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THE TACKING LOOSED
(Isaiah 33:23)

By Mrs. Paul E. King

Adam stood up in the bow of the boat, shading his eyes from the sun's glare on the water with his hands. He was almost home; he could see the shoreline in the distance: the shoreline with its myriad cottages and shanties,

the latter serving as delivery points for the day's catches of fish, shrimp and lobster, depending on what one went out after.

He heaved a sigh of relief. Ah, home! the young man thought, as he guided the boat with its myriad fish toward the much-loved little village with its beckoning shoreline and its waiting, welcoming residents. "Home!" How sweet the word sounded to his ears; how deliciously it rolled from his tongue! Again he heaved a great sigh of relief.

Turning his head slightly, he glanced quickly over his shoulder at the enormous haul of fish on board. Without thinking, he exclaimed ecstatically, "O Lord, Thou hast been good to Thy humble servant again! Such a wondrous lot of fish!" Tears of gratitude spilled copiously from his eyes and rolled down his ruddy, sun-bronzed cheeks.

"Don't forget who worked for this catch!"

The harsh words, along with the lash-like sting in them, brought Adam quickly out of his bit of spiritual reverie. He had forgotten, for the moment, that Hiram Hawks was on board the fishing vessel.

"This nonsense about God sickens me!" Hiram exclaimed, stepping up beside Adam. "God didn't put these fish in this boat, young man, never forget it!" Flexing his muscles and jerking his shirt sleeves up, he all but shouted, "Muscle and sinew and work -- hard work! dirty work! -- did it. Don't you forget it!" Turning, he walked away.

Adam sighed again, more heavily this time, in pity and concern for Hiram. Poor man! He never saw the beauty in anything and he had absolutely no time for God or anything pertaining to God. If he had ever once smiled, Adam couldn't remember having seen it. Pity his wife and six children, the young man thought, compassionately. Mrs. Hawks was a lovely woman. Shy as a deer, though, she was, and generally always sad looking. Could it be that Hiram was churlish in the home too and never gave her a kind or loving word? And what about the children; was he unkind and harsh-spoken with them?

Adam turned his full attention quickly to the pleasanter, nicer things in life, not caring to dwell any longer on Hiram and his seeming ever-bitter attitude and his hardness and harshness. Life had too many lovely things --

beautiful things, really -- to ponder at length upon unpleasantries. He preferred seeing the rainbows produced by sun on the storm clouds.

Involuntarily and yet quite naturally, his thoughts traveled to Gramps and to his godly counsel and sage advice. All his life, Gramps had been his guiding star; his beacon light that directed him toward Heaven, never vacillating or changing but always keeping him right on course. This, in spite of the scorn and pressure from his peers.

Adam loved Gramps, who was not his grandfather at all. Truth of the matter, he was no relation at all, even though he was named after Gramps when he was born. His own father, Nicolas Timon, a worthy and notable seafaring man, was himself pretty much brought up at the knees of Gramps. Having been orphaned at ten, Gramps and his wife had opened their home and their arms and heart to the distraught and grieving young Nicolas, who learned the lobstering-fishing trade from Gramps.

A warm feeling surged through Adam at thought of seeing Gramps and visiting with him before heading home to his parents. First, the load of fish would have to be taken care of. How proud Gramps would be to see all the fish. Choice fish, they were: a gift from God, Adam felt. Truly, the Lord had helped them to "cast their net on the right side" this time, even though Hiram disputed God having had anything to do with the enormous load.

Adam lifted his head high and let the breezes tousle and tease through his dark hair. It felt good. Cool good. He loved the water. And why not? From his earliest years, he had become a friend of the water and of his father's and Gramps' fishing boats, going out to sea with them since he was just a "wee little thing," as Gramps often declared and told his friends, adding proudly, "Someday, God willing, Adam will have a fleet of his own. Yes indeed, Adam's a born seaman; just like his father."

And now, guiding The Lobster toward the home shore, Adam thanked the Lord for this, his first owned boat, a partial fulfillment of Gramps' "prophecy" regarding a fleet. He had worked hard to make the acquisition of The Lobster possible. Long hours too, and careful spending. After tithing and giving offerings on his earnings, he saved everything he could toward the boat. The day he wrote out the check for the fishing vessel, paying it in full, would stand out forever in his memory as a symbol of victory: disciplined

victory over the credit craze which many of his peers and acquaintances had become slaves to and were ensnared with and bound by.

Adam recalled how he had had Gramps to pray over the boat when he had it docked before making its maiden voyage out to sea. He had dedicated it to be used for God's glory as he made a living for himself as well as helping his parents out financially. He felt God had provided both the strength (for him to work) and the finances, for the boat to be his. Every good gift came from God, the young man knew. Yes, "every good and perfect gift." What a kind Heavenly Father he had!

