Loving and kind father and mother,

My most humble duty remembered to you, hoping in God of your good health, as I myself am at the making hereof. This is to let you understand that I your child am in a most heavy case by reason of the nature of the country is such that it causeth much sickness, as the scurvy and the bloody flux and divers other diseases, which maketh the body very poor and weak. And when we are sick, there is nothing to comfort us, for since I came out of the ship, I never ate anything but peas and loblolly (that is, water gruel). As for deer or venison, I never saw any since I came into this land. There is indeed some fowl, but we are not allowed to go and get it, but must work hard both early and late for a mess of water gruel and a mouthful of bread and beef... People cry out day and night—Oh that they were in England without their limbs—and would not care to lose any limb to be in England again, yea, though they beg from door to door. For we live in fear of the enemy every hour, yet we have had a combat with them on the Sunday before Shrovetide, and we took two alive and make slaves of them. But it was by policy, for we are in great danger, for our plantation is very weak by reason of the dearth and sickness of our company.... we are but 32 to fight against 3000 if they should come. And the highest help that we have is ten miles of us, and when the rogues overcame this place last they slew 80 persons. How then shall we do, for we live even in their teeth [that is, close by]? They may easily take us, but that God is merciful and can save with few as well as with many...
And I have nothing to comfort me, nor there is nothing to be gotten here but sickness and death, except that one had money to lay out in some things for profit. But I have nothing at all—no, not a shirt to my back but two rags, nor no clothes but one poor suit, nor but one pair of shoes, but one pair of stockings, but one cap, but two bands. My cloak is stolen by one of my own fellows. . . . I have not a penny, nor a penny worth, to help me to either spice or sugar or strong waters, without which one cannot live here. For as strong beer in England doth fatten and strengthen them, so water here doth wash and weaken these here, only keeps life and soul together. But I am not half a quarter so strong as I was in England, and all is for want of victuals: for I do protest unto you that I have eaten more in a day at home than I have allowed me here for a week. You have given more than my day’s allowance to a beggar at the door . . .

If you love me, you will redeem me suddenly, for which I do entreat and beg. And if you cannot get the merchants to redeem me for some little money, then for God’s sake get a gathering [that is, take up a collection] or entreat some good folks to lay out some little sum of money in meat and cheese and butter and beef . . .

Good father, do not forget me, but have mercy and pity my miserable case. I know, if you did but see me, you would weep to see me. . . . Wherefore, for God’s sake, pity me. I pray you to remember my love to all my friends and kindred. I hope all my brothers and sisters are in good health, and as for my part I have set down my resolution that certainly will be; that is, that the answer of this letter will be life or death to me. Therefore, good father, send as soon as you can . . . I thought no head had been able to hold so much water as hath and doth daily flow from mine eyes. But this is certain: I never felt the want of father and mother till now; but now, dear friends, full well I know and rue it, although it were too late before I knew it. Your loving son, Richard Frethorne

Virginia, 3rd April, 1623.