

# THE FOG

BY ARTHUR MASON

## I

'KEEP the foghorn going, and your eyes open,' said the master of the Racing Wave.

'Aye, aye, sir,' answered the mate, and he passed the word forward to the crew.

A heavy voice roared back in a jagged tone: 'What's yer eyes fer? Cain't ye see out of them?'

The mate looked in the direction of the voice, from underneath thick eyebrows whose hairs drizzled fog-beads to the deck. He could just see the huge outlines of Keelhaul Harry, trouble-maker and forecastle bully, as he stood by the starboard fore-rigging, his arms folded, and his chin resting on his chest.

'Looking for trouble, are you?' muttered the mate through his teeth. 'Always the same.' And a ridge of muscle simmered along his jaws as he walked aft to where the captain stood searching a gap in the sea-fog wall.

On the forecastle head a sailor cranked a Norwegian foghorn. A long blast belched out of it. Sails slapped against the masts; the barque rolled unhindered, with scarcely any steerage-way.

'Never seed it like this afore,' mumbled the foghorn sailor.

He blew another long blast, then cocked his ear to listen. Glassy bulbs, like fish-eyes, hung on the rigging as the fog swept in on the Racing Wave, filling her with misty, smothering cargo.

In the forecastle the nut-oil lamp looked squeezed by its crowding, colored halo. The watch below were

restless; the bunks squeaked when they turned their bodies over; and when, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the ship's bell rang eight times, the men rose noiselessly, like wraiths, to take their places on deck for the two hours of the dog watch.

Keelhaul Harry went below for his two hours with the relieved watch.

'It's going to be a helluva night,' said the foghorn sailor, hanging up his coat.

'Whadya know about it?' interrupted Harry, as he turned up the nut-oil lamp in the obvious hope that the increased heat of it would drive the fog out of the forecastle.

'I know enough about it,' replied the sailor angrily. 'It ain't your kind that can tell me anything about lee shores or fogbanks. Jest because you're a bully, that ain't meaning that ya know much. I ain't afeard of you. Ya have everybody under your thumb on the ship. That ain't meanin' ya got me —'

His voice trailed off into silence, the current of his words dried by the concentrated heat of Keelhaul Harry's gaze, as it looked out from the ring around the light. Set in a frown, it was, of concentric angry wrinkles; framed in lank and black hair whose straight lines jailed the eyes that sought vision from within. Eyes of the dog who has been always kicked, they were: not originally unkind, but angrified — knowing what to expect.

The whole man was uncanny as he stood there, tall and broad, his outlines

seeming to flow into the mirrored mist: a creature of great strength, evidently, grown aware and self-possessed through the experience of self-defense, and become dreaded among his shipmates through the reflex power of his resentment.

He walked over to the bench by his bunk, took off his shoes, and pulled off his sweater with hands so coarse that the flimsy fabric seemed to shrink from the touch of them.

The foghorn wailed another blast at the behest of another human lever, and an unconscious silence filled the fore-castle. With the common instinct for danger, shared by those whose life depends on ocean moods, they listened as if with one ear, to satisfy themselves that no sound came from that sightless world outside.

Then, silently, they resumed their domestic duties. A bearded sailor went on nailing a heel on a blucher boot; another, with a wooden mallet, pounded hardtack in a canvas sack, preparing a cracker-hash treat. Keelhaul Harry rolled into his bunk and gave his usual watch-below order:—

‘Keep quiet, you fellows, while a man gets his rest.’

They looked at each other and puffed at their pipes with fiery eyes, but no one was so brave as openly to defy him. He spread the blanket over himself with his feet, and all hammering stopped.

But they dared to look at his six feet of stretched-out length, and to whisper about the bad man, and how life was not what it had been for decent sailors before he came aboard the *Racing Wave* at Panama.

## II

On the after part of the ship the captain and the mate were in consultation, and both wore worried looks. Night-

seeds were sowing in on the fog, which seemed to be painlessly smothering the universe with its layered motility, faintly hissing as it enveloped spars and rigging in succeeding arabesques of mist. There was not enough air stirring to steady the barque; as she rolled, the sails snapped like whips, and rain, like fine sand, fell out of them and wet the decks.

