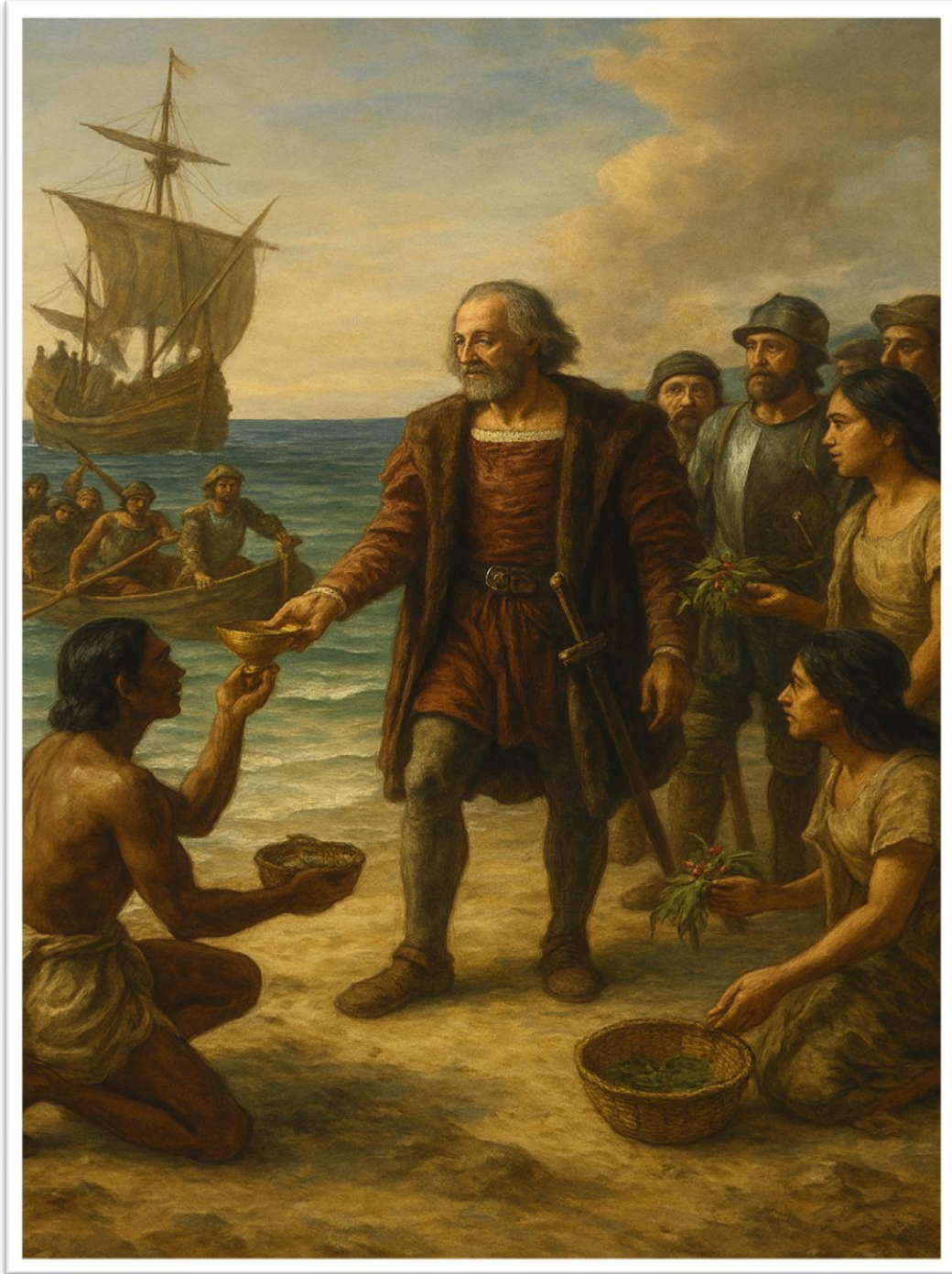


COLUMBUS

The last dream of the old continent



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The damned dream of the West

He sat there, the damned Genoese, with his hands over a half-empty bowl of wine that tasted of vinegar and guilt. The sun over Porto Santo burned his forehead, and the waves spoke softly, like old men who'd long since grown tired of life. Christopher Columbus, the man who thought the Earth was small enough to circumnavigate in one breath, had that gaze that never faltered. Always searching, always calculating, always convinced that God had given him a sign—or perhaps the devil. He was never so sure, but that didn't make any difference. The world was cursed anyway.

He had already seen too much. Corpses in the harbor, drowned sailors, women who sold their dignity for a loaf of bread, and priests who lied more than they blessed. And yet he spoke of a dream, of a west, of a route no one had ever taken, because no one had been stupid or desperate enough to leave the sun behind. He called it a vision. The others called it madness. And probably both were right.

The air in Madeira was damp and sweet, and money was scarce. Columbus had collected maps like other men collect whores. Old parchments, half-burned, stained with wine and salt. Lines made of hope more than knowledge. He continued painting, at night, with trembling hands, while his son Diego slept in the corner and his wife was long buried. She had always told him to stop chasing that damned dream. That the sea would swallow him, as it had so many before. He had smiled, kissed her, and agreed with her—only to then go back to calculating, writing, and praying.

The world was a circle, he knew that. Or he wanted to know. And somewhere over there, beyond all that water, he was supposed to be—the West, the gold, the scent of spices, the power, the freedom. Everything a man lacked when he lived with empty pockets and full of longing.

Sometimes, at night, when the wind was still, he heard the voices. Not divine, not human, more as if the sea itself were speaking to him. It told him things no human wanted to hear—of currents that swallowed men, of islands made only of mist, and of birds that flew over water as if there were land, but never found any. And yet he continued to believe.

The others laughed at him. A nutcase, they said. A sailor with big words and empty pockets. Someone who wanted to see himself in the arms of kings but only ended up with whores. But he was different. He had that damned spark in

his eyes, the one you see in men willing to perish over anything just to prove to themselves they're right.

He knew the sea better than the Bible. He had seen the coasts of Africa, the sands of Guinea, the salt in people's hair, the blood under their fingernails. He had seen slaves dragged across the deck in chains, and merchants laughing as they did so, as if it were all a game. Europe smelled of money, of guilt, and of burned dreams. And somewhere amidst these stench, Columbus thought he could change that.

He believed in numbers. In miles, in degrees, in the course of the stars. He no longer believed in people. Especially not in those with power. But he knew he needed them. The damned kings, the popes, the princes, those with golden tongues and iron hearts. He had to convince them. He, a poor bastard from Genoa, was supposed to explain the world to them anew.

He wrote letters, long ones, in ink that looked like blood, to everyone with a shred of power. But the replies never came. Or they were sneering. "A way west?" they wrote. "Folly." And yet there was this one moment, late at night, as he sat over his maps, the candle almost burned out, the wind from the sea coming through the cracks—he swore to himself that he would do it anyway. With or without her.

He dreamed of ships. Three, small, old, stinking of tar and sweat. Of men who don't believe, but follow because they need bread. He dreamed of islands that glowed like promises, of gold burning in the sun. But most of all, he dreamed of proof—that he was right. That the world would listen to him when he returned.

He wasn't young, not handsome, not particularly friendly. But he was obsessed. A man born in a time when dreams were either sacred or deadly. And Columbus knew his was both.

The nights were long. The wine was getting worse, the money was getting scarcer. But he kept painting. He kept drawing the lines across the Atlantic, as if he could make the route visible. They laughed at him in the taverns. "The West!" someone shouted, "There's only death over there!" Columbus didn't answer. He drank, smiled, went home, and continued writing.

Perhaps that was his curse—that he loved the sea more than people. That he believed that somewhere out there, beyond the boundaries of the known, the world would finally make sense.

The world was tired, Europe was old. The plague had left its mark, the churches lied, the kings waged wars no one understood anymore. People were searching for a new miracle, a new God, a new hope. Columbus wanted to bring them all of this—or save himself with it.

He didn't know that instead he would begin the end.

That night, as he hung over the maps again, the rain tapped on the window. And somewhere outside, a dog barked, lonely and in vain. Columbus put his pen aside, closed his eyes, and saw the sea. Not as it was, but as it could be. Endless. Open. Full of promise.

He smiled. For the first time in days. Maybe that's exactly what life was—a damned bet against death, and the sea was the stake.

Then he drank the rest of the wine, wiped his mouth, and murmured quietly: "The West won't wait forever."

And outside, beyond the black sea, something seemed to answer.

The next morning, the sea smelled of death and salt. The sun crept wearily over the horizon, as if it no longer believed that a new day was worth anything. Columbus stood barefoot on the beach, the water lapping at his toes, and thought of everything he had lost—and everything he would still lose. He was a man forgotten by time. Too late for the great wars, too early for the new world. One who didn't fit into any era. And perhaps that was precisely his curse.

He had dreamed again. Of billowing sails, of screams in the fog, of a laughing horizon. Sometimes he wondered if this dream was truly his or if the sea had implanted it in him, like a disease. A slow, sweet plague that ate away at him until nothing remained but maps and madness.

In Funchal, they had laughed at him. "A westward route to India!" the old captain had shouted, a man with a face like a piece of dried leather. "If you keep sailing, you'll fall off, you fool!" Columbus hadn't responded. He had just nodded, drunk, and paid. And thought to himself: If I fall, at least I'll fall forward.

He was one of those people who just couldn't stop. Every blow, every rejection, every ridiculed idea was like fuel on his fire. And it burned even when there was no wind.

He had stolen knowledge wherever he could. From monasteries, from books, from conversations with sailors who were too drunk to realize he was extracting secrets from them. He read about Marco Polo, about Toscanelli, about Ptolemy—men who believed the world was bigger than fear. But he was the only one who believed it could also be smaller.

He had calculated that only a few weeks' journey lay between Europe and Asia—a mistake big enough to make history. But numbers were only as reliable as the man who wrote them, and Columbus had more faith than mathematics.

In the taverns, he talked to anyone who would listen—sailors, whores, merchants, priests. Most just wanted to drink or forget, but he kept talking as if every evening were a confession. "Out there," he said, "lies the West. Gold, spices, lands without masters." And while the others laughed, he believed it more and more with every fiber of his being.

He had no money, no power, no ship. Just this damned dream and a tongue that wouldn't stop.

He wrote to the kings of Portugal, Castile, and Aragon. He spoke of shortcuts, of treasures, of honor for God and glory for the crown. But what he really wanted wasn't God, not glory—it was confirmation. That he wasn't crazy. That his life meant more than salt and hunger.

The answer never came. Only silence. And silence was worse than ridicule.

He moved on. From city to city, from port to port. Porto, Lisbon, Huelva, Palos. Everywhere the same: noise, stench, hopelessness. Men cursing because life had forgotten them. Women laughing because otherwise they would have cried. And Columbus in the middle of it all, with his maps under his arm, as if they were the gospel of a lost prophet.

Sometimes he wondered if he was still made of flesh or just paper and salt.

He remembered his youth in Genoa. The smell of the nets, the blood of the fish, the cursing of the men. Back then, he thought the sea was freedom. Today, he knew it was just a mirror. It showed you what you really were—and if you didn't look, it drowned you.

He was born poor and would die poor, he knew that. But somewhere in between, in that narrow gap, he wanted to be the man who found something greater than poverty.

That evening, he sat in the tavern, alone, his fingers sticky from the wine. The walls stank of smoke and sweat. Two sailors were arguing over a woman, a third was laughing until he coughed up blood. And Columbus? He just looked into his glass, as if the wine could reveal his future.

He remembered his wife, Filipa. She had believed in him until she couldn't anymore. She died young, too young, and her death clung to him like salt on his skin. He had lost her because he was too distant. And now she was gone—and he was still here.

"Why the West, Christoph?" she had once asked him. "Because the East already belongs to someone else," he had said.

He had never been a good liar, but he liked this lie.

As he left the tavern, the moon was over the sea. Large, cold, beautiful. He looked at it and thought, "Perhaps someone in India is seeing the same moon." And then he thought, "Perhaps I can find it."

He walked through the alleys, past drunks, beggars, and cats. Life was cheap here. A knife cost less than a dream. But Columbus had nothing except the latter.

In the distance, he heard the bells of a church. They sounded like a mockery. God was a rich man, and Columbus never had the right clothes to appear before him. Nevertheless, he sometimes prayed. Not for salvation, but for direction.

He knew the world was changing. Portugal was becoming greedy, Spain was angry, Italy was fragmenting. Everyone was looking for the next big thing, and no one knew where it was.

Columbus thought he knew. That was his problem.

He saw maps, lines, ideas. But the only thing he truly saw was the sea. This eternal, cold, indifferent thing that took everything and gave nothing back—except to those who didn't give it up.

The night was silent, only the waves lapped against the rocks. And in that sound lay a kind of truth that no Bible could capture.

He sat down on the wall by the harbor and pulled the parchment out of his pocket. Again, the same line. Again, the same damned West. He ran his finger over it, as if he could feel it.

"Somewhere there," he murmured, "lies what we lack."

An old fisherman stepped beside him, stinking of seaweed and poverty. "What are you looking for out there, Genoese?" he asked. "A way," said Columbus. "Where to?" "Away from here."

The old man laughed, without joy. "Then you're looking for the wrong thing. There's no getting away from here. You're just slower to forget." Columbus looked at him. "Then they'll forget me when I get over there."

He stood up, walked away, and left the man behind.

The light was fading in the east, but Columbus looked west. Always west.

He was no hero. No saint. Just a damned fool with a dream no one wanted—and that's exactly why he would pursue it until there was nothing left of it.

History began not with courage, but with defiance. And Columbus was full of it.

Lisbon stank of fish, money, and decay. The harbor was an open mouth, swallowing everything—ships, men, dreams. Sailors trudged between the docks with eyes that had seen too much and hands that smelled of tar, blood, and sin. It was a place where everyone was looking for something, but hardly anyone found what they wanted. And in the middle of it all was Columbus—a piece of parchment under his arm, which he handled as if it were a revelation.

He had come here because he believed Portugal was the gateway to the world. And perhaps it was—except no one had the key. The rich sat in the taverns above the city, drank good wine, talked of God and gold, and let others die for them. The poor drank below in the alleys, prayed to empty glasses, and stole whatever they could. There was nothing in between.

Columbus belonged to neither. Too clever to remain a sailor, too poor to become a merchant. A man between worlds, losing himself with every mile he walked.

He lived in a small room above a bakery, where the heat of the oven made the air stifling. At night, he wrote by candlelight, while below, the clatter of bread shovels reminded him of the waves. He wrote letters to the crown. To King João II. He asked for ships, for men, for trust. He promised wealth, honor, new lands for Portugal, glory for God. He lied in beautiful Latin. But the lie was purer than anything the churches taught.

The answer was slow in coming. Weeks. Months. He went to the palace almost daily, talking to clerks who acted more important than they were. They took his papers, nodded, yawned, and laughed behind his back.

One day, one of the king's advisors came out—a fat man with gold rings and eyes that saw nothing but himself. "Your proposal has been considered," he said. "His Majesty thanks you, but Portugal has its own ways." Columbus looked at him as if he wanted to cut his soul out of his body. "You mean ways south," he said. "To where gold is safe," the man replied, and left.

That was it. Not another sentence. Not a look back.

Columbus stood there, hat in hand, the wind blowing from the sea, and everything inside him burning.

In the weeks that followed, he drank. Too much. He hung around the taverns, talking to anyone who didn't leave in time. "They think the world ends behind Africa," he said. "Idiots! I tell you, the West is closer than India!" An old sailor laughed. "Then sail, Genoese. Build yourself a boat out of your pride!" Laughter. Wine. Another glass. Columbus didn't smile. He just kept drinking.

He went to the harbor at night, looked at the ships being loaded with pepper, ivory, and silk. He smelled the salt, the fat, the money. And he knew that all of this was slipping away from him.

Sometimes he stood at the dock, staring out into the darkness, wondering if there really was land out there. Or if he was just crazy. But madness was better than standing still. He was tired of everyone settling for what they knew.

The world was old, tired, rotting. But he still saw it as young. A dirty, dreaming bastard who thought he could redraw it.

He obtained old maps from the library in Lisbon. Parchments that smelled of dust and error. He compared them, drew lines, calculated distances. He wrote to scholars in Florence, to monks in Rome. Some responded, politely, out of curiosity. Others laughed at him. "You are mistaken, Signor Colombo," one wrote. "Your west is the end of the world." He replied: "Then I want to end there."

He had no money left. His shoes were falling apart. He ate yesterday's bread, sometimes nothing at all. But the fire within him continued to burn.

One night, there was a knock at his door. A middle-aged man with a voice like cold steel. "They say you want to sail west." "I say that often," Columbus murmured. "And you mean it?" Columbus nodded. "Then let me warn you. The king doesn't believe you. But he's sending people to check your calculations. If you're wrong, they'll laugh at you. If you're right, they'll take everything from you." "Then let him take it," Columbus said. "I just want them to sail."

The man left. Columbus knew that his idea was now in the hands of others. And that was worse than any rejection.

He slept badly. He dreamed of storms, fire, and endless seas. He woke up drenched in sweat, his heart racing. Perhaps the king was right. Perhaps he really was just a fool who'd had too much wine and too little sense. But then he looked at his cards again – and knew: If he stopped now, he would die without having lived.

A few weeks later, he learned that João had copied his calculations and secretly sent a test attempt—a ship west to see if the fool was right. The ship never returned.

People said the sea had swallowed it. Columbus said, "Then the sea swallowed it to test me."

He laughed, but it didn't sound like laughter. He knew Portugal didn't want him. So he packed his few belongings—parchments, a quill, a cup, an old locket belonging to his wife—and set off for Spain.

The streets were long, dusty, endless. He walked, with aching feet, an empty stomach, and a full mind. He saw pilgrims, beggars, soldiers, monks. Everyone was going somewhere, but no one knew where. He thought: Perhaps this is the fate of people—they walk without knowing why.

In the evening, he lay under the open sky, looked at the stars, and there it was again—the damned sphere. He saw it in the constellations, in the movement of the moon, in the wind. Everything was round. Everything returned. So there had to be a west. He swore to himself, he would find it.

When he reached Castile, he was emaciated, dusty, and half-sick. But in his eyes, this light glowed—like embers under ashes.

He knew he was now at the point where men give up or make history.

He had no ship, no crew, no advocate. Only the damned dream of the West—and the courage to hold it against a world of ridicule.

He sat down on the side of the road, drank the last of the water, wiped the sweat from his face, and grinned. "Screw Portugal," he muttered. "Spain will hear me."

Then he stood up, took his cards, and moved on.

The wind came from the west. And the sea whispered after him.

He came to Spain like a beggar talking from heaven. Dust on his feet, hunger in his stomach, fire in his eyes. The streets were full of soldiers, priests, merchants—and misery. The smell of war pervaded everywhere. Granada hadn't yet fallen, the Moors were holding out, and the kings had other things on their minds than listening to a stranger with salty hair and crazy ideas. But Columbus went anyway. He went because he had no other choice.

He traveled through Andalusia, from monastery to monastery, from town to town. He spoke with monks, scholars, and officials. He talked of stars, of distances, of gold flowing in the rivers of Asia like wine in the taverns of Córdoba. Most didn't listen to him. Some pretended to. Others laughed. But a few—just a few—looked at him as if they saw in him something they didn't understand, but feared.

He wasn't an easy man. He spoke loudly, too much, for too long. He drank, he prayed, he cursed. A sailor in the body of a prophet, a prophet with the hands of a worker. He could talk for hours about currents, about wind directions, about the belly of the earth. And sometimes, in the middle of his sentences, he would suddenly fall silent—as if hearing a voice no one else could hear.

He stayed in Córdoba for a while. He lived in a monastery, slept on a cot, and ate dry bread. But he wrote. He was always writing. Reports, proposals, calculations. He sought allies who would open doors for him.

He found Fray Juan Pérez, an old monk with eyes that had seen too much misery to judge. Pérez listened to him, serious, silent, without laughter. "So you think you can reach the West?" he asked. Columbus nodded. "Why?" "Because it's the only direction no one has stolen yet."

The monk was silent, then smiled slightly. "Perhaps that's reason enough."

Pérez was the first to believe in him. Or at least pretended to. And sometimes that's enough to keep a man alive.

But Spain was a tough country. Everyone wanted something, no one gave anything. And Columbus had nothing to offer except his idea. He wrote to the

court, to Ferdinand and Isabella. For weeks, no response. Then, finally, a letter: He should come and present.

He washed himself as best he could, put on the best—or less ragged—clothes he had, and set out for Salamanca.

The city was noisy, full of horses, whores, soldiers, and theologians arguing about things they had never seen. Columbus entered a world of phrases and gold. The halls of the court smelled of perfume and power.

They led him into a hall. Cardinals, scholars, nobles—all sat there, looking at the stranger with the wild gaze. Columbus bowed awkwardly and handed over his scrolls.

"I come to show you the way God has hidden but not forbidden," he began. A murmur went through the room. One of the scholars, fat, well-fed, with a face reeking of arrogance, said, "You mean one can sail west and reach the east?" "I know." Laughter. Another, "And what if the earth ends there?" Columbus looked at him, long and coldly. "Then I will fall, but not into oblivion."

It was quiet. Then more laughter. The Spaniards laughed louder than the Portuguese. But he was used to it.

The queen listened to him, silently, behind a fan of gold. Her eyes were tired, but not empty. She saw a man who believed more than he was entitled to possess. She spoke quietly to an advisor, then nodded. He was offered lodging, food, a small pension—in exchange for silence.

But Columbus did not remain silent.

He stayed in Salamanca, continued talking, writing, convincing, and annoying. He was like a dog that doesn't stop barking until someone opens the door.

Some said he was possessed. Others said he was guided by God. He himself no longer knew if there was any difference at all.

He walked through the alleys, saw the beggars, the cripples, the orphans. That was Spain: glamour and dirt, gold and blood, Bibles and whips. And somewhere in between walked a man with maps under his arm and a dream that sat in his head like an illness.

After months, the decision came: "His Majesty thanks you, but the funds are currently intended for the war against the Moors. Perhaps at a later date."

Again, the word he hated most: later. Later meant never.

He drank. Too much. He cursed God, kings, and ships that were never built. In the tavern, he attacked a soldier who had called him "fool." He was beaten, bled, and laughed. "I am a fool," he cried, "but the world belongs to my foolishness!"

They threw him out. He lay in the dust, the stars above him, and felt the blood drying on his forehead. He smiled.

"If they won't hear me," he muttered, "I'll force them to see me."

The next day, he was back at the monastery. Fray Pérez saw him, shook his head, and helped him up. "You won't give up, will you?" "Not until the sea itself tells me no."

Pérez wrote secretly to the queen. He prayed for Columbus, calling him "a man of divine inspiration." And for the first time in years, a door opened.

Isabella wanted to see him.

Columbus arrived at the court of Santa Fe, where the war against Granada raged. Soldiers, dust, and corpses were everywhere. He appeared before the queen—exhausted, ragged, but with a gaze that burned like fire.

She asked him, "What drives you, stranger?" He replied, "A dream, Your Majesty. The last one this ancient continent has left."

She looked at him for a long time, then nodded. "We'll see."

Columbus bowed deeply. He knew it wasn't a yes. But it wasn't a no. And that was more than he was used to.

