

Letters from a Pilgrim Child

Autumn 1620

Dearest Aunt Constance,

You wondered what life in a ship would be like. I can now tell you, I would trade my bed for yours in the beat of a heart! I sleep on a damp bed and a tiny cabin with my mother and father. We are all packed in like so much cargo below deck. We do not know many of the other passengers, yet we live nearly on top of each other. Few of us have ever been aboard a ship, and there is so much seasickness. The stench is most awful! I welcome the times when we are allowed to go on Deck to empty our chamber pots and breathe the fresh air.

When the weather is fair, the days are much the same. We pray as we rise in the morning and before and after we take our meals. For food we commonly have peas or beans pottage, cheese and ship's biscuit. For drink, we have beer. We have some water but they say it will soon go bad.

Did I tell you that I have a friend? Her name is Mary and I am so grateful for her. Mary and I play games, tell riddles, sing or just speak to each other. It is often too dark to even read. There are few other lasses on the ship since most families left their daughters behind until our town is built. The sailors will sometimes allow us on deck, but they are a hard lot and frighten me somewhat. Master Goodman brought his two dogs-a mastiff and a spaniel-and we chase them as they chase the mousers that chase the rats. Have they made mention of the rats? They're almost as great in size as the mousers! May the Lord help us when the weather is not fair. Father told me that sailors usually seek safe harbor in the autumn and now I know why. The storms are fearsome! They roll and toss our poor ship which creaks and moans as though it will break apart. My arms and legs are bruised from being thrown about and having Things fall on me.

In one storm, a young man was thrown into the sea, but by God's good will he caught hold of a line that was dragging in the water and was saved. Just a fortnight ago came the worst storm yet. Aunt Constance, I thought we would all surely drown and become food for the fishes. The ship's upper works were leaking and all of a sudden there was a great snap! Master Carver told us that one of the ship's main beams had cracked. Many of the crew wanted to turn back, but after much consultation, t'was decided that we would continue. The Carpenters and sailors mended the beam and cocked the leaks. Thus we put our faith in God and we press on. I do not think that I could stand another storm like that! I pray that God's good will continues to watch over us here at sea, as well as you back home. Thus I commit you to God's good protection.

Your dutiful niece,

Lizzy

(Letter from 12-year-old Lizzy, a fictional Pilgrim child on the Mayflower, to her Aunt Constance.)