

August 3

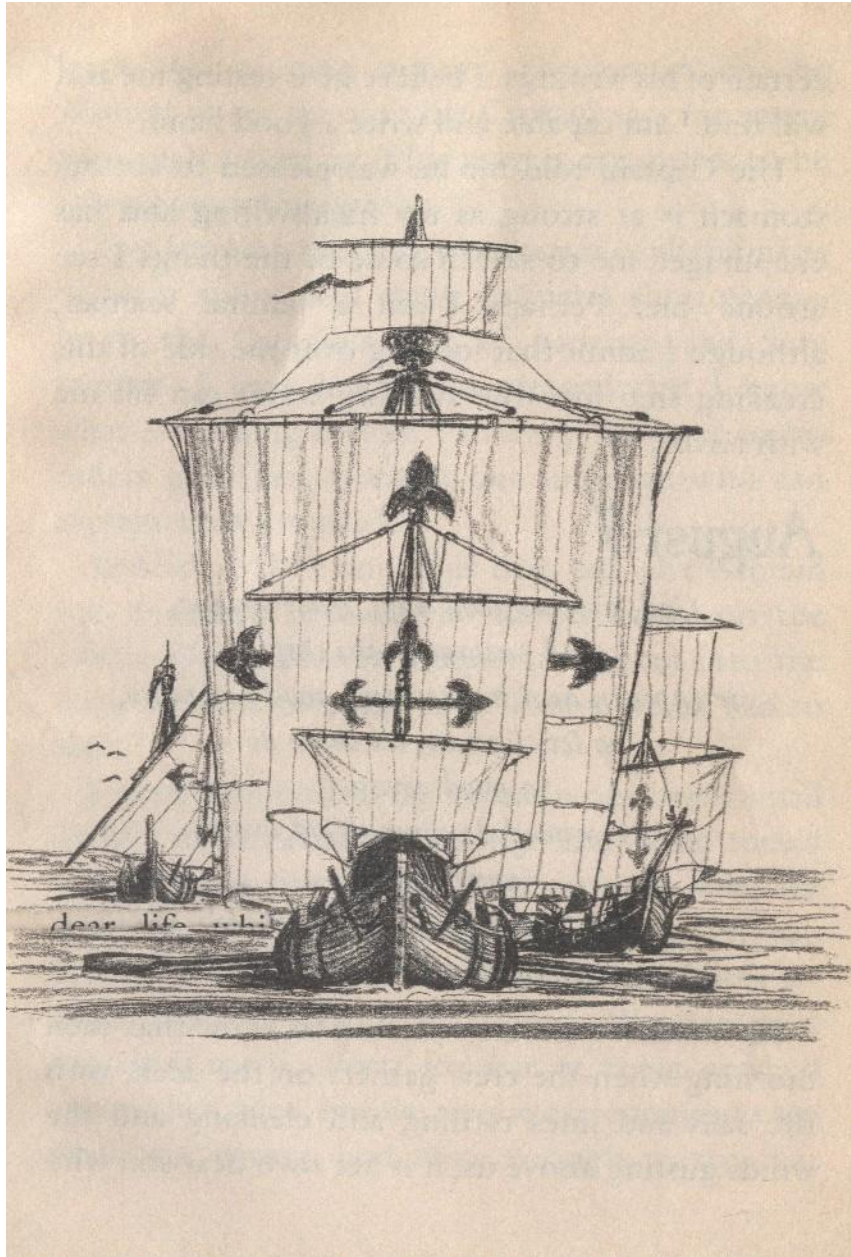
The ship's roster of the *Santa María* has me down as Pedro de Salcedo, ship's boy. And the captain of this ship, who calls himself "Captain General of the Ocean Sea," has hired me not for my great love of the sea, nor for my seamanship, but because I have been taught to read and write, and he thinks it will be useful to have me along.

Last night when I boarded the *Santa María* with forty others and made ready to begin this uncertain journey to India, I saw my mother standing alone on the dock wrapped in her black shawl. She lifted

her hand to wave, and I turned away quickly. I have never been away from our home. I have never been on a ship as great as this one. I dedicate this journal, this parcel of letters and drawings, to my dear mother, who has lost so much and who I pray will not lose me as well—me, her young boy whom she calls *Pedro de mi corazón*, Pedro of my heart.

