

January 16

We have left almost all our provisions with the men at La Navidad, planning to make some stops before heading out to sea. We've traded for fruit and breads and gathered anything else that might sustain us on the trip home. On the whole, the natives grew less and less friendly as we met them. Maybe word spread before us.

On one of the last days, some of our men went ashore and were greeted by natives with bows and arrows. These natives were different from any others they had met before. They were possibly the Caribes, who we'd been warned eat whomever they capture. They were ugly men. Their faces were smeared with charcoal, and their long hair was drawn back and gathered in clusters of parrot feathers.

Besides bows and arrows, they carried clubs.

Besides trading, they wished to capture our sailors.

At first our men were able to get them to lay down their weapons in order to trade, but soon they had taken them to hand again and came at our men with cords to tie them up. Of course, our men were



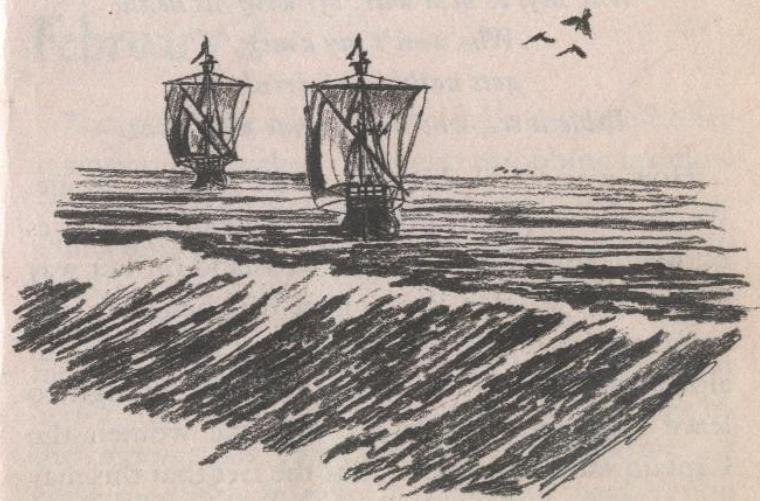
prepared at the Captain's orders, and even though there were only seven sailors and more than fifty natives, our weapons proved more powerful. They reported that one native was sliced across the buttocks, another on the chest. Our men were visibly shaken, not used to being challenged this way.

The Captain was at first troubled, and then he said, "Well, maybe this is good. They will know to be afraid of us, and if an envoy from La Navidad comes here, our people will be safe."

I don't know how safe the Captain really feels, however. Both the *Niña* and the *Pinta* are leaking

terribly, and he is not willing to risk another skirmish with the natives by beaching our ships and repairing them now. So our two ships are well stocked, but leaking, as we head out at last to sea, and to Spain.

We begin a new journey in a new direction, and not counting my one disaster of judgment and inexperience, I think, to spite them all, I am becoming a seasoned sailor. I look forward to the huge swells and pulse of the open sea, where no islands beckon with false promises of gold and



treasure. I yearn for a sweep of unbroken horizon and a depth of endless fathoms. It is just the parrots and the terrible mess they make that I hate.

January 28

*Table, table, sir captain and master
and good company,*

Table ready; meat ready;

*Water as usual for sir captain
and master and good company.*

*Long live the King of Castile
by land and sea!*

Who says to him war, off with his head;

*Who won't say amen,
gets nothing to drink.*

Table is set, who don't come won't eat.

How wonderful this feels to be heading home. We almost made one extra stop. One of the natives on board told the Captain of an island on our way where only women live, where it is believed men come only part of the year and then are kicked out along with boy children who are old enough to leave their mothers. It was not the women the Captain was interested in, but the fact that this may

be the island Marco Polo wrote about in his voyage to the Orient. And this would be the proof Columbus needs to show we did indeed make the Indies.

He even turned in this direction for two leagues, but when he saw how disappointed the men were—how even the thought of an island full of women did not distract them from their desire to go home, or their uneasiness about the leaking boats—he turned back towards our homeland, and now the ships roll before the winds, winds that grow cooler and cooler with each passing day.

