

Complete Story.

The Mad Private on the Transport.

"Will Miss Kingsley go and see Mr. Richardson as soon as you come in. He wants to see you immediately."
 "Good morning, Miss Kingsley," said my chief, as I walked into his sanctum to see what was wanted of me. "I have got a very unusual commission for you. As you are aware, the war which has for so long been foreseen as inevitable has at last been declared by the Transvaal. Will you go out as our war correspondent?"

The editor was a man of few words, and waited to see how I should take his suggestion. It was certainly startling, and so unexpected that for the minute it quite took my breath away. I did not hesitate long, however, for here was a glorious opportunity for distinction—an opportunity which had previously been accorded to me during the four years I had acted as interviewer and general writer for the "Morning Mail."

"Certainly I will go, Mr. Richardson," I replied.
 "Oh, you need not decide in that hurried manner. Just think the matter over for a bit. It will prove a perilous undertaking. You will constantly be confronted with unexpected dangers, and, of course, I should not wish you to go if you have any private reasons for not wanting to go. Let me have your decision to-morrow."

Mr. Richardson began to look over his papers, and taking this as a hint that he wished to let the matter rest until the next day, I quietly withdrew. "Hurrah! Hurrah!" I shouted in the exuberance of my joy, as I burst into my own room and, to the intense astonishment and alarm of the office boy, who happened to come in at that moment, I gaily waltzed round and round the room.

Here was the chance to make a name, to create journalistic coups, and otherwise make myself famous. It certainly was a startling innovation for a newspaper to send a lady correspondent to the front, and this lucky idea of the editor's was going to advertise the "Morning Mail." I would see to that.

I am afraid you will think me rather conceited, but—well, wouldn't you be too?

The next day I formally accepted the invitation. I will pass over the days of excitement which fell to my lot from this time until the day of my sailing. It was a round of dinners, fetes, presentations, and hurried preparations, for me. And, indeed, even now I have but a hazy recollection of all that happened during that busy time.

It will be necessary for me here to explain a little of my family history in order that the reader may be able to understand how I came to participate in the adventure which I am about to relate. My father is colonel of the 1st Blankshire Fusiliers—one of the first regiments ordered to the front—and I have practically been born and bred in the midst of military surroundings. When a little child—my mother had died shortly after I was born—I had been the pet of the regiment, and as a young autocratic ruler in the barracks, had commandeered, to use a popular expression, both officers and men as obedient and devoted servants.

Since that time, however, I had been educated in France, returned home, though on a slightly different footing, and had left again to come to London,

where, through the influence of some friends of my father's, I had been enabled to realise a much cherished ambition of mine, and had become a journalist. Though very much against the wishes of my father, I had determined to try and earn my own living, and had succeeded moderately well.

My father's position enabled me to have exceptional privileges, and to my great joy he managed to get permission for me to go over by the transport *Arosita*, in which his regiment was sailing for the front. I was rather a good sailor, and soon made myself at home on the boat, my father and the other officers doing all they could to make me happy and comfortable. Being of a rather inquisitive turn of mind, it was not long before I had made myself familiar with every part of the boat, and under the tutelage of Lieutenant R. Cunningham—who was known to the feminine portion of the military circle at home as the best looking man in the regiment, and spoken of in their boudoirs as "Handsome Dick"—rapidly acquired a complete knowledge of the men, arms, and ammunition which were being carried to the seat of war by our transport.

We had been out at sea a week when one morning, as I was parading up and down the deck with my father, the captain of the vessel came up to us. His face showed that he was puzzled.

"You will excuse me," he said, bowing to me, and then turning to my father he went on: "There is something about which I should like to consult you for a few minutes if you would kindly accompany me to my cabin."

"Certainly," my father replied, and they went away together.

Seeing that I was alone, Lieutenant Cunningham joined me, and, in entering into an animated conversation with him I had soon forgotten the rather unusual request of the captain's, and thought little of the fact that my father did not return. Going down to my cabin after dinner that evening, I sat down to pen my first article for the "Morning Mail," as its Special Correspondent, on the subject of "Life on Board a Transport," and by the time I had finished this it was getting on for the early hours of the morning, but feeling very much disinclined to sleep, I determined to take a turn round on deck, and, throwing a heavy shawl over my shoulders, as a protection from chill, went up to have a solitary promenade.

The moon was shining brightly, though at times obscured by passing clouds, and so I only caught occasional glimpses of the officer in charge on the bridge. I was glad of the opportunity for a solitary ramble, and, as I gratefully inhaled the cool fresh breezes, I fell to musing on the possible dangers that were to be confronted when we reached our destination. While thus meditating I had been strolling along without paying any attention to where I was going, and was only recalled to myself by bumping somewhat violently against the sentry who was on duty by the companion way.

I uttered a laughing apology and was about to pass on, when the man said to me:

"Excuse me, miss, but can you see what that is over there?"

He pointed away across the water, and I naturally faced round in the direction he indicated to see what had attracted his attention. As I did so the sentry must have suddenly but quietly placed his rifle upon the deck, for with a sudden spring forward he had one hand at my throat and the other clapped over my mouth, slowly but surely, despite my struggles, forcing me to the deck.