We are a fleet of three ships, the *Niña* and *Pinta* with us, and this morning in the darkness, with no one watching or waving good-bye, we left the harbor at Palos and headed out for the sandbar on the Saltes River. There we waited for tide and wind and then made way for the Canary Islands. We are to be the first ships ever to run a course west to the Indies, Marco Polo's land where palaces are built of gold, where mandarins wear silk brocade and pearls are the size of ripened grapes.

A couple of the men are seasick and are already mumbling that we will never see this India our Captain General is so certain he will find. Me, I have no knowledge of maps or charts or distant journeys. I am only a ship's boy. There are three of us, and I am beginning to suspect that we will do all the work no one wants to do. But already the Captain favors me and has called upon me to write and to copy



certain of his writings. I believe he is testing me and will find I am capable and write a good hand.

The Captain told me he was pleased to see my stomach is as strong as my handwriting and has encouraged me to sketch some of the things I see around me. Perhaps I am a natural seaman, although I admit that looking over the side of this creaking ship into the swelling water can fill me with terror.

August 7

*God, give us good days, good voyage,
good passage to the ship,
sir captain and master and good company,
so let there be, let there be
a good voyage;
Many good days may God grant
your graces,
gentlemen of the afterguard ~~and Me I have~~
and gentlemen forward.*

My mother would be pleased to know that each morning when the crew gathers on the deck, with the sails and lines rattling and clanking and the winds gusting above us, it is her own dear son who

leads the morning prayers. She would also be amused to see the way the Captain says his rosary with such a fury, as if his prayers are orders to be carried out immediately.

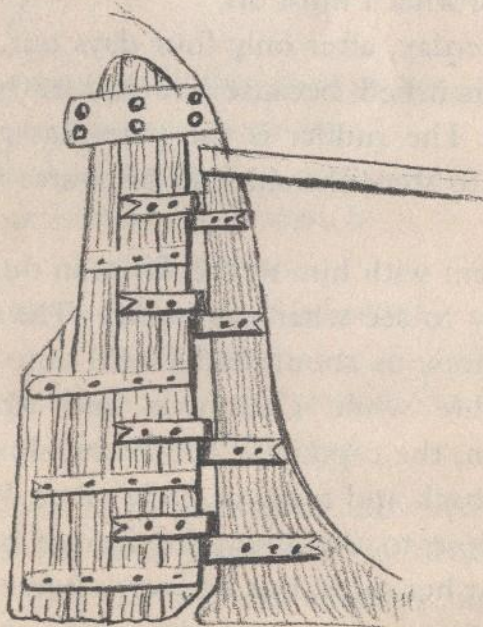
I am learning the names and terms of all things to do with sailing and ships. In just a short time—given the Captain's lack of patience and fiery temper—I have learned to pretend that I know what everything means. I nod my head yes to his orders and then I search out someone who can explain what I must do.

Yesterday, after only four days out, the Captain was disturbed because the rudder broke on the *Pinta*. The rudder is the part that goes into the water to steer the ship, so of course we all had to wait.

I went with him to the *Pinta* in our ship's small dinghy to see what was wrong. The ocean tossed and threw us about, and I held onto the sides for dear life while Columbus and Martín Alonso Pinzón, the captain of the *Pinta*, shouted instructions back and forth to each other. We didn't get too close to the *Pinta* for fear of being crushed against her sides, but we were close enough to see what was wrong, and close enough to see that

Martín Alonso was able to rig the broken rudder with rope.

Columbus was pleased for the moment that his captain had come up with an ingenious solution to the problem, and we returned to the *Santa María*. Last night Columbus wrote in his log that he believes it had been done on purpose, that there are men on board the *Pinta* who do not wish to make this journey.





