

Dearest Steven. Brother. I imagine after these months, you've given me up for dead. I'd make the same assumption had you been missing so long after not returning from a night at pub. I've been pressed into naval service. Can you fathom that? Me a naval man! Bloody damn... shipboard speech has already crept into my writing. "Fathom that." Please excuse the lack of paragraphs in this letter, along with the miniscule writing; I only have the one piece of paper. I traded a week's worth of tobacco and three meals worth of grog for this treasure. The tobacco I wasn't using at all. Don't miss it in the least. The grog, however... well... I've already grown accustomed to its numbing effect at the end of each watch. My joints are protesting its absence. Still, I'm sure by the time this letter reaches you, I'll have forgotten all about these pains and soreness. But enough of that. I went to pub. Several men were buying drinks all around. Most of the night is a deeper fog than ~~the~~ rolls of the moors in late autumn. The next day, I woke up on H.R.S. Ferret. It's a 32 gun frigate. We've been patrolling the enemy's eastern coast for weeks. Hungry and miserable, someone woke me and the two other men by splashing us with several buckets of cold water. When the sergeant of the marines informed us of our fate, I looked down at my gut hanging over my belt and the flabby skin of my arms, and asked, "why would you want this?" After I spoke, I wished I could choke my words back. Sergeant Bondal (I learned later when Captain Garrett bellowed his name) said, "You're overly thick now. But a few weeks of hard work and sea rations will ~~strengthen~~ strengthen you into your height." (Oh, and we all whisper jokes about Garrett the Ferret but only well before the mast and in the shadows below decks.) I can tell you now, Sergeant Bondal was right. I haven't looked at myself in a mirror since before they splashed me awake, but I dare say you would be hard-pressed to recognize me. I feel - I must go. The drums are beating to quarters. - The battle is done, and I am wondering why I told you I was going. Quite silly of me. The second of the two men pressed with me died today. His name was Hodgkins. Some snake on the other ship slit his belly open with a cutlass. For the snake's trouble, I smashed the right side of his face into the left with the maul. Sergeant Bondal assigned me. The battle raged on around me, and I could not stop fighting to drag Hodgkins to the physiker. What an ugly way to die. I never knew the other man's name. The night after we woke, he jumped overboard. Perhaps he felt he could swim to shore, even though through the day we could only see blue sea stretching to every horizon. I'm not sure if I should worry or take comfort in growing ~~accustomed~~ accustomed to battle. I tell you true, Steven, you might hardly recognize me. Not just my stature, but also my very countenance. Well, the paper grows short. I don't know when I'll have another treasure such as this, but as soon as I do, I will write again. Or perhaps, Sergeant Bondal will write you in the case of my death. Give mother, your dear lady wife, and the sweet children my deepest love and affection. I'll do my best not to die

Yours,
Nathanial Hayze