

Judith Piza
Joshua Piza's eldest daughter (3rd child)

1819-1896

Judith was the handsomest as well as the eldest of Hannah and Joshua Piza's seven well-favored daughters. She was attractive and popular, but alas, not with the set that her parents wished her to marry into. It was the wealthy Government circle, and the gay young Danish officers that occupied her thoughts, a group whose attentions to a beautiful but impecunious young Jewish girl could bode no good, her anxious parents felt. They could not mean matrimony, but even if they did – they were *Christians!* The Reverend Joshua, and even Hannah, could not face the thought of such disgrace. They must get the girl married and out of the way of temptation.

There was a Jewish young man who admired her, but so faint hearted a youth that he lacked the courage to press his suit. He put his case in the hands of Judith's uncle, Judah Sasso, and begged him to find out if he would be acceptable. Judah. Who cherished a secret admiration for the buxom girl, went straight to his sister:

"Hanna, who do you think would make Judith a better husband, that young snip So-and-So, or I?"

Now Hannah loved her brother, who was considered well-to-do; and besides, she thought this luscious girl would be better off guarded by an older man. So she gave her consent to their marriage. Judith was not yet sixteen, and Judah about forty!

However the girl was still to be reckoned with. She refused to have anything to do with the skinny old man, snubbing him at every opportunity. Her mother kept after her persistently. One morning she invaded her daughter's bed-chamber when the girl was hardly awake. Speaking of the affair years after, Judith, who never forgave her mother for forcing her, said:

"I was sleepy, and she kept fretting, till finally in sheer weariness, I said 'Yes'. Then I turned over and went to sleep."

But when her uncle came to see her after this decision, the girl was nowhere to be found. Later she was discovered hiding under a bed, and she had to be forcibly pulled out before she would meet her fiancé. During the engagement that followed she was constantly contriving not to be left alone with her betrothed. She used to bribe her sister Benvanida to stay in the room. The unwelcome lover did his best to capture the girl's young affections: he brought her dolls to play with, but even that did not win her heart.

They were married, and as might have been predicted, there was no happiness for either of the ill-assorted pair. Judith was statuesque, imperious vain. She took great pride in her

remarkably beautiful hands, and carefully manicured her filbert nails – no one else in their set indulged in such nonsense. She manufactured carefully creams for her face, and pomades for her lovely hair. Judah, well aware that all this effort was not for him, objected to these vanities, and tried to keep his dashing beauty at home. He was frankly, shamelessly jealous. The quarreled incessantly – and *not* quietly. The young virago scratched her husband. Comparing their physiques it is easy to see that she got the better of him. But even in the midst of her most violent rages she did not forget her vanity, but would pause in her tantrum to smooth out the wrinkles that had collected in her alabaster brow. Time and again Judah, driven from the house, would rush to his sister Hannah for comfort after a scene with her violent daughter. Sometimes Judith would lock him in his room, and herself go out. At one time they went to live with her parents who acted as mediators in their quarrels.

After some futile struggles, Judah gave up striving for mastery, and Judith did as she pleased. She even had her own bedroom – which was considered scandalous. They had two children, Hannah and Julius; the girl inherited her father's meager physique, and was never a favorite with her mother; but the boy, handsome and attractive, was 'her eyes'.

Judith read voraciously, and was ambitious to see more of the world than St. Thomas. As her husband said they could not

afford to travel, she set about earning the wherewithal for a trip. She did this quite easily by importing shoes from France and selling them at a good profit to the Negroes. She went into society richly and tastefully dressed. It was commonly said that the Governor of St. Thomas was at her feet. In later years she went frequently to Europe. Julius, established with a Parisian firm, provided generously for his mother.

The great tragedy of her bitter life was his death. He had married at thirty in Paris, where he was employed by a Mr. Dreyfus. His wife, a handsome English girl, whose parents were from St. Thomas, was Ada Da Costa. It was not one of the 'arranged' French marriages, but a real love affair: for Ada's father failed in business during the period of the betrothal and offered to release the young man from his engagement, as Mr. Da Costa could not now provide the appropriate dowry that was part of the marital agreement in every dignified union in French society. That Julius disdained the offer seems only natural to us, but it caused much favorable comment at the time. He and Ada were married and had two children, Conrad and Vera. They were blissfully happy. Then Mr. Dreyfus transferred Julius to Peru so that he might there manage a branch of his business. He took his family with him; but peace vanished in the new country. A brother-in-law of Mr. Dreyfus became ill, and Julius generously took him into his home, and he and Ada nursed him back to health. Then he discovered that his hospitality had been

rewarded by a love affair between his wife and their patient. Leaving a note saying that he died of a broken heart, Julius shot himself. Disconcerted by the gossip that centered around her, Ada fled to Paris, where later she married a Mr. Reye, the man Julius had named in his will as guardian of his children.

Judith lived for some years in Hamburg. Her husband died while she was abroad, having spent his last years at the home of the Solomon Maduros (his wife's sister and brother-in-law). The last couple of decades of Judith's long life were passed in New York, sometimes residing with her daughter Hannah – whose married life with Abram Maduro was hardly more felicitous than her mother's with Judah – sometimes, after violent quarrels with her daughter, living by herself.

The manner of her death in 1896 was characteristic, and in keeping with her passionate life. She was running after a young South American lad who boarded with them to chastise him with an umbrella, when she slipped and fell and broke her leg. As she was nearly eighty, the bone did not knit and she died of the pneumonia that resulted from her long stay in bed.

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