Sea gulls by the dozens followed. The Lobster, mewling, screeching and screaming and diving low, hoping for a morsel of food, the smell of the fish on board ship nearly driving them wild. Adam, enjoying their noisy mews, tossed scraps of food to them, marveling at their accuracy in catching it in mid-air before it had time to drop into the water.

"You beautiful birds!" he exclaimed, as several of the gulls landed gracefully on the hull of the vessel and looked longingly and hungrily at him. "You're beggars," he stated, laughing, "and I'm partly to blame." With that, he tossed the fragments of his lunch to them.

His pulse beat quickened as he sped nearer and nearer to the shore line. Home! What a lovely place. At least in his case it was lovely. Best of all, he would see Gramps and hear his words of commendation and encouragement and praise for the enormous haul of fish. How he loved Gramps! The bond between them was strong and wonderful. Adam wished every boy and young man had someone like Gramps to look up to and to follow. What a difference it would make in the world, he thought as the boat cut smoothly through the water.

From the moment the cottages and shanties came into clear and full view and until he anchored at the door, Adam sensed that something was different; wrong-different. The fishing village was too quiet. The usual noise and laughter and joviality was absent. The workers who milled around the docks waiting for the boats to come in seemed sad and preoccupied, and there were no shouts of welcome from the shore

Losing no time at getting off the boat, Adam hurried to the shanty, asking, "What's wrong, Jensen? where is everybody? Why the somber faces?"

The man, Jensen, looked up from the stool upon which he was sitting and said, "We've lost a great one from among us today. Yes indeed, a great man. Hardened seaman and shore worker that I am, I never had a friend in all my life like Adam Canor."

Adam felt like he was suffocating. He stood, momentarily, motionless and speechless from shock. Then, in a voice that shook and trembled with emotion, he said, "what do you mean, Jensen? what . . . what . . . well, I guess I mean where is Gramps? Did . . . something . . .? Well . . . I . . . please tell me; what happened? Where is Gramps?"

Lifting eyes that were tear-filled to meet those of Adam's, Jensen said softly, "Where is Adam Canor, you ask? If ever a man's in the place he called Heaven, and of which he pleaded with me to get ready for, he's there now. This very moment. He went out like a light when it's turned off. That fast."

"Jensen! Jensen! What are you saying? Is Gramps dead? What happened? Please . . .?"

"According to all he told me, Adam, he's not dead: he's living. He said death would free him to live forever, or something like that. I went by his shanty to get a few more lobster traps. He asked me to have a cup of tea and a cookie with him. He always was a sure enough sociable and kindly old chap, and it gave him an opportunity to 'witness' to me, as I often overheard you and your folks and the elderly Adam call it when you talk to someone about the Lord Jesus Christ.

"I sat down and took the cup of steaming hot tea he gave me and bowed my head in reverence to the thanks he was offering to God, and before he said the Amen, I heard a thud in front of me. I opened my eyes to see that kind and gracious and wonderful old man on the floor, less than ten inches from my feet. I called for help. But we knew. We all knew he was gone. He went out like a light, I tell you, young Adam. The village is in shock. We're all in mourning, just as you are."

"I . . . I don't know what to . . . say, Jensen. His tacking is loosed. Yes. yes, that's it: his tacking is loosed! God's Heavenly breezes loosed the earthly 'sails' for Gramps and took him Home. Oh Jensen, don't you see how wonderful and glorious it is to be ready for Heaven? We have no promise of tomorrow, nor of our next breath, even. It pays to put the 'tack' in God's hands; to be ready when He chooses to 'loose the sails' of earth."

Jensen was crying. Adam had never seen him cry. Not ever.

"Gramps prayed for you every day," Adam said, as tears fell. "He loved you, Jensen."

"He loved everybody," came the quick reply. "I wish I'd have let him know how much he meant to me. To all of us. I made sport of him and of his 'witnessing,' Adam. In my heart, though, I had nothing but admiration for him. He stood tall. In my hidden, inner thoughts, he was a giant: a giant of gentleness and God-likeness. And now it's too late to tell him any of this. Oh, why did I pretend to be so hard hearted and rough and tough when he was always so gentle and kind to me?"

"It's not too late to change, Jensen. God is still in the business of changing men's lives and hearts. He can still make gentle giants out of rough and tough seamen. This is His supreme business. Want to pray, Jensen?"

"I . . . I . . . need to. I should. But I feel like a coward. Why didn't I do it when Adam wanted me to and asked me to? I'm a coward!" Turning, Jensen fled from the shanty.

Adam wept. Then, turning, he too left the shanty. There was work to do. Gramps would want him to care for the fish. There must be no spoilage of what God had given. Praising the Lord that Gramps had landed safely on Heaven's peaceful shore, the young man hurried back to his boat and to the work that needed done, praying for Jensen and rejoicing that his soul was ready to meet God should his tack be loosed.