

Kensuke's Kingdom Michael Morpurgo

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.

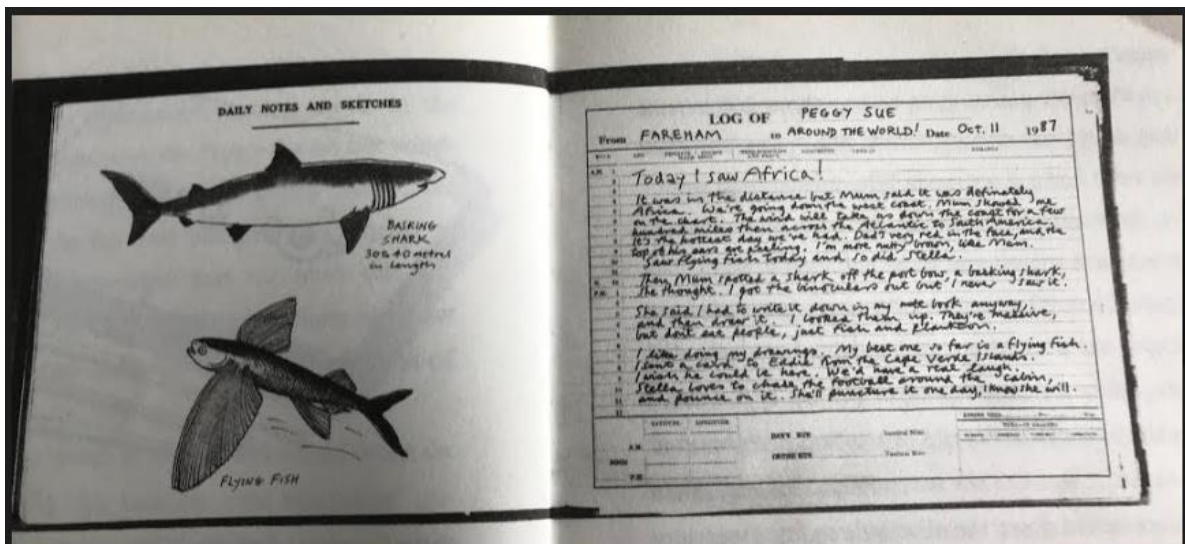
Mum gets quite snappy with us sometimes when we don't do things right. Dad doesn't seem to mind, not out here, not at sea. He just winks at me and we get on with it. They play a lot of chess together, when it's calm enough. Dad's winning so far, five games to three. Mum says she's not bothered, but she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



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.



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.