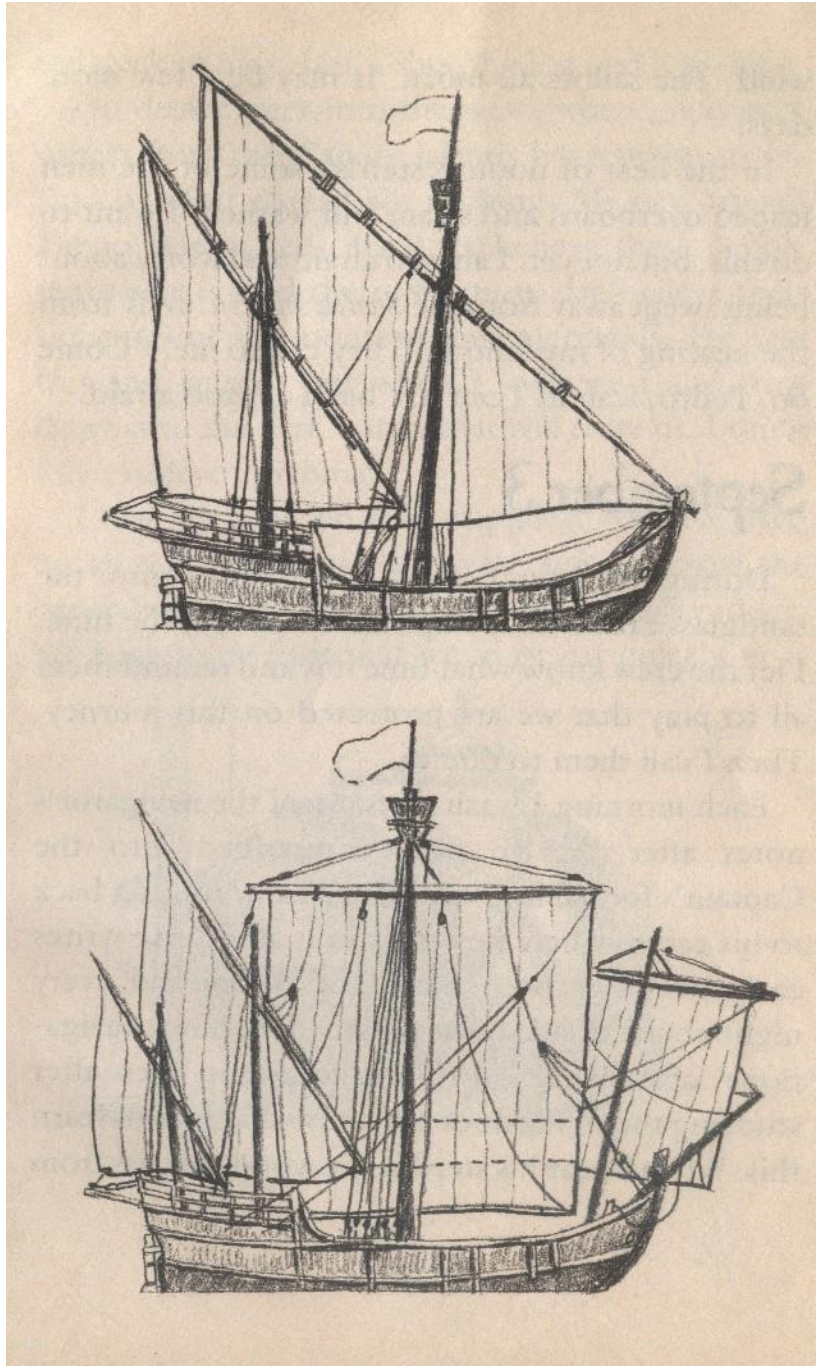
Now those ropes on the rudder have all broken in a hard wind. More repairs must be made, or a replacement ship must be found. There is a brooding silence about the crew, and I am surprised to learn through mumblings and complaints that few of the men want to make this voyage. No one has much faith. And they whisper among themselves of sea monsters and how the sea will come to an abrupt end and we will go toppling off the edge of the world like a log careening over a waterfall.

My Captain seems like a smart man. I cannot believe he would do something so foolish. So I turn away from the men when they speak so, but late at night, when I lie sleeping beneath my covers, sometimes I bolt awake, sure we are falling through space and that we've left the world behind.

August 27

The long voyage lies ahead of us. I learn that when we depart from these Canary Islands we are in uncharted seas. Yet I wonder if we will ever leave. First we wait for a ship to replace the *Pinta*, which not only has a broken rudder but also is leaking, and now it seems there is no replacement and she will have to be repaired. All day long the men row from boat to boat, the boatswain, carpenters, caulkers—experts all—who swear they have solutions to the problem. There is much hammering and shouting as we toss about, straining our anchor lines and the nerves of the waiting sailors.

Then when it seems we are ready to depart on the long trek, Columbus gives the order to change the rigging of the *Niña* from lateen rigging to square rigging, believing she will handle better in the



wind. The sailors all moan. It may be a few more days.

In the heat of noon yesterday some of the men leaped overboard and swam and washed. I want to do this, but not yet. I am too afraid and worry about being swept away from the *Santa María*, away from the hearing of my fellows. They call to me, "Come on, Pedro, leap it! Leap it!" but I am too afraid.

