

Kensuke's Kingdom Michael Morpurgo

Log Book Entries

Chapter 3

Ship's Log

September 20

It's five in the morning. I'm on watch in the cockpit and no one else is awake. We left Southampton ten days ago now. The Channel was full of tankers. There were dozens of them going up and down. So, either Mum or Dad took turns on watch the first two nights. They wouldn't let me. I don't know why not. There wasn't any fog, and I can see as well as they can.

We were planning on sailing about 200 miles a day, that's about eight knots. But in the first week we were lucky if we made fifty miles a day.

Barnacle Bill warned us about the Bay of Biscay, so we were expecting it to be bad, and it was. Force 9 gale. Force 10 sometimes. We were slammed about all over the place. I thought we'd sink. I really did. Once, when we came up on to the top of a wave, I saw the bow of the *Peggy Sue* pointing straight up at the moon. It was like she was going to take off. Then we were hurled down the other side so fast I was sure we were going to the bottom. It was bad. I mean it was horrible, really horrible. But the *Peggy Sue* didn't fall apart, and we made it to Spain.

Mum gets quite snappy with us sometimes when we don't do things right. Dad doesn't seem to mind, not out here, not at sea. He just winks at me and we get on with it. They play a lot of chess together, when it's calm enough. Dad's winning so far, five games to three. Mum says she's not bothered, but she is. I can tell.

We only spent a couple of days in La Coraha.

Mum slept a lot. She was really tired. Dad did some work on the rudder cable while we were there. He's still not happy with it, though. We set off for the Azores two days ago.

Yesterday was the best day we've had for sailing. Strong breeze, blue sky, and warm sun to dry things out. My blue shorts blew off the washing line into the sea. It doesn't matter. I never liked them much anyway. We saw gannets slicing into the sea all around us this afternoon. Really excellent. Stella Artois went mad.

I'm fed up with baked beans already, and there's still stacks of them down below.

October 11

Today I saw Africa! It was in the distance but Mum said it was definitely Africa. We're going down the west coast. Mum showed me on the chart.



The wind will take us down the coast for a few hundred miles then across the Atlantic to South America. We mustn't drift off course, else we'll get into the Doldrums. There's no wind there at all, and we could just sit there becalmed for weeks, for ever maybe.

It's the hottest day we've had. Dad's very red in the face, and the tops of his ears are peeling. I'm more nutty brown, like Mum.

Saw flying fish early this morning and so did Stella. Then Mum spotted a shark off the port bow. A basking shark, she thought. I got the binoculars out, but I never saw it. She said I had to write it down in my notebook anyway, and then draw it. I looked them up. They're massive, but they don't eat people, just fish and plankton. I like doing my drawings. My best one so far is a flying fish. I sent a card to Eddie from the Cape Verde Islands. I wish he could be here. We'd have a real laugh.

Stella loves to chase the football round the cabin, and pounce on it. She'll puncture it one day, I know she will.

Dad's been a bit gloomy, and Mum's gone to lie down. She's got a headache. I think they've had a bit of a tiff. Don't know what about exactly, but I think it's about chess.

## November 16

We've just left Recife. That's in Brazil. We were there four days. We had a lot of repairs to do on the boat. Something was wrong with the wind generator and the rudder cable's still sticking.

I've played football in Brazil! Did you hear that, Eddie? I've played football in Brazil, and with your lucky football. Dad and me were just having a kick about on the beach, and before we knew it we had a dozen kids joining in. It was a proper game. Dad set it up. We picked sides. I called my side Mudlarks and he called his Brazil, so they all wanted to play on his side, of course.

But Mum joined in on my side and we won. Mudlarks 5 – Brazil 3. Mum invited them back for a Coke on board afterwards. Stella growled at them and bared her teeth, so we had to shut her down in the cabin. They tried out their English on us. They only knew two words.- 'Goal' and 'Manchester United'. That's three, I suppose.

Mum had the films developed. There's one of some leaping dolphins, another of me at the winch. Mum at the wheel, another of Dad hauling down the mainsail and making a right mess of it. There's one of me diving off a rock into the sea when we stopped in the Canaries. There's one of Dad fast asleep and sunbathing on deck and Mum giggling. She's about to dribble the sun cream all over his tummy. (I took that one, my best photo.) Then there's one of me doing my maths, sulking and sticking my tongue out.



