

The Family From Twin Falls

Saturday, 2:15 p.m., October 30th

The husband was beyond aggravated. There was a dearth of information forthcoming from *Duchess* about the events around the ship. Things had been relatively quiet outside their interior cabin on the Queens deck. He, his wife, and only son were having a hard time understanding what all the fuss was about.

They had thoroughly enjoyed their cruise up until this day. They had never been on a cruise before. The husband had been building up his vacation fund with monthly deposits for over two years, so that the three of them could finally take the cruise they had talked about for almost a decade.

The husband had snagged a sale price of \$699 each for per adult, and less for their son. They couldn't afford the cruise price for ships sailing earlier in the season. He was a merchandising supervisor at Walmart in Twin Falls, Idaho; his wife was a part-time bookkeeper. They had to pull strings to get their son out of middle school and coordinate their vacations. They drove the entire way to San Francisco to catch the cruise.

During the week, they had eaten in the formal dining room every night. The husband ordered multiple entrees, as did their son. Before dinner, the parents took Jacuzzis with a bucket of beer on ice. After dinner, they attended shows in the *Duchess* Theater. The son spent the afternoons in the teen camp, making a number of new friends, while the husband and wife attended high tea and bingo. They strolled through the downtowns of each port of call, all being cities they had never traveled to before.

Everything had been perfect. Up until this day.

The husband and wife both were brought up to go by the rules. When they woke up to the warning announcement to stay in their room, they did just that. The ship television channels offered no detailed explanations. Their phone calls to

various ship departments went unanswered. Poking his head out the door, the husband conversed with their neighbors who decided to head up to the Pinnacle level for breakfast. The husband and wife agreed they would obey the captain's broadcast request and stay in their room.

Hours passed. The three were getting hungry and cranky. Information from the ship was not forthcoming. Poking their heads into the hallway, things were eerily quiet. There was no sign of their housekeeping staff or any other staff for that matter. A few times they heard bizarre sounds out in the hallways. They would wait for the noise to subside and then poke their head out to find just an empty corridor.

At a quarter after two, the son could no longer take being cooped up. "I am not going to watch another stupid episode of *The Big Bang Theory* on this little television even if you chain me to the bed," he announced to his parents. He had long ago tired of watching the limited number of ship television channels in their small cabin. "I know some of the guys must be up in the teen room. The ship isn't really enforcing a lockdown," he informed them, authoritatively.

"You are not going to the teen room," his father replied, annoyed. The son had been repeatedly threatening to go up to the teen room, only to receive rebukes from both his parents. His mother stepped the small cabin bathroom. His father picked up the phone off the desk in front of the mirror, attempting to call the ship operator. Seizing the opportunity, the son bolted out of the room.

Hearing the door slam, the husband turned around to see his son was gone. He hung up the phone. "Can you believe your son just out and out disobeyed a direct order from us? Now he's going to get us all in heap of trouble. I'm going to go get him, and make him rue the day he started smart-mouthing us like this," the husband called out to his wife, who was still in the bathroom. He grabbed his Duchess key card to the room, and rushed out the door without putting his shoes on.

The husband looked fore and aft in the interior hallway. There was already no sign of his son. He assumed the boy

would be headed straight to the teen room. He trotted around the corner to the staircase. He then jogged up one flight of stairs to the Kings deck. At the top of the stairs he turned to the portside corridor, heading aft toward the teen room.

Just down the narrow corridor, he ran into two rifle-bearing Coast Guard specialists. Beyond them were several bloodied, snarling people in torn attire, with their backs to the specialists. Further down the corridor, the husband could see his son, being held protectively by another Coast Guard specialist. There were two more of the creepy, growling, smelly people behind them.

“Go back to your room, sir, right now!” one of the Coast Guard specialists ordered the husband.

“I can’t do that,” the husband explained. “That’s my son down there.”

Everything unfolded rapidly after that. The specialist guarding his son produced a pistol, firing a kill shot into the forehead of one of the Zs behind him. He took aim at the other z, missing his mark with the next two shots, hitting it in the jaw and grazing its ear. The z behind him was almost on him. The three zombies in front of him were closing in fast as well.

Two rounds were fired by the specialists next to the husband. All three zombies were struck by the bullets, but the specialists didn’t have the angle to connect a fatal shot. The Zs weren’t fazed by the bullets that struck them. After that, the specialists had to hold off firing, as the three zombies were getting too close to their companion and the boy.

Sprinting forward, the two specialists drew their knives. Their companion fired a shot into the head of the remaining z in front of him. He let go of the boy. “Run,” he commanded the son. The three zombies caught up to both of them, with the two other specialists right on their tail.

“Hey, I’m right here,” the husband called out to his son.

Amidst the tangle of specialists and zombies, the boy slipped through unharmed and sprinted to his dad. The Zs were preoccupied with the larger adults.

The husband raced toward his son and embraced him momentarily. “Thank God you’re okay,” the husband blurted out, his voice quivering. They turned as they heard the anguished scream of the specialist who had been protecting the son. They watched him crumple to the ground after being bitten. Stepping back, the other two specialists began to mow down the three remaining upright Zs with their rifles. The husband and son both recoiled with each shot.

Suddenly, the husband yanked his son’s arm and started sprinting back toward their room. They turned the corner to the stairwell on the Kings deck. The noise of the gunfire had drawn two additional zombies in their direction. The husband literally ran into one of them. It grabbed him and bit him savagely in the right shoulder.

The husband fought through the stabbing pain, clutching onto the other z so it wouldn’t lunge at his son. Both zombies proceeded to focus on the husband.

“Hurry,” the husband commanded his son. “You sprint to our room and when your mother lets you in, keep the door locked and don’t come back for me.” Then everything became blurry for the husband.

The son didn’t listen to his father. The boy stood ten feet from the carnage, screaming. The two specialists bound around the corner. They positioned themselves behind the two Zs that were tearing into the husband, planting their knives into the backs of each Zs skull. The zombies collapsed on top of the boy’s dad.

The son began sobbing. One of the specialists put a hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Son, we’ll come back and attend to your father. But he’s infected now, and you can’t stay with him. We’ll take you back to your room. But we need to move it.”

The boy composed himself enough to guide them back to his room and his mother. He never saw his father again.