foreign words, raised his hands, palms towards her to signify that he meant her no harm. He made no move towards her, and spoke soothingly in his unintelligible tongue. The purpose of his little speech seemed to be reassurance, and he continued to speak quietly. When he finished speaking, he bowed and touched his forehead with his fingers, then backed out of the doorway, and gently closed the door.

Fearing his return, Aimée remained frozen in place, still holding the pot over her head. Her heart pounded in her throat, and her head ached. She was thirsty, and her eyes were almost swollen shut from crying.

A few minutes later, the door slowly opened again. This time, another man, even filthier than the first, stood holding a round, brass tray of small bowls filled with food. The leer on his face almost made her heart stop. She inched herself back against the cabin wall to put as much distance between them as possible.

The pirate moved slowly into the cabin, never taking his eyes from hers, and whispering God only knew what in his native tongue. She brandished the pot over her head, which made him laugh softly as he placed the tray onto the little table. Then he backed out of the room, closing the door. She heard a heavy bolt slide into place.

Her stomach growled from hunger, and once she felt certain that he would not return, she inched forward toward the table. The stench of bad fish made her back away again. Soon the odor began to pervade the whole cabin and made her want to retch. She dropped her weary head into her hands and found more tears to cry.

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The day passed into dusk, and she had never been so thirsty, hungry or tired. The small cabin was stiflingly hot. She climbed off the bunk to examine the contents of the tray more closely. Holding her nose against the rotten smell, she noticed a small glass of light green liquid. She picked it up and brought it to her nose, where the scent of mint almost made her feel relieved. Taking a tiny sip, she found it to be sweet mint tea, and she drained the glass in several gulps. Replacing the empty glass onto the tray, she examined each of the four small bowls of food, finding nothing she was willing to sample.

She was exhausted from lack of sleep and food, with barely the strength to climb onto the bunk and curl up. She fought to keep her eyes open, but lost the battle and was soon fast asleep.

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The next thing she knew, she felt rough hands running up her legs and probing between her thighs. She screamed before she was even fully awake and screamed a second time before the drunken sailor clamped his hand over her mouth and crushed her beneath him. The stench of his unwashed body filled her nostrils as he grabbed a handful of her hair and jerked her head back to turn her face up to his. He babbled incoherently in his foreign tongue, and with his free hand, lifted her skirts and tore at her underclothes as she struggled uselessly beneath him.

Suddenly, the cabin door flew open and another man moved across the room in one stride. He yanked the besotted man off Aimée and struck him across the jaw with his fist. Even through her screams, Aimée heard the crack of bone as the mate crumpled to the floor. The second man kicked the unconscious body and yelled something out the cabin door that brought two men running to his aid. They dragged the unconscious sailor from the room, while the one who had saved her stood in the doorway catching his breath. He spoke some words quietly to Aimée, who sat upright on the narrow bunk, clutching the filthy blanket to her body.

The pirate backed out of the room still speaking softly, perhaps apologizing, in words that brought her no comfort because she could not comprehend them.

After he had closed and bolted her door, she crumpled into a ball on the bunk. Her head was throbbing and she could only focus on her fear. Her situation was utterly hopeless. She vowed not to sleep again, to fight them off with all her strength. Despite her best efforts to stay awake, exhaustion and hunger soon lulled her back to sleep.

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She did not stir until the next morning, when there was a soft knock on her door. She scrambled to cover herself as fully as possible as the door slowly opened.

A small boy stood in the doorway. The man who had thwarted her attacker of the previous night stood in the passageway behind him. The boy made a deep bow, then walked over to the table and picked up the untouched tray of food. He bowed again and backed out of the room. The man remained in the open doorway, and a moment later the boy returned with a new tray of food. He gingerly raised the tray towards Aimée to show her its contents, and then slowly inched forward into the room. He knelt to place the tray onto the low table. Straightening up once again, he made an eating motion with his hand, nodding his head yes to indicate that she should eat. He could not have been more than eight or nine years old, and sported a huge grin on his face throughout his entire performance. The man carefully observed the boy's every move, and when his job was done, hurried him out of the cabin, closing and bolting the door.