## December 25

Christmas Day at sea. Dad found some carols on the radio. We had crackers, all of them a bit soggy so none of them cracked, and we had the Christmas pudding Gran made for us. I gave them a drawing each – my flying fish for Dad and one of the skipper, in her hat, at the wheel for Mum. They gave me a really neat knife they'd bought in Rio. So I gave a coin back. You're supposed to do that. It's for luck.

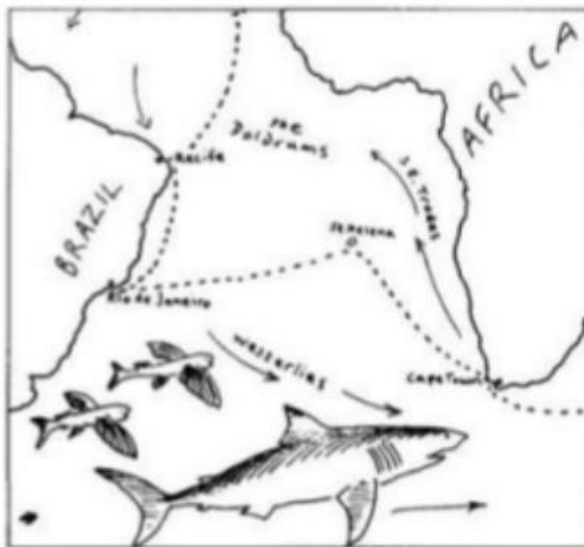
When we were in Rio we gave the *Peggy Sue* a good scrub down. She was looking a bit manky inside and outside, but she's not any more. We took on a lot of stores and water for the long haul to South Africa. Mum says we're doing fine, just so long as we keep south, so long as we stay in the west-to-east South Atlantic current.

We passed south of an island called St Helena a few days ago. No need to stop. Nothing much there, except it's the place where Napoleon was exiled. He died there. Lonely place to die. So, of course, I had to do a history project on Napoleon. I had to look him up in the encyclopaedia and write about him. It was quite interesting, really, but I didn't tell them that.

Stella's sulking on my bunk. Maybe it's because no one gave her a Christmas present. I offered her a taste of Gran's Christmas pudding, but she hardly gave it a sniff. Can't say I blame her.

I saw a sail today, another yacht. We shouted Happy Christmas and waved, and Stella barked her head off, but they were too far away. When the sail disappeared, the sea felt suddenly very empty.

Mum won the chess this evening. She's ahead now, twenty-one games to twenty. Dad said he let her win because it was Christmas. They joke about it, but they both want to win.



## January 1

Africa again! Cape Town. Table Mountain. And this time we're not just sailing by – we're going to put in there. They told me this evening. They didn't want to tell me before in case we couldn't afford it, but we can. We're going to stay for a couple of weeks, maybe more. We're going to see elephants and lions in the wild. I can't believe it. I don't think they can either. When they told me, they were like a couple of kids, all laughing and happy. They were never like this at home. These days they really smile at each other.

Mum's getting stomach cramps. Dad wants her to see a doctor in Cape Town, but she won't. I reckon it's the baked beans. The good news is the baked beans have at last run out. The bad news is we had sardines for supper. Eeeyuk!

## February 7

We're hundreds of miles out in the Indian Ocean, and then this happens. Stella hardly ever comes up on deck unless it's flat calm. I don't know why she came up. I don't know why she was there. We were all busy, I suppose. Dad was brewing up down in the galley, and Mum was at the wheel. I was doing one of my navigation lessons, taking bearings with the sextant. The *Peggy Sue* was pitching and rolling a bit. I had to steady myself. I looked up and I saw Stella up at the bow of the boat. One moment she was just standing there, the next she was gone.

We had practised the 'man overboard' drill dozens of times back in the Solent with Barnacle Bill. Shout and point. Keep shouting. Keep pointing. Turn into the wind. Get the sails down quick. Engine on. By the time Dad had the mainsail and the jib down, we were already heading back towards her. I was doing the pointing, and the shouting too. She was paddling for her life in the green of a looming wave. Dad was leaning over the side and reaching for her, but he didn't have his safety harness on and Mum was going mad. She was trying to bring the boat in as close and as slow as she could, but a wave took Stella away from us at the last moment. We had to turn and come back again. All the time I was pointing and shouting.

