

and farther. I feared I would never come up, just continue down away from Diego and my Captain and the *Santa María*. But soon I was emerging and there were friends around me, their laughing faces transformed by the hair laid flat and wet against their heads. A couple took hold of me, and I held on for dear life. Little by little they taught me to tread water, to dive below and open my eyes to an incredible light of green. I guess the Captain was right. I didn't want to go back on board. I dove deeper and deeper, paddling like mad to catch my breath and find Diego. But after a while we all climbed back up on board. I was shivering, and Sancho told everyone to look at my blue lips. I am sorry I waited so long to try this.

September 26

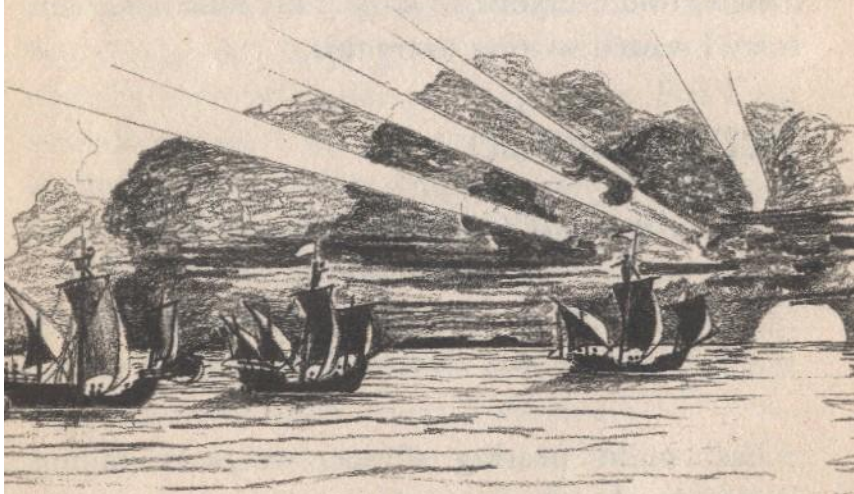
*Amen and God give us a good night
and good sailing;
May the ship make a good passage,
Sir captain and good company.*

Last night nearing sunset, we were sailing alongside the *Pinta*, and our Captain and the

Pinta's captain were calling back and forth, discussing the use of a certain chart. The sky was spectacular, striped with colors and softness, and all about us the sea was a quiet, slow river. Suddenly a cry went up on the *Pinta* that stunned us all.

“Land! Land, sir! I claim the reward! 10,000 maravedis are mine!”

An incredible sight! On all three ships the men scrambled up the rigging, higher and higher, wherever they could get a grip with their toes and their hands. Even I clambered as high as I could



along the mast, which was not too high but high enough to see in the distance what appeared to be a tall mountain, clear and sharp like ice chiseled against the sky. We shielded our eyes against the setting sun, and in the soft pink air a great triple shout of joy went up across the small stretch of our sea. When I looked down at the deck, I saw the Captain on his knees in prayer.

I am sorry, however, to report this morning that after sailing all night in the southwesterly direction of that chiseled mountain, we have found nothing. Not even a sandbar. It had just been a squall cloud on the horizon at sunset. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Everyone is quiet. There is still a chance for each of us to win the reward.

September 30

The Captain believes land must be very near. We have seen terns regularly these last few days, and petrels, not to mention frigate birds and dorados, and flying fish that land right on our decks. But Columbus is the only one who takes these things as encouraging.



There has been very little wind, and what there is comes at our stern, pushing us along very slowly. The men are bored and restless, with not much to do. They are cleaning and trolling for fish, and cleaning, and checking gear, fishing, cleaning, and always, constantly scanning the western horizon for their pile of 10,000 maravedis.

The Captain is muttering to himself a lot these days. I followed him from the forecastle to the cabin with his log, and to one group of men he said that if there were a mutiny, that if it had occurred to them to return to Spain without him, they would all be hanged. The men stared at him as blank as cows. To the next group of men he promised gold nuggets and gold blankets, gold rings and gold bowls. He boasted to them that we have surpassed the record: we have been out of sight of land now for three weeks. I do not think that particular bit of information was comforting to the men. They only stare at him and say nothing in his presence.