He left the tent, the wind smelling of dust and blood. Black smoke hung over Granada. He turned west. "Not yet," he whispered. "But soon."

Granada lay ablaze, and Columbus waited. The city burned like an old body finally letting go, and Spain rejoiced in its victory. But to him, it was all just smoke obscuring the sky he longed to see. The war was over, and every court jester, every merchant, every damned friar talked of the glory of the crown. Only one thought of the West. The man who had nothing but maps, tenacity, and a hunger that didn't ask for bread.

He sat in the camps while trumpets celebrated victory, drawing lines on parchment. Next to him were stacks of reports he had copied a hundred times, because every "no" only made him stronger. The soldiers laughed at him. "There's the man who seeks the end!" they cried. He nodded. "Someone has to find it."

His shoes were broken, his clothes worn. But his gaze—his gaze was harder than any stone in Granada.

He wrote to the treasurer, to the queen's confessor, to the men who called themselves "decision-makers." They saw him as nothing more than a tiresome salesman of dreams. A crackpot with salty skin. But Columbus had learned that persistence is the sharpest weapon of a man no one believes.

He waited. Months. He saw the soldiers return home, the flags laid down, the queen praying, and the king calculating. He saw the world return to its lies—and he stopped.

The sun in Andalusia was merciless. He moved from Santa Fe to Córdoba, back to La Rábida, and back to Fray Pérez. The old monk was surprised to see him alive. "You really won't give up." "I can't," said Columbus. "If I give up now, the world will die in my chest."

They drank wine from tin cups, cheap and sour. The monk spoke of humility, Columbus of direction. Two men who were seeking the same thing, but had different words for it.

Columbus barely slept that night. He saw the sea before him, in dreams, so real that he could taste the salt in his mouth. But there was no ship. Only waiting. Always waiting.

Sometimes he thought God himself was testing him. Other times he thought God had drowned long ago.

He continued writing. Again and again. Letters to Isabella, to Ferdinand, to advisors, to courtiers. Words that flew like arrows into nothingness. But one day – a messenger. A letter from Santa Fe.

He tore it open, his fingers trembling. "Come immediately. Her Majesty wishes to hear you."

He laughed. Loudly. Dirty. Tears streamed down his face. The monk entered. "What is it?" Columbus held out the letter. "Finally."

He set out on his journey. He walked for days. The dust clung to his skin, the wind blew hot, but there was only one thing on his mind: Now.

When he reached the Santa Fe camp, the land was exhausted by war. Smoke still hung over the mountains. Everywhere were horses, soldiers, traders, and clergy. And there, amidst the chaos, the court.

They made him wait. One day. Two. Four. He barely ate, drank from wells, slept on straw. Then finally – a messenger: "The queen receives you."

He entered the tent. Isabella was dressed in gold, Ferdinand beside her, cool as steel. Columbus knelt, then spoke. Not with reverence, but with anger, with passion.

He spoke of the West, of wealth, of a kingdom for God. He spoke of spheres, of currents, of birds that point the way. He spoke like someone who wants to stake everything.

The courtiers whispered, some laughed. Ferdinand looked bored. But Isabella— she remained silent.

Then she asked, "And if you're wrong, Admiral?" Columbus smiled wearily. "Then I am the man who was wrong because he believed."

She looked at him for a long time. "You ask for much: ships, men, titles, a share of the profits." "All I ask is that you allow me to prove that the sky is bigger than your maps."

Silence.

Then she waved. "We'll consult."

He left the tent, the wind was cool. Waiting again.

Days turned into weeks. They told him the king wanted to save money, the treasuries were empty. Others said they thought he was crazy. He sat outside, alone, next to a tent full of soldiers singing songs of heroism they themselves didn't believe in. He drank their wine, slept among them, talked about the sea. Some listened, others laughed. But a few nodded. "If you go, take me with you," one said. Columbus smiled. "If I may go, I'll take the whole damn world with me."

Then, one morning, the message: Rejected.

They handed him the letter. "His Majesty thanks you. But the costs are too high. The benefits too uncertain."

He read it twice. Then he crumpled it up. "Too high," he muttered. "How much does a dream cost?"

He left the camp. Back on the street. Alone again.

He headed toward France. Perhaps, he thought, they'd listen better there. But inside, he was empty. All those years, those words, those bills—for another no.

He lay at night under the stars, the wind blew across the plain, and he thought the sea had become quiet. Perhaps even it had stopped speaking to him.

He fell asleep, his head on his parchments. In the morning, a rider woke him. "Columbus!" he cried. "Stop! The queen commands you to return!" He blinked. "Return?" "She's changed her mind. The treasures of Granada have been sold. She wants you to leave."

Columbus sat up. His heart was pounding. He laughed—a harsh, disbelieving laugh. "Finally, heaven has shown mercy," he said.

He stood up, picked up his cards, dusted off his trousers, and grinned. "Then let's go conquer the world."

He returned to Santa Fe, dusty, tired, but with a grin that remained like a scar. The queen had changed his mind, and that meant everything. He wasn't yet rich, not powerful, not at his goal, but he was finally no longer a nobody.

The sun was burning as he entered the camp, and the soldiers who had laughed at him weeks before stared after him as if he had risen from the dead. Columbus went straight to the treasurer's tent, the old parchments under his arm, his boots untied, his eyes glowing. He spoke, he demanded, and this time they listened.

Three ships, he said, three damned piles of planks would be enough to change fate. People looked at him as if he were possessed, but obsession was cheaper than reason, and Spain had just been through war—so why not pay the next fool who might find the world's gold?

They sat down together: Columbus, the scribes, the courtiers, the treasurer, a few priests who swore by God while counting the numbers. He demanded a lot:

the title *Admiral of the Ocean*, ten percent of the profits, the right to be viceroy over anything he might find. They laughed, of course they laughed.

But then they thought about it. If he fails, they lose nothing. If he wins, they get rich. So they gave him the dream—but with shackles. And Columbus, the old dog, took them.

He signed the treaties in ink that smelled of blood and looked at the king. "You will not forget me," he said. Ferdinand just nodded, knowing he would. Isabella, however, looked at him as if seeing something she both feared and admired. "May God go with you," she said. He smiled. "I'd rather take the wind."

Outside, the sun waited. The dust danced in the air like the ash of old wars, and Columbus sensed that this wasn't a victory, but a deal with the devil. But the devil had ships.

He walked through the camp, past drunken soldiers and monks talking about penance, smelling of wine. He thought of all those who had laughed at him—in Lisbon, Córdoba, Salamanca. They would soon curse his name, not because he had failed, but because he was right.

In the shade of a tent, he saw the soldiers' children playing, throwing stones, shouting, laughing. And he thought: That's how it all begins—with games, with stones, with noise. Except that some never forget the noise.

That evening, he sat alone on a hill, looking down at Santa Fe. Torches glowed like wounds in the darkness. He had the contract, the consent, the permission. And yet he felt empty. Perhaps, he thought, that was the curse of all dreamers—that the moment they get what they want is the moment they realize it's never enough.

He took the wine cup and drank. The sky above him was clear, and somewhere out there lay the west—the direction that had cost him his life and given him meaning.

He grinned. "All right, you old bastard of an ocean," he muttered, "now I'm going to get you."

And down in the camp, where the horses snorted like shadows, the wind flickered briefly, as if the sea itself had answered.

The treaty was barely dry when the next battle began. Paper meant nothing without wood, sail, and men foolish enough to follow it. Columbus rode to

Palos, a nest of salt, misery, and drunkenness, where every other man was a sailor and the rest lived off the sailors' mistakes. The harbor stank of seaweed and despair, and somewhere in between, his future waited, dirty, rusty, half-dead.

He entered the tavern on the quay. In the corner, two sailors were playing cards, one of them coughing blood. The innkeeper was wiping with a rag that spread more dirt than it removed. Columbus ordered wine, bad wine, of course, and asked for men who weren't yet tired of the sea. The innkeeper laughed, a high, dry laugh. "You want to go west, Genoese? Then you don't need men, you need fools." - "I'll take what I can get," said Columbus.

He spoke to fishermen, smugglers, deserters. Most listened until they understood where he was going. Then they laughed or drank faster. A few stayed. A few who had had enough of life to spit in the eye of death. Among them were the Pinzón brothers—experienced, suspicious, but wise enough to smell the risk that might be worth it. Martín Alonso, with the calm of a man who had already survived too many storms, and Vicente, silent, with cold eyes. They listened, talked quietly among themselves, and at the end the older one said, "If you really want to go, we'll go with you." Columbus nodded, and for a moment the sea was completely still.

The three ships came together like something out of a bad dream. *Niña*, small, tough, a workhorse. The *Pinta*, faster, but capricious like a woman who knows too much. And the *Santa Maria*, the flagship, heavy, tired, but proud—like Columbus himself. They weren't built for glory. They were built to survive. Nothing more.

While the ships were being repaired, Columbus toured the city. Children ran after him, shouting "Admiral! Admiral!" – a word he hardly dared to believe. The women looked at him as if he were about to die and smiled sadly. The men shook their heads. "He's sailing into the abyss," they said. "Or into history." No one knew which was worse.

In the evening, he sat in the tavern again, the parchment next to his cup, and the conversations around him were full of mockery. He heard everything and said nothing. Only once, when a young sailor called out, "What are you doing out there, Genoese?"—he replied, "The end of fear."

He slept badly, dreaming of waves crashing over him, of stars flickering like burning candles. In the morning, he woke up drenched in sweat, the sky gray, the sea calm as an animal waiting to bite. He went to the harbor, saw the sails

being mended, men shouting curses, and barrels rolling. And amidst the noise, he knew: This was no longer a dream. This was the limit.

The last days in Palos were a jumble of prayers, threats, and bargaining. Some wanted to go, others tried to escape before they were hired. Columbus went from ship to ship, talking, shouting, persuading, begging. Sometimes he promised gold, sometimes salvation. The main thing was that they came aboard.

The evening before departure, he stood alone on the jetty. The sky was red as blood, and the sea was breathing heavily. He held his hand to the wood of the *Santa Maria* and whispered, "Don't make it difficult for me, old lady." The wind smelled of farewell and anger.

He thought of all the places where he'd been laughed at. Lisbon, Salamanca, Santa Fe. All the faces that had told him to worry, he didn't know anything. And now he stood here, at the edge of the world, ready to prove them wrong.

The bells of Palos struck midnight, and somewhere a priest prayed. Columbus laughed softly, almost amiably. "God can stay where he is," he murmured. "I'll find my own heaven."

At dawn, they cast off. Men, ships, doubts. The ropes taut, sails filled with wind, and the shore slipped away like a memory one can't quite shake off. Columbus stood on deck, his hand on the railing, his gaze to the west. No cheers, no trumpet blast, only the creaking of the wood and the breath of the ocean.

He knew they thought he was crazy. But crazy people are the only ones who get ahead.

He saw the horizon changing, slowly, like a wound opening. Then he said quietly, almost to himself: "Now the damn dream begins."

And the West responded with silence.

Cards, debts and cheap wine

The world was round, but Columbus felt angular. The sea hadn't swallowed him, not yet, but the nights on the Atlantic tore at his thoughts like rats at a piece of bread. The men were restless, the wind capricious, the supplies poor. And the wine—the damned wine—tasted of tin and fear. Columbus drank anyway. He drank because water rotted faster than dreams, and because dreams were hard to digest without something to wash them down.

He sat in his cabin, poring over maps that had long since become more hope than truth. Lines, crooked and shaky, drawn on parchment swollen with moisture. He traced them, again and again, as if he could trace the West. The walls creaked, the lantern flickered, and somewhere above, the men laughed at him. They called him *El Loco*, the madman. And he knew they were right.

He calculated, cursed, and prayed. The miles no longer matched his records, the current was stronger than expected, and the wind was coming from the wrong direction. But what was right in this world? He took another sip, stared at the map, and said quietly, "If you're going to deceive me, old friend, at least take me somewhere no one has been before."

It was loud up on deck. The crew argued, played dice, and spat overboard. They hated him, but they needed him. He was the only one who believed he knew where they were. And faith was all they had.

He came up, his shirt open, his beard unkempt, his gaze both empty and burning. The sky was gray, the sea almost black. There were no more seagulls to be seen. Signs of life vanished like memories. One of the men, a young Andalusian with bad teeth, stepped forward. "Admiral," he said mockingly, "when will your India arrive?" Columbus looked at him, silent, then grinned. "If you stop talking, maybe we'll hear." There was no laughter. The wind blew stubbornly.

At night, when everyone was asleep, he heard the creaking of the planks and the whispering of the water. Sometimes he thought he heard voices. Not from the men, not from God—from the sea. It spoke in a language without words that only he understood. And what it said was never friendly.

He remembered the days before departure. Palos, the debts, the stench of the tavern. How many promises had he made? How many lies had he told to start this damned adventure? He had promised gold, wealth, land, glory. But the

only thing he had truly sought was certainty—that the world didn't lie, that it was round, that he was more than a ghost in the alleys of Lisbon.

The debts weren't letting him go. The Pinzóns had given money, the crown had hesitated, and Columbus knew that every glance at him carried the question: *What if you fail?* He was a man who couldn't go back because there was no going back.

He stood at the railing, looking at the waves crashing against each other like cold hands. The sky was clear, the wind was shifting, and suddenly—a moment of calm. No sound, no rocking, just the endless blue. Columbus felt the sea breathing. And in that breath lay something that sounded like understanding. Perhaps that was the reason he never stopped: The sea understood him, even if no human did.

He went back downstairs, continued drawing, calculating, writing notes, numbers, words that barely meant anything to him anymore. His course lay somewhere between faith and delusion.

Later, in the evening light, he shared the wine with Martín Alonso Pinzón. The older sailor looked at him, suspiciously but with a hint of respect. "You really believe in this West, don't you?" he asked. Columbus nodded. "I don't think so. I know." Pinzón laughed dryly. "That's what everyone says before they drown."

Columbus raised his cup. "Then let's drink to that."

They drank. Two men who cursed the sea in different ways. One because it never let him go. The other because it hadn't swallowed him yet.

As night fell, Columbus stood on deck again. The stars reflected in the water, and somewhere out there, between darkness and dream, lay what he was seeking—or what would destroy him.

He whispered, "Cards, debt, cheap wine—that's my sacred triangle." Then he laughed, rough, tired, honest. "And damn, maybe that's enough to find a new world."

The days dragged on like old chewing gum. The wind came, went, and came again, and with it the men's moods. One cursed, another prayed, a third vomited over the railing. Columbus wrote numbers, saw stars that were of little help, and pretended he knew what he was doing. But deep down, he knew: The sea laughs at plans.

The supplies deteriorated. The wine thinned, the water murkier, the bread harder. A sailor found maggots in the barrel and said they were at least alive. Columbus pretended not to hear. He couldn't afford to doubt, or they would eat him. Men are like sharks—they smell blood, especially that of their leaders.

He heard them whispering at night. About mutiny, about homecoming, about the madman who had led them to nothingness. They called him *the priest without God*. He smiled at that. If they knew how much he no longer believed in anything, they would throw him overboard to make room for their cowardice.

He went into the cabin, drank wine that tasted of metal, and looked at the maps. Lines, dots, none of it had any weight on this sea. The Earth wasn't a sphere, he sometimes thought, but an open wound. And he was the idiot who dug into it with his bare hands.

He wrote in his logbook as if it were a confession. *The wind is blowing from the northwest. Men are restless. Trust is dwindling. I myself... continue to believe.* He wrote the last one every time, even if he didn't feel it.

Pinzón came in, the old man with the eyes of a man with too much salt in his soul. "The men are talking, Christopher. They say you're leading us to hell." Columbus laughed softly. "Then they should pray I'm right." Pinzón shook his head. "You're playing with lives as if they were dice." "They are dice," said Columbus. "Only one of them is called God and the other Chance."

The next day, no wind. Only sun, hot, heavy, and motionless. The sails hung like limp tongues. The sea was smooth as glass, and nothing moved except the men's gazes. They sweated, cursed, and fought out of boredom. One slashed another in the arm with a knife, just to watch the blood flow. Columbus saw it, but said nothing. Violence was at least a sign of life.

He lay awake at night. The wood creaked, and voices buzzed in his head. *You fool, you believe in a line on paper.—You are not looking for anything, you are only fleeing.—You are not Columbus, you are proof that dreams kill.* He drank to quiet her voice. It didn't help.

He remembered his debts in Spain, the faces of the creditors, the cold eyes of the officials who said: "If you fail, you will owe us something, Admiral." He hated the word *admiral*. It sounded hollow, empty, false in that stinking ship's belly. He was no admiral. He was a beggar with a compass.

Once a sailor came to him, young and with trembling hands. "I'm scared," he said. Columbus looked at him. "Then you're not dead yet." The boy nodded and left. He knew that sometimes fear was the only thing that kept you awake.

On the seventh day without wind, a barrel tipped over. The wine flowed across the deck, and the men watched as if their hearts were pouring out. One began to cry, another laughed hysterically. Columbus stepped up, scooped up the remains of the wine, and drank directly from the bottom. "To us," he said. No one responded.

Later, in the darkness, he sat on deck and looked at the stars. They were the only ones who didn't laugh at him. Perhaps, he thought, stars are just holes in the sky through which one can see the truth. And the truth was: he had no idea if he would ever find land.

But he would continue because giving up was worse than dying.

He looked at the horizon, black, empty, endless. "Cards, debts, cheap wine," he whispered, "and a crew that hates me. If that isn't a divine plan, I don't know what is."

He laughed, loudly, defiantly, and the sea was silent. It didn't like jokes.

The wind returned, but not with salvation—more like a drunk who'd forgotten where he was. The sails billowed, the ships creaked, and the men cursed with a rage deeper than hunger. Columbus stood on deck, his hair matted with salt, his face burned, and looked west. Always west. The sky was so clear you'd think God himself was smiling—but God had long since gone overboard.

The men talked behind his back, loud enough for him to hear. "The fool is leading us to our deaths," "the sea will devour us," "we are cursed." One swore he had heard a voice coming from the waves at night. Another said the sea was too still, too smooth, as if it were only a skin over the abyss. Columbus listened but pretended not to. He knew: fear was a poison that worked faster than hunger.

He wrote in his logbook again, with a shaky hand, the ink smudged. *Day thirty-seven. Men restless. Signs from the sky – nothing. Wind light, but from a good direction. I'm holding course.* He put down his pen, drank the rest of the wine, which tasted of lead, and stared at the wall. It vibrated softly, like a heart.

At night, Pinzón came to him. The old sailor smelled of sweat and salt, his eyes gleaming like cold iron. "Christopher," he said, "the men are losing their faith."

Columbus nodded. "Then let them believe something else. Me, for example." Pinzón looked at him, serious, without anger, only with weariness. "You know what they're whispering." - "Of course I know. They want to go home." - "And?" Columbus smiled thinly. "They're welcome to go home. West."

The next day, a seagull was found dead on the deck. A bad sign, the men said. But Columbus took it, looked at it quietly, and said, "If it comes here, land will follow." They didn't believe him, but he spoke it with a conviction that was stronger than logic. And sometimes that's exactly the trick: You say it until even the wind believes it.

He began to dream. Dreams of light, of water, of voices calling him. A woman with golden skin spoke to him in a language without words. She said: *Further, further, you are near.* He woke up drenched in sweat, laughed, drank, and wrote in his logbook: *Sign of divine confirmation.* He knew it was just wine, madness, or both. But what did it matter? Every prophet is drunk.

The days became strange. The sky remained bright until late into the night, the sea glowed green, almost alive. One of the sailors said the sea was breathing. Another swore he saw faces beneath the surface. Columbus listened to them, nodded, and said quietly, "Then look away. The sea doesn't like spectators."

The wind picked up again. The men sang, shouted, laughed, and cried. One fell overboard, and no one held him. Columbus watched until the water closed. No prayer, no word. Only silence. The sea had taken its toll. And deep inside, Columbus thought: *Better him than me.*

At night he climbed onto the deck of the *Santa Maria*. The sky was black, the stars hard as nails. He felt the wind, cold, tough, alive. He whispered, "Show me something, damn it." A wave slapped against the hull, and he laughed, loud, hoarse. "All right, you bitch. I'm not giving in."

He no longer knew whether he was searching or fleeing. Whether he was fighting against the sea or against himself. But he knew that giving up would be worse than any hell. And somewhere deep inside, he sensed that they were closer.

In the morning a scream came from the *Pinta*. "Land! Land!" – and for a moment everything was silent. Columbus jumped to his feet, his heart racing, his hands shaking. He ran to the deck, looked out – and there was nothing. Only clouds, shaped like promises. The men cursed, spat, and screamed. Columbus stood still, staring into the void, and said quietly: "It was close. It was damn close."

Pinzón came to him. "They'll kill you soon, Christopher." Columbus smiled, his eyes never leaving the horizon. "Then let them. But not until I smell land."

He stayed at the railing, the sun above him, the sea before him, and the world below him. A man who refused to die before proving to himself that the dream was real.

He raised the cup, which barely contained any wine, and drank the last sip. "To cards, debts, and cheap wine," he murmured. "That's my God. And he'll soon show me land."

The sky burned white. No wind, no shade, just sun, salt, and sweat. The men had fallen silent. Not that nervous, brief silence that passes, but the great, leaden silence before a storm—or a mutiny. Columbus felt it at his back. He heard them whispering, saw them gathering in small groups, turning away when he came. The sea was calm, but their minds were churning.

The barrels stank, the water was rotten. The bread was hard as stone, the wine almost like vinegar. One sailor said God had forgotten them. Another said God had never known them. Columbus laughed, and that made them even angrier. "If God has forgotten us," he said, "then we can do whatever we want." But they wanted only one thing: home.

At night, footsteps could be heard across the deck, knives being drawn and then sheathed. He hardly slept anymore. Every sound sounded like a betrayal. Even the wind, when it blew, seemed to whisper: *They'll throw you soon, Admiral.* He drank more, talked less, and when he did talk, he sounded like a preacher who had long since realized that no one was listening anymore.

On the third day without wind, Pinzón came into the cabin. Sweat on his brow, his eyes tired but sharp. "Christopher," he said quietly, "they're talking openly. They want to turn back. Perhaps tonight." Columbus looked at him for a long time, as if he needed to translate what he had said. Then he said calmly: "If they turn back, they'll leave without me." "They won't take you," Pinzón replied. "They'll throw you." Columbus grinned. "Then I'll fly."

Pinzón slammed his fist on the table. "Damn it, Christoph, this isn't a game!" "I know. It's history."

There was a loud argument up on deck. Screams, curses, the crash of a barrel. Columbus stepped out; the wind barely stirred, but the mood was stormy. The men stood in groups, each with anger on his face. One stepped forward, a

broad-shouldered Galician with scars and a blank stare. "We're going back, Admiral. Tonight. Either with you or without you."

Columbus looked at him, calmly, almost kindly. "If you turn back, you'll die more slowly. If you continue, perhaps more quickly. But at least as men." The words hung in the air like sparks. The Galician stepped closer. "We are no longer men, we are dead men on leave."

Another cried, "He wants to sacrifice us for his glory!" Columbus raised his hand, and suddenly he was no longer the beggar from Genoa, no longer the fool, but a man with his eyes on the fire. "Glory?" he said. "I have nothing. No money, no home, no friends. Only this." He pointed to the horizon. "This is all I have left. So if you want to kill me—do it. But you'll never know how close you were."