February 2

Tonight is the night of the full moon, and once again we are traveling through a throbbing meadow of seaweed, this time at a good speed with gentle winds pushing us along. Earlier, I was not able to sleep for the eerie noise the seaweed brings, the soft, enchanted swish against the hull, like a mother's hand soothing a baby's head, so I went above and found the Captain alone on deck, lit by the moon. His log entries these last days are concerned with the miles we make and the direction

we sail, constantly plotting and striving to find his way back to Spain. I was uncertain at first what to do, but finally I came up beside him. I don't think he had even looked to see who I was, when he pointed off toward the north-northeast and said, "I believe there are islands off in that quarter. When we come back on our second voyage, I will make certain we visit them."

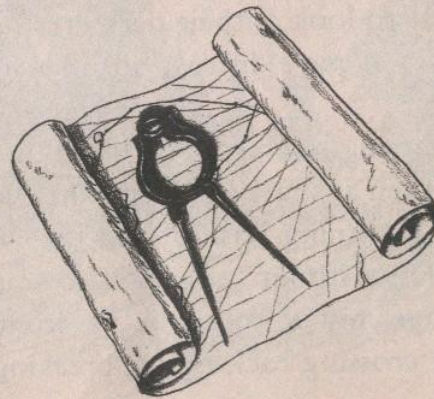
A second voyage. Suddenly the wind was too cold for me. The moon too bright. Below, I wrap myself tight in my blanket and struggle to write. The inkhorn in one hand, the quill in the other, I try to imagine myself growing to manhood on ships such as this, and I cannot. Oh, I cannot.

February 7

For the last few days we have been sailing beneath an overcast sky at a tremendous speed, the fastest I have ever gone in my life. It nearly takes my breath away. It's growing colder, and we can no longer walk on deck without holding on. Then, yesterday, with much sadness for a few on board—myself not included—two of the parrots blew away. *Vaya con Dios.*

There is much heated discussion lately among the pilots about where we are exactly. Vicente Yáñez Pinzón says Madeira is due east. Peralonso Niño insists we will miss Madeira by thirty-eight miles. And Bartolomé Roldán says Porto Santo is due east. The Captain, probably wiser, will commit himself only to saying we are seventy-five leagues south of the parallel of Flores. What a shame the seas are too high for us to draw close to the *Pinta*. Then we could ask them what *they* think and have a few more expert opinions on where we are.

"Where are we?" they all ask. "We are right here," the ship's boy answers. And I am probably the only one who is right.



February 13

I try to write, but it is difficult. I cannot eat. I cannot bear to stand. I did not think the sea could turn on us this way. I had grown used to her gentle swells and even her strong waves and winds, but this tempest is unbearable. When I turned the sand-glass tonight and feebly called out the time into the roaring storm, heavy waves of green sea and foam crashed through the rudder port, nearly drowning the helmsman and myself. Everything that was not tied down has washed overboard. Even things that were tied down have been ripped from our deck. Below, our possessions are strewn about, flying like mad birds each time we pitch and crash through this storm. The natives huddle together in terror. I cannot bear to look at their dark eyes, eyes grown huge and even *more* distrustful, if such a thing is possible.

The Captain ordered bare masts most of the night and then at sunrise put up a little sail to keep us steady. Lightning flashes, and the *Niña* labors and shudders without ceasing. The seas show no order. Huge waves come at us from opposite directions, crossing each other, breaking over our

heads and crashing onto our deck. All day we are pounded and pounded. Each time a wave breaks over us, I think, *we survived that one, maybe it was the last*. But there is no end to this.

The Captain has abandoned course. The only direction he can take is to stay out from beneath the goliath waves to keep us from sinking. All night, drenched and staggering, we try to keep our light burning so the *Pinta* can keep us in sight. For a while her light flickers back. But somewhere in the night we lose her. The *Pinta* is gone.