October 5

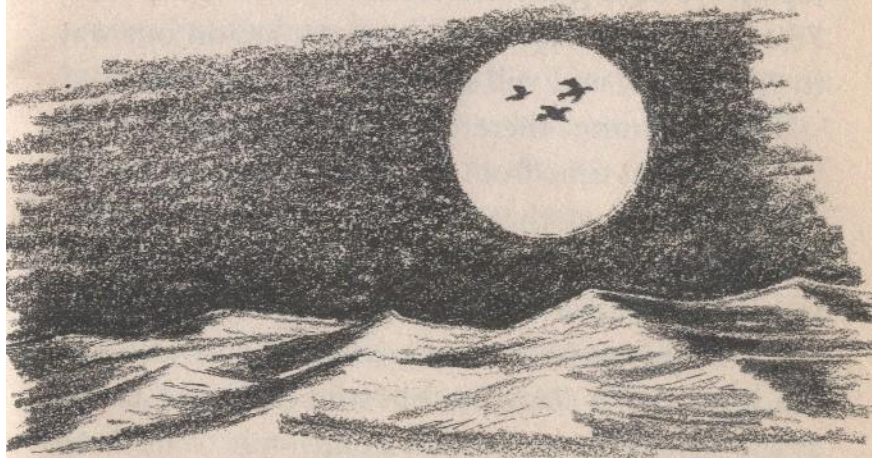
Last night I could not sleep. All I could think about was my mother and what would happen to

her if I were never to return, if the *Santa María* just kept sailing westward forever, trapped in this endless sea that goes nowhere. How would she ever know what became of me? Would she think me dead? Would she look for me forever and then die herself, only for me to return years later and find her gone? I feared in the loneliness of my snug corner that I might begin to cry and wake someone. So, wrapping my blanket about my shoulders, I made my way to the deck for some air.

The night watch—were it not for having to sleep during the day—is my favorite. There is a peace and stillness that surrounds our ship that is like nothing else. And this one night I will remember for the rest of my life, if that be long or short. There was a full brilliant moon in the sky lighting our way. In a path held out before us, the sea was lit, and the prow of our ship headed towards it. Always towards it. The only sounds were the whoosh of the wind in the sails and the gentle churnings of our wake, sounds that are as familiar to me now as my own breath and heartbeat.

I thought of my mother and knew the moon lit my face like a giant lantern. I looked up into the sky and tried to remember her face, and as I did three

birds flew across the face of the moon and I knew
that in Spain, in the mountains, she was looking at
the same moon.



October 7

*On deck, on deck,
Mr. Mariners of the right side,
On deck in good time,
you of Mr. Pilot's watch,
For it's already time.
Shake a leg!*

We have picked up considerable speed and distance this first week in October, but there is only one thing we are certain of: we grow farther and farther from Spain. The Captain writes in his journal, wondering if somehow we have missed Japan. We have gone much more than the expected 750 leagues. Surely, if this is so, we are on our way to China now and will soon spot the mainland.

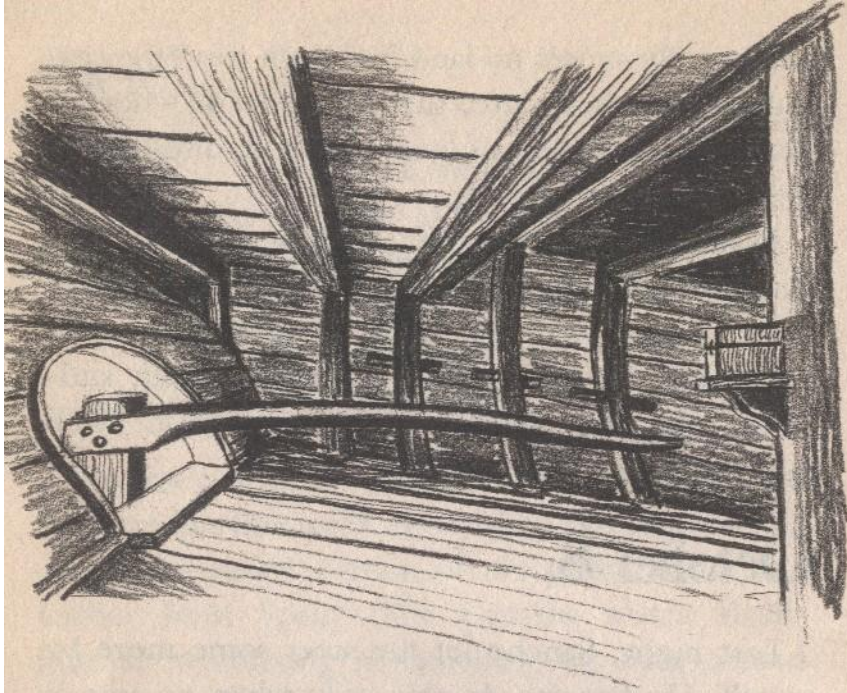
This morning there was another false cry of "Land!" This time from the *Niña*. The Captain was upset with her, that she had sailed on ahead, probably to see land first. He wants to be first, to be in the lead. But at sunrise there was the cry, followed by gunfire to signal land and also the sending up of a flag. We followed the *Niña* all day at top speeds to the western point, only to discover

