

## My Maiden Voyage

by Roberta Maioni  
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When I say that I am a survivor of the Titanic you will know at once that my story is to be one of great tragedy, for even after fourteen years, the name of that ill-fated vessel brings a shudder of horror to those who remember it's wreck.

On the day the Titanic set out on her first and only voyage (10th April, 1912) I was just a girl in my teens looking forward with a schoolgirl's anticipation to a voyage in the worlds latest and finest liner on a tour through North America.

The weather was brilliant and the docks at Southampton were crowded with bustling people; for this was no ordinary boat departure. It was the departure of a wonder ship - a floating palace that far excelled all others in size and magnificence, and men said that she could not sink.

We passengers were crushed and pushed about by excited crowds as we struggled to reach the gangway, but once across we were swallowed up in that great vessel.

The noise made in getting the luggage aboard was deafening, but when the Titanic started on it's journey and even greater pandemonium broke loose - the cheering of thousands of people and the shrieking of many sirens.

Then - as if some unseen hand had silenced them, a hush suddenly fell upon the people. I went to the side to see what was the matter and found that the passing of the mighty Titanic had drawn another liner - the New York - from her moorings into the fairway.

Tugs soon took the New York back to her place and the majority of us went on our way without giving further thought to this incident, but some passengers took it as a bad omen of ill-fortune and were further discomforted by the fact that large numbers of seagulls followed the ship to the sea. This, they said, was a sign of impending disaster. I had no time for such forebodings, for I had entered a fairy city and spent the first few days of the voyage in exploration and in making friends.

On the fateful Sunday evening I went into the music saloon to listen to the band and found myself in company of a man who had previously taken a fatherly interest in me. He was travelling alone and seemed to suffer from his loneliness, for he had been one of the passengers most affected by forebodings.

When ten o'clock came and I was called away to bed, he begged me to remain with him a little longer, saying he was sure something awful was about to happen. Perhaps he was influenced by the fact that the band was playing such pieces as 'Ave Maria' and 'Nearer my God, to Thee'.

His seriousness and pessimism frightened me, so for once in my life I was quite glad to be sent to bed. I bade him 'Goodnight' and never saw him again.

After I had been in bed for about an hour and a half, I was awakened by a terrific crash, followed by the rending of metal, the rushing of water and the shouting of men.

I was about to get up when a steward came and said, 'Miss we have struck an iceberg, but I don't think there's any danger. Should there be I'll come back and let you know.'

I prepared myself for sleep once more, but in a few minutes the steward was back again, telling me not to be afraid, but to dress quickly, put on my lifebelt and go on deck. I put on the first clothes that came to hand and found my lifebelt. I could not fix this, but the steward came and did it for me.

Still realising nothing of the danger I was in, I joked with him about the funny way in which it was fixed. He did not answer, but smiled very sadly, and shook his head. Then I knew that something serious had happened.

I was carried by a swarm of other passengers to the boat deck, and shall never forget the strange sight that met my eyes. There were pieces of ice all over the deck and groups of men and women, looking

gaunt and fearful in their night attire or in odd garments hastily donned. Some of them were talking calmly, firmly believing that her watertight compartment would save the Titanic from sinking. Others were frantic with excitement or dumb with terror, huddled closely together in silence as though they knew they were about to be parted by death.

There were men swearing horribly and women quietly sobbing and I knew that many of them were praying as they never prayed before.

But there was no panic, and I, with the fortitude of youth, looked on in wonder.

It was bitterly cold.

I watched them preparing to lower the lifeboats. I heard the order, 'Women and Children first'. I saw women parting from their husbands and fathers. Some women clung to their husbands and refused to leave them, but the ship's officers pulled them apart - the women to live and the men to die.

An elderly officer, with tears streaming down his cheeks, helped us into one of the lifeboats. He was Captain Smith - the master of that ill-fated vessel.

As the lifeboat began to descend, I heard him say, 'Goodbye, remember you are British'.

We dropped over 60 feet down the side of that huge vessel and it seemed an eternity before the lifeboat reached the water. There were about thirty-five of us in the boat including three of the crew - a seaman, a steward, and a cook.

These men had been told to get away from the Titanic as quickly as they could, lest the lifeboat be drawn under by the suction of the sinking vessel.

When we were at a safe distance they stopped rowing and we watched the Titanic sink rapidly into the black depths. She was ablaze with electric light until the last minute.

Then I heard the terrible last cries of the twelve hundred men, women, and children left aboard her, rising above the din of the explosion of the boilers. For a moment the sky was lighted up, with black masses thrown up into the air and we saw that dreadful iceberg towering above us, like some grim monster about to devour its prey.

Then came the awful silence - more terrible than the sounds that had gone before.

The sea was calm, otherwise no one would have been saved, but by now it was studded with the wreckage and with bodies of the dead and dying.

Some poor souls reached the lifeboats, only to be pushed back into the relentless ice-cold sea, for the boats were full and in grave danger of swamping.

We had one loaf of bread in our lifeboat and this had been trampled upon. There was neither drinking water, compass nor clock and our single lamp would not light. Because of this we drifted away from other lifeboats.

We rowed all through the night, taking turns at the sweep.

I took my place and remember that my long hair was very much in the way for it often caught between my hands and the oar and caused me terrible pain.

They steered our boat towards the lights of a tramp steamer in the distance, but we had no means of attracting attention and the steamers lights slowly passed out of sight.

The disappearance of the tramp steamer seemed to leave us on the ocean - a handful of people in an open boat - and we were faced with a worse fate than drowning.

To add to our misery the sea became rough and our boat was pitching and tossing helplessly.

At last the morning came and we saw several icebergs around us, grim spectres that would crush our frail craft like an eggshell.

As our eyes became accustomed to the light, however, we saw the objects that we had taken for a iceberg was a ship - the Cunard liner *Carpathia* - called to our rescue by the heroic wireless operators of the Titanic, Mr. Phillips, whom we left behind to perish. He stayed in his cabin to the very last, directing vessels to the scene of the disaster.

We soon reached the *Carpathia* and were taken up her great side one more time in a kind of a cradle - just a piece of board, strong hands and a willing hands at the top.

This was no easy operation, for the lifeboat was being dashed along the *Carpathia's* side and while waiting to be taken up we were jerked backwards and forwards by the fury of the waves.

As soon as I reached the deck, kindly hands put a rug around my shoulders and pressed brandy to my

trembling lips.

I was safe, thank god, and little the worse for my adventure.

It was a terrible story, but I shall never shrink form telling it, for above the horror of the tragedy there stands out the noble British gentlemen who perished that we women might live.

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