

# Miss Verity

by

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INT. ARMY HEADQUARTERS, VARNA - DAY

Staff Officers go about their business. Russell marches in.

RUSSELL  
(to a Staff Officer)  
I wish to speak to Lord Airey at  
once.

STAFF OFFICER  
His Lordship is not here.

RUSSELL  
Is he likely to return soon?

STAFF OFFICER  
I could not say sir.

RUSSELL  
Then I shall wait, and I will not  
leave until I have spoken to him.

INT. ARMY HEADQUARTERS, VARNA - DUSK

Russell paces up and down. A few officers are still working.  
Russell snaps to at the sound of approaching footsteps.

AIREY (O.S.)  
Order for brigade commanders,  
parade tomorrow at two o'clock for  
full kit and quarter inspection.

NOLAN (O.S.)  
Yes sir.

Russell faces the door as Airey walks in.

AIREY  
(calling to Nolan)  
And fetch me a brandy.  
(noticing Russell)  
You!

Beat.

AIREY  
What are you doing here?

RUSSELL  
Lord Airey. I respectfully request  
that you honour my position as a  
special correspondent and grant me  
the allocation of resources to  
which I am entitled.

AIREY  
I do not like to repeat myself! I  
told you before, you are entitled  
to none of our equipment, therefore  
I am under no obligation to honour  
(MORE)

AIREY (cont'd)

your position. This title you have given yourself, it is not even an official position, is it? You have not been dispatched by the War Office, you do not report to the Duke of Newcastle. As far as I am concerned your position grants you nothing more than the deserved scorn of your countrymen for jeopardising the success of this expedition, and the lives of its protagonists.

RUSSELL

Jeopardise? My intentions are merely to convey the realities of the events I witness to my editor, John Delane.

AIREY

While undermining our security, morale and discipline, no doubt.

RUSSELL

Since you have been reluctant to assist, I have made Mr Delane aware of the obstructions you and your staff have rudely placed before me. He has seen fit to intervene.

AIREY

Your editor holds no jurisdiction over this military office!

RUSSELL

(holds out his letter)

I trust this will provide a suitable explanation, and prove to you that my entitlement to such necessities must be respected.

Airey snatches the letter from Russell.

AIREY

(reading)

This is preposterous! I do not care who Mr Delane has been in correspondence with, he has no right to influence the policy of Her Majesty's government, or the forces that serve it.

RUSSELL

Your position has been made quite clear to you.

AIREY

Outrageous! You expect me to stand by while you shamelessly help yourself to our limited provisions.

RUSSELL

Perhaps they would not be so limited if you recognised the extent of the shortcomings in your preparations, and address the failings in your conduct.

AIREY

How dare you!

RUSSELL

I think there is nothing more to discuss. You have your orders.

Airey glares at Russell.

AIREY

(calling)

Nolan!

In walks CAPTAIN NOLAN, 36, lean, thin moustache. He salutes Airey.

NOLAN

Sir.

AIREY

Escort this meddling scribbler to the stores. Issue him with a basic consignment of rations, suitable clothing, and a tent. Once you have done that see him to his camp and ensure he does not fraternise with any military personnel. Is that understood?

NOLAN

Yes sir.

AIREY

Good.

Airey heads towards his office.

NOLAN

Which camp am I escorting him to?

AIREY

Just get him out of my sight.

Airey storms into his office.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP, ALADYN - NIGHT

Russell and Nolan navigate their way through a maze of tents.

NOLAN

Here will do.

RUSSELL

Where are we?

NOLAN

Camp at Aladyn.

RUSSELL

Which regiments are here?

NOLAN

I cannot say sir.

RUSSELL

I see. Well thank you for your help.

NOLAN

Colonel Airey is inspecting the camps tomorrow afternoon. Come to the Headquarters while he is away and I will see you are provided with a horse and servant.

RUSSELL

You are very kind.

NOLAN

Allow me to apologise for the Colonel. Your presence here has caused a great deal of frustration among the senior officers.

RUSSELL

I've noticed.

NOLAN

I understand you are intending to report on the campaign?

RUSSELL

Yes.

NOLAN

If I may offer some advice sir, the senior officers are a very traditional bunch, they are not familiar with the modern ways of things. But all the same it would be unwise to make enemies of them.

RUSSELL

Thank you, but I will not sacrifice my integrity as a reporter of the facts to satisfy the misgivings of a few stubborn toffs.

NOLAN

I understand completely.

RUSSELL

It is late Captain. I would like to pitch my tent before dawn, and I must not keep you any longer.

NOLAN

Goodnight sir.

Russell holds out his hand for Nolan to shake.

RUSSELL

William, please.

NOLAN

(shaking Russell's hand)

William.

Nolan disappears into the darkness. Russell watches him go, before pitching his tent.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP, ALADYN - DAY

Like a picturesque scene from England. One side of the camp: meadows beside a lake. On the other, a forest.

On Russell: Staring out at the landscape. Content.

SFX: Soldier suffering from diarrhoea.

Russell looks round to see an exhausted soldier crouched by his tent. He's dehydrated and diarrhetic. Nearby soldiers are just as sick, some vomiting, others are at death's door.

On Russell: Frustrated.

EXT. ARMY HEADQUARTERS, VARNA - DAY

Russell approaches Nolan who is standing by a makeshift stable.

RUSSELL

Good afternoon Captain.

NOLAN

Hello William, and please, my name is Nolan. Louis Nolan.

RUSSELL

Has Colonel Airey left yet?

NOLAN

He has.

RUSSELL

That's a relief. I expect he was not in good spirits this morning.