September 3

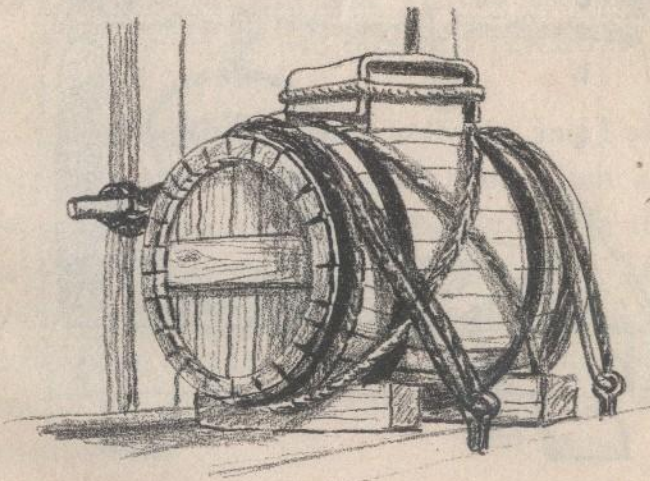
During my watch it is my job to turn the sandglass exactly as it empties and call out the time. I let the crew know what time it is and remind them all to pray that we are protected on this journey. Then I call them to dinner.

Each morning I wash the slate of the navigator's notes after they've been transcribed into the Captain's formal log, and then I carry this log back to his cabin, where he writes in it alone. He writes each morning about the night before and every night about the day just passed. He draws navigational charts that I do not understand even after studying them. He does not know that I try to learn this. When I hear his step on the wooden stairs from

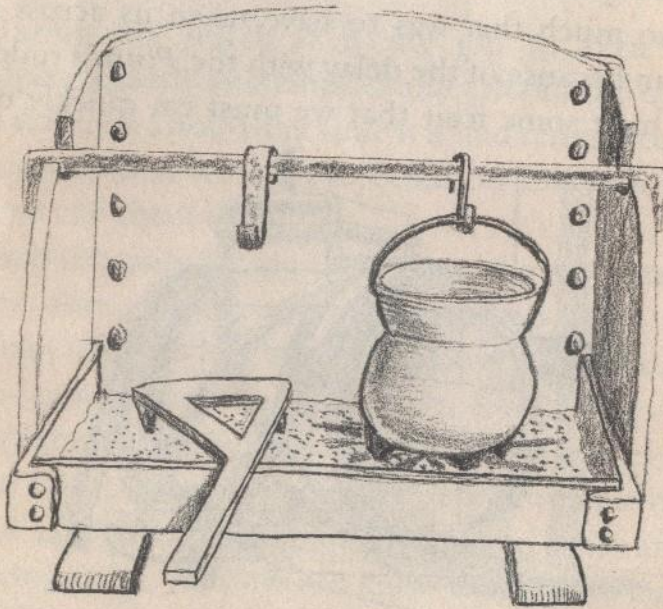
the deck to his cabin, I shut the log and look busy.

On deck I peer into the west, where, it is said, others from the Canary Islands have sworn to see land on clear days. I see nothing. My new friend, Diego García, tells me if we believe these people that there is land there, we must also believe their sightings of sea monsters and mermaids. He says this and laughs, but when I look west and then down into the dark waters that will carry us, I think I can believe anything.

Today we took on fresh supplies. We have used up so much that was to have taken us across the ocean because of the delay with the *Pinta's* rudder. We have some fruit that we must eat quickly or it



will go bad, wine, molasses, dried meat and salted fish, biscuits. The Captain has written in his log that we have taken on enough supplies to last us twenty-eight days. What will we eat after twenty-eight days if we have not found an Indian port? We cannot then turn around and come home. We will not make it. Oh, dear Mother, I hope you are praying for the speedy return of your only living son.



September 10

Everyone seemed crazy all day. No one is doing his job well. Even the helmsman steered improperly and took us north instead of west. I thought the Captain would string up the whole crew to the mast. "What do you think you are doing?" he shouted. "Steering a ferryboat across the River of Seville?" I've seen him go into white rages and then pace his small cabin saying his Hail Marys.

We finally lost sight of land as we sailed west. Some say it will be a long time before we see it again. If at all. A couple of the men were crying, and the Captain shamed them and then promised them all sorts of riches and fame. He has said that the first man to spot land will receive a reward of 10,000 maravedis.