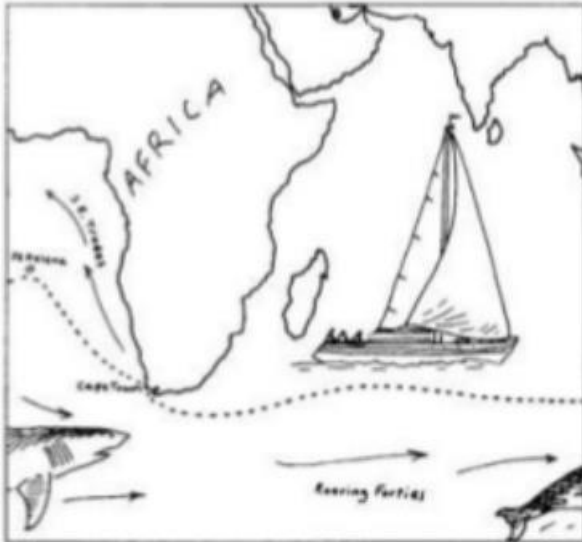
Three times we came in but each time we passed her by. Either we were going too fast or she was out of reach. She was weak by now. She was hardly paddling. She was going under. We had one last chance. We came in again, perfectly this time and close enough for Dad to be able to reach out and grab her. Between the three of us we managed to haul Stella back into the boat by her collar, by her tail. I got a, "Well done, monkey face," from Dad, and Dad got a huge rollicking from Mum for not wearing his safety harness. Dad just put his arms round her and she cried. Stella shook herself and went below as if nothing at all had happened.

Mum has made a strict rule. Stella Artois is never to go out on deck – whatever the weather – without a safety harness clipped on, like the rest of us. Dad's going to make one for her.

I still dream of the elephants in South Africa. I loved how slow they are, and thoughtful. I loved their wise weepy eyes. I can still see those snooty giraffes looking down at me and the lion cub sleeping with his mother's tail in his mouth. I did lots of drawings and I keep looking at them to remind me. The sun in Africa is so big, so red.

Australia next. Kangaroos and possums and wombats. Uncle John's going to meet us in Perth. I've seen photos of him but I've never met him. Dad said this evening he's only a distant uncle. "Very distant," Mum said, and they both laughed. I didn't get the joke till I thought about it again when I came on watch.

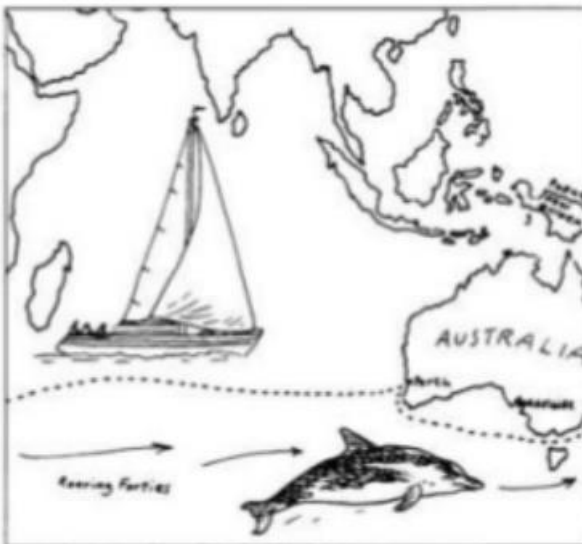
The stars are so bright, and Stella was saved. I think I'm happier than I have been all my life.



### April 3

Off Perth, Australia. Until today it has been nothing but empty ocean all the way from Africa. I love it more and more when it's just us and *Peggy Sue* and the sea. We all do, I think. But then, when we sight land we always get so excited. When we saw Australia for the first time we hugged each other and jumped up and down. It's like we're the first sailors ever to discover it. Stella Artois barked at us as if we were mad as hatters, which we probably are. But we've done it. We've sailed all the way from England to Australia. That's halfway round the world. And we did it on our own.

Mum's been getting her stomach cramps again. She's definitely going to see a doctor in Australia. She's promised us and we'll make her keep to it.