Silence. Only the creaking of the mast, the slapping of the ropes. Then Pinzón stepped forward. "Three more days," he said loudly. "Three days, and if we don't see anything by then, we'll turn back." The men grumbled, but they nodded. Three days—that was hope in installments.

Columbus looked at him, both grateful and angry. Three days' grace. Three days to be right or perish.

He retreated to his cabin. His hands trembled. He took the logbook and wrote: *Day 70. Mutiny threatens. Three days of hope. I'm calm. Too calm.* Then he put the pen aside, drank, and whispered: "If I don't make it now, it will all have been a drunken stupor."

Night came with heavy clouds. The sea was dark, the air thick, as if it were holding its breath. The men barely slept, whispering and praying. Columbus stood alone on deck, staring at the horizon, as black as his thoughts.

He thought of his wife, his children, the queen's face, the looks of those who had called him "fool." If he failed now, everything they had said would be true. If he succeeded, the world would be false. He grinned. "Then I'd rather have the world."

A gentle wind arose. The sea shimmered strangely, greenish, almost luminous. One of the men pointed. "Witchcraft!" he exclaimed. But Columbus said, "No. Signs." And he meant it.

He returned to the cabin and slept restlessly for a few hours, dreaming of fire and land that smelled like prayer. In the morning, a scream woke him. A real one. Not madness, not wind.

He ran out, the sun was burning, the sea was calm – but on the horizon... something. Something that wasn't water.

A dark stripe.

The men stood silent, no one spoke. Pinzón raised his hand and whispered, "Land?"

Columbus looked out, his eyes wide, his heart racing. He smiled. "Perhaps," he said, "perhaps the dream is starting to hurt now."

The sea held its breath, and everyone with it. No one spoke, no one cursed, not even the wood creaked. Only the distant glimmer on the horizon, small, barely visible, but there. Columbus stood at the railing, his fingers white, his gaze unwavering. It was as if he refused to blink, afraid the dream might dissolve into mist again. Pinzón stepped beside him, his eyes narrowed. "That's land," he said, quietly, almost reverently. Columbus nodded. "Or another joke from God."

The men approached, one by one, staring out, whispering prayers they had forgotten. Even those who had hated him now looked at him differently—no longer as a madman, but as someone who had conjured the impossible out of thin air. One wept. Another laughed like a madman. And Columbus? He remained silent. He felt nothing but exhaustion.

The sun burned lower, the horizon tinged red. Land or cloud, island or illusion—it didn't matter. There was hope, and that was enough. At night, he let no one sleep. They kept watch, staring into the darkness, as if the land might disappear if they closed their eyes.

Columbus sat in his cabin, his logbook open, his wine almost empty. *Day 71. Signs. I think we've made it. Or the sea is playing its final game.* He continued writing, repeating the same sentence: *Country. Country. Country.* As if he had to nail down the word before it escapes.

In the morning, it was clearer. A green stripe, solid, clear, real. Palm trees, coast, light. The West, which had haunted his mind for years, finally had a physical body. Columbus went on deck, the sun blinding, and the men cheered.

Loud, raw, honest. They hugged each other, shouted, laughed. Some fell to their knees. And Columbus? He smiled—not in joy, but in defiance.

He turned to Pinzón. "I told you." The old man nodded, slowly. "Yes. But I wish you'd been wrong." Columbus grinned. "Wrong is for people who dare nothing."

He rang the bell. Three times. The sound echoed across the water, like a scream after years of silence. He looked up at the sky and muttered, "Do you see that, you old bastard? I did it." Whether he meant God or the sea, no one knew. Perhaps he didn't know himself.

The men celebrated. They drank, they danced, they talked of gold, of riches, of returning home as heroes. But Columbus withdrew. He was empty. He had accomplished it, but he felt nothing but tiredness. He thought of all the faces that had laughed at him—Lisbon, Salamanca, Santa Fe. They would now recite his name like a prayer.

He saw himself in the polished metal mirror. A face full of wrinkles, salt, and dirt. No hero. Just a man who had hoped for too long.

As the sun set, he stood on deck again. The coast lay there, close, within reach, but he didn't move. The wind carried the scent of earth, of flowers, of something he hadn't smelled in years. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. "So this is what the West smells like," he whispered.

Then he said quietly, almost sadly: "Now the next war begins."

They rowed in the dawn, the sea smooth as oil, the air heavy with the smell of salt, mold, and fear. The men were silent, each preoccupied with their own thoughts. Some prayed, others simply stared into space. Only Columbus spoke quietly to himself, like someone unsure whether he was awake or dreaming. "It smells of earth," he murmured, "of something that isn't ours."

The boats glided onto the beach. White sand, palm trees, birds crying as if they knew something irrevocable was beginning here. Columbus disembarked, barefoot, the water cool, the ground firm. He stood there, looked around, and breathed deeply. No trumpets, no thunder, no sign from the heavens. Only the wind blowing in his face, as if to say: *Okay, you did it – now what?*

He pulled the Spanish flag out of the boat and planted it in the sand. A few men fell to their knees and kissed the ground. One laughed, another wept. Columbus stopped, his hand on the hilt of his dagger. There was no triumph in

his eyes, only a quiet madness. "In the name of God and their Majesties," he said, "I take possession of this land."

But his voice sounded empty. As if he were telling a joke that only he understood.

Then they came—the first. People with dark skin, bare shoulders, shining eyes. They stood at the edge of the palm trees, curious, calm, almost friendly. One stepped forward, held out something—fruit, perhaps a gesture, perhaps a test. Columbus looked at him, took it, nodded, and said, "Friends." The man didn't understand a word, but he smiled.

The other sailors whispered, gossiped, and looked at each other as if they'd encountered ghosts. One said, "Are those the Indians?" Columbus nodded. "Of course. We're in India." The sentence hung in the air like a prayer no one believes, but everyone repeats because it sounds better than the truth.

They moved through the thicket, saw huts, smoke, and simple tools. Children ran away, women watched, men stood still. Columbus led the way, his hand always on his sword. The air was hot, sweet, and strange. He felt like he was in a dream that began beautifully but already carried the scent of blood.

That evening, they sat on the beach. Fire, fish, laughter. The men talked about the way home, about fame, about the gold that must be hidden somewhere in this land. Columbus drank, stared into the flames, and said nothing. Only one thought swirled in his head: *I have arrived – and yet I am still a stranger.*

Pinzón sat down next to him. "You did it, Christopher. You're the man who made the world bigger." Columbus grinned wearily. "Or was crazy enough to make it smaller."

He was silent, listening to the sea tapping against the shore like a clock. Every wave said: *Now it's just beginning.*

He took his logbook and wrote: *Enter the country. People are peaceful. Anything is possible.* Then he put down his pen, drank the last sip of wine, and whispered: "Anything is possible—that is the most dangerous sentence a person can say."

The night was warm, the men slept on the beach, and somewhere in the darkness, birds called, as if they knew that peace would soon be over. Columbus looked up at the sky, the stars both strange and close, and thought: *I did it. But at what cost?*

He laughed quietly, lay back in the sand, and said, "Cards, debt, cheap wine—and now a new world. If that isn't a bad joke, I don't know what is."

The sea answered with silence.

The sun over the new world wasn't light, it was a knife. The men crawled out of their tents, their eyes red, their mouths dry, and no one knew what to feel. They had found land, yes – but no gold, no wonders, no cities of marble. Only sand, trees, people who smiled and understood nothing. Columbus stood at the edge of the beach, looked at the locals by their huts, and knew that this was not paradise, but a mirror. A mirror in which he no longer recognized himself.

He watched them move, laugh, eat. Everything about them was simple, calm, matter-of-fact. They needed no maps, no kings, no damned treaties. They belonged to this land, like waves to the sea. Columbus envied them for a moment. Then he remembered who he was—and that envy is the first sign of weakness.

At midday, Pinzón came to him, a piece of gold in his hand, no bigger than a fingernail. "Found it at one of them," he said. "Just jewelry, but real." Columbus took it, looked at it against the sun, and something dark flickered in his eyes. "Gold," he said quietly, "so there's more." Pinzón nodded. "Perhaps. Or perhaps that's all." Columbus closed his hand around the piece, tightly, as if it would otherwise slip from his grasp. "Then we'll find everything."

He had the men search. They dug, asked questions, threatened. The locals gave, laughed, and pointed to other islands. They didn't understand the strangers' greed. Columbus always smiled, nodded, and thanked them—and thought only of maps, lines, and routes. If there was gold here, then there was power here too. And power was the only language kings understood.

In the evening, the men returned with shells, fruit, and a few shiny stones. No wealth, only promises. One was furious and threw everything into the fire. "We have been betrayed!" Columbus remained silent. He drank, looked into the fire, and said simply: "This is only the beginning." But deep down, he knew that the beginning always contains the end.

The days passed. They built a cross, raised the flag, and prayed. Columbus spoke loudly of the glory of Spain, of God, of discovery. But his voice sounded hollow. He knew he was no explorer. He was a debtor with luck. A gambler who had hit the jackpot and yet knew the stakes were too high.

The locals brought gifts, food, and small pieces of gold. The men became greedier, louder, and more brutal. One hit a local just to see if he would resist. He didn't. That made things worse. Columbus ordered calm, but his words bounced off like arrows against stone.

He wrote in the logbook: *People friendly. Land fertile. Signs of gold. God gracious.* Then he put the pen down, rubbed his eyes, and laughed softly. "Good heavens," he murmured. "If he sees this, he'll laugh himself to death."

At night, he sat on the beach, alone, the sky clear, the sea calm. He heard the waves repeating themselves like a truth no one wants to hear. He thought of Spain, of Isabella, of the promises. How easy it had been to say words, how difficult to keep them.

A local man quietly approached and sat down next to him. Not a word. Just two men staring out into the sea, each in his own direction. The stranger handed him a piece of fruit. Columbus took it, bit into it, sweet, fresh, alive. For a moment, everything was silent. No war, no gold, no God—just the sea and the taste of something real.

Then the man stood up and walked away again. Columbus watched him and thought: *Maybe they are the discoverers – and we are the ones who were lost.*

He sat for a long time, drinking the last of the wine from the cup he had brought from Palos. The wine was warm, salty from the sea, but it tasted of memories.

"Cards, debts, cheap wine," he said quietly, "and now a new world. Maybe it was all just a joke, and I'm the only one who didn't get it."

The wind blew, gently, almost friendly. He closed his eyes. The sea was silent. And somewhere far away, the dream was already beginning to rot.

The man who talked too much

The return was louder than the discovery. Trumpets, bells, fluttering flags, faces staring at him as if he had fallen from the sky. Columbus stood on deck, his hands sore, his hair salty, and looked at the coast of Europe, which seemed like a bad joke to him. He had found the West, yes, but what had he really brought? Sand, stories, a few golden crumbs, and people smiling before they died. Yet that was enough to make him a hero.

In Palos, the crowd screamed his name, "Admiral!" "Explorer!" "Messenger of God!" He grinned, waved, played his part. Inside, he was empty. He had expected more noise, more emotion. Instead, he felt like an actor who, after the last act, realizes that no one has understood the play.

He rode to Barcelona, accompanied by priests, merchants, and soldiers. The streets were filled with people who wanted to see gold, hear stories of miracles, and receive blessings. Columbus talked. Too much. He spoke of islands, of wealth, of obedient peoples just waiting to be baptized. He spoke of paradises, of rivers glittering like liquid metal. He knew they were lies—or half-truths, and that's sometimes worse. But lies sold better.

In the hall of the royal palace, he knelt before Isabella and Ferdinand. He presented gifts: gold flakes, feathered headdresses, parrots, and two natives with downcast eyes. The queen smiled gently, the king nodded. "You have done great things, Admiral," said Ferdinand. Columbus raised his head. "I only did what had to be done." He meant it, but it sounded like arrogance, and perhaps it was.

After the reception came the wine. Lots of wine. He drank, laughed, told the same stories over and over again, always bigger, always smoother. He talked until no one was listening anymore, but he kept talking. Pinzón was deathly ill, the other officers withdrew, but Columbus kept talking. About new voyages, about kingdoms just waiting to be discovered. About gold, about God, about fate.

He lay awake at night. The ceiling above him was too low, the wine too sweet, the voices in his head too loud. *They will forget you*, they said. *They will take everything from you*. And he knew they were right. Spain only loved its heroes as long as they danced. After that, they were made fools of.

He began writing letters. Long, angry, desperate letters. To the king, to the queen, to God. He wrote that he had seen more than any man before him. That

he had brought a new world. That he deserved more—more ships, more power, more faith. The answer never came.

People called him "the man who talks too much." In the taverns, they said he was an imposter, a lucky man who had ridden a storm others had created. Columbus laughed at this, but it was a thin, brittle laugh. He knew they were already tearing him apart, piece by piece.

Prayers were said for him in the church, but no one listened. The priests saw him as a tool, the merchants as a risk, the Crown as a problem. He was too loud, too convinced, too lively.

Sometimes he would go to the harbor at night, look at the sea, and talk to it as if it were an old friend. "They don't believe you're real," he said. "To them, you're just a story." The sea responded with waves that shimmered in the moonlight. "Perhaps you are too," it seemed to say.

Columbus drank more, wrote more, talked more. He told everyone who didn't run away that this was just the beginning. That he would bring more—gold, lands, glory. But there was weariness in his eyes. He was like a boxer who keeps fighting after the bell, having forgotten that the fight is over.

In the end, he sat alone in a room full of cards. Lines, circles, numbers everywhere. He looked at them as if they were old lovers. He touched them, whispered, "You are the only ones who will never betray me." Then he took the cup, drank, and laughed.

"I've found the world," he said. "But no one wants to see it."

And outside, behind the walls, the sea roared. Like laughter.

The glory didn't last a whole season. No sooner had the jubilation died down than it reeked of mistrust again. Spain had grown tired of its own legends. The crown had its heroes, but heroes were expensive, and Columbus was as expensive as sin. The courtiers whispered, the priests smiled falsely, and the merchants wanted proof—gold, numbers, markets, not stories of palm trees and friendly naked men.

Columbus sensed it in the conversations, in the glances that avoided him. First they asked politely, then cautiously, then mockingly. "You've found land, Admiral," they said, "but where is the treasure?" He replied: "The land itself is the treasure." They laughed. He smiled along, but something was brewing inside.

He wrote letters again, pages long, demanding new ships, promising more wealth, more faith, more world. The replies came late or not at all. And when they did come, they sounded polite but cold—as if someone had decided to let him die kindly.

He began to see enemies everywhere. In the taverns, in the alleys, in the faces of the men who had once called him "Admiral." Pinzón was dead, the crew scattered, the heroes of the West forgotten. Only Columbus remained, and that made him dangerous. A man who knew too much and talked too loudly was a bad investment in Spain.

He was invited to receptions to be displayed as a curiosity. An old sailor who had survived the end of the world, but not the end of his own ego. He told his tale again and again, with wine in his hand, his eyes burning. And each time the story grew bigger, louder, more wonderful—and a little further from the truth.

He noticed it himself. But he couldn't stop. Talking was the only thing left. When he remained silent, the sea returned, in his head, with the voices, the screams, the waves whispering to him: *You're not out there anymore. You're dead and you just don't know it yet.*

At night, he lay awake, hearing the wind outside and thinking he smelled of salt again. Sometimes he thought the walls of the house were swaying like a ship. Then he got up, walked barefoot across the room, drunk, cursing, and searched for his cards. He spread them out on the floor, on the table, everywhere. Lines, paths, islands, circles everywhere. He spoke to them as if they were old friends. "You were real," he said. "I saw you. You answered me."

In the morning, the servants found him like this—asleep among cards, ink on his hands, his cup tipped over. He looked like a man dreaming, unaware that the dream had long since consumed him.

He continued to the court, talking to everyone who would receive him, and there were fewer and fewer of them. Isabella still listened to him, patiently, wearily. Ferdinand looked right through him, as if he could already see the end of his usefulness. Columbus sensed he was on the wrong side of history. He was no longer the discoverer. He was the admonisher, the guilty one, the man who cost too much.

One evening, he stood on the balcony of his lodgings in Seville. The sky was red, the sea far away, but he saw it nonetheless. "They don't believe me anymore," he said. "But they believe in the gold. And that's what I'll bring them."

He turned around, went inside, took pen and parchment, and wrote with a hard hand: *I demand a second expedition. Twenty ships. I will bring you wealth you cannot imagine.*

He knew this was madness. But madness was the only thing keeping him alive.

The next day he delivered the letter. Weeks later, the reply came. Short, cold, with a royal seal: *Their Majesties grant a second voyage.*

Columbus smiled when he read it. No jubilation, no pride. Just that tired, broken grin of a man who knows he's already lost, but still tries again.

"The man who talks too much," he muttered, "always gets a second chance. So he can fail utterly."

Then he raised his glass, drank, and laughed – loudly, lonely, and the sea laughed with him.

The second voyage began not as an adventure, but as a regret. Too many ships, too many men, too many expectations. Columbus looked at them, the twenty black wooden bodies, packed with greed, faith, and fear, and knew: This was no longer a dream, this was administration. Spain hadn't sent him to discover—they had sent him to collect.

He stood on deck of the *Marigalante*. The wind was warm, the sea calm, and everything felt wrong. No longing, no whisper of the ocean, only noise. Soldiers, priests, officials, merchants—each with their own gold on their minds. The wine was better, the barrels full, but the taste was the same: metal and guilt.

Columbus drank, talked, and planned. He wrote orders and issued instructions, but no one really listened. The admiral was now merely a symbol, a flag with a beard and dark circles under his eyes. At night, he lay awake, listening to the sea and wondering why it was so quiet this time. No voices, no comfort, only silence. Perhaps, he thought, the sea only speaks to men who can still dream.

Weeks passed. The ships reached Hispaniola, the place that had once seemed like a promise. Now it smelled of death, of smoke, of people who had seen too much. The old camps were dilapidated, the men who had stayed behind were sick or insane. They spoke of strife, hunger, and violence. Columbus listened, nodded, and drank. "We'll bring order," he said. But order was just another word for control.

He had a fortress built, a city, a symbol. The men worked, cursed, and died. The locals watched, silent, their faces like stone. At first they helped, then they fled. Columbus sent troops after them. "We must convert them," he said. But the men only understood "to capture."

Gold was suddenly everything. Every conversation revolved around it. Where, how much, who had it? Columbus wrote reports, full of lies and hope, and sent them to Spain. *Immense wealth, undiscovered territories, peoples willing to believe.* Between the lines it said: *Send more men. More weapons. More mercy.*

He saw his men drinking, robbing, burning. He screamed, threatened, prayed—in vain. The dream no longer had a soul. It had become flesh, power, addiction.

At night, he went alone to the sea, barefoot, the water cool, the sky full of silence. "This is what you wanted," he told himself. "You wanted the world. Now you have it." But it tasted of ash.

He wrote again. Page after page. Words full of madness and weariness. *The men are undisciplined. The natives are unruly. The mission is in jeopardy.* Then he paused, put down his pen, and stared at his hands. They trembled. He reached for the cup, drank, and whispered, "I am the man who talks too much and no one listens."

He began baptizing the locals, hundreds, thousands. He believed this would save him. He believed in symbols, in words, in rituals. But faith had become a trade. For every baptized body, a new debt.

The men grumbled, the diseases came. Malaria, hunger, fever. The ships rotted, the wood stank, the nights were filled with screams. Columbus stood his ground, out of defiance, not strength. An admiral who didn't understand his own empire.

One night, a young officer came to him, his face pale, his eyes empty. "Admiral," he said, "we've had enough. We want to go home." Columbus looked at him, smiled wearily. "Home? Where is that?" The boy remained silent, left, and Columbus was left alone with his maps.

He drew lines again, always the same ones, like a prayer no one hears. Each line an attempt to prove to himself that he still existed.

When morning came, a wind blew from the land, damp, heavy, and strange. Columbus smelled it, and for a moment he thought the sea was whispering again. But this time he understood the words: *Anything you find will eat you.*

He smiled. "Then let's get started."

And out in the jungle, evil began to breathe quietly.

The jungle stank of blood and fever. Hispaniola was no longer a paradise, but a wound that refused to heal. The men were sick, starving, insane. Some no longer spoke, others spoke only to the heavens. Columbus walked among them like a doctor who was already dead himself. He saw what his dream had become: wood, dirt, hunger, sweat, and the slow decay of everything that had ever meant anything.

The locals hated them now. They had once smiled, but now they looked away. Those who could fled into the forest. Those who remained were forced to work, carry, and dig. Columbus said it was necessity, order, and justice. But in truth, it was just desperation disguised as power.

He continued to write reports to Spain. *Everything is good, everything is growing, everything is blooming.* Meanwhile, men died every day, in the sun, from fever, in arguments. Some turned against him, against the "Admiral of the Ocean." They called him a dictator, a madman, a heretic. Columbus heard this, nodded, and smiled. "If you only knew how right you are," he murmured.

He began to believe God was speaking to him directly. Not like before, through signs, wind, and chance—no, now with words. Clear, harsh words, in the middle of the night, when all was silent. *Christopher, they said, you are my tool.* He laughed. "A broken tool, perhaps." *Then you are perfect,* the voice answered.

He wrote it down, pages and pages, trembling, obsessed. *God speaks through me. I am chosen. I bring light into the darkness.* And as he wrote, the huts burned outside. The men searched for gold, found suffering, took women, and took lives. Columbus commanded moderation, but no one listened to him anymore. The sea was far away, and faith was a cheap excuse for greed.

One morning, a man was found hanged in a palm grove. Beside him lay a bowl of earth and a piece of gold. Someone had scrawled on it: *Enough.* Columbus saw it, nodded, and said, "Coward." But that night he dreamed of the same tree, of the rope, of the weight in his own throat.

The diseases became more severe. Men died by the dozen, the sea stank of corpses. The sun burned mercilessly, the rain came too late, too briefly, too

warmly. Supplies perished, and so did hope. Columbus wrote, prayed, and drank. In what order, no one remembered.

Pinzón was long dead. His brothers were gone. The officers began to ignore his orders. Once, a captain refused to set sail, and Columbus had him flogged. He watched, motionless, as the skin burst, and afterward said, "There must be order." But inside, he felt something inside him finally break.

He heard voices, day and night. They came from the sea, from the forest, from the faces of men. *You wanted to find gods, they said, and became one yourself. And they hate you for it.* He laughed, screamed, cried, sometimes all at once.

The priests wrote reports. *The admiral is losing his mind.* But Spain didn't want madness, it wanted results. So they continued to lie. They wrote of wealth, of progress, of faith. But in truth, Hispaniola was a ruin—a cemetery pretending to be a church.

Columbus walked through the camp, barefoot, dirty, with a blank expression. A boy brought him water, he took it, drank, and said, "Thank you, little king." The boy didn't understand, nodded, and ran away. Columbus sat down, looked at the ground, at the ants eating their way through the blood in the sand. "They are more honest than we are," he said.

In the evening, he sat alone on the beach with a cup of cheap wine that tasted of rust. He looked at the sea, black as ink, and said quietly: "I am the man who talked too much. Now the sea speaks for me."

He really heard it. A murmur, deep, steady, almost friendly. *Everything you wanted, you got,* said the sea. *And now you pay.*

Columbus nodded. "As always."