The Captain spoke nervously to the mate: ‘Mr. Turner, clew up and make fast the royals, haul down the staysails and flying jib — snug her down for the night. If we have to wear or tack to get out of the way of a ship, we’ll be better off without quoits. Call all hands, and do it quickly.’

‘Aye, aye, sir,’ and the mate walked off the poop and forward to the fore-castle.

‘All hands on deck and shorten sail!’ he shouted.

The watch below pulled on their coats obediently, growling a bit, for it was near the hour for their supper. All but Keelhaul Harry, who merely pulled the blanket over his head, as token that he was not going to be disturbed in his watch below.

‘Roll out, roll out!’ again shouted the mate.

When they came up on deck he missed Harry.

‘Where is that big brute?’ he asked.

‘In his bunk’ — they all seemed to answer at once.

The mate ran into the fore-castle.

‘Get out of there — do you hear me?’

Harry looked at him over the bent corner of the blanket.

‘You get out of here,’ he snarled, ‘and get out quick. It ain’t blowin’ and you don’t need all hands to take in the royals.’

The mate ground his teeth and walked out. He was afraid of Harry — afraid to prod him to anger. ‘I’ll turn him over to the old man,’ he thought, as he walked aft.

'Harry refuses to turn to,' was all he said to the captain.

The captain scratched his iron-gray hair, walked to the compass, listened to the squeaking halyards and clew-line blocks. He pulled off his long oil-skin coat, and threw it angrily on to the wheelbox.

'Keep a sharp lookout for her,' he told the man at the wheel.

'Aye, aye, sir.'

The captain walked off the poop. The foghorn blew its sea-cloud call, the crew, some aloft and some busy on deck, talked loudly in sailor talk. Staysails and royal halyards sprang from their coils like live snakes, squeaking as they ran through the blocks. In the confusion of men and mist the Captain passed forward into the fore-castle unnoticed.

He pulled the blanket from Harry's face, swore at him, and struck him on the jaw.

'Get out of there, you lazy cur!' His voice trembled with emotion.

Harry rolled out of his bunk with the clumsiness and swiftness of a dislodged boulder. His wide and long stockinged feet clamped the fore-castle floor; the upper half of him swayed for position. Bending forward with outstretched arms, he grabbed the master of the Racing Wave and gathered him in like a harrow. He raised him to arm's length and pitched him to the floor like a thudding piece of pig iron. Then, tightening the belt around his dungarees, he gave an indifferent glance at the insensible man huddled at his feet, took a long draught of the thick, wet air, and still in stocking-feet, without coat or hat, walked out on to the deck — conqueror.

### III

The foghorn on the fore-castle head tingled his set muscles; he looked up, and could barely see the outlines of the

sailor there. The wind from the lee of the slapping foresail gripped his long hair and sent it against his face like fine whips. Unheeding, he walked aft. As he reached the foremast, there came suddenly from the port quarter of the ship the short belch of a steamer's whistle. He stopped, and grabbed the rail, his nostrils wide and snorting. Somewhere farther aft the mate's voice rang out: —

'Hard down your helm, jib sheet, weather main-braces. Lively, men, lively!'

Too late — the stem of a steamer, like a black sword with the power of the ocean behind it, struck the Racing Wave. The noise of riving timbers was clean and clear like the heavy slap from a sharp broadaxe, and from the stricken ship a thousand voices seemed to set up a wail.

'The boats, the boats! She's sinking!' came the added human cry.

The Racing Wave listed over to windward, rammed forward of the mizzen chain-plates. The steamer had a mouthful of the barque's ribs in her prow.

The mizzen topmast fell on to the poop and part of it across the wheel-box; the helmsman sank and lay still.

Those of the crew who were aloft, making fast the fore and main royals, swooped down the backstays like black vultures. The foghorn sailor jumped off the fore-castle head and ran aft, screaming. The signal bell on the steamer's bridge rang in violent jerks its command to the engine room: —

'Full speed astern.'

She made a rasping, nervous noise as she backed out from the hole she had dug in the barque's quarter.

The mate's shriek fell like hammer blows: 'Stand by us! Stand by us!'