The men listen to him sullenly, and I see them exchange glances. They don't believe him, and after what I saw this morning, I wonder if they should. I noted that the morning's slate said we made 180 miles, and yet the Captain recorded only 144 in his official log that the men see. I believe he is trying to make the crew believe that we are closer to home than is true.

But 10,000 maravedis! Ah, think of all I could buy for my mother. Even now I can picture a beautiful dress, a rich dress that she could wear to Mass at Easter. I will keep a sharp eye. I will be the first to spot land!

September 13

*Good is that which passeth,
Better that which cometh,
Seven is past and eight floweth,
More shall flow if God willeth,
Count and pass makes voyage fast.*

Everyone is worried. They say that Christopher Columbus is mad. Last night and this morning a reading was taken of our compass card off the North Star. I don't understand fully, but they are saying the readings were different and off by quite a bit. Some of the crew say that because we are in uncharted and dangerous seas, our compasses will no longer work and we will be lost forever.

The Captain has stated simply and with authority that last night the North Star moved. It is that simple. That is all.

September 17

What strange things we have seen. One day there was a large mast floating in the water. The sailors said it must have belonged to a ship weighing at least 120 tons. Where is that ship now? What has happened to it? And where are we? What are these waters that devour huge ships and spit out the broken pieces?

Then, something else. I was not there to see it, for it was not my watch, but the other night some of the crew saw a falling star crash into the water. There were whispers that this is a bad omen, forebodes ill for our journey, but the Captain told stories all day of other meteorites he's seen during his sailing career and how they have all portended great blessings and grace. Everyone seemed comforted. He says these things to the crew, yet in his journal he writes that he has never had one fall so close to his ship before. . . .

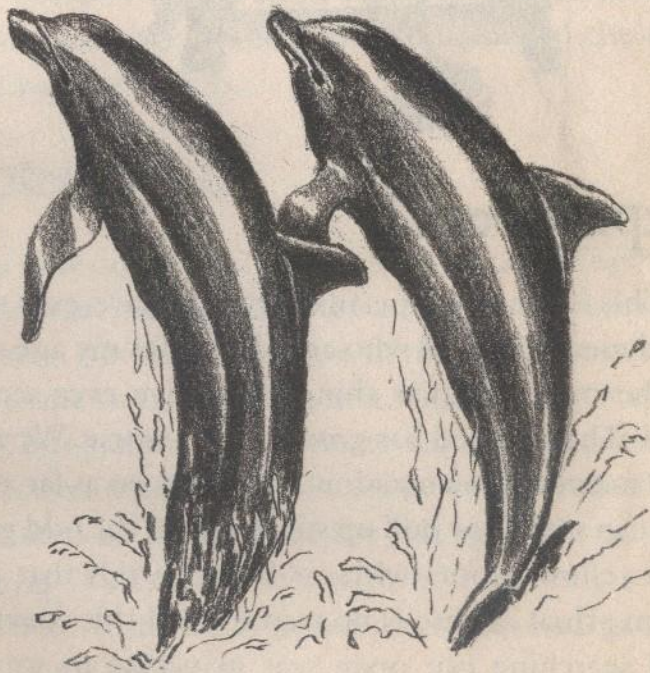
The weather is lovely right now, so that helps everyone's state of mind. There are mild breezes and light rain showers now and then, and the crew is excited that we are sailing through tremendous patches of yellow-green seaweed. It must mean we

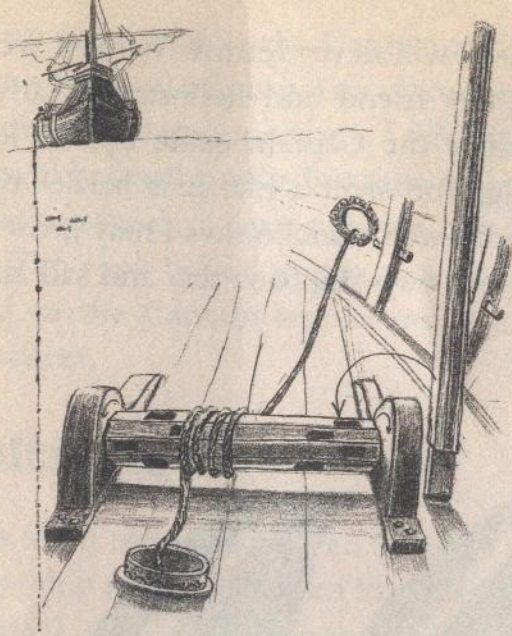
are near land. Maybe the Captain is right after all. We saw a school of porpoises swimming beside us, and someone harpooned one. I felt sad to see it die and leave its small family, but then we saw a live crab on the seaweed, a sure sign we are approaching land. The cook boiled up the tiny crab, and it was served to the Captain amidst much laughter and good cheer.