He drank the rest, threw the cup into the water, and the cup floated away – like a final thought that no one else can hear.

The sun was low when they arrived, wearing uniforms, parchments, and that cold smile that only officials have when they already know you're lost. They called it an "inspection," but it was an execution by installments. Columbus stood there, in his filthy clothes, his skin burned, his eyes dull. He nodded. They said he had too much power, too little order, too many dead. He nodded. It was all true. But no one understood why.

They read accusations, words of ink and poison. "Abuse, arbitrariness, violence." He laughed. "Arbitrariness? On this island? It's the only thing that works." They wrote it down, as a confession. The men he had once led testified against him. One claimed Columbus had lost his mind. Another swore he had declared himself a god. Columbus listened, drank, stared into the void. "Perhaps," he said. "But your God was never here."

They put chains on him. No trial, no resistance. Only the clang of iron and the sound of his footsteps as he was led onto the ship that would take him back. He didn't look back. Hispaniola remained behind him, smoking, stinking, silent. The dream was dead, but he was still alive—and that was worse.

The journey home was long, damp, and gloomy. The ocean was silent, as if ashamed of what had become of history. Columbus sat in his cell below deck, his hands sore from his shackles, his soul empty. Every now and then a sailor came, bringing water, bread, and wine. He drank only the wine.

He barely spoke. Sometimes he laughed softly, sometimes he whispered to the darkness. "I did it," he said. "I damn well did it. Why isn't that enough for anyone?" The sea answered with silence, but he heard something like a whisper between the waves: *Because they never asked you for the truth.*

When they landed in Spain, no one was there to greet him. No cheers, no bells ringing. Only the sound of the harbor, shouts, and seagulls. Two guards led him ashore, and the wind blew cold through his torn clothes. So the hero returned home—in chains, crushed by his own glory.

In Seville, he was put in a house, not a prison, but it felt like one. Visitors came, curious, sneering, pious. He spoke to no one. Only to his cards. They were old, crumpled, yellowed, but he smoothed them like a father smooths the hair of his dead child.

The queen summoned him. He came, slowly, bent, but with the old fire in his eyes. Isabella looked at him for a long time, with a mixture of pity and disappointment. "What happened, Admiral?" she asked. Columbus smiled thinly. "I found what you were looking for. But you never wanted to see what I found."

She sighed, nodded, said he was free. *Free.* He didn't like the word. Freedom was a mockery when you'd lost everything.

He left the palace, back into the streets that had once celebrated him. Now the people turned away. Children threw small stones and laughed. A man shouted, "There goes the fool who discovered hell!" Columbus didn't turn around.

He rented a room in Valladolid, small, dark, with no view of anything. He wrote. Again and again. Letters, petitions, confessions. *I have found more world than you can bear.* But no one answered.

Sometimes he dreamed of Hispaniola. Of the faces of the men who hated him, of the flames, of the sea that called to him. He woke up drenched in sweat, reached for the cup, drank, and muttered, "I just wanted to prove the earth is round. Now I know people are flat."

Outside, you could hear children laughing. Inside, there was silence. Only the soft clinking of the chains he had kept—not because he was forced to, but because he couldn't sleep without them.

He raised his head and saw the light coming through the window, weak, gray, merciless.

"I'm the man who talked too much," he said. "And in the end, no one listened."

Then he took a sip, sat down, and continued writing—because that was the only thing he ever knew how to do.

The years after the chains were the hardest. Not because he was beaten or imprisoned—worse. He was forgotten. The noise of glory had faded, and what remained was the scratching of his pen on cheap parchment. Columbus continued writing, day after day, as if writing could set the world right again. Letters to the crown, to bishops, to merchants, to God. He demanded recognition, pension, respect. Everything came late or not at all. If anything, they sent polite rejections with seals that gleamed like mockery.

He grew older, tired, more suspicious. He drank the bad wine he could still afford and told anyone who would listen that he had changed the world. Most nodded, out of politeness, and looked away. In the taverns, people whispered: *The old admiral is crazy.* Sometimes he stood up and shouted that they should all thank him for living on his discovery. Then the innkeeper threw him out.

He went for a lot of walks. Slowly, with a cane, his face worn by sun and salt. He spoke to no one, only to the wind. "You've been fooling me, old friend," he

often said. "You led me on and then laughed at me." Sometimes he stopped, looked up at the sky, and laughed back.

He lived on debt, mercy, and leftovers. His sons rarely came. The younger wrote him letters about money, the older about honor. Both sounded like strangers. Columbus read them, put them aside, and said: "You have my name, but not my sea."

In Valladolid, he had a small room with a chest, a few books, old maps, and a cross. He guarded them like other men guard their last teeth. Sometimes he unrolled the maps, ran his fingers over the lines, and said: "Here. I was here. And no one believes me." Then he laughed, coughed, drank, and continued writing.

He wrote a final manifesto, as thick as a Bible, full of justifications, proofs, and visions. He declared that his travels were divine, that he was the chosen one, the instrument of God, and that no one could understand him because no one had his courage. The writing became increasingly shaky, the ink darker, the words wilder.

The servant who brought him the wine later said she often heard him murmuring at night. "They say he talks to the sea." - "And what does the sea say?" - "That it misses him."

He received a visit from the king. Not Ferdinand himself, but an envoy, polite, clean, and young. He handed him a letter: *The Crown thanks the admiral for his services. His pension is being reviewed.* Columbus read it and laughed hoarsely. "Pension. I don't want money. I want a confession." The man nodded and left. And Columbus remained, alone with his ghosts.

He became ill. His leg was inflamed, his back crooked, his hands shaking. But his head—his head remained clear as a knife. He knew he was forgotten, but that only made him more stubborn. "They'll find me again," he said. "Not today, not tomorrow, but someday. When they realize their world is smaller without me."

Some days he got up, went to the window, looked out at the empty streets, and said aloud: "I have found the West! I have made you greater!" No one answered. Only the wind through the open window, still, almost gentle.

In the evening he wrote in his diary, the last sentence always the same: *I'm the man who talked too much. But without me, they would never have*

listened. Then he put down the pen, picked up the cup, drank, coughed, laughed, and said, "And without wine, I couldn't have done it at all."

The night smelled of rain. He lay in bed, the blanket thin, his heart heavy. The maps lay on the table, unfurled, as if waiting. Columbus closed his eyes and smiled. "Just a little further west," he whispered. "Perhaps there will finally be peace."

Then he fell asleep.

And outside, somewhere behind the walls, a wind blew that smelled of salt – as if it came from another world.

He knew it would soon be over. The nights grew longer, the air thicker, his body heavy. His leg throbbed, his back burned, his hands trembled, but his mind remained awake—too awake. He talked in his sleep, while awake, to no one, to everything. Words dripped from him like old oil, viscous, bitter, inescapable. The servant said he spoke to the sea. She was right.

Sometimes he woke up in the middle of the night because he thought he heard waves. He listened, but there was no sea outside, only wind in the alleys. Nevertheless, he spoke: "I know you're there. I hear you." Then he smiled, as if an old friend were answering him.

His cards lay spread out on the floor, yellowed, scratched, torn. He could barely read them anymore, but he knew every line by heart. He ran his fingers over them, slowly, tenderly. "There you are," he whispered. "My damn dream."

He hardly had any visitors anymore. The church came to offer him comfort, but comfort to him was a lie scented with incense. A monk asked him if he repented. Columbus looked at him with tired eyes, in which a trace of madness still burned. "Repent?" He laughed harshly. "I only showed that life goes on. You all want to believe that there's nothing beyond the horizon. And I proved you wrong. If that's a sin, then God was the first to sin." The monk prayed, Columbus drank. Both did what they could.

He wrote again. Just a few lines, shaky but clear. *I've found more of the world than it deserves. I'm no hero, no sinner. Just a man who wanted to know how far one could go before it all ended.* Then he put the pen down. It rolled off the table and fell to the floor. He didn't bend down again.

Night came. One of those nights when the air is still, as if waiting. The maid found him at the window. He sat there, gazing westward, the cup in his hand, half empty, half forgotten. Outside, the sky burned in the last light.

She asked quietly, "Should I get someone?" He shook his head. "No. I've had my audience." He breathed heavily. "Do you know what the worst part is?" "No, Señor." "That I was right. And no one wants to know."

He coughed, laughed, coughed again. Then he leaned his head back and closed his eyes. "Tell the sea I'll be right there."

His breathing became shallow, then calm. A gust of wind came through the window, cool, with a hint of salt. The candle flickered, almost as if in greeting.

When she came in the morning, he was dead. His face calm, almost peaceful, his hands on the cards. On the top one, in his scrawling handwriting, was written: *A little further to the west.*

He was buried in Valladolid, quietly, without fanfare, without a king, without bells. A few monks, a few strangers. No applause. No God.

But at night, when everyone was asleep, the wind was heard again. It came from the west, carrying the scent of salt and distant shores. And those who listened closely swore they heard a voice, deep, rough, tired, laughing.

"I told you so."

The sea was silent. And the world continued to turn.

Lisbon, port of lies

Lisbon smelled of salt, fish, sweat, and sin. The city was a harbor with more lies than sails. Men came, men went, no one was left clean. Columbus was one of them. Not a hero, not an admiral, just a sailor with rough hands, broken shoes, and a head full of maps he didn't fully understand. He lived cheaply, drank cheaply, and thought big.

The days were hot, the nights humid. In the taverns, they talked about gold, about India, about routes south. Everyone had a story, no one the truth. Columbus listened, drank, laughed, and in his head, everything revolved around one question: *What if the path leads not south, but west?*

The Portuguese laughed when he said that. "The West will eat you, Genoese!" they cried. "Only fools sail to their deaths." Columbus grinned. "Then I'm a fool." And he meant it.

He lived in a small room above a shoemaker's shop, damp walls, low ceiling. The rats were more punctual than the sun. On the table lay maps, parchments, half-empty wine jugs. He drew lines, always the same, always wider, as if he could force the world to open up with his strokes. He believed in logic, but he drank against it.

Sometimes he worked at the harbor to earn food. Hauling crates, mending ropes, sorting nets. No money, no pride, just exercise. He liked the smell of the ships, the screeching of the seagulls, the sound of the water beneath the planks. The sea was the only place where lies sounded honest.

In the evenings, he sat in the "Casa de Vinho," a bar for losers. Sailors, hookers, gamblers. The wine was warm, the floor sticky. One man was always talking about Africa, one about China, one about women who never existed. Columbus listened and collected fragments—stories, rumors, coordinates, names. He built his universe from garbage.

He wrote letters to scholars, priests, and merchants. Most didn't respond. One did: a monk named Marchena. He wrote: *Your idea is interesting. But the West belongs to God, not to man.* Columbus grinned. "Then I'll pick him up."

He fell in love with a woman. A widow, Portuguese, quiet, intelligent, too kind for him. She liked his eyes, he liked her faith. She believed in him, and that was dangerous. She brought him books, old maps, helped him read what others had long since forgotten. She said, "When you go, go with purpose." He said, "I go with defiance."

She died of a fever, and after that, he hardly spoke to anyone. Only to the sea. It listened, as always.

The city aged him. Life was about waiting. For wind, for an answer, for some kind of sign. He sold what he had to buy maps, let himself be laughed at, again and again. "You'll find nothing in the West but death." - "Maybe that's something," he said, "if you find it first."

One evening, drunk, he stood on the pier. The sky was black, the water still. He held a map in his hand, crumpled, wet, almost unreadable. "There," he

whispered. "Over there. There's everything they won't give me." He threw the map into the sea, watched it drift, and said, "Get it if you're braver than I am."

The next morning, he fished them out again. Dried them. Redrawn them.

That's how Columbus functioned back then. He sank, got up, drank, dreamed, doubted, and kept talking. A man with more hunger than bread, more pride than money.

And above it all the sound of the sea – like a promise that had not yet been broken.

The years in Lisbon passed like cheap wine—quick, burning, with an aftertaste of regret. Columbus was now more famous in the taverns than in the harbor. Not because he drank more than the others—they all did—but because he never stopped talking. About maps, about currents, about numbers no one understood. "The West is closer than you think," he said again and again, "the Earth is smaller." And every time they laughed.

He wrote, calculated, drew. Parchment upon parchment, ink upon stains, thoughts upon tiredness. The walls of his room were covered with lines, circles, arrows, notes. It looked like the mind of a madman—and maybe he already was. He talked to himself, to the maps, to the wall. "If only I could prove it," he muttered. "Just once, damn it."

The money was gone. He sold everything he had: clothes, books, even his dead wife's small silver ring. With the money, he bought maps, rulers, and compasses again. He barely ate, but drank all the more. The wine was cheap, the bread stale. But the dream – it was fresh.

One afternoon, he stood in the harbor, looking at the ships sailing south. Africa, spices, gold. He felt envy, but no hatred. Only this faint burning in his chest: *You are all on the wrong path.* He said it loudly, and a few sailors laughed. One shouted, "Then swim west, you fool!" Columbus grinned. "I would, if necessary."

He got into debt. A lot. Every innkeeper in Lisbon knew his name; no one wanted to write to him anymore. He promised to pay "as soon as the West opens up." It became a saying, a joke, a warning. "Don't give the Genoese wine, he'll pay you with world maps."

But then a man came along, a navigator named Bartholomew, who didn't laugh. He listened, nodded, and remained silent. In the end, he simply said:

"You may be wrong. But you're wrong with style." That was the greatest praise Columbus ever received.

Bartholomew took him to a cartographer. An old man with a gray beard who knew more legends than truths. They talked for hours, drawing, comparing. Columbus explained that the west was shorter than the east, that Asia was reachable if one was only brave enough to sail straight ahead. The old man looked at him, smiling gently. "And if you're wrong?" - "Then at least I'll die trying."

He regained hope. Hope—that nasty, sweet poison. It awakened him, let him breathe, made him forget how empty his pockets were. He wrote letters to the Portuguese crown, to merchants, to scholars. The answers? Silence or scorn. One wrote back: *Your plan is foolish, your cards are fantasy. God has set boundaries that no human may cross.* Columbus grinned: "Then I'll just break it."

The nights were his laboratory. He drew by candlelight, his fingers black with ink, his hair greasy, his eyes red. Wine was always there, silent, loyal, and cheap. He called it "my only sailor."

Once he woke up, his face on the cards, the ink smudged, the sun already high. He had dreamed the sea had spoken to him. Not with words, but with waves that sounded like promises. He wrote down the dream: *Water has no direction. It belongs to those who dare.*

He read it again the next day and thought, "Damn. Maybe I really am crazy." Then he laughed, loudly, honestly, for a long time.

He knew Lisbon no longer wanted him. Too many unpaid debts, too many speeches, too many dreams that yielded nothing. So he packed the essentials: maps, compass, notes—and left. No destination, just one thought: *If you don't believe here, maybe someone else will.*

He headed toward Spain. On foot, with blisters on his feet, a hunger in his stomach, and a world in his head that no one wanted to see.

As he left the city, he didn't turn around. He simply said quietly, "Port of Lies—you'll miss me."

Then he continued on, step by step, westward.

He arrived in Spain on foot, with nothing but a bag full of paper and a hope that had long since taken on a stench. The streets were dusty, the sky pale, and every step sounded like a curse. Columbus was emaciated, his beard wild, his clothes dirty. But in his eyes—there was still fire. That damned fire that kept him alive and frightened everyone else.

He came to Palos, to Cadiz, to Huelva—everywhere the same thing. Doors closing, faces laughing, priests telling him that God knew his limits. He said, "Then God doesn't know me."

He sought out scholars, wealthy merchants, and influential sailors. Most listened as long as the wine flowed and forgot about him the next day. He talked about bullets, about seas, about roads no one knew. About Asia beyond the west, about spices, gold, and immortality. They said he was a crackpot, a fraud, a debt-ridden dreamer. He said, "I am everything you will never be—curious."

He slept in stables, in churches, on boats. He found no work, only pity. Pity – that was worse than hunger. Once, a beggar gave him bread. Columbus took it, broke it in half, gave back half, and said: "I'm like you, only with a worse plan." The beggar laughed, the only honest sound Columbus heard in weeks.

He continued writing letters. To Spain, to Portugal, to Genoa, to God. No answer. He went from monastery to monastery, begging for food, sleep, and a hearing. In one of these monasteries, he met Fray Juan Pérez, an old monk with clear eyes and too much patience. Pérez listened to him for hours. Columbus talked about ocean currents, wind directions, spherical geometry. The monk nodded, slowly, as if he understood it all—or as if he wanted to listen to a drowning man who still needs to speak before he sinks.

In the end, Pérez said, "Maybe you're wrong. Maybe not. But you believe it too much to be wrong." And that was enough.

He helped him. He wrote letters of recommendation, and maintained contacts with the court. Columbus was grateful—but not humble. He felt like a prophet again, and that made him dangerous.

In Córdoba, he arrived at the royal court. Or rather, at the gates. The guards laughed when he mentioned his name. "A Genoese wants to turn the world upside down? Go home, old man." But he didn't go. Day after day, he stood there, waiting, talking to anyone who came near him. Finally, someone, a scholar, came, perhaps out of pity, perhaps out of boredom. He picked up his

cards, looked at them, and smiled thinly. "You talk too much," he said. Columbus nodded. "Yes. But at least about something worth it."

He stayed in Córdoba for months, begging to be heard, to be believed. He saw kings ride, saints preach, beggars die—and all of them did so with more dignity than he did. But he stayed.

Sometimes he went to the taverns at night, sat alone with a cup of wine, looked into the candle flame and said softly: "I know you are there, West. I feel you in my bones. I hear you laughing." Then he drank until the world fell silent.

His reputation grew – not as a genius, but as a crank. *The Fool with the Cards*, they called him. And he laughed along, because laughter was at least a form of attention.

Then the news came: The queen wanted to see him. Isabella of Castile. He thought she wanted to hear him. She just wanted to check if he really existed.

She made him wait. For days, weeks. He slept in the kitchen, ate what was left. But he stayed.

When she finally received him, he was pale, tired, but erect. She asked, "So you believe Asia lies to the west?" He said, "I know." She looked at him, long, cool, almost sad. "You're convinced." - "I'm obsessed."

She smiled. "It's almost the same."

Then she dismissed him. No yes, no no. Just silence.

Columbus left. Outside, the wind waited. He looked west, raised his head, spat in the dust, and said, "Just wait. Someday you'll listen to me."

And the sea, far away, murmured softly – like a promise that had not yet been broken.

He stayed in Spain because giving up was worse than starving. The sun was burning, the money was gone, and people were sick of his stories. Columbus had nothing left to take from him—except his dream. And it was as stubborn as he was.

He slept in church courtyards, in abandoned boats, sometimes with women who tolerated him for an evening because they believed a spinner brought good luck. In the morning, he was alone again. The wine became cheaper, his

pride thinner. But the fire within him remained. He could no longer speak normally. Every sentence ended in heaven, water, or the west.

He continued to seek patrons, talking to scholars, bishops, and merchants. Everyone promised something, but no one kept it. One said: "You want to find Asia, but the worst you'll ever lose is yourself." Columbus grinned. "Then at least I'd be found."

He began scribbling notes in the margins of his maps. No more coordinates, just sentences. *If no one believes, go alone.—God is just wind that needs courage.—Sometimes a mistake is the most honest truth.*

In the evenings, he sat in taverns, talking with sailors. They laughed, spat, and drank with him, but some listened. He was good at talking, too good. Words were his weapon, and he wielded them with desperation. He painted them pictures of the West—lands full of gold, people without sin, skies that never ended. He believed every word as he spoke it. Afterward, he hated himself for it.

Once, he lost almost everything at dice. He only kept his cards. The innkeeper tried to take them away. Columbus grabbed him by the collar, his eyes red, his voice shaky. "Take my wine, take my bread, but not that. Without that, I'm nothing." The innkeeper let go. Perhaps out of pity, perhaps because he was afraid of meeting a man with madness in his eyes.

One cold night, he arrived at a monastery, half dead, half sober. The monks took him in. He ate, slept, and stayed. He barely spoke, worked in the garden, gathered wood, and secretly continued writing his maps. The abbot watched him, silently, for days. One morning, he said: "You talk in your sleep." - "What am I saying?" - "That the sea is your judge." Columbus laughed. "Then at least I have an honest judge."

He stayed there for weeks. It was quiet, too quiet. The wind barely blew, life was at a standstill. He felt imprisoned, even between prayers. Finally, he packed his things. The abbot asked, "Where to?" - "To the west." - "But there's nothing there." - "Then there's room for me."

He went back out onto the road. Dust, sun, hunger. But there was also movement. Always heading west. Always the same word in his head: *More*.

He came to Salamanca. A city full of books, full of men who considered themselves wiser than life itself. He spoke to scholars, to theologians, to old

men with soft hands. They listened to him, nodded, looked at each other, and then said politely: "Your theory contradicts Holy Scripture." He grinned. "Perhaps Scripture contradicts the earth."

They wrote reports, words that meant nothing. *Interesting, but erroneous.—Unproven, dangerous.—He should pray, not calculate.* Columbus read it and laughed bitterly. "You pray for heaven, I sail it."

But somewhere among all the closing doors, one remained open. There was always someone who hesitated, someone who wondered: *What if the fool is right?* And that was enough. Hope doesn't need a palace. Just a crack.

At night he wrote: *I'm still here. I'm not going back. The West is calling.*

Then he drank, stared into the candle, and said, "Lisbon was the lie. Spain will be the proof."

And the wind that blew through the streets sounded like someone was laughing quietly.

Salamanca was over, but that was when the story really started to stink. Columbus now had a few people behind him—not out of faith, but out of curiosity. A few monks, a few traders, a few men with too much time on their hands and too little hope. He was still poor, but no longer invisible. The fool was given a name. The name gained weight.

He came to Córdoba, where courtiers spoke as if they were spitting gold. Everything was smooth, perfumed, calculated. Men with beards who had never seen sweat, women who smiled like daggers. Columbus didn't fit in there. He smelled of the sea, of work, of despair. And that's what they liked about him—for one evening.

He spoke in halls, in chambers, in kitchens. Always the same words: West, brevity, glory, God. People laughed politely, poured more wine, said, "Interesting, very interesting," and thought: *Another spinner with cards.*

He learned to bow without bending. He spoke with lips that smiled, while his eyes remained steely blue. He knew what they were thinking—*Genoese, heretics, soldiers of fortune*—but he kept talking. Words were his sail, lies his wind.

He met clergymen who asked him questions no one could answer: "How far is it really? How do you prove that God is guiding you?" Columbus replied: "If you

want to know, you must come with me." They never did. But they talked about him. And in Spain, talk was the beginning of power.

At night, he slept with prostitutes because saints couldn't comfort him. They called him "Capitán Phantom." One said, "You talk like you have the devil in your pocket." He laughed. "No, just the West."

He went to parties, to receptions, stood on the sidelines, and watched men play their promises like cards. A fake smile, a brief toast, a broken future. He knew he belonged—not out of honor, but out of necessity.

Once he stood before the treasurer, a man with soft hands and cold eyes. Columbus spoke for an hour, gesticulating, sweating, painting entire continents with words. The man nodded slowly. "And you want the crown to pay?" "No," said Columbus, "that it believes." The man smiled thinly. "Faith is expensive, Señor Colón."

He left without an answer, but with a feeling – that the wind was changing.

