

Christmas at Sea (on a Lee-Shore)

Dm-----C-----Dm/C---Dm
The sheets were frozen hard, and they cut the naked hand;
-----C-----F-----C----Dm
The decks were like a slide, me boys, where a sailor scarce could stand;
-----C-----Dm
The wind was a nor'-wester, blowing squal-ly from the sea,
-----C-----Dm/C---Dm
And cliffs and spouting breakers were the on-ly things a-lee.

Now we heard the surf a-roaring, 'fore the breaking of the day;
But only in the morning light did we see how ill she lay;
We tumbled from our hammocks, briskly with a shout,
And we gave her the maintop's'l, stood by to come about.

All day we tacked and tacked between the South Head and the North;
All day we hauled the frozen sheets, and got no further forth;
All day as cold as charity, in bitter pain and dread,
For very life itself, me boys, we tacked from head to head.

Now we gave the South a wider berth, for there the tide-race roared;
But for every tack we made we brought the North Head close aboard.
Soon we saw the cliffs and homes, the breakers running high,
And the coastguard in his garden, with his glass against his eye.

The frost was on the village roofs as white as ocean foam;
The good red fires were burning bright in every 'long-shore home;
The windows sparkled clear, and the chimneys volleyed out;
And I swear we sniffed the victuals as our vessel came about.

The bells upon the church were rung with a mighty jovial cheer;
For it's just that I should tell you how of all days in the year,
This day of our adversity was blessèd Christmas morn,
And the house above the coastguard's was the house where I was born.

On shore we saw the lighthouse blaze, as dark began to fall.
"All hands to loose to'ga'n's'ls," we heard the Captain call;
"By the Lord she'll never stand it," our first mate, Jackson cried;
"It's the one way or the other, Mr. Jackson," he replied.

She staggered to her bearings, but the sails were new and good,
And the ship nosed up to windward just as though she understood;
As the winter's day was ending, in the coming of the night,
We cleared the weary headland, and passed below the light.

The crew all heaved a mighty breath, every soul aboard but me,
As the helmsman swung her bow around, pointing handsome out to sea;
But all that I could think of in the darkness and the cold,
Was just that I was leaving home, and my folks were growing old.