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Come all you jolly seamen bold,
Who live a-safe on shore,
Free from all troubles and hardships,
Which we poor souls endure.
Free from all troubles and hardships,
That we were forced to stand,
For fourteen days and fourteen nights,²
On the banks of Newfoundland.
A storm arose about 9 o'clock,
On a dreary winter's morn.
We were hove in to the leeward my boys,³
Two of our men were gone.

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We lashed ourselves in the mizzen shroud⁴
And then contrived a plan,
For to hist⁵ the signal of distress,
On the banks of Newfoundland.
We fasted there three days and nights⁶,
Our provisions⁷ being all gone,
'Twas on the morning of the fourth,
Our lots we did pass round.⁸
The lot fell on the captain's son,
Think him the least at hand,⁹
But we spared him yet another day,
On the banks of Newfoundland.

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'Twas on the very next morning
We told him to prepare¹⁰;
We just give him one hour
To offer up a prayer.
But Providence¹¹ proved kind to us,
Kept blood from every man,
When an English vessel hove in sight¹²
On the banks of Newfoundland.
They took us from the wreck, my boys¹³
We were more like ghosts than men.
They clothed us and they fed us,
And sent us home again.

² Later in the ballad, the sailors fast for three days and three nights.

³ In sailing, "heaving to" is a process of slowing a boat's forward progress. When hove to, there will be some drift to leeward (downwind).

⁴ Shrouds are pieces of standard rigging which hold the mast up from side to side. The mizzen mast is the third mast, immediately aft of the main mast. In other words, the sailors have tied themselves to the rigging at the back of the ship.

⁵ Hist: exclamation; archaic. Used to attract attention.

⁶ Although we may assume that the ship has hit the rocks at this point, it is unclear whether the sailors have been stranded on the wreck for three or fourteen days (see line 7).

⁷ A stock of supplies, especially food and drink.

⁸ Drawing lots is a method of making a chance decision by casting or drawing straws, pebbles, etc.

⁹ Perhaps, the smallest man nearby; perhaps the lowest-ranking.

¹⁰ Prepare for death; the sailors intend to kill and eat the captain's son.

¹¹ Divine providence; God's will.

¹² Rose to view, as from below the horizon.

¹³ This line makes clear that the ship floundered on the rocks; the sailors were stranded on the wreck after the storm.

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Soon we were all jolly sailors bold
And did our ship well man;
But our captain lost his feet by frost
On the banks of Newfoundland.