The unexpected and unprovoked assault was so startling in its suddenness that for the moment I could not understand what had happened, but a glance at the man's face as I struggled with him speedily enlightened me. The look of fiendish cruelty and cunning could only have been the expression of a maniac—the sentry had gone mad!

In less time than it takes to write, half dead with fright and almost paralysed with the dread of what was about to happen, I found my arms tightly pinioned and a gag thrust into my mouth.

"So you would seek to betray me, curse you!" he muttered. "But we shall see. You were not quite smart enough this time."

I was now in a semi-unconscious condition, and thought that my last moment had surely come. What he thought I had done or who he thought I was it is impossible to tell, but picking me up in his arms as if I had been a mere feather-weight, the mad soldier carried me down the companion-way to the deserted saloon, where he quickly and securely fastened me to a seat with a coil of rope which was lying on the ground.

"Ha, ha!" he muttered, as he peered into my face in the almost total darkness of the saloon, with its one dim light. "So you would all go to help to kill and murder my countrymen, the Boers. But I will prevent it. You found out my mission and thought to thwart me. I will have my revenge. Not one of you shall ever reach Cape Town—I am going to fire the boat!"

With this awful threat the madman left me, evidently bent on executing his terrible purpose.

I shall never forget the hour that followed, my agony of mind was so intense. Here was I, lying bound and helpless in possession of the knowledge that over 300 men who were peacefully sleeping that night on board the transport were in danger of their lives! The cunning of the madman would have helped the sentry to find his way unperceived into the hold. If he was not prevented by a merciful Providence from letting the fire once get a hold of the ship, at any moment it might reach the ammunition stored below, and then—the awful thought of the fate of all aboard was so appalling that I think I must have fainted.

When I came to, someone was bathing my temples with cold water.

"Miss Kingsley—Miss Kingsley! Tell us what has happened," I dimly heard Lieut. Cunningham saying, and his voice sounded a long way off to my ear, but for the moment I was too stupified to move. Then the recollection of the madman's threat came back to my mind with alarming rapidity, and I struggled to my feet, only to be gently replaced on the settee.

"The sentry! the sentry!" I shouted wildly. "We must find him at once." And I struggled once more to get on to my feet.

"Do try and calm yourself, Miss Kingsley," he said, "and tell me what has happened."

But brushing him on one side, I rushed on deck into the arms of my father, who had been told of my strange predicament, and was hurrying down to see what was the matter.

A few stern words from him were wonderfully efficacious in quieting me, and as soon as he grasped the full meaning of my hurried explanation, the anxious parent at once became the stern man of discipline and military precision, and in a few brief, harsh words of command he had called the watch on deck and the one or two soldiers who were on sentry duty to attention.

With scarcely a moment's delay the captain was sent for, and he speedily organised a party to search for the missing madman.

For some time the search was unavailing, nor were there any signs to show that the incendiary had commenced his work. Indeed, if it had not been for the fact that I had been found gagged and bound, they would have thought that my imagination had run riot, or that my story had been the result of a delirium.

After a search that could not have lasted more than ten minutes, although it seemed hours to me, the word was passed along that the madman had been found—found with his neck broken at the bottom of the hold, with a box of silent matches in one hand and a can of paraffin tightly clutched in the other. The body was brought up in silence, and presented a ghastly appearance. The method by which he had met his fate was apparent. In his blind haste to wreck the vessel he must have stealthily crept below, but in getting to the hold from the lower deck must have missed his footing on the steps and been pitched headlong below.

The doctor gave me a strong sedative, and I was hurried down to my cabin. Without troubling to undress I lay down, and in a few minutes' time must have been in a deep and peaceful slumber, for I remember nothing more until I awoke late the next afternoon.

The rest of the story was told to me during the evening by my father. The madman was practically a recruit, but at his company his wish having been more readily granted, as at the last moment some difficulty had been experienced in making up the full complement of men. He had gone by the

name of John Morgan in the regiment, but none of the men seemed to know anything about him, for he would make friends with no one. There can be little doubt that he was not quite sane, and the excitement of going to the war must have completely turned his brain.

It would appear that on the evening of my adventure he was not supposed to be on duty, and it is remarkable that he managed to escape the notice of everyone. He must have hidden down in the saloon after it was vacated, and when he heard my footsteps must have quietly rushed on deck and stood at attention, and as I passed, favoured by a heavy cloud darkening the moon, had carried out what was evidently a preconceived plan. So quiet and stealthily had been his actions that neither the men of the watch or the sentries had heard or noticed anything unusual.

Luckily it so happened for me that the lieutenant, who had been playing cards with three of the other officers, suddenly remembered he had left some belongings of his in the saloon, and going there to recover them, to his intense amazement found me bound, gagged, and senseless. The startling denouement has already been told. Curiously enough, it was with regard to the man Morgan that the captain of the transport had requested a private conversation with my father that morning. One of the seamen had observed him acting once or twice in a very curious manner, and had reported the matter to the captain.

The body of the unfortunate man had been quietly consigned to a watery grave during the night, and although the true story was but imperfectly known to any but the few soldiers and sailors who participated in the hunt for the madman, my dramatic experience became quite a nine days' wonder on board the transport.

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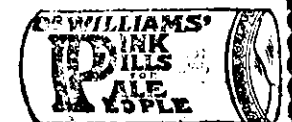
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