Lost

Armour Kane*

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C. E. '41

As I trotted along in Dad’s wake through the cool dimness of the huge dock-shed, I wondered vaguely why, no matter what was piled in such great stacks in the shed, the air always smelled of hemp and coffee; but before I got much constructive work done on this problem, we emerged into the hard, bright sunshine and made for the gangplank of the huge German freighter moored at the dock. We marched up the gangplank and continued assuredly for the bridge, strictly forbidden territory to the general public, but not to me because I was with my Dad, and my Dad aboard ship was a Person, a Government Inspector, and nobody could tell him what to do. No, sir!

We entered the Captain’s quarters and found that god-like individual sorting through a sheaf of papers on his desk; but as we entered he rose, smiled, and shook hands with Dad, made the usual trite remarks about “And is this your boy? Fine looking chap,” etc., etc. He and Dad settled into a short conversation which wound up with Dad saying he had a little chore to finish up in the engine-room to complete the inspection and that he guessed we’d be at it.

Down the ladders we went to the main deck, with Dad receiving the respectful greetings of all, and with me basking proudly in the reflected glory and feeling quite the big shot. Through the galley and down a few odd miles of narrow corridors smelling of onions, grease and tobacco-smoke, we made our way, until we emerged onto a ledge of iron gratings which overhung a huge precipice dropping sheer nearly to the bottom of the ship. The mighty engines rose like some panting, impatient monster reaching nearly to our feet, and surrounded by a maze of pipes, gratings, rods, and valves. The gratings were treacherously slippery, and I went in constant fear of falling
into the yawning cavern beneath us, until we reached a descending ladder with a handrail and started down into the bowels of the vessel. Down and down we went, past level after level, and the deeper we went the hotter it got; with each rung lower, the air became even heavier with the smell of steam and hot oil and hot metal. At last we reached the bottom and started toward the fireroom. As we passed through the bulk-head door, a blast from hell itself struck us full in the face. I was quite ready to make for the open air again, but Dad kept on so unconcernedly I guessed I'd better not be scared, and followed gingerly after him along the slippery gangway. Cross alleys opened every few feet, leading to the rows and rows of fire doors, fed by unbelievably dirty men clad only in foul dungarees and rope-soled, canvas shoes. When the fire doors clanged open, the blood-red glare glistened on the sweat-covered bodies, making them grinning demons from the Pit. I stopped to stare, fascinated, for a moment, and when I looked up the passage, Dad was gone!

For a moment I was merely irritated, thinking I had only to go back to the engine-room and make my way up on deck, but as I thought further, I began to wonder just where we had made that last turn—and where was the one just before that? What if I couldn't get out of there! That shouldn't be hard, though. I started to retrace my steps, turned about where I thought we'd come, and—clang!—a fire door banged open, and I was bathed in a blast of searing heat. My heart thumped wildly against my chest, the fire door slammed shut under the impact of a shovel, and I started away. Guess that wasn't the turn.

Down another alley I turned, and entered a world of gauges, escaping steam, and more heat, with men hurriedly doing things to valves, making notes, and shouting in a strange tongue. The ship was due to sail before very long, I knew, and what if I should be taken right along! I about-faced, turned up a narrow passage and ran some distance before I realized that I had got on a catwalk of some kind which must be between the boilers. Back I started, tripped over a huge black snake on the walk, which, on closer inspection, proved to be a steam hose, turned left, and found myself right back where I had started.

*December, 1938*
YE GODS! Where was Dad? Why had he left me alone in such a place when he knew I couldn't find my way out? What if I should be carried out to sea? What if—oh, a million things.

This time I started in the opposite direction. Fifty feet farther on I turned right, wondering what new trouble this would bring me and—there was Dad talking rapidly to the Chief, with the Second acting as interpreter. Resentment filled me right to the brim—here I'd wandered through the realm of the devil himself, frantically seeking a way out, while there stood Dad not a hundred feet from where I'd started, unconcernedly gabbing with the chief engineer.

Saying never a word, I moved closer, and until we reached deck where we could see the world again, I was practically riding in his pocket. Later, as I was giving an over-vivid account of my heroism in winning through all those frightful dangers, I learned that I hadn't even been missed!

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Something Wrong

*Margaret Himmel*

I. S. '40

Faces clouded; figures shrouded
In clothes which sadly need a press.
Eyes are droopy; throats are croupy;
Hair unkempt in wild distress.

No one dances; no one prances;
Feet can barely shuffle along.
Roommate's bossy; boy friend's saucy;
Campanile strikes all wrong.

Grads are laggard; profs are haggard;
Dorms and frats alight till late.
Bells are knelling! all this spelling
Final exams at Iowa State.