September 18

Last night the wind howled through our shrouds and the ship rolled and lifted like a child tossed in a blanket. I slept not a wink. This morning it is calmer, with the bluest of skies and huge billowing clouds above us, and the ocean becoming flatter and smoother. Later, while taking the log to the Captain's cabin, the Captain and I spotted a tern flying over the ship. He was excited and said land could not be far beyond now. He immediately ordered soundings to be taken to see how deep the ocean is where we are sailing. Even at 200 fathoms, our longest measure, there is nothing. Perhaps there is no bottom. A few are saying the wind will not take us back to Spain. We are entering a place

from which we will never return. When I went to see Sancho, my friend and helmsman, early this morning before the Captain came up, he let me hold the tiller and steer a bit. It is harder than it looks, but I did well. Sancho says I may grow to be a captain of my own ship one day and sail all over the world.





September 21

This is the most peculiar thing I have ever seen. And men on board who are four times my age say it is the most peculiar thing they have ever seen as well. The seaweed has grown much worse. We woke this morning to a meadow of pale green as far as the eye can see. They pull up stickloads of the odd green and yellow shoots with air-filled berries that keep them afloat. There is no way around this covering, and searching out open seas may take us way off

course, so we continue on, the prow of our ship splitting the field like a farm plow tearing up the earth. One of the men said if the wind stops we are all dead. We will be locked here for all eternity in a mat of thickening weeds. I think not. It almost appears that if that were to happen we could all climb over and walk home across the meadow. I told this to Diego, who laughed at me—me, the boy who won't jump overboard for a swim about to jump overboard for a stroll across seaweed. He said I would sink like a wet boot. And float to the top dripping with weeds.

September 25

We have come to clear waters at last. So clear and so calm that once again I had a chance to swim with the crew. But this time a few of the men threatened to toss me over, claiming that was the only way to learn, but luckily Diego threatened to teach a lesson to whoever tried such a thing. He went ahead of me and called to me as I sat for a long while on the gunwale. Out in the sun with my shirt off, I was surprised to see how brown my hands had gotten from the wrist down.

“Leap, Pedro! I am here,” Diego called.

“I’m frightened,” I answered, and the others laughed, trying to splash me from the water. The Captain was behind me, his arms crossed, his face serious.

“Can you swim, sir?” I asked him.

“Like a porpoise,” he answered. “And I have come to observe over the years that those who take easily to the written word—scribes, readers—they are the best swimmers.”

It was what I needed. I looked down into the calm ocean. And at the men who couldn’t read and yet were floating before me like so many corks. I thought of my letters, my journal, the Captain’s heavy log, and, keeping my eyes on Diego, I slid myself to the very edge and went over. But I am ashamed to say I was not sea-wet within the next instant. I was suddenly dangling over the side by a cleat that had hooked onto my pants. Screaming and kicking, I hung above the water and the crew’s hooting. Even Diego—I could hear him laughing. Until suddenly I felt a hand clasp my arm and felt my pants eased off the cleat. I was free.

I flew straight down like a diving bird, and once smacking the cold, wet surface, I went down farther

and farther. I feared I would never come up, just continue down away from Diego and my Captain and the *Santa María*. But soon I was emerging and there were friends around me, their laughing faces transformed by the hair laid flat and wet against their heads. A couple took hold of me, and I held on for dear life. Little by little they taught me to tread water, to dive below and open my eyes to an incredible light of green. I guess the Captain was right. I didn't want to go back on board. I dove deeper and deeper, paddling like mad to catch my breath and find Diego. But after a while we all climbed back up on board. I was shivering, and Sancho told everyone to look at my blue lips. I am sorry I waited so long to try this.

September 26

*Amen and God give us a good night
and good sailing;
May the ship make a good passage,
Sir captain and good company.*

Last night nearing sunset, we were sailing alongside the *Pinta*, and our Captain and the