It seemed apparent to Aimée that the man who had come to her rescue must be in charge, maybe a captain of sorts. She waited several minutes before her empty stomach propelled her forward toward the table that held the tray. Kneeling down before it while keeping her eyes on the door, she picked up the familiar glass of pale green tea and drank the whole thing. She gingerly lifted one of the bowls and gave it a sniff. Wrinkling her nose in disgust at the fishy smell, she set it back down on the tray and picked up a bowl that held what appeared to be some type of grain. Taking a small pinch in her fingers, she sniffed it and found it appealing, surprised by a combination of both sweet and spicy tastes. She identified cinnamon and honey, but there were other unfamiliar tastes as well. Finding the combination to be quite edible and using her fingers—as the barbarians had not thought to include utensils—she quickly finished off the entire contents of the bowl.

Still hungry, she turned her attention to some small, leathery-looking items sitting on a flat wooden plate. Picking one up, she sniffed it and found it fruity. A tiny nibble confirmed her nose's analysis. It was tough on the outside, but soft and seedy on the inside—dried fruit, a fig to be exact, but a type she'd never tasted. She ate all of the little dried bits and climbed up onto the bunk, facing the door with her back to the wall, to take stock of her situation. She was alone and helpless against her captors, but when the man had attacked her, the other one had stopped him. *Why? Did he want her for himself? What if the food is poisoned or drugged to make me*

compliant? She hugged her knees in close to her body, determined not to cry. What could she do? She must pray more. She slid off the bunk and knelt beside it, bowing her head, saying penance and begging forgiveness for her transgressions, both known and unknown.

For the remainder of the day, the only time she ceased praying was to use the chamber pot. As darkness descended in the little cabin, she heard a soft knocking on her door. Her heart began to pound, but she made no reply and remained curled up on the bunk as the door slowly opened. The boy who had brought the tray of food stood holding a tray with a lighted oil lamp and another glass of tea. There was also a small bowl of nuts and dried fruit. He bowed slightly, then held up the glass of mint tea and said something in Turkish, which of course Aimée could not understand. What he actually said was, “You like?”

Recognizing the tea, Aimée nodded her head and pointed to the table. The boy understood and entered the room to place the tray there. Then he picked up the tray that held mostly empty dishes, and bowed several times as he backed out of the room.

When he had gone, she got off the bunk and walked to the table to get the glass of tea. On the tray was her portrait, the one that Signore Cavalieri had painted three years earlier, the one that she had carefully packed in her trunk to bring to her aunt and uncle in Martinique. She picked it up and gently ran her fingertips over its smooth, cool surface. Her eyes filled with tears and the sadness that comes with the loss of one’s dreams. She held her framed likeness to her heart and wept for everything she had lost: her dreams of a life in Paris, the happiness of her youth on Martinique, her dear cousin Rose, the peacefulness and security of the convent, Da Angelique, and her true love, Mister Braugham. She was so filled with sorrow that, for the first time in her life, she wished to die. She sank down onto the filthy cushions, still clutching the portrait, awash in utter despair, wishing they would kill her and be done with it. Feeling that there was no end to her misery, her despondency was so deep that she could not even bring herself to pray.

Spent and unable to cry anymore, she drank the sweet tea and looked out the porthole at the black expanse of ocean. The moonless sky was filled with stars, but they brought her no solace. Eventually, exhaustion overtook her and she slumped down onto the cushions and fell asleep.

She was sleeping soundly when something brushed across her face. As she opened her eyes and screamed, a large, gray rat ran across her chest. She continued screaming as she climbed up onto the bunk and the cabin door flew open. The captain rushed in, ready to encounter another man, but found it empty of anyone other than the girl. Aimée misunderstood his intent and began shouting at him. “Keep your distance or I will claw out your eyes!”

The captain raised the palms of his hands towards her and spoke quietly until she calmed down. He remained in the doorway and stared at her, unsure of what to do next. By the light of the oil lamp she was able to see his face clearly for the first time. Beneath the black beard and long unkempt hair, his striking handsomeness surprised her. He extended his right hand to her and made a motion for her to come towards him or with him. It did not matter what he meant, as Aimée backed further into the corner of the bunk and shook her head, “no.” The captain continued to speak quietly and sweep his arm out the door as if she could leave.

Where does he wish me to go?

When she did not respond, he began moving towards her, and once again, she screamed.

Much taller and stronger than she, he quickly overpowered her and flung her upside down over one shoulder. In this manner, he carried her, kicking, flailing and screaming, up onto the deck, where he dumped her onto the wet planks. Standing over her, he spoke a short command to the few sailors who were on deck and all, except the one who held the wheel, went below. He

continued to stare at her creamy, white skin and extraordinary golden hair that cascaded over her shoulders and down her back. Even in the darkness of night, her eyes shone like bright, blue jewels. *Yes, if I did not love gold so much, she would be mine.* His breathing became regular again, and he slowly turned his back to her and sauntered across the deck to gaze out over the black ocean.