NOLAN

Not at all. He wrote to Lord Raglan last night, I think the purpose of his correspondence is quite clear. I suggest you avoid any of the commanders for the time being.

RUSSELL

Thank you. I shall. I'll stay with the men in the meantime. Speaking of which, I saw earlier that a number of them are unwell. Several looked gravely ill. I hope something can be done for them.

NOLAN

I will make a note of it. I'm sure Colonel Airey will see it for himself while he inspects the camps and act accordingly.

RUSSELL

I hope so.  
(turning to the stable)  
So. Which one of these fine creatures is mine?

Nolan beckons to a Nubian servant, KHALIL, to bring forth a horse.

NOLAN

Here is your ride.

Russell circles the horse, inspecting it.

NOLAN

He is a strong beast.

RUSSELL

Indeed he is.

NOLAN

This Nubian is Khalil, he'll be your servant.

RUSSELL

You speak English Khalil?

KHALIL

A little, sir.

RUSSELL

A little will be enough to be going on with.

(to Nolan)

Thank you for your help Nolan. I am most grateful.

NOLAN

You're welcome. Good luck, William.

RUSSELL

Good luck to you.

Russell and Khalil set off, Khalil leading the horse.

EXT. ROAD TO ALADYN CAMP - DAY

Russell rides the horse along a dirt track, Khalil walks beside him.

RUSSELL

How long have you been working for the army Khalil?

KHALIL

(broken English)

Two months. Soldier came, said the army needed men for work. We come here.

RUSSELL

Do you like working for the British?

KHALIL

I miss my home.

Beat.

RUSSELL

So do I. Though I'm assured we will not be out here for long.

Khalil says nothing.

RUSSELL

You have a wife?

KHALIL

Yes.

RUSSELL

Is she beautiful?

KHALIL

Yes.



RUSSELL

My wife is beautiful. But out here  
Khalil, the only mistress that is  
of importance is Miss Verity.

KHALIL

Miss Verity?

RUSSELL

If you are to be my servant, you  
will devote yourself to her. Is  
that clear?

Khalil is blank.

RUSSELL

Well, it will become clear.

At that moment, a snake slithers across the path. The horse  
spooks, Russell tries to control it as Khalil snatches up  
the snake and throws it into the undergrowth. Khalil then  
calms the horse.

RUSSELL

(sigh of relief)

Well done Khalil. How's the horse?

KHALIL

Calm now.

RUSSELL

Good, good. We're not far from the  
camp now, feed him when we get  
there and make sure he is alright.

KHALIL

Yes sir.

Khalil strokes the horse, leads it on.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP, ALADYN - DAY

Russell and Khalil pass dozens of sick soldiers. They are  
busy breaking camp, packing equipment.

KHALIL

What is wrong with them?

RUSSELL

They're victims of disease and  
incompetence. God help them.

KHALIL

What are they doing?

RUSSELL

Looks like they're decamping.

Russell approaches one of the soldiers.

RUSSELL  
You there. What's going on?

SOLDIER  
Orders to decamp. We're moving on.

RUSSELL  
To where?

SOLDIER  
Not sure, wherever they tell us to  
get off the boat.

The soldier carries on packing. Russell turns to look at Khalil, who is visibly apprehensive.

On Russell: Steeling himself. He knows this is it.

EXT. BRITISH SHIP - DAWN

Russell, Khalil and several soldiers stand on the ship's deck.

Russell's POV: horizon dominated by ships, the smoke from the chimneys billowing into the sky.

RUSSELL  
(to Khalil)  
Impressive isn't it?

Khalil says nothing.

RUSSELL  
(looking ahead)  
Look.  
(points towards the bow)  
That must be it.

Russell's POV: The morning sun reveals the shore line of the Crimea.

EXT. BRITISH OUTPOST, CRIMEAN PENINSULA - DAY

A small collection of tents upon a hillside. Men are already digging perimeter trenches. Others are on sentry duty. Russell and Khalil approach.

RUSSELL  
We'll stay with the Grenadiers for  
now. Can you remember the way to  
here from the port?

KHALIL  
(pointing)  
Straight back there.

RUSSELL

In that case can you go back to the harbour and find out what the bloody hell has happened to my tent and horse.

Khalil heads off, Russell starts to wander through the camp. Russell approaches the trenches.

On Russell: Spots a familiar face.

Russell's POV: Captain Sinclair is supervising the trench digging.

RUSSELL

Hello Captain!

SINCLAIR

(turns to see Russell)

Ah William. Good to see you made it.

RUSSELL

Well, you know me Captain, I go wherever the action is. Although on this occasion I don't actually know where that is.

SINCLAIR

You are standing on the windy plains of the Crimean Peninsula. To the south lies our objective, Sebastopol. Home to Russia's fleet, though not for much longer.

RUSSELL

So why the trenches?

SINCLAIR

It's a sensible precaution to install some defences to cover the landings. We shouldn't be here for long. Although I wish the artillery would hurry up and join us. To my knowledge they've yet to disembark.

RUSSELL

Much like the supply trains.

GUARDSMAN (O.S.)

Captain!

Sinclair and Russell turn to the Guardsman.

GUARDSMAN

(pointing)

Russians. Over there.

Sinclair and Russell gaze in the direction the Guardsman points. Sinclair pulls out his telescope.

Russell's POV: Ten Russian cavalymen stand on the crest of the hill opposite the British outpost. They are not making any attempt to engage.

RUSSELL

What are they doing?

SINCLAIR

Cossacks.

(to Guardsmen)

Hold your fire. They're just spotting our positions.

The Cossacks withdraw off the hill, out of sight.

SINCLAIR

The Light Brigade will catch up with them eventually.

On Russell: Cautious eagerness.

To be Continued...