nothing. By sunset no land had risen from the sea, and the Captain shouted that from now on whoever gave a false sighting of land would be disqualified from any future rewards.

As he shouted at the men, a whole flock of birds flew over his head, and he grew quiet and watched them. We all watched them disappear into the southwest. "Alter course," Columbus said, suddenly calm and assured. "West-southwest. We'll follow them to their nests."

October 8

Last night, Sancho let me steer some more by myself. He lets me do this only when no one is around and when conditions are very gentle. I see how it takes all his strength to keep the ship on course when the winds and waves toss us about. But when things are quiet and he lets me take the tiller, Sancho lies on the floor beside me and dozes. If I hear a footstep, or if the wind begins to howl, I kick him and he is instantly awake and in charge. But when I am at the tiller and I feel the pressure of the ocean weighing on the ease of the tiller, and I can hear Sancho snoring away, then I am a Captain



myself, a Captain of the Newly Discovered Seas, Explorer, Adventurer, Granter of Maravedis, and I am returning home with my ship stocked to overflowing with cargo. There are bolts of cloth as fine as a new goat's belly, and spices that fill the hold with fine aromas, and gold, gold that shines so brightly that no candles or lanterns are needed below. And all my men respect and revere me, and kings and queens will meet me at the ports.

This is what I think as I keep my eye on the star that Sancho tells me to steer to. But I tell no one, not even Sancho or Diego, of my imaginings, for then they would think there are two crazy sailors on board: me and Columbus.

October 10

This has been the worst day of all for the Captain. I am certain of this. We have doubled all previous records of days and leagues at sea, and we've gone way past the point where he originally said we would find land. There is nothing out here. Surely we are lost. And everyone is certain now as well.

This morning the men responded slowly to orders, scowling and slamming down their tools and lines. They whispered in pairs and small groups on deck and below. The air was thick with mutiny and betrayal, until finally everything came to a dead stop. The wind howled through the shrouds, and the men just stood there on deck and did not move aside when Columbus came.

"Enough," one of the men said to his face. "This is enough. Now we turn back."

The other men grumbled their assent and

nodded, their fists clenched, their chests broad. And they remained motionless and unmoved while Columbus paced the deck, telling them how close he figured we must be, that land could be right over the next horizon. He told them again of the fame and fortune that would be theirs if they could only last a little longer. And they laughed at him, the cruel laughter of impatient and defeated men.

“All that aside,” he added, “with the fresh easterly wind coming at us and the rising sea, we can’t turn a course back to Spain right now. We would stand still in the water.”

I looked up at the sails, full and straining, taking us farther and farther from Spain. What if a westerly wind never came? What if we were just blown away forever and ever?

“Let me offer you this,” Columbus finally said. “Do me this favor. Stay with me this day and night, and if I don’t bring you to land before day, cut off my head, and you shall return.”

The men glanced at each other. Some nodded. “One day,” they said. “One day, and then we turn around.”

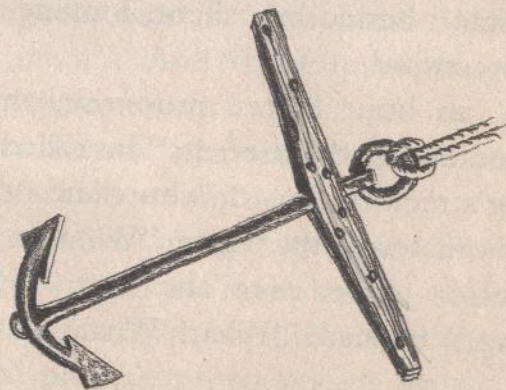
“That is all I ask,” Columbus said.