Then he met Beatriz. Not a saint, not a whore—something in between. Dark eyes, a ragged voice, laughing misery. She looked at him, listened without interruption. He spoke of cards, of queens, of gold. She said, "You talk as if you've already seen it." - "Perhaps I have, too," he replied. She stayed.

She was the first in years who didn't want to change him. She drank with him, cursed with him, laughed with him. At night, when he leaned against her, she said, "I believe you. But I also believe this will destroy you." - "Then at least I'm going with a purpose," he said.

The court became restless. Wars, debts, politics. No one had time for a sailor with maps. Columbus ran from door to door, waiting, writing, talking, threatening, praying. He reached Ferdinand, who barely looked at him. "You are tough, Genoese," said the king. "And you are cautious," said Columbus. "That is my job." "It is mine not to be."

The conversation ended as it began – politely, pointlessly.

But Isabella heard from him again. Through letters, through priests, through whispers. She liked men who didn't give up. Perhaps because she herself had never given up.

Columbus knew: One more no, and he would break. But within him was this defiance, this rusty nail in his heart that said: *Stay loud as long as you breathe.*

He wrote:*The West is waiting. I'll die if I don't reach it.*

And below he wrote his name, crooked, proud, almost defiant:*Cristóbal Colon.*

Then he put down his pen, looked up at the sky, and said, "If they laugh at me again, I'll laugh with them. But the sea will prove me right."

The wind blew through the window. Warm. Gentle. And somewhere in the distance, it sounded like laughter.

Winter came like a knife. Cold, damp, silent. Columbus had no money left, no friends, hardly any faith. Only maps, notes, and the wine that kept him alive because it convinced him he was worth it. Beatriz was gone, vanished into some other bed where dreams cost less. He remained alone with the sea in his head.

The Spaniards were fed up with him. He had visited every door, talked to every priest, and forced every audience. At some point, they were whispering:*Here he comes again, the Genoese with the cards.* And when they saw him, they turned away. Even the beggars in Córdoba stopped giving him bread.

He wandered through the streets, a shadow of salt and defiance. Sometimes he stopped, stared up at the sky, and whispered, "Why don't you just let me die?" No answer. Only the wind, smelling of the south—like mockery.

In the spring, he moved on. Westward, as always, toward the La Rábida Monastery. An old acquaintance had told him there was a monk there who listened before judging.*Fray Juan Pérez.* The name sounded like a wooden lifeline.

When Columbus arrived, he was half-dead. The monks gave him soup, water, and a bed. He slept through two days. On the third day, Pérez arrived. A man with steady eyes that couldn't be fooled. He sat down by the bed. "They say you're looking for Asia in the west." Columbus nodded weakly. "I'm just looking for damned proof that I'm right." - "And if you don't have it?" - "Then at least it was mine."

They talked for hours. About earth, sky, currents, sin. Pérez barely contradicted him. He let Columbus talk, drink, and sweat. Then he said: "You talk like a man who's already been there." - "Perhaps it was me in a dream." - "Then let's pray that dreams sometimes come true."

Pérez wrote a letter to the queen. Not a begging letter—a clever, simple text: *This man may be foolish, but he speaks with the fire of truth. Hear him before God himself listens.*

Columbus read it and almost wept. Not from emotion, but from exhaustion. "One in a thousand," he said. "And that's just enough."

They waited for weeks. Then a messenger arrived from the court. The queen wanted to hear him. Columbus laughed—that hoarse, dry laugh of a man already accustomed to his own grave.

He stood up and dressed as neatly as he could. His robe was torn, his shoes thin, his hands rough. But in his eyes: fire. Pérez gave him his blessing. "Go," he said. "And if they reject you, go again. And again." - "How many times?" - "Until heaven listens."

He left. On foot, through dust, sun, and hunger. Back to Córdoba, back to the courtyard, back to the same faces. This time they looked different. Not mocking. Curious. Like people who sense that they'll soon hear something they won't forget.

He spoke. For hours. In a voice hoarse from too much silence. About bullets, about stars, about courage. About God, who isn't afraid of water. And at the end, he said quietly: "I have no money, no power, no court. Only this damned dream. And it won't let me sleep."

Silence. Then applause. Slow. Uncertain. A courtier said, "The man is crazy." Isabella smiled. "Perhaps. But crazy men have saved us many times."

Columbus almost fell over, but he grinned. "Then I'll save you too."

He went out into the sun. The sky was bright, the wind warm. For the first time in years, it smelled not of mockery, but of a new beginning.

He closed his eyes, raised his face and whispered: "So it is."

He almost had them. The queen, the advisors, fate—everyone was already on the edge. One breath, one glance, and the West would have been his. But Spain had more important things to do at the moment: war, faith, power. Granada was still burning, and the empire no longer wanted dreams, but victories. Columbus waited, talked, wrote, calculated—and watched as everything slipped away again.

The audiences became less frequent, the letters shorter. "His Majesties are busy." That was polite for: *Get out*. Columbus stayed anyway. He knew the game by now—if you stay long enough, you'll eventually become part of the inventory.

He lived in a room in Santa Fe, close to the court, but far enough away that he could be ignored. The wine was thin, the bread hard, the nights long. He dreamed of ship's planks, of wind, of a laughing horizon. And when he awoke, he laughed along with them—brief, bitter, broken.

Beatriz came by once, thin, beautiful, tired. "You're still talking about it?" she asked. "I know men who lost their children and were less stubborn." Columbus looked at her for a long time. "I've lost more than children. I've seen the world, and no one believes me." She shook her head. "Then you'll die of it." - "At least in the West."

She left, and this time she didn't come back.

He remained alone with his maps, his pride, and the wind that mocked him. Even Pérez, the old monk, wrote to him to be patient. Patience—the word for people who have no idea about burning. Columbus no longer had patience. He was only hungry.

He began selling everything he still owned. The few books, the last of his clothes, even his inkwell. He kept only the maps. They were more than paper—they were proof. Even if no one understood him, they did.

Then the day came when he was told that the Crown had rejected his request. No money, no ships, no west. He nodded, smiled, and went outside. No one saw him collapse outside, bang his head against the wall, and laugh. A laugh without sound, only teeth and pain.

He packed his things—just enough to carry in a bundle—and set off. Toward France. Toward nothingness. The dream was dead, but he kept running anyway. You run differently when you've lost everything. Freer.

He only got as far as Granada, tired, thirsty, almost broken. And then, as if in a cheap miracle, the messenger arrived. Dusty, breathless, with a parchment in his hand. *Her Majesty requests that you return.*

Columbus stared at him as if God had told him a bad joke. "Too late," he said. The messenger grinned. "Not for Spain."

He laughed. This time loudly, honestly, painfully. A laugh that contained everything—anger, joy, exhaustion. Then he turned around. Back to Santa Fe. Back toward the farm. Back to the dream.

When he arrived there, he saw Isabella. No pomp, no crown. Just a woman with tired eyes and a decisive look. She said, "We will dare."

Columbus nodded, too exhausted to cheer. "Why now?" he asked. Isabella replied calmly, "Because you didn't stop."

He laughed. "That's all I can do."

She smiled. "Then I guess that's enough."

Outside, the wind waited, warm, lively, curious. Columbus stepped out, looked up at the sky, and whispered, "I knew it."

And somewhere, far back in my mind, the sea whispered back:
Me too.

Between whores, traders and saints

He had the crown's blessing, but not a cent. A dream was nice, but wood, sails, wine, bread, and men had to be paid for. And the world had learned that hope doesn't pay. So Columbus went back where he always went: to the wrong people.

He walked through the taverns of Palos, Moguer, and Cádiz—places where the air smelled of fish, tar, cheap wine, and corrupted pride. Men spat, cursed, and played cards. There were no heroes to be found here, only castaways, convicts, debtors, faces who knew they were lost. Exactly the ones he needed.

He talked, promised, lied. "Gold in the west," he said. "Land as far as the eye can see. The Queen and God are behind me." Some laughed, others listened because they had nothing left to lose. A few nodded. And so his crew began—an army of losers, drunks, and beggars.

He got three ships. *Santa María, Pinta, Niña*. Three planks between him and madness. Too small, too old, too little. But they were real. Wood under his hands, ropes that smelled of salt, wind that tasted of departure.

The traders wanted profit, the monks wanted souls, the men wanted happiness. Columbus wanted it all. He ran between the docks, shouting, organizing, writing lists, almost tearing his voice out. He was no longer a dreamer; he was a logistician, commander, salesman, prophet, and fool all rolled into one.

In the evening, he sat in the pub with the captains. The Pinzón brothers, experienced sailors, tough dogs with eyes that had seen more than prayer. They listened to him, searching, skeptical. Martin Alonso Pinzón said: "If you lie, Genoese, at least lie well." Columbus grinned. "I only lie when God is silent." The other raised his cup. "Then we drink to divine silence."

He drank with them, laughed, sweated, talked—too loudly, for too long. He was obsessed. Everyone saw it, and that was precisely what attracted them. No one follows a reasonable man. Only madness inspires movement.

The weeks passed with arguments, paper, wine, and wood. The harbor was a chaos of cursing, hammering, and prayers. The crown sent officials to check lists, check seals, and count numbers, while Columbus tried to record the uncountable—a dream.

Beatriz came by once, unexpectedly, in a dirty dress that fit better than any velvet dress. She saw the ships, then him. "You've really done it," she said. He nodded, proud and empty at the same time. "Not yet. Not until I come back." She smiled wearily. "Then don't come back."

He said nothing. There was no appropriate answer.

He moved on, commanding, checking, praying. The men cursed, the merchants pressed on, the priest recited a blessing that wasn't one. Everything was movement, noise, sweat. No heroism, just work.

Sometimes Columbus stood alone on the quay at night. The ships lay there like sleeping animals, the water black, the wind cool. He spoke to the sea, as always. "Now listen," he said. "I'm coming. And this time I'll silence you." The sea responded with a dull rumble, as if it were laughing.

In the morning he signed the final document that allowed the launch. *Surrender of Santa Fe*. A contract between a king, a queen, and a man who believed more than he could know. He read the lines, nodded, and thought: *Now there's no turning back. Only west.*

He put down his pen, looked up at the sky, and said, "All right. Let's finish the joke."

And the wind blew through the masts, softly, approvingly.

The port of Palos was a sinkhole of noise, wind, and dreams. Men shouted, women laughed, children ran among crates and ropes. It was as if God had decided to gather all human garbage in one place before dumping it over the ocean. Columbus stood in the middle of it, his hands behind his back, his gaze like a knife. He tried to bring order to something that never wanted order.

The *Santa Maria* was his pride and shame at the same time – a heavy, sluggish boat, slower than the rest, but large enough to look like a ship. *Pinta* and the *Niña* They were faster, but capricious as dogs. The men cursed, the carpenters shouted, the wind devoured their voices. And Columbus stood there, taking notes, commanding, doubting—a king without a crown, an admiral without a sea.

He knew every name, every guilt, every curse of his crew. Thirty percent were criminals who had been saved from the gallows, twenty percent were drunkards, the rest were poor devils with too much hope. It reeked of fear, but also of adventure. A dangerous mix.

In the evenings, they gathered in the taverns. Wine flowed like oil, and the stories grew bigger than the boats. Columbus sometimes sat there, quietly, listening. One spoke of mermaids, one of ship monsters, one swore that the ocean would burn if they sailed too far. Columbus grinned. "Then we'll take buckets." Laughter. Short, nervous laughter.

There were fights, of course. Sailor against sailor, sailor against innkeeper, sailor against God. Columbus didn't interfere. He knew that anyone who sets out wants to fight—better now than in the middle of the sea.

The days before were a chaos of lists, deliveries, and lost nerves. Wood was counted, barrels rolled, bread baked, water stored, wine smuggled. Columbus checked everything three times. He was obsessed with preparation because he knew there would be no second chances. "One mistake," he said, "and the sea will eat us all." The men nodded, continued drinking, and laughed again.

At night, he wrote letters to Isabella. No longer begging letters—reports, almost tender, almost poetic. *Your Majesty, we stand at the edge of the world. I*

swear, I will bring you back more than you ever had. He knew she might never read them, but writing them calmed him.

The priests came, blessed the ships, and spoke Latin words that no one understood. Columbus stood by, watched, and thought: *If God is waiting for us, then hopefully he is heading west.*

Sometimes, late at night, he came to the dock, alone. He walked along the planks, touching the wood that would soon be all that lay between him and hell. He murmured, "You're holding me, you treacherous piece of wood. You better hold on to me."

Once, he found Martin Alonso Pinzón sleeping in a barrel. The man smelled of wine, sweat, and victory. Columbus approached him. "If you sail like that, we'll drown before we see land." Pinzón grinned and opened one eye. "When we see land, we'll drink twice." Columbus laughed. "Deal."

Beatriz came back, for one night. She wanted to see him, not for love, but out of curiosity. He was different now—harder, quieter, but somehow brighter in his gaze. She said, "You really did it." He nodded, remained silent. She kissed him, briefly, sadly. "You won't come back." - "Maybe I don't even want that."

She left before morning came.

The next day, the traders brought the last salt, the last water, the last bread. The harbor buzzed like a beehive about to swarm. Columbus went on deck and looked out over the sea, which was gray, motionless, endless. He said quietly: "So, old friend. Soon we'll see who eats whom."

Then he turned around, shouted orders, yelled names, counted men. And somewhere deep beneath the noise, beneath the shouts, the wind, the curses, one could hear the sea laughing.

The night before departure was warm and dirty. The harbor of Palos stank of sweat, fish, and cheap wine. No one slept. Not the men, not the whores, not the sea. Everyone knew that the next morning something would end—or everything would begin. The ships lay there, like animals about to leap, lashed together, trembling in the wind. Columbus walked among them, his cloak open, his hands deep in his pockets, his face as pale as chalk.

Chaos raged in the taverns. Men drank, laughed, and argued. Some swore they would see the end of the world, others swore they would only find gold. Most swore nothing at all—they just drank as if their lives depended on it. Maybe it

did. Columbus sat at a table in the corner, alone, with a cup of wine and a candle that flickered more than it burned.

Martin Alonso Pinzón came and sat down next to him, his beard salty, his voice raspy. "You look like you're expecting the gallows." Columbus drank. "Perhaps the sea is a better rope." Pinzón laughed. "Do you really think there's something over there?" - "I know." - "And if not?" - "Then at least we tried something worthwhile."

That was it. No big speeches, no heroics. Just two men with too much pride and too little sense, looking at each other and knowing that neither could go back.

Outside, the sailors were singing, off-key, loud, drunken. A song about women who wait and seas that lie. Columbus listened, and something inside him fell silent. Not calm, but silent, like an animal that notices its cage is open.

A priest passed by, blessed them halfheartedly, murmuring prayers that were drowned out by the noise. Columbus nodded and had himself crossed, though he no longer knew if God was even listening. Then he looked out at the sea, black and smooth like a promise that had fermented for too long.

Beatriz wasn't there. No goodbye, no glance, no word. Maybe that was better. He wouldn't have said anything right anyway. Love was for men with a future.

A few sailors pulled a whore onto the table, dancing, screaming, and clapping. Someone played a lute, off-key but loudly. One vomited in a corner, another laughed about it. Life—in its rawest, most honest form. Columbus smiled. "If God's listening," he said quietly, "then he must be laughing."

He finished the last cup, stood up, and went outside. The wind had shifted. It was as if the sea already knew they were coming. He walked to the dock and looked down at the black water, which glittered like pitch in the moonlight.

He spoke softly, almost tenderly. "I know you hate me. I hate you too. But tomorrow we belong to each other."

Then he spat into the water, turned around, and walked back to the ships. The men were sleeping drunkenly on the planks, the air vibrating with anticipation.

He sat on the deck of the *Santa Maria*. He looked up at the sky. Stars, countless, like holes in the fabric of creation. He thought of everything: Lisbon, debt, ridicule, hunger, Beatriz, Isabella, the sea calling him. And he laughed softly, tiredly but upright.

"Tomorrow, you filthy piece of shit. Tomorrow I'll show you that you're round."

The wind blew over the masts, quiet, warm, almost like an answer.

The morning smelled of metal and salt. The sky was gray, the sea still—too still. Palos awoke slowly, like a city ashamed to witness. No cheers, no fanfares, only the creaking of the planks, the shouts of the sailors, the hissing of the ropes. The wind blew from the east, almost mocking, as if to say: *You're on the wrong track.*

Columbus stood on the deck of the *Santa Maria*, hands clasped, faces in the sun that had yet to warm itself. He saw the men cursing, carrying, coughing, praying. Some kissed the earth before untying themselves. Others stared at the water as if they were looking at their grave.

Pinzón shouted orders, and the *Pinta* responded with movement. The ropes loosened, the wood groaned, the sails fell like tired shoulders. Everything was suddenly real. No talk, no plan, no dream – just wind and direction.

Women, children, and old people stood on the shore. Some waved, some wept, some just watched silently. No one believed in the West. They believed in goodbyes. And those last longer.

A priest murmured a prayer that no one understood. Columbus listened nonetheless. Not out of faith, but out of habit. God had become like an old friend to him, whom one greets only out of politeness.

He thought of Lisbon, of the years that had brought him here—the ridicule, the debts, the nights in bars, the faces of those who laughed. He thought of Isabella, of her "*We will dare.*" And he thought of Beatriz, whose smile hung somewhere between hope and farewell.

"All aboard!" roared Pinzón. The voices filled the air, the wood creaked, the water lapped against the hull. Columbus felt the world shift – at first barely perceptibly, then irrevocably.

He looked over at the other ships. Three small shadows, pathetic compared to what they were planning. But he smiled. *Three shadows are enough to change a kingdom.*

The water receded, the ropes were cut, and the ships glided out, slowly, heavily, like animals leaving the stable. Columbus stood at the bow, the wind in his face, the taste of salt and fear on his tongue.

Behind him, the mainland—dusty, inert, familiar. Before him, nothingness—unwritten, boundless, lurking.

He raised his hand as if to say goodbye, but he didn't wave. He wasn't a man for gestures.

The sun rose higher, blinding, burning. The sails filled, the creaking became more regular, the sea widened.

Pinzón came to him, grinning. "Really, you fool. We're actually setting sail." Columbus nodded. "Yes. And no one can stop us now." - "Not even the sea?" - "Especially not that."

They looked out, two men with more pride than sense, and behind them Spain disappeared.

The wind shifted, increased, and grew louder. The men cheered halfheartedly, as if they knew that cheering might later be regretted.

Columbus looked west, into the endless blue. No gold, no land, no certainty. Just a line that wouldn't move.

He muttered, "So there you are, you damn dream."

Then he placed his hand on the wet wood and whispered, "Start."

And the sea answered – with a deep, indifferent breath.

The first few days were almost too calm. The wind was good, the sea did what was asked of it, and the men acted as if they believed everything would turn out well. Columbus knew this was dangerous. Complacency is the beginning of doubt.

The sun burned, the wood cracked, and the smell of salt and sweat hung in every plank. Columbus often stood at the bow, his hands on the railing, his eyes to the west. He didn't talk much. When he did speak, it was in commands or half-prayers. *Just a little further. Keep going.*

The men worked, cursed, laughed, played cards, and argued. A ship is a floating madhouse, and the sea is the warden. One complained about the water, one about the food, one about God. The priest on board nodded, blessed, and secretly drank along.

In the evening, when the sun fell like blood into the sea, it fell silent. The men watched, as if hoping it would show them the way. Columbus stood beside them, his hands clasped, and said quietly: "Over there. It's waiting there." No one answered. But they watched. That was enough.

On the fifth day, a wind blew from the southwest, strong, warm, almost too friendly. The sails billowed, the ship danced. The men cheered, sang, and shouted. Columbus looked up and smiled. "He's testing us," he said. Pinzón laughed. "Or he's finally coming for you."

They made good progress. Every day, Columbus wrote in his logbook: *Calm seas. Good signs. Men calm.* He didn't write this because it was true, but because he wanted to believe it.

At night, he heard the water beating against the hull, regularly, like a heartbeat. Sometimes it seemed to him as if the sea were breathing with him. He spoke to it softly. "I know you hate me. But you need me. Without me, you'll remain nothing but a surface."

The men whispered that the admiral was speaking to ghosts. Perhaps they were right. But at least ghosts answer.

On the tenth day, the bets began. One said they were already dead, but no one had noticed. Another swore the West was a lie, invented by kings who wanted to get rid of their fools. Columbus listened, grinned, and said nothing. He knew words change nothing. Only the horizon does.

He gave speeches, short, harsh speeches. "You are not here to believe. You are here to sail. Belief comes later." The men nodded, not out of conviction, but because orders are easier than reasoning.

He wrote to Isabella every evening, even though he knew the letter would never arrive. *Your Majesty, the sea holds still, as if it knew I would break it.*

Sometimes he sat on deck with Pinzón, both silent, both drinking. "You know," Pinzón said one night, "I feel like we're sailing into a joke whose punchline no one knows." Columbus laughed softly. "Then I hope I'm her."

The nights were long. The sea was black, the sky full of stars that looked as if they were waiting. Columbus looked up and thought: *Maybe that's what God left up there when he was finished.*

The men began to tell each other stories. About demons, islands, sirens. One claimed he had heard singing at night. Another claimed he had seen light. Columbus recorded both. Not because he believed it—but because hope can take any form.

He slept little, ate little, and wrote a lot. His writing became narrower and harder. *Day 12: Men restless. Day 14: Wind weakens. Day 15: Sky clear, sea calm, too calm.*

He knew this was just the beginning. They still thought they were sailing. But in truth, they were already drifting—toward doubt.

The silence came without warning. No wind, no waves, no sound except the creaking of the planks and the dull thwack of the ropes against the mast. The sea lay there like glass, heavy and dead. For three days, nothing moved. The sails hung limp, the water smelled of decay, and the sun burned everything clean.

The men became restless. At first they spoke more quietly, then stopped altogether. They sat in the shade, drank the lukewarm water, chewed on dry bread, and stared at the sea, which looked as if it were laughing at them. One spat into it and whispered, "Perhaps we're already dead." Columbus heard this but said nothing.

At night, it was worse. No wind, no stars, only darkness and the crackling of the wood, which sounded as if something was breathing beneath them. Some prayed, others drank, a few started to fight. Columbus intervened, striking hard, without words. Sometimes only violence helps to maintain order.

Pinzón came to him one evening, his brow wet, his voice soft. "If this goes on much longer, they'll tear you to pieces." Columbus nodded. "Then I hope they do it with the wind in their sails." - "You're taking it too lightly." - "I have no choice. If I show fear, the sea will think it's won."

He wrote in the logbook: *Day 23. Calm wind. Men tired. Faith thin. The sky silent.* And then underneath, smaller, almost invisible: *I'm scared too.*

The water began to stink. Barrels that had lain in the sun too long, bread that was growing mold, men who no longer washed. The stench was pungent, sweet, like the breath of despair. One said he saw smoke on the horizon. Another swore he heard a voice coming from the sea. Columbus just smiled. "If she's talking to us, that means she's alive."

He stood on deck at night, alone, the sea beneath him as smooth as a mirror. He saw his own face in it—pale, hollow, restless. "I hardly recognize you," he murmured. "Perhaps the land will recognize me better when it sees me."

