

John Masefield (1878-1967)

10 *The Yarn of the Loch Achray*

The *Loch Achray* was a clipper tall  
With seven-and-twenty hands in all.  
Twenty to hand and reef and haul,  
A skipper to sail and mates to bawl  
“Tally on to the tackle-fall, 5  
Heave now ’n’ start her, heave ’n’ pawl!”  
Hear the yarn of a sailor,  
An old yarn learned at sea.

Her crew were shipped and they said “Farewell,  
So-long, my Tottie, my lovely gell; 10  
We sail to-day if we fetch to hell,  
It ’s time we tackled the wheel a spell.”  
Hear the yarn of a sailor,  
An old yarn learned at sea.

The dockside loafers talked on the quay 15  
The day that she towed down to sea:  
“Lord, what a handsome ship she be!  
Cheer her, sonny boys, three times three!”  
And the dockside loafers gave her a shout  
As the red-funnelled tug-boat towed her out; 20  
They gave her a cheer as the custom is,  
And the crew yelled “Take our loves to Liz —  
Three cheers, bullies, for old Pier Head  
’N’ the bloody stay-at-homes!” they said.  
Hear the yarn of a sailor, 25  
An old yarn learned at sea.

In the grey of the coming on of night  
She dropped the tug at the Tuskar Light,  
’N’ the topsails went to the topmast head

To a chorus that fairly awoke the dead. 30  
She trimmed her yards and slanted South  
With her royals set and a bone in her mouth.

Hear the yarn of a sailor,  
An old yarn learned at sea.

She crossed the Line and all went well, 35  
They ate, they slept, and they struck the bell  
And I give you a gospel truth when I state  
The crowd didn't find any fault with the Mate,  
But one night off the River Plate.

Hear the yarn of a sailor, 40  
An old yarn learned at sea.

It freshened up till it blew like thunder  
And burrowed her deep, lee-scuppers under.  
The old man said, "I mean to hang on  
Till her canvas busts or her sticks are gone" — 45  
Which the blushing looney did, till at last  
Overboard went her mizzen-mast.

Hear the yarn of a sailor,  
An old yarn learned at sea.

Then a fierce squall struck the *Loch Achray* 50  
And bowed her down to her water-way;  
Her main-shrouds gave and her forestay,  
And a green sea carried her wheel away;  
Ere the watch below had time to dress  
She was cluttered up in a blushing mess. 55

Hear the yarn of a sailor,  
An old yarn learned at sea.

She couldn't lay-to nor yet pay-off,  
And she got swept clean in the bloody trough;  
Her masts were gone, and afore you knowed 60  
She filled by the head and down she goed.  
Her crew made seven-and-twenty dishes

For the big jack-sharks and the little fishes,  
And over their bones the water swishes.

Hear the yarn of a sailor, 65  
An old yarn learned at sea.

The wives and girls they watch in the rain  
For a ship as won't come home again.

"I reckon it 's them head-winds," they say,  
"She'll be home to-morrow, if not to-day. 70

I'll just nip home 'n' I'll air the sheets

'N' buy the fixins 'n' cook the meats

As my man likes 'n' as my man eats."

So home they goes by the windy streets,

Thinking their men are homeward bound 75

With anchors hungry for English ground,

And the bloody fun of it is, they're drowned!

Hear the yarn of a sailor,

An old yarn learned at sea.

1902

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