'Aye, aye,' came an answering roar, and the steamer, like an apparition,

disappeared into the blend of the night, leaving in its place the river-sound of gurgling waters as they rushed into the hole in the barque.

Still Keelhaul Harry gripped the rail, his nostrils wide, his mouth puckered as if in sorrow, his eyes seeming to swing in his head like anchor lights bafted by land winds.

He inhaled and exhaled the thick air in rough gulps, like the hunted deer that strikes an open place in the timber, and pauses there, visible to its pursuers, before it again plunges into shelter. He heard the call to man the boats of the sinking ship; men like bats flitted past him; tackles squeaked; voices of men, unrecognizable from one another, burst out into profanity or calling on the saints for aid, came to him, while the crew labored frantically to get the boats away.

The mates, unable to maintain discipline, cried that every man must look out for himself, and the absence of the captain passed unnoticed. The fog grew even thicker, and it was the time of year when night pulled down its curtain with a jerk.

Suddenly tense muscles relaxed in Keelhaul Harry's arms, and action seemed to flow through them in smooth ripples. Fiercely he tossed the hair back from his eyes, as with a steel-spring bound he leaped for the starboard side of the ship, knocking men like gnats to the right and left in his irresistible rush for safety in the boat.

Down the boat-falls he slid, and took place in the stern, his bulk seeming to outcrowd the shoving fog. The banging of boats against the ship's side changed from the lighter noise of emptiness to the dangerous bump of overladen craft, striking new terror into the men. As they got out their oars and rowed away, their breathing struck the moist air in deeper gusts of steam.

#### IV

There are occasions when the speed of a comet seems slow to time; and again, in the dreary dregs of life, the pulleys seem scarcely to turn. To the captain of the sinking barque it seemed but a moment since he had entered the forecandle, yet the time that bridges life and death had passed over him.

As he rolled over on the forecandle floor, the haze outside seemed to have seeped into his mind. Then came a clear thought — Keelhaul Harry.

'He'll suffer for this!' he swore.

He tried to get up on to his feet, but the left hip and shoulder refused to obey his thought.

'Hi, out there!' he shouted, 'Some of you come here!'

Not even an echo reached him. He wondered desperately what had happened, and listened. He heard the waves slap sluggishly against the bows, the way they do when a ship rides at anchor.

'She's caught aback,' he thought.

The odor of the forecandle lamp and the musty smell that oozed out of the sailors' bunks made him expand his lungs for all the pure air he could get to breathe.

'Hello, out there!' he called again. 'Won't some of you come here? I'm hurt, I tell you.'

There was no answer.

'God!' he moaned, 'Is she deserted?'

He realized that the foghorn was not blowing, and his eyes grew wild. He felt an uncanny feeling creeping over him. The roll of the barque was labored; she vibrated to make an even keel.

'She's sinking!' His voice filled the forecandle.

Like a crippled lizard, he crawled on his belly out on to the deck. He must do something. He thought he heard the waves wash over the after deck.

'The foghorn, the foghorn!' raced through his mind.

Worm-like, he pulled himself up to the forecastle head. Faintly he turned the crank. The foghorn let out a soft sound. The captain rested.

## V

Keelhaul Harry stood in the stern of his boat, commanding, by the might of his instinct for self-preservation, the ten men who formed its crew.

'Row, damn yous, row!' he shouted, with the full strength of lungs that seemed to expand out of his open blue shirt, making his hairy breast with its diamond fog-pendants protrude like some Visigoth's breastplate.

For all his uncivilized energy, for all his selfish strength, it seemed that he was more nearly attuned to the infinite than any other in that boat, for to him alone came the faint sound of a foghorn, borne direct to his straining ears as through a tube in the besetting fog.

'Did yous hear that?' he asked them. 'Stop your oars.'

'Hear what?' they asked. 'We did n't hear nothin'.'

As the squeak, squeak, of the oars recommenced, the hunted look left Harry's face, giving way to more human lines of anxiety. For another; and for himself, — in the superstition of ignorance, — lest he ignore the call that was meant just for him.

His brain raveled like the end of an unwhipped rope, and words came out of his loose lips that formed his resolution: 'The captain,' he whispered, 'not dead. How can I get him off?'

