

Scheherazade Tells a Story

Although in no danger of losing her ornamental head, Alma Rubens spins an engrossing tale.

By Malcolm H. Oettinger

But, most of all, Oriental creature that she seems, this brunet beauty is *Scheherazade*. Besides pictorial charm she possesses fire, verve, mischief. She is capable, be it known, of playing a part as well as posing in a pageant. And the part that she should play better than any other of our gelatin prima donnas is unquestionably *Scheherazade*.

Nor was any of this hidden by the fact that she was just off the Avenue.

"A story?" she repeated, letting her dark eyes narrow, while her red lips twisted in a slight curve. "Let me see. I could tell you the story of the girl who was led by fate."

I leaned forward expectantly. There were ever so many things that I wanted to know about this strangely exotic, alluringly attractive actress. Perhaps—there is always at least a chance—I was to learn some of them.

"When I played with Triangle, under the supervision of Mr. Griffith, I always was wanted for foreign rôles, and I hated them. Some queer whim—the desire, I suppose, to do what we cannot do—made me feel sure that American society rôles were my forte. Luckily fate overruled me. First there was Bill Hart. He was watching Chet Withey direct Doug Fairbanks and me in one of those light Manhattan-cocktail comedies that Doug made

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Photo by Ira L. Hill

Alma Rubens is compelling, insinuating, yet always with troubled eyes seeing the futility of the future.

IF I were a casting director, which of course I am not, and if I were engaged in filming the Bible—another fantastic impossibility—the first, or charter member, I should sign for my cast would be the lush Rubens, Alma of the olive skin, the gleaming black hair, the sinuous, lithesome figure. She is *Judith of Bethulia*, she is the seductive wife of *Potiphar*, she is *Sheba*—a truer type than ever came out of Hollywood—she is *Delilah*, she is the *Magdalene*, compelling, insinuating, yet always with troubled eyes seeing the futility of the future.



Photo by Ira L. Hill Hf

Alma Rubens talks whimsically, in a fairy-tale manner.

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famous. Mr. Hart was looking for a Spanish type, and for some reason or other decided that I was it. He asked me to do the vamping señorita in his next picture. I didn't want to, but Mr. Ince was rather enthusiastic, too, and at the last minute my next Fine Arts picture failed to start on time, so I was loaned to the Ince branch, and lured Bill Hart in a Mexican-border affair. Louise Glaum, still camping on the old vamp ground, was my rival in the same picture.

"I had a shawl-and-comb part, romantic, dashing, picturesque—the kind, you know, that always figures extensively on the posters in front of the theater. It landed me in 'type' parts, and I guess I landed in it. And from then on I was a marked woman. I didn't want to be a character actress. I wanted to play dressy parts with lots of emotional stuff.

"When Doug Fairbanks put on Bret Harte's story—called in the pictures 'The Half-breed'—he insisted upon my playing the exotic passion flower, another fandango lady. I declined with thanks, and arranged to support Bill Desmond in a society comedy that he was beginning in a few days. Then he was taken ill, his director left for the East, and I was—well, we call it 'resting' sometimes, and other times 'at liberty.' No matter what you call it the economics are the same. You don't meet the cashier socially or any other way. Mr. Fairbanks soon found out from Mr. Desmond about it, and again insisted upon my doing the Harte lady, and so, with fate shoving me into it, I played the part."

She talks whimsically, in a fairy-tale manner. In a fascinating manner, I thought. Beauty, after all, is an undeniable magnet. Women of such potent lure need say nothing of consequence when they discourse, need utter no words of wisdom. If a Titian canvas had a Victrola attachment you would hardly pay much attention to it.

But I interrupt. Miss Rubens, I trust, will pardon me.

"After doing the overseas characterizations for Fairbanks and Hart, I was fairly definitely established as a 'furriner.' People wrote me from Mexico and Algeria and Morocco and places the names of which I would not dare attempt to pronounce correctly—everywhere, it seemed, outside the two-cent-stamp limit—claiming relationship, friendship, what not.

"To escape the rôle fate had thrust upon me I went East, away from my Triangle starring contract, and made half a dozen independent affairs—so-

ciety dramas, yes; but," her hands went up in horror, "paper-covered drama, all of it. You would never realize how bad it was while you were acting in it, but suggestive subtitles, 'catchy' advertising lines, and lurid captions can ruin any halfway sexy picture. It's funny—sad—how different they can make the finished picture look. Deliver me from any more experiences like that."

It seemed strange to hear this tropical-looking, sloe-eyed, oval-faced Sahara girl talk of "subtitles" and "box-office captions" and such things. She should have been reclining at ease upon a purple-swathed couch mounted on a marble dais, with black men serving her, and silken drapes and woven tapestries forming a background of befitting splendor. *Cleopatra, Sappho, Salammbo*, all the seduction of the Continent and of the Orient were here, I felt. Her tapering fingers, her gleaming teeth, shining whitely in contrast with her red lips and olive skin.

"About the time I had finished my independent contract, Frank Borzage was looking all over New York and outlying territory for his 'Humoresque' girl. He had to find a Semitic type of considerable beauty, he told me, and he was kind enough to choose me. My contract had not yet expired, but, depending upon old Felix P. Fate to help me, I signed with Mr. Borzage and Cosmopolitan Productions. Then I hoped for a way out of my dilemma. And fate came through!

"At the psychological moment, three days before Mr. Borzage expected to start shooting, the concern for which I was working called off operations, for reasons known only to themselves and best left to every one else's imagination, and there I was, a free agent—able to work in the picture I wanted, 'Humoresque!'

"You know what came of that, of course. Dear old Vera Gordon walked off with the honors, but the play was such a countrywide success that every one in it or even remotely connected with it benefited immensely.

"After 'Humoresque' I signed a lovely 'know-all-men-by-these-presents' contract with Cosmopolitan, and I've been in New York ever since. In fact, I've just finished doing 'Find the Woman,' and two of filmdom's finest supported me—Norman Kerry and Harry Ford. And I believe the Ibañez story, 'Enemies of Women,' will be next."

"Find the Woman" and you'll see what I saw—*Scheherazade!*

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