February 14

Is it possible that things have grown worse? Nothing less than a miracle from heaven can save us now. This morning shortly after sunrise, below-decks in the dark green air of the storm, the Captain placed in a seaman's cap as many chickpeas as men in the crew. One chickpea was cut with a cross, and whoever picked that one would perform a pilgrimage once we are safely on land, a pilgrimage of gratitude to Santa María de Guadalupe in the mountains of Estremadura. The Captain himself pulled the cross on the very first draw. He swore to carry a candle weighing five pounds and to light it at the altar. Still the ocean raged.

By midday the peas were drawn again. This time it is a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santa María de Loreto in Ancona. When Pedro de Villa pulled the crossed chickpea, Columbus agreed to pay his expenses. Yet even as he spoke, a wall of water spilled down the hatchway. The ocean mocks us.

Just now a third lottery was drawn. To hold a vigil all night and have a Mass said at the church of Santa Clara de Moguer, near my home. I hoped to get this one, but the Captain picked the cross once

again. Nothing matters any longer. Terrified, we have all promised to go in procession to the first shrine of the Virgin Mary if only, only we may live to see another shrine. God has forgotten us. We are so engulfed by this tempest, even He must be certain we are lost.

Later, same day

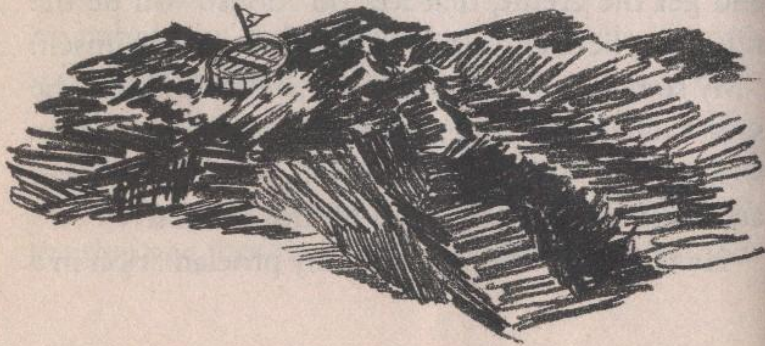
I have been hiding in the Captain's cabin, trembling from cold and fear. I am only a ship's boy. Everything is drenched with salt water except this journal and the Captain's log, which we keep wrapped together high on a shuttered shelf. It is growing dark again, and the Captain's lantern flickers and sways from the ceiling as he writes. He tells me we are sure to go down. The *Niña* will not make it, and he is furious that the *Pinta* may return and get the credit, that Martín Alonso will be the returning hero and claim all the rewards for himself. "My sons will be left orphaned and penniless," he says, "unless I can get a message to the king." So he writes his final proclamation, quickly giving accounts of the voyage and his discoveries.

He tells me, "We will wrap my proclamation in a

waxed cloth, seal it in a wooden barrel, and cast it into the sea. If we don't return, may the truth return without us." And then he turned to me and offered to include my letters in the barrel.

I hold you in my hands. You are still dry, so before you are sodden and your ink smudged, and before I change my mind, I will hand you over to my Captain. Go with God. Tell God where I am. And if you should ever reach my home, tell my mother I died with her love in my heart, and that she should pray for my foolish soul.

Go with God. And please, tell Him where I am.



Here the journal of young Pedro de Salcedo ends.

We do know from historians and scholars that, despite their fears, the *Niña* and the *Pinta* did find their way back through more storms, squalls, and rolling seas and were reunited in the harbor of Palos from which they had departed seven-and-a-half months before.

And from Francisco de Juelva (who returned from the New World with the crew of the *Pinta*, and who with his earnings bought a fishing boat), we hear that the last time Pedro de Salcedo was seen he was heading up into the hills toward his mother's house. His back was to the great ocean sea, and the ground was firm beneath his feet. Francisco said that Pedro never even looked back at the blue horizon that beckons young men to nautical adventures, and that no one really expected that Pedro de Salcedo would ever go to sea again.