The men began to whisper. Words like *mutiny*, *lie*, *Craziness*. One of them said loudly, "He doesn't know where we're going!" Columbus heard this, approached him, looked at him for a long time, and said calmly, "You're right. I don't know. But I'm going anyway." The man was silent.

Pinzón suggested turning back. Columbus laughed, short and cold. "If you turn back, you'll die on the way back. If you continue, maybe not. Your choice."

The next day, the wind blew—barely noticeable, but real. The sails hoisted, the men cheered, Columbus breathed a sigh of relief, silently. The sky looked different, the color of the water changed. It was as if the sea briefly felt pity.

He wrote: *Day 26. The West is breathing again.*

But the smile didn't last long. After two days, the wind died down again. And this time the silence was deeper. Heavier. It was as if the world was holding its breath to watch them fail.

Columbus stood at the bow, the sun on his back, his logbook in his hand. He read what he had written so far, and it sounded like a sermon for the blind. Then he tore out a page and threw it into the sea. "Eat," he said quietly. "Perhaps you'll like paper better than meat."

At night, he barely slept. He paced the deck, talking to himself, sometimes to God, sometimes to the sea. Once, a sailor heard him whisper, "If you kill us, take me first." Columbus turned around, grinning wearily. "I don't kill anyone. Waiting does that."

He realized they were about to break. But somewhere deep inside him, there was still that one piece of steel that wouldn't break. He looked up at the sky, which remained unmoved, and said softly, "I know you're there, West. And when I find you, I swear I'll forget to hate you."

The wind didn't answer. But far out, on the horizon, something flickered for a moment. No land. No light. Only hope in disguise.

And that was enough. For another day.

The sun hung above them like a glowing eye, merciless, unmoving. The sea was smooth, as if it had decided to do nothing more. Day 30, maybe 32—no one knew for sure. Time no longer had any direction at sea. The men counted not days, but curses.

Water was running low. The bread was hard as stone, the salt burned the wounds. A few men prayed aloud, a few quietly, and a few stopped praying altogether. Hope was a word only whispered, lest it break.

Columbus stood on the deck, his eyes red, his skin dark, his lips chapped. He barely spoke. Every command came harshly, every word tasted of iron. Pinzón avoided him. The men avoided him. He was no longer human to them—he was a shadow in the form of a captain.

That evening, the whispering began. "We're turning back." - "He's leading us into nowhere." - "The man is possessed." One, a young sailor, barely twenty, said loudly: "He's not an admiral. He's death incarnate." Columbus heard it. He turned around, slowly, and walked toward him.

"Say it again," he said quietly. The boy trembled, silent. Columbus stepped closer, his face only a hand's breadth away. "I may be Death," he said, "but you'll already be dead if you turn back now." Then he struck. Hard, fast, without anger. Only with necessity. The boy fell, blood dripping onto the deck. No one moved. Columbus looked at them. "Anyone who thinks the sea wants to eat us is right. But if we provoke it, it eats faster."

Silence. Only the creaking of the planks and the breathing of too many men in too little space. Then he turned away and went to his cabin.

Inside, it was dark, hot, and cramped. He wrote in his logbook: *Day 33. Men on the sidelines. Me too.* Then he put down his pen and laughed softly, bitterly. "Maybe we're all just part of a bad punchline."

At night he heard them talking outside. Plans, half-spoken, disorganized. Words like *Chains, knives, takeover*. Pinzón came to him, whispering. "They're talking about mutiny." Columbus nodded. "Let them. Talk is cheaper than action." - "And if they do?" - "Then they'll see why they haven't thrown me overboard yet."

He barely slept. He sat upright, knife at the ready, logbook open. Outside, the sea roared, gentle and indifferent. The night was clear, the sky too beautiful for murder.

In the morning, everything was quieter than before. The men worked slower, spoke less. Their eyes avoided his. Columbus walked across the deck, slowly, measuredly. "You want to turn back," he said aloud, "but there is no way back. The wind won't carry you east. Only west. That's not a curse. That's the law."

No one answered. But they looked at him, and he saw something he hadn't seen in a long time—fear. Not of the sea, but of himself.

He called Pinzón over. "We have to move on," he said. "They need a sign." - "A sign?" - "Yes. Something that will give them lies they can believe again."

In the evening, the wind blew. Gently at first, then stronger. The sails filled, the wood sang, the men cheered. Columbus stood at the bow, the wind in his face, and closed his eyes. *Thanks, he thought. Whoever.*

He wrote: *Day 35. Wind. Men are alive again. Me too.*

But deep down, he knew this was only a delay. Hope at sea was like wine—sweet, short, deadly.

That night, as he stood alone on deck, he saw a glimmer on the horizon. A glow, far away, faint, but there. He stared, holding his breath. "Land?" he whispered. Then he laughed. "Or just the sea disguised as hope."

He didn't write it down. Some things are too fragile to be killed with ink.

He looked into the darkness that was coming again and said quietly, "Just a little more, you bastard. Just a little."

And the sea, indifferent and old, whispered back – or perhaps it was just the wind –:

A little is sometimes enough.

The Queen and the Beggar with Visions

Isabella of Castile sat in a room that smelled more of incense than power. Her advisors talked, whispered, argued, but she was only half-listening. Outside, the war against Granada was still winding down; inside, the air stank of politics. Spain wanted peace, order, victories—everything Columbus was not. And yet, his name kept cropping up, like an annoying splinter in the finger of history.

The "Genoese with the cards," they called him. The beggar who calls himself an admiral. The dreamer with the big mouth. Isabella had read his letters, hesitantly at first, then several times. Between all the exaggerated words, the calculations, the pleas—there was something. No reason, no proof. But that damned faith that infects even skepticism.

Ferdinand wouldn't hear of it. "We were at war, Isabella. We don't have money for fantasies." She replied calmly, "And if the fantasy pays off?" He snorted, smiled, and left. Men like him considered dreams to be decoration.

She remained alone, reading his lines again. *Your Majesty, the world is not flat; it is hungry for discovery. I want to bring it to you. Not out of pride, but out of duty.* She sensed it was a lie—but it was the right lie. The kind that changes history.

Columbus arrived at court, as always out of place. No courtier, no diplomat. His clothes were worn, his gaze too direct, his smell of wind and dust. The guards eyed him like a beggar with delusions of grandeur. He bowed awkwardly, muttering something about gratitude and divine guidance. Isabella looked at him, long, searching, with that cold interest she showed toward men who believed too much.

"So you want to sail west," she finally said. He nodded. "Yes, Your Majesty. The path is shorter, the Earth smaller, the destination certain." She raised an eyebrow. "Certain?" He smiled. "Nothing is certain, Your Majesty. But everything is possible."

A few advisors laughed quietly. One whispered, "A madman." Isabella ignored it. She stood up and walked slowly around him, like a cat around an animal she couldn't judge. "And what if you're wrong?" "Then the world is wrong with me."

She stopped, right behind him. "And if you're right?" He turned around. "Then you owe me one more crown."

There was silence for a moment. Then she laughed, briefly and genuinely. "You have nerve, Genoese." - "Without it, you wouldn't get to the end of the world."

He talked, explained, gesticulated. About currents, maps, stars. She barely understood half of it, but she understood the tone—that unshakable hunger that wouldn't be subdued. Men usually only talked like that after they'd already lost.

Later, when he was gone, she sat at the window, gazing out at the courtyard where horses, soldiers, and dust mingled. "What do you think, Your Majesty?" asked one of her advisors. She replied: "He's lying, but he believes it." - "Then he's dangerous." - "Or useful."

That night she slept badly. She dreamed of an endless sea, of burning skies, of ships disappearing into nothingness. When she awoke, she was drenched in sweat. Ferdinand slept deeply, loudly, indifferently. She got up, went to the window, and saw the morning coming.

"A man who dreams like that can either win everything or ruin everything," she said quietly. And then, almost smiling: "I like men like that."

The next day she had a message written: *The Genoese should stay. We are examining his demands.*

Columbus read it, and his smile was that of a man who had almost convinced the universe.

But in the shadow of the courtyard, between gold and prayer, the knives were already beginning to sharpen.

The discussions dragged on for weeks, perhaps months. Columbus lived in the shadow of the courtyard, ate what was given to him, drank what was left over, and waited. He hated waiting. It was worse than a storm, worse than hunger. The sea is at least honest, but power—power smiles while it lets you die of thirst.

He was admitted again and again. Advisors, secretaries, treasurers—each wanted something different. Wealth, influence, control. Columbus wanted it all. "I demand the title of Admiral of the Ocean," he said calmly. "And Viceroy over every land I discover." The men looked at him as if he'd burned his head. One laughed. "You demand like a king, but speak like a fool." Columbus grinned. "Then you've heard me correctly."

Isabella sat quietly, listening, observing. She wasn't a dreamer, she was a mirror—she merely reflected what was before her. And Columbus stood there, a man of salt and madness, believing his own words. This fascinated her. Not because she believed he was right—but because she knew that such people sometimes made history, while the sane merely commented on it.

The treasurers talked numbers. "The venture is too expensive," they said. "The fleet is too risky." One added: "There's no guarantee he'll return." Columbus nodded. "Guarantees only exist for those who never try anything."

They wrote reports, calculated, and doubted. Columbus sat beside them, calm, stubborn, his face like stone. When an advisor said, "You demand 10 percent of all profits," he replied, "I only demand 10 percent of what you would never have without me."

Ferdinand wanted to get rid of him. "He's impudent," he said. "A man without background, without fortune, without boundaries." Isabella replied, "That's precisely why I like him."

It was a game, and she knew it. He had nothing—no rank, no troops, no name that mattered. Just a dream that weighed more than reason. And sometimes that was enough.

He wrote to her at night. Not polite letters, but confessions. *Your Majesty, I don't ask out of pride. I ask because I know what I am. I can give you more than all who flatter you.* She read them. Sometimes she smiled, sometimes she frowned, but she was never indifferent.

One day she asked him to come alone. No advisors, no witnesses. Just her and him in a quiet room, light through glass, dust in the air. "So you want everything," she said. Columbus nodded. "Yes, Your Majesty." - "Why?" - "Because I can."

She approached, her voice calm, almost gentle. "You're a fool." - "I know that." - "And fools cost kingdoms." - "And they make them."

For a moment, it was quiet. Then she turned and looked out the window. Outside, a flag, red and gold, fluttered lazily in the wind. "I won't stop you," she said quietly. "But I won't save you either." Columbus bowed. "I don't expect that."

She smiled thinly. "You expect too much from the world, Genoese." - "Then at least I don't owe it anything."

He left, and she stayed, watched him, thought: *If he perishes, his death will be mine. If he wins, so will his glory.* That wasn't romance, that was politics – and perhaps the most honest contract between two people who knew what dreams cost.

That night, as he sat back in his room, he wrote in the logbook of his life: *The queen doesn't believe in me, but she believes that I believe. That's enough.*

He drank, laughed, and looked out the window. The sky was dark, the wind was still.

"Just a little more," he murmured. "Just a damn little."

And somewhere, beyond the walls, the sea was already beginning to wait.

The "no" didn't come loudly. No messenger with a drum, no shout, no anger. Just a parchment, a signature, a polite word. *"Their Majesties regret that they cannot support the undertaking."* That was all. A polite burial for an idea.

Columbus read the sentence three times. Then he placed the letter on the table, sat down, and stared at the wall. No anger, no outburst, just emptiness. This is what it looks like when a person freezes inside.

He had seen it coming. For weeks they had kept him waiting, postponed conversations, exchanged glances, laughed behind closed doors. He was too demanding, too foreign, too safe. Spain only liked dreamers after they were already dead.

In the evening, he went to the tavern under the arcades, where the sailors were playing, singing, and drinking. They saw him coming; some nodded sympathetically, others pretended not to see him. One called out, "Well, Admiral, when are you sailing?" Laughter. Columbus sat down and ordered wine. "Soon," he said. "Alone, if necessary."

He drank, slowly, in silence. The voices around him grew muffled, the light blurred. He thought of Isabella, of that look that was so close to faith, yet still not enough. He thought of all the nights he had spent drawing the world on maps, of the lines that were now only chalk on paper.

When he left, the city was silent. No wind, no sound, just his footsteps on the pavement. He walked to the harbor, looked out at the sea, black, boundless. He whispered, "You won." Then he laughed. "But I'm still here."

He considered going to France. There were ears there that weren't yet annoyed by him. Maybe money. Maybe just other lies. He had nothing to lose, so this was already a gain.

Meanwhile, the conversation continued in the courtyard. The advisors called him arrogant, dangerous, and insane. One said, "He demands as if he's already discovered." Another, "A man without heritage. No blood matters." Isabella remained silent.

Later, when she was alone, she asked her confessor: "Do you believe that God sometimes speaks through fools?" The old man nodded. "Sometimes fools are the only ones who listen." She smiled sadly. "Then perhaps we silenced him too soon."

Columbus wrote a letter that night that he never sent. *Your Majesty, you said no, but the sea always says yes. I'm going. And if I drown, at least it will be on the right shore.*

He packed little. Maps, papers, his notes, a few coins he still had. He walked. Dust, sun, hunger. The cities no longer left an impression. Only the sea remained, somewhere out there, like a mirror waiting for his face.

In Salamanca, halfway there, he paused. A chapel, empty, silent. He entered and sat in the last pew. No prayer, only silence. He stared at the cross and said quietly: "If you want me to give up, then give me peace. If not—then give me wind."

No answer. But outside, the sky was darkening, and a light breeze blew through the trees.

He smiled. "You can't get rid of me, old friend."

He continued on. Westward, toward the La Rábida Monastery. To where the monks believed more than the kings.

In the courtyard, they continued to talk about him. They laughed, judged, and planned. But Isabella remained silent. A thought burned in her mind that wouldn't let go: *If he is right, we will be fools and he will be a king.*

And somewhere on the road, dusty, sweating, almost barefoot, Columbus walked and muttered: "If they don't want to go, I'll go anyway."

The sea heard it. And laughed. Quietly. Like an animal that knows the game isn't over yet.

He arrived there as one arrives at the end: tired, hungry, devoid of all dignity. The road was dusty, the sky gloomy, the wind cold. La Rábida lay on a hill,

quiet, gray, a place that looked like a last attempt. Columbus dragged himself to the gate, knocked, waited. Nothing. Then again. A monk opened the door, old, with calm eyes that knew more than words.

"I'm looking for Fray Juan Pérez," said Columbus. His voice was rough, almost broken. The friar nodded and let him enter.

Inside, it smelled of wax, wood, and silence. No courtyard, no gold, no lies. Only prayers clinging quietly to the walls. Columbus was given bread, water, and a bed. He ate, drank, and slept for two days straight. When he awoke, Pérez was sitting at the table, staring at him without speaking.

"You've gone far," the monk finally said. Columbus nodded. "Too far, perhaps." - "And why?" - "Because I had to." - "Why do you have to?" - "Because no one else does."

Pérez was silent for a long time. Then he said: "You really believe that Asia can be reached via the west?" Columbus nodded. "I don't believe it. I know." - "And if you're wrong?" - "Then at least it was mine."

The monk looked at him as if testing whether there was anything human left in this man. "You have the court against you," he said quietly. Columbus laughed, dryly, wearily. "I have everything against me. But I have the sea on my side."

They talked for hours. About geography, theology, currents, faith. Columbus spoke with the zeal of a drowning man, Pérez listened with the calm of a man who had seen many fools—but perhaps none like this.

In the evening, they sat outside, the wind blowing from the west, mild and comforting. Columbus stared up at the sky. "I've failed," he said. "They don't believe me." Pérez smiled. "Then maybe God will believe you." - "God has enough believers. I need ships."

Pérez laughed, quietly, honestly. "Sometimes it's the same thing."

That night, the monk wrote a letter to Isabella. No big words, no courtly Latin. Just: *I've seen the Genoese. He's no fool. He's a flame. If you extinguish it, you might extinguish more than one man.*

Columbus knew nothing of this. He sat in his cell, his head in his hands, and thought: *Maybe it was all just a bet and I lost.*

A few days later, a messenger arrived. A boy, barefoot, dusty. He sought out Pérez and brought a seal. Pérez read, nodded, and looked at Columbus. "She wants to see you," he said. Columbus laughed—the laughter of a man who has already lost everything and yet still wins.

"Me? Again?" - "Yes. Again. Maybe this time for real."

He got up, washed himself, and straightened his shirt, which was almost falling apart. "What if she changes her mind?" he asked. Pérez put his hand on his shoulder. "Then you'll always have the sea. And no one will forget that."

The next morning he set out. The sky was clear, the wind strong, and the road to Santa Fe long. But this time he didn't walk stooped. He walked as if he knew that somewhere out there something was waiting for him—no land, no gold, no glory. Just a Yes that was finally honest.

And up above, on the monastery wall, Pérez stood, watching him and murmuring: "Sometimes God doesn't send angels. Only stubborn people."

The wind blew from the west, and the sea, invisible behind the hills, murmured softly – as if it knew that it would soon be needed again.

Santa Fe smelled of victory and dust. Granada had fallen, the Moors defeated, the queen finally the ruler of a united empire. The city was filled with jubilation, blood, and gold that still tasted of iron. Columbus walked through the center, dusty, exhausted, with a face marked more by wind than by life. No one looked at him. He was one of those figures you overlook until they begin to shine.

He asked for Isabella. She was busy, they said. Celebrations, petitioners, strategists. He should wait. Columbus smiled wearily. "I can wait. I've been waiting for years."

He was given a room, a piece of bread, and water. He wrote, talked, and drew. Again and again. Plans, lines, calculations. No one listened. But this time he was no longer the supplicant. He was the man the sea hadn't yet swallowed. That made him more dangerous.

After two weeks, she summoned him. A room full of light and gold, too large for honest words. Isabella sat on a chair that looked more like an altar. Ferdinand sat beside her, cold, polite, bored. Columbus entered and bowed, not deeply, but sincerely.

"You again," Ferdinand said dryly. Columbus nodded. "I won't give up, Your Majesty." - "And why not?" - "Because I can."

Isabella smiled slightly. "I was told you were with Fray Juan Pérez." - "He fed me when the world starved me." - "And what does he think?" - "That you're wiser than your advisors."

She laughed. Ferdinand didn't.

Columbus spoke, differently this time. Less zeal, more fire. No pleading, no pathos—just conviction. "I don't ask for mercy," he said. "I ask for trust. If you send me, I might lose my life. If you don't, you might lose the world."

The room was silent. The advisors exchanged glances, Ferdinand drummed his fingers. Isabella looked at him, long and searching. "You are a stubborn man." - "They call me worse." - "I believe you."

She stood up and went to the window. Outside, flags fluttered, red and white, the new Spain. She spoke quietly, almost to herself: "We've fought so much war to gain territory. Perhaps it's time to find some."

Columbus said nothing. He knew every word was too much.

She turned around. "You'll get what you asked for. Three ships, men, provisions. But if you fail, forget my name." Columbus nodded. "If I fail, you'll forget me anyway."

Ferdinand rolled his eyes. "You dare a lot, Genoese." - "You too, Your Majesty."

The contract was drawn up. The *Surrender of Santa Fe* Admiral of the Ocean. Viceroy of the New World. Ten percent of the profits. Titles, rights, promises. Words that weighed nothing, but meant everything.

As he signed, his hand trembled. Not with fear, but with relief. He read his name on the parchment –*Cristóbal Colon*– and knew that he had just bought a piece of heaven that no one understood.

Isabella held out her hand. "I hope you find what you're looking for." - "I'm just looking for proof, Your Majesty." - "For what?" - "That dreams aren't lies."

She nodded. "Then go. And pray that God has mercy on you."

He smiled crookedly. "If he isn't, I'll still sail."

Outside the gates of Santa Fe, the wind waited. The sky was bright, the light harsh, and the sea far away – but Columbus felt it. It was calling.

He stood still, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. After all the years, all the ridicule, all the doors closing, one had finally opened.

And he knew: now she would never go again.

As soon as the ink was dry, the court smelled of envy. Columbus had won—not gold, not power, but the right to dream. And that alone was enough to create enemies. Advisors whispered, courtiers smiled falsely, and everywhere he went, he felt looks that said: *How could this nobody do this?*

He wore the titles like a fever. *Admiral of the Ocean. Viceroy of future lands.* Words as big as the sky, as heavy as stones. He knew they were laughing behind his back, but he laughed along with them. *Just laugh, he thought, When I come back, you will kneel – or vomit.*

Ferdinand hardly spoke to him anymore. For the king, he was a necessary evil, a tool with too much voice. Isabella, on the other hand, remained calm, almost maternal. She sometimes looked at him with that look that was neither affection nor distrust—more curiosity. "You remind me of someone," she once said. "Who?" "Me. Before the war."

He smiled. "Then I hope you won." "I survived," she replied. "That's enough."

In the cities, people were talking. The Genoese, they said. The man who wants to sail to the edge of the world. Children played in the streets and threw stones into the water, shouting, "Land, land!" Priests preached about hubris, merchants about courage. Most believed he would never return. Some hoped so.

Columbus walked through the streets, unrecognized, unimpressed. He had no interest in fame. Only in direction. He gathered men, supplies, maps. Again the same song—lies, wine, promises. Only this time he sang it with the weight of a man who bore the signature of the Crown on his back.

Some of his old enemies suddenly sought his company. Merchants offered materials he previously couldn't afford. Priests blessed him with the zeal of people hoping to be mentioned in the book later. Even those who laughed at him now called him "Your Grace." He didn't like that. "Call me Columbus," he said. "Until I find something, I'm not worthy of any mercy."

At night, he sat alone, with a candle, the maps, and the wine. He drew lines, currents, islands that didn't yet exist. "There," he murmured. "There it is. I know it." He talked to himself, to God, to the sea he could already see in his mind.

Sometimes a messenger would arrive with news from Palos—the ships were being prepared, sailors recruited, supplies procured. Everything was taking shape. Finally. But he knew the hardest part was yet to come. Not the sea—people. Always people.

Once, Isabella visited him in his study. No pomp, no entourage, just her. She saw the maps, the drawings, the calculations. "You really have no doubts?" she asked. Columbus answered without hesitation. "Doubt is for those who stay." - "And fear?" - "Fear is fuel."

She nodded slowly. "Then sail," she said. "Sail before you become a story that never happens."

He bowed deeply. No drama. Just respect.

After she left, he stood there for a long time, alone, the light dim, the wind outside loud. He thought of everything he had lost and what he now carried: responsibility, pride, hope—the most dangerous triumvirate a person can bear.

He wrote to Pérez: *I'm going, brother. If the sea eats me, at least it'll be full. If not, then I'll bring you proof that faith is worth more than gold.*

Then he extinguished the candle, drank the last sip of wine, and lay down.

He didn't sleep well. He dreamed of water, of hands reaching out of the depths, of a sun rising over a black land. He woke up, his heart pounding, his forehead wet. He sat down, looked out the window, and said quietly, "I'm not finished with you yet, sea."

And somewhere out there, far beyond Palos, far beyond all the talk, lay the West – silent, impatient, lurking.

The morning was clear, too clear. Santa Fe shone in the light as if celebrating its own history. Flags waved, soldiers marched, priests prayed, courtiers whispered. And in the middle of it all was Columbus—no longer a beggar, not yet a hero, but something else: a man better seen from behind.