Later, when I went down to the cabin with the

log, the Captain's door was bolted shut, and when I knocked he didn't answer, so I sat outside the door with the heavy journal in my lap and waited.

October 11

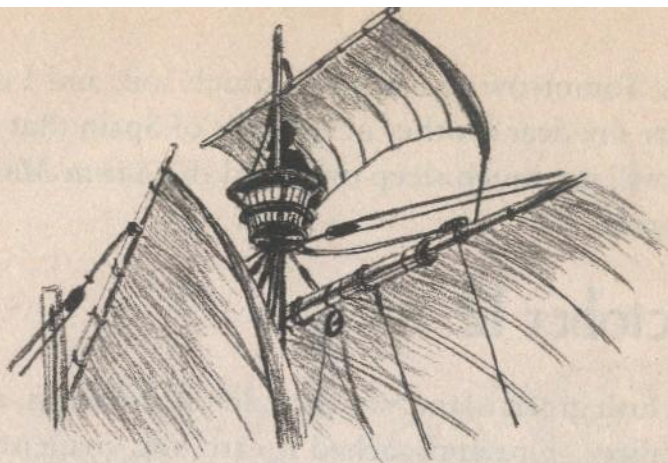
Through the day, the day that was to have been our last day traveling westward, many things were seen floating in the water, things that stirred everyone's hopes and had the men once again scanning the horizon. We saw birds in flocks, reeds and plants floating in the water, and a small floating board, and even a stick was recovered that had iron workings on it, obviously man-made. Suddenly no one wished to turn around. There was no further word on it.



At sunset, I led the prayers and the men sang the *Salve Regina*. Then the Captain spoke to the seamen from the sterncastle, doubling the night watch and urging everyone to keep a sharp lookout. No one asked about turning back. Then the Captain added a new bonus to his reward of 10,000 maravedis. He added a silk doublet, and some of the men joked with each other. Next the Captain nodded to me, and I sang for the changing of the watch, but my words were lost in the wind that was growing brisker and in the seas that were growing heavier and sounding like breakers all about us. The men dispersed to their watches and their bunks, and the Captain paced the deck. I don't know why, but this night I stayed with him. I stayed still by the gunwale, watching over the side. Once in a while he would stand beside me, silent, looking westward, always westward.

Then, an hour before moonrise, the Captain froze beside me. "Gutierrez!" he called to one of the king's men on board, who came running. He pointed out across the water. "What do you see?"

Gutierrez peered into the west. "I don't see anything," he said. "What? What? What do you see?"



“Can’t you see it?” the Captain whispered. “The light? Like a little wax candle rising and falling?”

The man at his side was quiet. I was there beside him, too, straining my own eyes to the dark horizon.

Suddenly another seaman called out across the darkness, “Land! Land!”

“He’s already seen it!” I shouted. “My master’s already seen it!” And the Captain laughed and tousled my hair.

“*Tierra! Tierra!*” It was heard all across the water from all three ships.

I am below now in the Captain’s cabin writing, while in the light of the rising moon, with our sails silver in the moonlight, we three exploring ships are rolling and plunging through the swells towards

land. Tomorrow our feet will touch soil, and I can assure my dear mother in the hills of Spain that no one will get much sleep on board the *Santa María* tonight!

October 12

A lush green island was there in the morning, and our three ships approached it carefully, maneuvering through breakers and a threatening barrier reef. We could see clear down to the reef in the sparkling blue waters as we sailed through. And, ah, it is truly land, truly earth, here so far from Spain. The *Santa María* led the way into the sheltered bay of the island and got a mark of only five fathoms' depth. We anchored there and barely paused to admire the breathtaking beauty. Small boats were prepared, armed, and lowered, and in these some of us went ashore. Out of respect, all waited while Christopher Columbus leaped out of the boat, his feet the first to touch this new land. (I wondered what my mother would say if she knew her son had lost the 10,000 maravedis to the Captain, who claimed it for himself.)

The Captain carried the royal banner of our king