Aimée remained where she had been dropped, until the captain turned toward her and made a gesture with his hands, indicating that she was free to walk about. It was the first time she had been out of the stifling cabin in three days, and the night air felt cool and refreshing on her skin. But her heart still pounded with fear and the uncertainty of his intent. Slowly, she rose to her feet, backing away to put distance between them, sensing that he was a man who could be dangerous in ways that she did not understand.

She kept him in her peripheral vision as she gazed at the churning sea and wondered if she had the courage to throw herself in. As if reading her mind he crossed the deck towards her. She backed away instinctively, then realized there was no place for her to go except overboard, and she had not found that courage. So, heart pounding, she resigned herself to her fate and stood her ground. But she could not look up at him. He stood so close that she could feel his breath as he gently lifted her chin to see her face. His large, black eyes held her gaze, and she shivered as he carefully lifted a handful of her hair and brought it to his face. Inhaling her scent, he whispered in Turkish, “If you were mine for a night you would be mine forever.” She did not understand his words, but the gist of their meaning was somehow communicated.

Releasing her hair, he sauntered away and lay down on his back on the deck, folding his arms beneath his head, not seeming to care about her anymore.

Aimée remained standing at the rail, trying to comprehend the meaning of his gesture and the unexpected feeling it ignited in her. She reached for the rail to steady herself, fearing she might faint. Now she was more confused than ever. She gazed at the churning sea, but kept watch on the pirate out of the corner of her eye, hoping he would not come near her again, and yet, hoping that he would.

When the night air chilled her, she indicated that she wished to return below, and he rose to lead her back to the dingy cabin. As he closed the door behind her, she listened for the bolt sliding closed, but did not hear it. Standing alone in her small, stuffy quarters, she knew that something had changed. She was still apprehensive, but the pirate’s actions had given her a sense of her own power. He had seemed apprehensive of *her*. For the first time in several days, she felt safe enough to sleep soundly through the night.

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The next morning she was awakened by a gentle tapping on her door and once again, the young boy stood with a tray of food and tea. She did not move from her place on the bunk as he entered and set the tray down, picking up the one that had held the lamp and bowl of nuts and fruit.

“You don’t like figs and nuts?” he asked in Turkish, which of course she could not understand. But he was very young and sweet and did not appear to have sinister motives. She shrugged her shoulders and smiled at him, causing his smile to broaden as he bowed several times and backed out of the room.

When he had gone, she went to the small table and sipped the warm mint tea. The strange occurrences of the previous night were truly confusing. Why had the pirate acted so and what

exactly had she felt? Surely, that excited feeling could not have been the same as she felt in Mr. Braugham's presence. But something about it made her think of Signore Cavalieri. Maybe it was just the headiness of the fresh night air on the open sea. She absently ate some of the grain and nuts and sipped her tea. If the pirates did not mean to ravish her, what *were* they going to do? Certainly they had some plan for her, or they would not have taken her. She sipped the tea and pondered her situation, trying to ascertain their purpose by going over each thing that they had done. The one in charge had protected her from the man who tried to force himself upon her. He spoke to her in a soft, reassuring manner. They served her food and tea, brought her a lamp when it became dark and bowed as they came and went. She found that odd. People only bowed to royalty.

They're treating me like a queen.

All of a sudden, the exact words of Euphemia David's prediction came pouring into her head.

Your ship will be taken by corsairs and you will be placed in a seraglio. The words echoed in her ears. She remembered Mimi squealing, "You gone be a queen!" Then she remembered Rose telling her what a seraglio was. *Why did I not remember until now?* She was going to be sold into a harem. She was to be a concubine to a sultan.

Seized with panic, she stood up and began to pace the tiny room. Being a queen in this manner held no romantic image. For the fiftieth time she looked out of the small porthole at nothing but open sea. *This must not happen.* How could she possibly escape? If only someone knew her plight. *Mr. Braugham and Angelique knew what had happened. They will tell my uncle. He will be enraged and demand that an envoy be sent from King Louis to force the Sultan to return me to my rightful home.*

This thought gave her the hope she had tried so desperately to find. *I can be saved. There is real hope.* It would of course take time, many months at the least, but she would be saved.

She held on to the comfort of this hope, replaying the scenario over in her mind. Of course, there was no way for her to know that both of her imagined saviors had already died trying to aid her.