He walked slowly through the courtyard. No gold, no escort, only a small retinue of clerks and servants, more curious than reverential. Some nodded to him halfheartedly, others turned away. The court had a short memory—admiration one day, ridicule the next.

Isabella waited at the top of the stairs, Ferdinand beside her, stiff as a statue bored with itself. She wore no tiara, only a simple gown. It was almost more honest than all the crowns in the world. Columbus stepped forward and bowed, this time deeply.

"So you're really going," she said. "Yes, Your Majesty." - "Are you afraid?" - "Only that I'm right."

She smiled, weak but genuine. "I don't know if you're brave or crazy." - "The two usually don't work together."

Ferdinand stepped forward and shook his hand, briefly, coldly, politically. "Bring us gold," he said. Columbus looked at him. "I'll bring you something better." - "And what is that?" - "Evidence."

Isabella took a step closer. "You know many hope you'll never return." - "Then I'll just disappoint them."

A brief moment—the kind that hangs silently in the air before it becomes history. She looked at him with that look that said everything a queen mustn't say out loud: *I hope you can do it, because otherwise I don't believe in enough.*

Columbus bowed one last time. "When I return, Your Majesty, it will be with heaven beneath my feet."

"Then go," she said. "And don't let the devil tempt you." "Too late," he replied. "He's sailing with us."

He turned around and walked down the stairs. No fanfare, no cheering. Just footsteps, wind, sun. A few children ran after him, calling his name, laughing. The adults looked away. No one believes in miracles until they happen.

He mounted his horse and looked back once more. Isabella was still standing there, motionless, in the wind, like a promise. Her hand lifted briefly, barely noticeably. He nodded, then rode off.

The roads were dusty, the sun merciless. The land smelled of harvest, of blood, of the future. Columbus rode, reins loose, his face to the west. Behind him, Spain – loud, proud, exhausted. Before him, the sea – quiet, patient, invincible.

On the way, he met no one who wanted to stop him. Only farmers, traders, and pilgrims. A few asked where he was going. "West," he said. They laughed, thinking it was a joke.

At night he slept under the open sky, the parchment of the *Capitulations* in his pocket, the sea in his head. He often woke up, drenched in sweat, drenched in dreams. But every time he opened his eyes, the sky was there—vast, clear, merciless.

On the last day, he saw it: the water, endless, glittering, lurking. The sea. His enemy, his judge, his stage.

He dismounted, went to the shore, knelt, and dipped his hand in the salt. "I'm back," he said. "And this time I won't come back empty-handed."

He stood up and looked over to where the sky kissed the sea. There, somewhere, was his west. He knew he could still fail. But he wouldn't lose again.

For now the dream belonged entirely to him. No king, no crown, no god could take it away from him.

He smiled, quietly, tiredly, invincibly. "All right," he said. "Then let's begin."

And the wind answered with a long, salty breath – like a whisper that said: *I've been waiting for you.*

A no that feels like mockery

He rode through the country, but in his mind he was still in the halls of Santa Fe. Those long hallways that smelled of wax, power, and hypocrisy. Those faces—smooth, saturated, indifferent. Men with too much velvet and too little heart. They had laughed at him, waved him away, whispered "fool" when he turned his back. He remembered each of those faces, each smile that smacked of mockery.

He was free now, but freedom had an aftertaste. It was the kind that tasted of sweat, dust, and loneliness. The triumph was only a promise—and those who congratulated him now were the same ones who would stab him in the back tomorrow if the sea swallowed him.

He rode on, across flat plains, through villages where no one knew who he was. Perhaps that was for the best. He wanted no bows, no glances. Only silence. Only direction. But at night, when the fire flickered and the stars stared down at him, they came again: the voices from the courtyard, the cold eyes, the mocking laughter.

"The Genoese thinks he can sail around the edge of the world!" "He should pray instead of calculating!"

"If God had wanted us to know the West, he would have laid out maps!"

He heard them all, like ghosts unable to find rest. But instead of fear, there was rage. A clear, clean rage that burned without destroying. He swore to himself to keep each of those names. Not out of hatred, but as a reminder that he would never have anyone to thank for the impossible—but himself.

He saw the sky above him, vast and merciless. Spain was beautiful, but it reeked of complacency. Every stone, every house, every man was sick of history, too sick to make new ones. He spat in the dust. "You thought you were sick," he murmured, "and I'm still hungry."

He thought of Isabella—the only one who hadn't laughed at him. She hadn't saved him, she had tested him. And he had passed. Part of him was grateful to her, another part wanted to prove to her that he had never needed her. Faith and pride—a pair that never lasts.

In the evening, as he rested under a tree, he took out the parchment – the *Surrender of Santa Fe*. The seal was still intact. He ran his fingers over it, slowly, almost reverently. It was his only treasure, and he knew that paper could carry more weight than any sword.

He spoke quietly, almost a whisper: "They said no. Then yes. Then no again in their eyes. I'm tired of asking for permission."

The wind responded with a rustling in the grass. It sounded like mockery, but also like approval.

He thought of the years in Portugal, of the mockers there, the wise men with false teeth who told him to draw maps instead of dreams. He thought of

Beatriz, of the quiet "Go" in her voice. Of all the nights he stared at the sky because no one wanted to listen to him anymore.

Now the world would listen to him – whether it wanted to or not.

He smiled, tugged at his coat, which had long since become more patches than fabric. He smelled of sweat, leather, and salt, but that didn't bother him. He smelled of work. Of direction. Of risk.

A farmer passed by with an oxcart, looked at him, and nodded. "Are you traveling far?" he asked. Columbus nodded. "Yes. West." The farmer laughed, took it as a joke, and moved on. Columbus watched him go, his smile still intact.

He thought: *They laugh because they have never tried to offend the world.*

In the distance, he saw the line in the sky where the land ended and the sea began. The west was close; he could almost smell it—salt, danger, beginning.

He murmured, "I owe no one thanks. Only the wind."

Then he urged his horse on. The dust rose, the sky turned red, and the sun slowly fell behind the line that called him.

He thought about the "no," which felt like a mockery. And he vowed to turn it into a "yes" that would make history.

Palos smelled of fish, sweat, wine, and sin—in other words, of everything that was honest. The city lay languidly under the sun, the sea glittering as if it wanted to pretend to be innocent. But Columbus knew what lay beyond. Every sailor knew that. Water is never innocent. It eats you if you blink.

He arrived early in the morning, his boots dusty, his face tanned by the wind, the parchment of the *Capitulations* under his arm like a piece of Holy Scripture. People looked at him, curious, suspicious, mocking. "That's him," they whispered. "The fool who wants to sail over the edge." He pretended not to hear. One gets used to ridicule. It's cheaper than bread.

He went first to the church, then to the harbormaster, then to the tavern. Everything in that order—first to calm the heavens, then the bureaucracy, then his nerves.

The men he needed were sitting in the tavern. Rough faces, broken hands, voices like sandpaper. Sailors, fishermen, smugglers, convicts. Not heroes. But heroes sink faster.

He ordered wine, spoke loudly, and laughed even louder. "I need men who aren't afraid of water," he said. "And not of me either." Laughter. One shouted: "And what will we get if we survive?" Columbus grinned. "Stories. And maybe gold." Another: "And if we don't survive?" - "Then you'll finally have peace."

They laughed again, but this time differently. Not mockingly. More as if they understood that this man wasn't lying—because he didn't even know how.

The next day he went to the harbor. Three ships, so miserable they almost looked like a joke. *Santa María, Pinta, Niña*. More planks than ships, more hope than substance. But he loved them nonetheless. He ran his hand over the planks as if to soothe them. "You and I," he murmured. "We pretend we know what we're doing."

The Pinzón brothers arrived. Martin Alonso, Juan, Vicente—experienced sailors, proud men, with shoulders as broad as doors and eyes that had seen more storms than prayers. They distrusted him, but they liked his courage. "If you fail, Genoese," said Martin, "I'll drag you into the sea with my own hands." Columbus grinned. "Then at least you'll sail with style."

The weeks passed in sweat and curses. Barrels were loaded, ropes were taut, sails were mended. The sun burned, the wind carried the scent of misfortune and hope. Columbus cooperated, always, everywhere. No order was given without dirt on his hands. That made an impression.

The people of Palos whispered. Some said he was blessed, others, cursed. During the mass, the priest spoke of sin, of pride, of the wrath of God that strikes those who venture too far. After the mass, Columbus looked at him and said, "If God hadn't wanted the West, he would have left it empty." The priest stepped back.

In the evenings, he sat with the men on the quay, drinking, listening. Stories of the sea, of ghosts, of women, of lost ships. He spoke little. He knew: true captains only speak when necessary.

At night, he wrote in his logbook. No numbers, no navigation. Just thoughts. *I've lost the land, but I've found my destination. Spain laughs, but the sea listens. I'm ready.*

He often stood on the dock, alone, barefoot, the water around his ankles. He looked at the stars, at the line where sky and sea kissed. It was quiet. Only the creaking of the ships, the lapping of the water, the gentle breathing of the depths.

"I know you're waiting," he said quietly. "But this time I'm leading."

Behind him in the darkness, sailors sang, laughed, and argued. Life before the storm.

Columbus smiled, quietly, wearily. "Soon," he whispered. "Very soon."

And the sea—that old, indifferent creature—was silent, but it was silent in a way that sounded like agreement.

The days in Palos were loud, dirty, and full of doubt. No one believed those three ships would ever return. Not even the seagulls perched on the masts—as if they knew that one wouldn't grow old there. The harbor smelled of fish, wine, and fear.

Columbus walked the docks every morning, talking to carpenters, checking barrels, testing sails, complaining about nails that were too short and men who were too drunk. He was everywhere at once, a driven man in human form. He knew that every mistake, every loose rope, every crack in a barrel would mean the difference between life and death.

The priests made his life difficult. They preached about the devil, who seduces the soul, about the hubris of people who believe they can transgress God's boundaries. One of them openly called him a sinner during mass. Columbus sat in the back, listened, and laughed quietly. After mass, he waited for the man at the door. "You say the devil is controlling me?" he asked calmly. The priest stepped back. "He gives you dreams that aren't yours." Columbus approached. "Then at least he should get something out of it."

He had learned that the best way to deal with ridicule was to chew it like a meal—slowly, with teeth, until there was nothing left.

In the city, the women began to cry. Not because they believed in him, but because they knew their husbands. Men who would now die at sea, sailing after a stranger who believed in an edge no one could see. Some implored their husbands to stay. Some did, most didn't. Poverty has a strange form of courage—it's called indifference.

Martin Alonso Pinzón worked like an animal. He procured men, weapons, barrels, provisions. Without him, Columbus would have nothing. But there was a tension between them, invisible but dangerous. Two men with too much pride and too little patience. One evening, Pinzón said: "If you lead us to ruin, Genoese, at least they'll call me the wisest one." Columbus grinned. "And if I win, they'll talk about me. You'll get the rest of the bread." Pinzón laughed. It wasn't a friendly laugh.

At night, they sat in the tavern, drinking, silent. The men played cards, argued, prayed—sometimes all at once. One asked Columbus: "Why are you doing this?" Columbus looked at him, calmly. "Because I want to know what lies beyond the void." - "And if there is nothing?" - "Then at least I saw it."

He knew the men thought he was crazy. But that was precisely what kept them moving. No one follows a normal person into infinity.

The next day, a messenger arrived from Santa Fe. A seal, a few words, royal approval for everything necessary. Official. Final. Columbus read it and felt something inside him give way. Years of fighting, ridicule, debt, hunger—all culminated in a piece of parchment. He laughed. "So it is."

But joy never lasted long. The rumors began. A few sailors wanted to escape, others had gotten drunk and were saying the sea was cursed, full of monsters, whirlpools, and fire. One swore he'd heard voices coming from the water during the night. "They're telling us to turn back!" he cried. Columbus stepped forward and gave him a slap, hard, loud, liberating. "Then tell them to catch up with us first."

The men laughed, nervously, but that was enough. Laughter is cheaper than courage, but sometimes it's enough.

Late at night, Columbus sat on the quay again. No wind, no moon, only the creaking of the ships. He gazed at the water, black and endless. In his hand he held the royal letter, shimmering in the darkness like a piece of stolen sun.

"You said no," he murmured, "and now you say yes. But the sea... the sea never asked."

He put the parchment in his pocket, stood up, and walked along the planks, from ship to ship. He placed his hand on each deck, each rail, each mast, as if blessing them. "You three," he said quietly, "are my last attempt to show the world that it's round."

Then he stepped down, barefoot, into the shallow water that lapped around his ankles. It was cool, awakening, real.

"One more week," he said. "Then you'll see what a person can do when no one believes in them anymore."

And the sea was silent, as always. But this time the silence didn't sound empty. It sounded like anticipation.

The evening smelled of salt, smoke, and farewells. The sun slowly burned into the horizon, and the sky turned blood red—like a promise or a warning. It was loud in the tavern of Palos, so loud that you could no longer hear the sea. Men drank, laughed, cursed, prayed. The wine flowed like liquid courage, and everyone knew that tomorrow none of them would be the same.

Columbus sat off to the side, a bottle in front of him, his face in shadow. He spoke little, laughed rarely, but when he did, it was so palpable. He watched the men quell their fear with noise. Some shouted that they were about to make history, others that they would rather have forgotten history in a brothel. One danced on a table, naked from the waist up, and yelled that he would sleep with sirens at sea. Laughter. Then silence. No one wanted to admit they were afraid.

Martin Alonso Pinzón sat in the corner, a cup in his hand, his face red, his voice ragged. "Tomorrow, Genoese," he cried, "tomorrow we'll show them that the sky is greater than their beliefs." Columbus nodded. "Tomorrow," he said, "we'll show them that even nothingness has limits."

Outside, it grew quieter. The wind had died down, and the sea stood there, black and smooth as a mirror. Columbus went out. The noise remained behind him. Only the creaking of the ships and the distant clinking of cups followed him.

He walked to the quay, sat down, took off his boots, and dangled his feet in the water. It was cold, clear, real. He looked at the three ships, his three wooden prayers. They looked small, lost, almost pathetic against the vastness. And yet there was something in them—a defiance that pleased him.

He pulled out his notes, read what he'd written about currents, stars, and distances. Numbers, lines, hopes. It all looked so orderly on paper. But the sea wasn't paper. The sea didn't correct mistakes.

He laughed quietly. "If you're going to kill me, please do it with style," he murmured.

A boy passed by, barely sixteen, one of the youngest sailors. "Admiral," he said hesitantly, "is it true that the sea is boiling at the edge?" Columbus looked at him. "No, boy. It's boiling everywhere." The boy laughed nervously and stepped back.

Columbus remained alone. Night fell. Stars appeared, slowly, cautiously. He looked up, recognized the familiar patterns, the old lies of navigation. *North Star, polar line, divine order.* All nice inventions to keep men quiet. But the stars weren't made for humans. They were too distant, too old, too indifferent.

He thought of Isabella. Her gaze, her "sail," echoed within him. Not as a command—more as a challenge. He wondered if she was thinking of him now. Probably not. Kings sleep well when fools dream for them.

He took a sip of wine, looked at the water, and suddenly it seemed alive—small waves, lights, movement. The sea whispered, quietly, incomprehensibly, like an animal too large to know language.

"I'll come tomorrow," he said. "And I'll take a piece of your secret with me."

He sat until the sky changed color, until the sea and the horizon became one. He felt that this was the last moment that belonged to him. From tomorrow on, he belonged to history—or death.

Behind him in the tavern, the men sang an old sea shanty, off-key and loud. It sounded of homesickness, of courage, of resignation. Columbus smiled, quietly, wearily.

"Tomorrow," he said, "it all begins. Or it all ends."

He stood up, put on his boots, and walked back along the planks. The ships were at rest, as if they knew what was coming. He placed his hand on the mast of the *Santa Maria*, pressed firmly.

"Sleep well," he whispered. "Tomorrow I'll wake you up with madness."

Then he left. The wind returned, light, salty, lively. And somewhere in the darkness, far away, the sea stirred—as if it had smiled.

Morning came quietly. No triumph, no thunder, no sign from the sky. Only light cutting through the fog and the smell of salt, tar, and cold sweat. Palos awoke slowly, like an animal awakened too soon. Dogs barked, bells rang lazily, seagulls circled over the harbor as if they knew that today, food in abundance would be thrown into the sea.

The men arrived one after another. Some still drunk from the previous evening, others pale and silent. Some kissed their wives, some didn't. A few didn't even look back. Anyone who was still thinking about it had already lost.

Columbus stood on the dock, hands behind his back, facing the sea. No speaker, no priest, no pathos. Just him, the wind, and three ships that looked as if they would break apart at the first wave. *Santa Maria, Pinta, Niña*— three piles of boards, held together by nails, hope and lies.

Martin Alonso Pinzón approached him. "We can still change our minds," he said. Columbus looked at him, dry and calm. "I've changed my mind too many times."

They walked the planks together. Men stood ready, ropes were loosened, sails were set. The creaking of the masts was like the breathing of an animal that seemed to know it was being hunted.

The harbor filled. Women, children, and the elderly – they stood there, silent, watching the spectacle. Some prayed, some wept, others whispered: *Fool, heretic, lucky guy*. The sea smelled of farewell.

A priest came, blessed the ships with holy water, and muttered something about God's protection. Columbus nodded politely, accepting the blessing as one would a stone before throwing it into the sea. "If God wants me," he thought, "he will find me."

Then, a shout from the bow: "Ready to set sail!"—Voices, shouts, movement. Columbus took a deep breath. This was the moment. No turning back, no maybe. Everything he was was now at stake.

He went on deck of the *Santa Maria* Slowly, without haste. The men looked at him, expectant, fearful, curious. He said nothing. Words would have only ruined it. He raised his hand, a sign—simple, clear. The ropes were released.

The wood creaked, the water lapped against the side, the sails caught the first wind. Slowly, reluctantly, the ships began to move. The shore slipped back,

quietly, unnoticed. Voices echoed, then they grew smaller, fainter, and disappeared.

Columbus didn't look back. No glance at land, no last salute. Only the west stretching before him, vast, gray, silent. He felt the ship beneath him come alive. It was as if something great was finally breathing freely.

Pinzón stepped beside him. "So that's it," he said. Columbus nodded. "It never was. Now it begins."

The sun broke through the clouds, slowly, hesitantly. The light hit the sails, causing them to glow briefly, like symbols made of cloth. The men cheered, one shouted, "For Spain!" Another, "For God!" Columbus murmured, "For me."

The wind increased. The ships gained speed. The sea opened up, vast and merciless. The sound of Palos faded, the land shrank, a dot, then nothing. Just water, sky, and direction.

He leaned against the railing, looked ahead. The rushing, the flapping, the soft singing of the rope in the wind. Everything fit. Everything was right.

He smiled, but not out of joy. It was the kind of smile that only people have who have come too far to take fear seriously.

"All right," he said quietly, almost tenderly. "Then eat me if you can."

And the sea responded with a splash of cold water that hit him in the face – like a handshake between enemies who respect each other.

The first few days were easy. Too easy. The wind was kind, the sea calm, the men drank, laughed, and worked with the serenity of people who still believe they can turn back at any moment. Palos lay behind them, Spain was only a memory, and the sea was still friendly—like an innkeeper who smiles before locking the door.

Columbus stood at the bow, his face to the wind. The smell of salt and tar, the creaking of the planks, the constant flapping of the sails—all of it was music. He had finally lost land, and that was a good thing. Land was noise, lies, politics. The sea was honest. It killed you, yes, but unintentionally.

The men talked a lot. About women, about gold, about gods who guard the sea. One claimed he saw smoke on the horizon, another that the water tasted different. Columbus let them talk. Men need to talk to avoid thinking.

Martin Alonso Pinzón led the *Pinta* with iron discipline. He wasn't a dreamer, he was a survivor. And he distrusted Columbus, even now. At night, when they sailed within sight of each other, Columbus stood on deck and looked across, the small silhouette of his sister ship in the moonlight. He knew Pinzón was talking about him, that he doubted him. He knew it—and he needed it. Doubt was fuel.

The sea changed on the third day. The wind shifted, the water became darker, heavier. Seagulls disappeared. Only silence, vast and deep. A few men began to whisper: "This is the zone where God doesn't look." Columbus heard it and grinned. "Then he'll finally see properly."

That evening, a young sailor came to him, his hands rough, his face covered in salt. "Admiral," he said hesitantly, "how far is it?" Columbus looked at him. "Until we stop doubting." The boy nodded, understanding nothing, but it sounded like courage.

They sailed on, day after day, mile after mile. The sun burned, the nights were cold. Water was rationed, bread was hard, wine was sour. But no one complained yet. It was as if they were all holding their breath, hoping the sea would blink first.

Columbus wrote in the logbook every evening. *Calm sea. Men happy. Me too. No one believes the sky is lying yet.* He didn't write it for the queen. He wrote it for himself, as proof that he still had control—over words, if not over the world.

At night, he often sat alone, at the bow, gazing westward. Stars reflected on the water, an endless carpet of light. He looked at them, those old, indifferent dots, and thought: *You have survived for millennia, but today you look to me.*

Sometimes he spoke quietly. To God, to the sea, to himself. "I'm here," he said. "And this time I'm not going back just because someone's afraid."

On the fourth day, they saw nothing more of Europe. No land, no smoke, no birds. Only water. The men grew quieter. One said he now knew what loneliness smelled like. Another whispered, "The sea is too big. No one should see this." Columbus stood by, listening, and simply replied, "Then we'll do it anyway."

A storm flickered in the distance, far away but visible. Lightning flashed like thin cracks in the sky. Columbus looked, felt the trembling in the air. He grinned. "Finally, a sign."

The men looked at him as if he were insane. And perhaps he was. But it was the good kind of insanity—the kind that keeps you afloat while others are already drunk.

He wrote that evening: *The sea has begun to test me. Okay. I'll test back.*

Then he sat down, drank the last sip of wine, and murmured into the darkness: "I warned you, gods. I'm coming."

The sea was silent, as always. But this time the silence sounded like a grin.

After a week, the sky was different. The color, the light, even the wind smelled foreign. Spain was no longer a place, but a rumor. The men talked less, no longer laughed. The jokes they used to shout on land now sounded muffled, empty, hollow. The sea eats away sounds when it begins to fear you.

Columbus saw it coming. Not the storm, but the silence before it. The kind of silence that creeps under your skin. Men became suspicious, nervous, aggressive. A few began to whisper – about turning back, about signs, about gods who had set limits.

He walked among them, calmly, slowly, his face like stone. "You wanted adventure," he said. "Now you have one. So pray or work, but stop complaining." One murmured, "What if we never come back?" Columbus looked at him coolly. "Then at least you'll have seen something other than your own yard dirt."

Pinzón watched everything, silent, but his gaze spoke volumes. He believed in the course, but no longer in the man. And Columbus knew that. Two captains on an ocean are one too many. Yet they still kept each other in check – pride against pride, steel against stone.

The sea was calm, almost too calm. No seagulls, no fish, nothing. Just the sun, the water, the endless horizon. Men began to see things—shadows, lights, islands that vanished in the next breath. One swore he saw a flame on the water. Another claimed the stars were moving. Columbus smiled. "Of course they are. We're moving them."

In the nights, noises came. Wood creaking, sails whispering, as if someone were walking among them. Sleep was scarce. Dreams were too loud. Columbus wrote in his logbook: *Men become silent. Good. Silence is more honest than prayer.*

He began testing them. He went from deck to deck, talked to them, asked what they thought they were doing, how far along they were. He knew they didn't know. But he wanted to see who was lying. Lying was the beginning of fear.