May 28

At sea again after nearly six weeks with Uncle John. We thought we were going to stay in Perth for just a few days, but he said we had to see Australia properly while we were there. He took us to stay with his family on a huge farm. Thousands of sheep. He's got masses of horses, so I went riding a lot with my two little cousins, Beth and Liza. They're only seven and eight, but they could really ride. They called me Mikey, and by the time we left they both wanted to marry me. We're going to be penpals instead.

I saw a snake called a Copperhead. Uncle John said it could have killed me if I'd trodden on it. He told me to watch out for Redback spiders in the toilet. I didn't go to the toilet very often after that.

They called us their 'pommy cousins' and we had barbeques every evening. They gave us a great time. But I was happy to get back to the *Peggy Sue*. I missed her while I was gone, like I miss Eddie. I've been sending him cards, funny animal cards, if I can find them. I sent him one of a wombat. I saw a wombat too, and hundreds of possums and loads of kangaroos. And they've got white cockatoos in Australia like we've got sparrows at home – millions of them.

But out here it's gulls again. Wherever we've been in the world there's always gulls. The plan is we're going to put in at Sydney, explore the Barrier Reef for a bit, then go through the Coral Sea and up towards Papua New Guinea.

Mum's stomach cramps are much better. The doctor in Australia said that it was most probably something she'd eaten. Anyway, she's better now.

It's really hot and heavy. It's calm too. No wind. We're hardly moving. I can't see any clouds, but I'm sure a storm is coming. I can feel it.



## July 28

I look around me. It's a dark, dark night. No moon. No stars. But it's calm again, at last. I'll be twelve tomorrow, but I don't think anyone except me will remember it.

We've had a terrible time, far worse even than in the Bay of Biscay. Ever since we left Sydney, it's been just storm after storm, and each one blows us further north across the Coral Sea. The rudder cable has snapped. Dad's done what he can, but it's still not right. The self-steering doesn't work any more, so someone's got to be at the wheel all the time. And that

means Dad or me, because Mum is sick. It's her stomach cramps again, but they're a lot worse. She doesn't want to eat at all. All she has is sugared water. She hasn't been able to look at the charts for three days. Dad wants to put out a May-Day call, but Mum won't let him. She says that's giving in, and she's never giving in. Dad and I have been doing the navigation together. We've been doing our best, but I don't think we know where we are any more.

They're both asleep down below. Dad's really wiped out. I'm at the wheel in the cockpit. I've got Eddie's football with me. It's been lucky for us so far. And now we really need it. We need Mum to get better, or we're in real trouble. I don't know if we could stand another storm.

Thank God it's calm. It'll help Mum to sleep. You can't sleep when you're being slammed about all the time.

It is so dark out there. Black. Stella's barking. She's up by the bow. She hasn't got her harness clipped on.

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Those were the last words I ever wrote in my log. After that it's just empty pages.

I tried calling Stella first, but she wouldn't come. So I left the wheel and went forward to bring her back. I took the ball with me to sweeten her in, to tempt her away from the bow of the boat.

I crouched down. "Come on, Stella," I said, rolling the ball from hand to hand. "Come and get the ball." I felt the boat turn a little in the wind, and I knew then I shouldn't have left the wheel. The ball rolled away from me quite suddenly. I lunged after it, but it was gone over the side before I could grab it. I lay there on the deck watching it bob away into the darkness. I was furious with myself for being so silly.

I was still cursing myself when I thought I heard the sound of singing. Someone was singing out there in the darkness. I called out but no one replied. So that was what Stella had been barking at.

I looked again for my ball, but by now it had disappeared. That ball had been very precious to me, precious to all of us. I knew then I had just lost a great deal more than a football.

I was angry with Stella. The whole thing had been her fault. She was still barking. I couldn't hear the singing any more. I called her again, whistled her in. She wouldn't come. I got to my feet and went forward. I took her by the collar and pulled. She would not be moved. I couldn't drag her all the way back, so I bent down to pick her up. She was still reluctant. Then I had her in my arms, but she was struggling.

I heard the wind above me in the sails. I remember thinking: this is silly, you haven't got your safety harness on, you haven't got your lifejacket on, you shouldn't be doing this. Then the boat veered violently and I was thrown sideways. With my arms full I had no time to grab the guard rail. We were in the cold of the sea before I could even open my mouth to scream.