He looked at the oarsmen, and he knew that he could never induce them to row back. Then his invincible stubbornness dominated him and bent his strength to cunning.

'They shall go back — they shall!' he muttered. 'And him there on the

foc's'le floor, and God A'mighty knows what a-callin' me with the foghorn.

'They shall go back!'

The oars told their heavy strain. The blades dripped water, and splashed on the waves. Like a thief, he pushed the tiller hard to port.

'Pull, men, pull!' he cried, his voice sounding strange in its anxiety, even in that lair of fog and night.

'Where are you going?' the men asked, as they felt the boat turn around.

'Pull, pull!' he roared; and they pulled, till the sound of slapping sails reached their ears, and they lay down on their oars.

'You are crazy, Harry, you are crazy! Why, man, you are running into the Racing Wave! Here — give one of us that tiller.'

Keelhaul Harry yanked the tiller out of the rudderhead, and swung it high.

'Pull!' And this time his voice was low, and clear, and dangerous, 'The first man who refuses is going where there won't be no waves get him no more. The captain's on that ship, and I'm goin' to get 'im, if she leaves me the time to get there. Yous is goin' to get me there, and wait for me there! Row, now, row!' and he towered over them like some huge monster from the deep. 'Row, or I'll pull out the boat plug and sink yez where ye ride!'

He reached to where the plug held fast in the bottom of the boat — and so they rowed him back into the danger from the suction of a sinking ship, back into the path of the awaiting steamer, back; and by comet-time the time they had been away was nothing at all, and by pulley-time, to the listening ears of the wounded captain it was a century, for the hull of the Racing Wave was nearly submerged, and only now when she bobbed to breathe did the golden letters of her name identify her with other floating things.

'Way enough on your oars,' came

the command from Harry, as the boat glided up to the bow of the ship. He caught the martingale guy, and swung himself up to the forecastle head. Then turning to the boat's crew, he spoke: —

'Lay away from danger. If she goes down, don't risk your lives.'

'We'll wait, Harry,' they shouted back, with the rugged loyalty that is inborn in the worst of us for those who are brave.

Keelhaul Harry found the captain alongside the foghorn, and gently, with tears running from his eyes, gathered him up in his big arms.

'I just had to come,' he said, "'cause I — I —'

'That's all right,' said the captain; 'it might have been worse.'

As the bows of the *Racing Wave* started to go up for her last plunge, the boat took them in, and pulled away.

Harry placed his hands around his mouth: 'Ship ahoy!' he called. 'Ship aho-o-y!'

Away on the starboard bow came the fog-call of a steamer's whistle, and in that coop-caved ocean not even a gull could see the expression of joy on Keelhaul Harry's face.

## A BOY'S IDEAS ON RELIGION

*[The writer, a boy of seventeen, is a pupil in a well-known secondary school.—THE EDITOR]*

CLOSE and constant relationship with other boys, who like myself are preparing for college in a famous boarding-school, has suggested to me the possibility of presenting through the *Atlantic* to a wide circle of intelligent, and I trust sympathetic, people a boy's ideas on religion. I am convinced of the need among older people for a better understanding of the boy's viewpoint on this vital subject, and to present as best I can our side of the matter is the purpose of this article. Personally, religion means no more to me than it does to thousands of boys just like me. My parents are devoted to my welfare, and I have been given every advantage for mental and spiritual growth. I was sent to Sunday School when I was smaller, and I go to church now. I have absolutely no intention of studying theology, or of ever regarding religion otherwise than from the lay-

man's point of view. In other words, I believe my opinions to be as far as possible unbiased, and my ideas representative of a large group of boys. Otherwise I should not attempt to discuss the matter.

Most boys hate to show their feelings on religion. It embarrasses them to talk about it. They will discourse on football, or politics, or camping, but if the conversation is turned to religion they retire within themselves, fortified by an adamant barrier of reserve. Why is this? Perhaps because they are afraid of being laughed at, or because they don't want to be thought prudish. At any rate, religion among boys is rarely, if ever, discussed, except by small groups of exceptionally deep-thinking fellows or between very intimate friends.

Now the unjust conclusion drawn — perhaps naturally — by many older