One evening, shortly before midnight, he heard an argument. Two sailors, fists, blood, screams. One had said the sea smelled of death. The other had called him a coward. Columbus intervened, separated them, and slapped them both. "The sea smells of you," he said. "And that's bad enough."

He stood at the bow for a long time afterward. The wind had shifted. The water was smooth, unnaturally still. He thought of the court's "no," of the faces that had laughed at him. And suddenly he understood that that was nothing compared to this new "no"—the silence of the sea, which tested him without saying a word.

He wrote: *The land mocked me. The sea laughs differently. It laughs when you're not looking.*

Pinzón approached him, his brow dark, his gaze hard. "The men are doubtful," he said. Columbus replied: "Then they're finally awake." - "They're whispering about returning." - "Then at least they're still whispering. If they scream, it's too late."

Pinzón wanted to say something, but didn't. He left. Columbus stayed. He looked out at the endless gray, which was both his home and his threat.

He thought of Isabella, of her sentence: *Sail before you become a story that never happens.*

He murmured, "I've long been a story. I just want to know how it ends."

Then the wind picked up again. Slowly, like a warning. The sails stretched, the ship creaked. Men ran, shouted, worked. Movement. Life.

Columbus stood there, motionless, his hair ruffled by the wind, his face marked by salt. He gazed into the distance, into nothingness, and smiled.

"I hear you, old beast," he said. "But I'll have the last laugh."

And deep down, in the black silence, the sea laughed back.

Granada burns, and Columbus waits

Granada stank of smoke, blood, and prayer. The city had surrendered, but no one spoke of peace. Only of victory. Flags, crosses, fanfares, and sweat were everywhere. Men shouted "God is great!" and meant themselves. Women threw flowers, children carried wood for bonfires. The sky was filled with ash, as if God himself had forgotten where he belonged.

The Moors departed, slowly, with dignity, with the gaze of people who know that history is always written by the victors—and always by the wrong ones. One last drum roll, one last look back, then only dust.

Ferdinand stood on the balcony of the Alhambra, proud, stiff, and content. A king who finally had what he wanted: a unified Spain, pure, Christian, and obedient. He drank wine that tasted of iron and spoke of eternity.

Isabella stood beside her, but her gaze was elsewhere. Not at the land, not at the people. Somewhere inside her was a thought that didn't fit. A thought that smelled of wind, salt, and departure. Of a man who wanted too much, yet she still couldn't forget.

"Your Majesty," said one of her advisors, "your kingdom is now complete. God has spoken." Isabella nodded, but continued to look west, where the sun was setting. "God speaks constantly," she said quietly. "But who's listening anymore?"

The city rejoiced. Bells, drums, gunfire. The victory over Granada was a victory over the foreign. Over doubt, over chaos. Spain had been reborn – and didn't realize that in the same breath, it had grown old.

In the streets, beggars danced with soldiers, monks with whores. Wine flowed like water, and the water smelled of blood. The walls of the Alhambra, once golden, were now black with smoke. And high above, on a tower, hung a cross that looked as if it had been forged in defiance.

Isabella withdrew. No celebration, no triumphal procession. She went to her chambers and drew the curtains. She wanted silence, but received only the echo of jubilation. She sat down and picked up a letter from the table—the last

one she had received from Columbus. It was old, crumpled, almost faded. She read it again anyway: *If you send me, I will bring you a world. If not, you will remain in your own.*

She folded the parchment and put it aside, but the sentence remained. *Stay in your own.* She knew he was right, and that made her angry.

Ferdinand entered, still drunk with victory. "We did it," he said. Isabella nodded. "Yes." - "You don't sound happy." - "I'm thinking of the Genoese." Ferdinand laughed. "The fool who wants to sail into nothingness?" - "The fool who might be right."

He waved his hand and poured himself more wine. "When he comes back, we'll talk. If not, that's one less thing to worry about."

She remained silent. Outside, the celebrations continued, but a hole grew inside her. Not a feeling of guilt, more like a premonition. One of those quiet premonitions that later become history.

She stepped to the window. The sky was red, smoke rose, and the wind blew off the sea. She closed her eyes. "You're out there," she murmured. "And if you die, please don't die in vain."

Down in the city, someone screamed, someone laughed, someone died. All at once. Spain was full of life and yet already tired of it.

And somewhere far out, beyond the horizon, a small dot drifted across the sea. Three ships, so tiny that even God could miss them.

Columbus, she thought. The only man who left while everyone else stayed.

She looked west again, and for a moment, just a moment, she thought she heard the sea laughing.

Spain raged, but the sea remained silent. Two worlds, a breath apart. In Granada, the faithful clinked their cups; in the distance, men butted their heads against the wind. The land celebrated victory over the Moors, while the sea tested the men who had broken away from all that was certain.

The streets of Granada smelled of burnt wood and old blood. A kingdom rejoiced over God's victory, as if faith were a sword to be wielded. In the taverns, they sang songs about heroes who had never sailed, while outside,

Columbus and his men sailed across water that looked like the end of the world.

Columbus stood on deck, his face in the wind, which tasted salty and smelled of danger. Behind him was only the horizon, before him nothingness. The sky was vast, the sun merciless. The men worked in silence, each at their own pace, each with their own fear. It was no longer a departure; it was already a waiting.

Pinzón came to him. "No more birds," he said. Columbus nodded. "Perhaps we are the birds." Pinzón laughed harshly. "Then I hope we can swim."

The sea was still, too still. The men felt it. The kind of silence that sounds like something is listening. One murmured, "The water whispers." Another replied, "Then it's a better liar than we are."

A cloud drifted in the distance, large, black, and threatening. The wind shifted, growing louder. The sails stretched, the timber creaked. Columbus grinned. "Finally, some movement."

A sailor shouted, "A storm is coming!" Columbus nodded. "Good. I like company."

The men cursed, ran, pulled on ropes, tied cables. The sea awoke. Waves, high, angry, heavy. Water over the deck, salt in their eyes, voices in the wind. One called for God, another for his mother. Columbus stood at the helm, holding on, his hands white, his face covered in rain. He laughed. Loudly, honestly, defiantly.

"This isn't a storm!" he shouted against the wind. "This is a welcome!"

The wind answered with a blow, a wave, hard, cold, real. The ship danced, groaned, survived. The men screamed, prayed, spat. The sea took what it wanted—and still let them live. For now.

The next morning, everything was calm. The water was smooth, the sky blue, the air alive. The men lay exhausted, wet, and silent. Columbus stood at the bow, his clothes heavy, his eyes alert.

He wrote: *The sea has tested us. We're alive. Maybe it likes us. Maybe it's just playing.*

He turned around and looked at the men. "You survived," he said. "So stop acting like you're dead."

One laughed, quietly, briefly. Another patted him on the shoulder. That was enough. Life returned, in small doses.

Far away, in the land from which they came, the bells still called. Prayer, victory, pride. Spain celebrated the expulsion of the infidels.

And out here, on this endless water, were the men who would soon invent a new kind of disbelief—those who no longer believe in anything except direction.

Columbus stood at the helm again, the wind in his hair, the sea beneath him. He gazed into the distance where sky and water kissed.

"Granada is burning," he murmured. "And no one notices that the fire has been here for a long time."

He felt it inside him, that burning sensation—not anger, not triumph. Something else. Something you only have when you've lost everything except the will to be right.

And while Spain basked in the light of its crosses, Columbus sailed into the darkness that was brighter than any victory.

In Granada, the air still smelled of victory, but beneath the smoke lay something else—fear. The city had fallen, but faith had gained a taste for it. Where yesterday there was war, today the Inquisition began. Men in black hoods marched through the streets, speaking of purity, of faith, of purification. Women whispered, doors slammed. One had betrayed a neighbor, another himself. Spain became pious, like a man who suddenly feels guilt after seeing too much blood.

In the Alhambra, Isabella sat with a confessor who looked as if he had never smiled. "Faith is strong," he said. "But it needs order." She nodded. "Order often smells of death." "Better death than doubt," he replied. She looked at him for a long time. "I'm afraid you don't know the difference."

As she spoke, the sea rolled beneath Columbus's feet, restless and alive. The men cursed the food, the water, the wind. One had a fever, another was hallucinating. They began to see signs, faces in the waves, shadows on the horizon. The sea was too vast for simple thoughts.

Columbus noted:*Day 12. Men nervous. Skies clear. Perhaps too clear. Faith melts like wax.*

He knew they were watching him. No longer with respect, but more with suspicion. He was their compass, but no one knew if the needle was still pointing correctly.

In the evening, as the sun set, the prayers came. Men on their knees, whispering, hustling. One beat his chest, wept, and shouted something about demons beneath the keel. Columbus approached and grabbed him by the shoulders. "The only demon here is you, acting like a child." The man trembled, nodded, and continued to cry.

The sea was silent. But it watched.

In Granada, bonfires crackled. Heretics, Jews, and dissenters—they called them impurity, but it was just fear, in a more euphemistic language. Priests blessed the fire as if it were holy water. The sky was red, as if the earth itself had a guilty conscience.

Columbus stood on his *Santa Maria*, looking at the same red sky, only from the other side. "You're burning your doubts," he murmured. "I'm sailing mine."

The night was quiet, too quiet. Men slept badly, murmuring in their dreams. One woke up screaming, saying he'd heard the sea speak. "It said my name." Columbus grinned. "Then at least you'll have company."

The next day, the wind changed. The sky darkened, clouds heavy and low. No storm, just pressure. One said the sea smelled of sulfur. Another spat overboard and whispered, "We've gone too far. God has forgotten us." Columbus looked at him. "God never invited us."

He went to the railing and looked out. The water was dark, almost black. No horizon, only movement. He knew the men were beginning to break. Not yet loudly, but deep inside. Doubt was like salt—it creeps into everything that lives.

That evening, he sat alone at the helm. The sea had calmed down, but inside him, it raged. He wrote: *Day 13. In Spain, they're burning their fear. I'm sailing mine. Both stink equally.*

Then he laughed. Loudly, bitterly, genuinely. A few men looked and whispered. They thought he was crazy. Maybe they were right.

But in Granada, far away, Isabella knelt in a church, praying to the same God who was currently silent. She spoke of blessing, of order, of purity—and had no

idea that out there, on the sea, another was doing something much greater for the same God.

Columbus looked at the water, glittering in the moonlight. "They're burning houses," he said. "I'm building roads."

Then the wind came. Gentle, cool, like an answer.

And while Spain consumed itself with its own faith, the fool sailed on – into a nothingness that was more honest than any prayer.

The sea had had enough of calm. Day 15 began with a wind that not only blew, but spoke. It came from the west, smelling of metal and madness. The waves rose, rolling like the shoulders of an enraged beast. Columbus stood at the railing, felt the first blow, the jerk of the ship, the creaking of the ropes. He grinned. "Finally," he said.

The men ran, cursed, cried out to God, pulled on ropes, tied, untied, shouted orders no one understood. Water poured over the deck, heavy, cold, merciless. One fell, slipped, hit his head on the mast, and lay there. No one had time to care. The sea took what it wanted.

Columbus held onto the helm, his hands bloody from the wood, his eyes wide open. The wind roared, the water raged, but within him there was only clarity. No noise, no fear. Only this feeling: *Now it's decided.*

Pinzón surfaced, wet and furious. "We have to turn!" he shouted. Columbus shook his head. "No! Straight ahead!" - "This is madness!" - "Then we'll be fine!"

A wave came, bigger than anything before. The ship rose, tilted, and fell, as if trying to drown itself. Men clung to the masts, to each other, to their faith. One prayed aloud, another laughed hysterically. The sky was black, the rain hammered like nails.

Columbus shouted into the wind: "You want me, don't you? Then come!" – and the sea answered. A wave hit him, almost carrying him away, water all over the deck, salt in his lungs. He coughed, spat, laughed. "Not today, bastard."

The storm lasted all night. The men prayed, shouted, and cursed. Some sang. Columbus remained on deck, his face covered in water, his heart full of defiance. *If this is the end, he thought, then at least in the right element.*

When morning came, everything was quiet. The sky was gray, the sea weary. Men lay exhausted on deck, staring into the void. One was missing. The sea had kept him. No one spoke of it.

Columbus walked slowly over the ship, checking the ropes, masts, and sails. Everything was damaged, but intact. Like her. He wrote: *Storm over. One less. We're alive. Still.*

He stood there for a long time, gazing into the gray expanse. Clouds drifted in the distance, languid and indifferent. Behind him, men slept, snoring, quiet, broken. He knew they would now believe that God had turned his back on them. But for Columbus, this was the moment when God finally listened.

He muttered, "The West is not a direction. It's a test. And no one passes it willingly."

Far away, in Granada, bells rang. The Inquisition held its first great celebration. Bonfires flickered, and priests thanked God for the purification of souls. Ferdinand sat on his throne, drinking wine that tasted of victory. Isabella stood beside him, silent, pale.

A monk entered and knelt. "Your Majesty, the fire burns well." She looked at him. "Fire always burns well, Brother. It just never extinguishes the right thing."

She stepped out onto the balcony. Smoke, cheers, prayers. The sky was black over Granada, and in the west it glowed red. She didn't know why, but she whispered, "He's still alive."

At the same time, Columbus stood at the railing, his hands open, his face etched with salt, and said, "I'm still here."

Two places, one sentence. Two religious wars, one victim.

And the sea that lay between them was silent – content.

The morning after the storm was too bright. The light cut into the eyes, the water glittered like a false promise. Everything was silent, except for the creaking of the wood, the dripping of water, the breathing of the survivors. Men lay on deck, their faces pale, their lips crusted with salt, their hands like claws. No one spoke. Survival didn't make them proud, only empty.

Columbus stood at the helm, barefoot, wet, his hair matted, his eyes red. He looked like someone the sea had spat out because it was sick of him. He smiled nonetheless. "We're going on," he said, more to himself than to the men.

Pinzón approached him slowly, his face hard, his eyes full of anger. "We should have turned around," he said. Columbus nodded. "Then we would have been dead." - "Or home." - "The same."

They looked at each other for a long time, like two dogs who don't bite because they both know they'll die otherwise. Finally, Pinzón turned and left. The men watched him, and in their eyes there was something Columbus recognized: fear mixed with growing doubt.

They mended sails, counted barrels, and buried the dead man. No priest, no speech, just two men who lowered him into the water. The sea took him, silently, indifferently, as always. One murmured, "God rest his soul." Columbus quietly replied, "The sea is faster."

In the afternoon, the wind came, mild and friendly. The sails stretched, the ship moved again. Life returned, in small steps. Men talked again, laughed briefly, cursed. One said, "We're alive." Columbus nodded. "Still."

But the sea had left its mark, and not just on the wood. Some men now prayed more, others not at all. One, an old sailor, looked at Columbus and said, "I've seen things no human should see." Columbus replied, "Then at least you're no longer human. Congratulations."

The nights became quiet again. Too quiet. No wind, no waves, just silence. A silence that made one sick. Men woke up drenched in sweat, talking in their sleep, staring into the darkness as if expecting something. Maybe land. Maybe death.

Columbus wrote:*After the storm comes the true test: survival. Humans are worse at it than the sea.*

Meanwhile, in Granada, the churches filled up. Priests preached of purification, of divine victory, of purity of blood. Spain bathed in its own faith while its souls withered. Isabella sat silently, listening to the preachers, but her thoughts were far away. She thought of the sea, of this man who sailed against gods in her name.

She wondered if he was still alive. She wondered if she should have sent him at all. Then she pushed the thought aside. Kings don't doubt—they just forget how.

Columbus sat in his cabin, his logbook open, his lamp dim. He drew lines, circles, currents. His hand trembled. Not from fear—from exhaustion. He wrote: *The sea has beaten me, but not defeated me. The men think I'm possessed. Maybe I am. But at least I'm possessed by something real.*

He leaned back, listening to the creaking of the wood, the gentle breathing of the ship. He whispered, "You and I, old friend. A few more days. Then we'll show them that the world has no edge."

Outside, you could see nothing. Just water, everywhere, endless. The moon reflected on it, cold and strange. It was beautiful, in a cruel way.

And while Spain washed its souls, the sea washed its men. Only salt was more honest than holy water.

The days became long and sticky. Sun, calm wind, heat – the sea lay there like a giant, sleeping beast. Nothing moved, not even the sky. Water, sky, breath. Everything the same. Everything dead. Men became quieter, more restless. Too much time, too little direction. They began to count things that shouldn't be counted – hours, drops, thoughts.

Columbus saw it, felt it. This tension slowly eating through the planks. One man cursed because the bread was hard. Another because the water stank. A small anger that grows. That's how mutinies begin. Not with swords and shouts—with boredom.

He wrote: *Day 19. No wind. No land. Just people slowly turning into animals.*

Pinzón spoke less to him. The men talked too much. In the evenings, when they thought he was asleep, Columbus heard their voices. Whispers, quiet, sharp. *He doesn't know where we are. He's leading us into nothingness. We're going to die. We're turning back.* He smiled in the darkness. "You've already turned around," he murmured. "Only no one notices."

In the morning, a man came to him, trembling, his expression nervous. "Admiral," he said, "the men are talking. They say we should go back." Columbus looked at him for a long time. "And you?" - "I don't know." - "Then you'll know soon."

He stood up, stepped outside, and called everyone onto the deck. The sun burned, the water glittered like oil. Men lined up, dirty, hungry, and frightened. Columbus walked slowly past them. "You want to turn back?" he asked calmly. No one answered. "You want to go home?" Silence. Then one, bravely, half-whispered: "We want to live."

Columbus stopped and looked at him. "Then stop talking like you're dead."

He turned away, looking at the horizon. "There's land ahead. Not today, not tomorrow, but soon. If you don't believe it, jump. The sea takes anyone who doubts."

No one jumped. No one objected. Just stares. Hard, dark, angry stares. He took them in like the wind in his face.

That evening, Pinzón came to him. "You're losing her." - "I never had her." - "Then we'll sink." - "Perhaps we have to sink first to know we can swim."

Pinzón shook his head. "You're talking like a madman." Columbus grinned. "That's why I'm leading you."

At night, the sea was black, still, and empty. Columbus sat at the helm, alone, and wrote: *Faith is not light. It is a blade. Men cut themselves on it.*

A scream from the darkness. A man had tried to turn the rudder. Another held him tight. Struggle, screams, curses, blood. Columbus stepped in, striking with his bare fist until there was silence. Breathless, he stood over them. "You want to go back?" he shouted. "Then go! That way!" – and pointed into the water.

No one moved. Only the sea responded—a dull, indifferent rumble, like mockery.

Later, Columbus sat at the bow again, his head in his hands. He looked like someone who was fighting against the world but no longer liked himself. He whispered, "I know you're laughing. You've had it all, the sea, always. But not this time."

He didn't believe in God. Not anymore. Not in the one they had sold him. But he believed in direction. And that was enough.

In Granada, a monk preached that doubt was the root of all evil. People nodded, murmured, and prayed. Outside, wood crackled. Another heretic was purified.

And on the sea, another heretic fought against the greater fire – his own faith.

In the morning, Columbus stood on deck again. Tired, calm, unchanged. "One more day," he said. "Then we'll see something. Anything."

The men nodded, half hopeful, half resigned.

And the sea smiled—because it knew he was right. Just not what he was right about.

The sun stood as if nailed to the sky. No wind, no shadow, no sound. Only the creaking of the planks, the clanging of the ropes, the gentle trembling of the ship, as if it itself had a fever. Day 25. The sea was as flat as glass that couldn't be shattered. Men were silent. No one sang anymore. No one prayed aloud. Faith was now something one carried secretly within oneself, like a wound.

Columbus stood at the bow, his face gray with salt, his eyes hollow. His beard was untidy, his hands chapped, his lips cracked. He had changed. He was no longer an admiral, a supplicant, or a prophet. Just a man who had gone too far to turn back.

He wrote:*Day 25. I've lost the land that despised me. And the sea that wants to test me. I'm somewhere in between – a place without a name.*

The men barely spoke. One suddenly laughed, loudly, for no reason. Another began to softly hum a song no one knew. One wept, silently. Columbus heard them, pretended he hadn't heard anything. He knew this was the threshold. One more day, and they would hate him. Two more, and they would kill him.

Pinzón arrived, silent, sweaty, and nervous. "They're talking again," he said. Columbus nodded. "Let them." "They're planning something." "Then at least they'll be busy."

"You don't understand them," said Pinzón, "they're afraid." Columbus looked at him. "So do I." - "But you don't show it." - "Because it doesn't change anything."

They stood side by side, looking out to sea. Two men, two kinds of madness.

"If we die," said Pinzón, "they'll hate you." Columbus nodded. "If we live, they'll hate you, too."

The sun burned, the air shimmered. The wine was almost gone, the water was bad. The sky was flat, the horizon still. A few seagulls appeared, circled, and disappeared again. It was as if the world wanted to tell them: *I'm here. But not for you.*

Columbus wrote again: *The West is not a place. It's a decision you can never reverse.*

He knew that even if they found land, nothing would be over. The dream had consumed him. He could no longer sleep without counting the stars. He could no longer see land without distrusting the horizon.

In Granada, Spain celebrated its third month of peace. Cemeteries filled with heroes, churches filled with smoke. Isabella stood before a map, looking at the borders of her kingdom. She ran her finger along the coast, stopping where the sea began. Her gaze settled. "He's out there," she said quietly. "And he finds what no one else is looking for."

Her confessor entered. "Your Majesty, the world is in balance." She looked at him. "Then it will soon topple."

Columbus stood alone on the sea. The men slept, shallowly, restlessly. He looked at the water, which shimmered in the moonlight. No land, no sign. Only the faint murmur that sounded like breathing.

"I betrayed you all," he said quietly. "The land, the sea, God, myself. But if I'm right, then it was worth it."

He laughed, a dry, tired laugh that vanished in the wind. Then he raised his eyes, saw the sky, the old, indifferent sky, and murmured, "I know you're there. I just don't know what you want."

He closed the logbook and put it aside. The wind shifted, ever so slightly. The sails stretched, barely noticeable. Movement.

Columbus smiled. Not triumph, not happiness. Just relief.

"All right," he said. "One more piece then."

And the sea—that old, dirty, merciless thing—breathed. Slowly. Like an animal that had just decided not to end the fight, but to prolong it.

Golden words for tired monarchs

In Toledo, Valladolid, Burgos—everywhere people were talking about Columbus again. Quietly, mockingly, casually. "He's gone," they said. "And he's never coming back." A few laughed, others shrugged. Spain was busy. Granada belonged to them, and so did God, supposedly. Who had time for a man seeking the West?

The courts smelled of perfume, power, and boredom. Music, wine, and politics. Men in velvet, women in gold, lies of all colors. There was laughter, arguments, and dancing. Spain was at the height of its arrogance—and called it grace.

Ferdinand drank, laughed, and celebrated. He talked about order, about expansion, about glory. His advisors nodded, like flesh-colored chimes. One casually mentioned Columbus. "The Genoese?" Ferdinand waved his hand. "If he's dead, at least he's quietly stopped talking."

Isabella said nothing. She sat there, silent, her gaze fixed on the cup. "You think he's dead," she said quietly. "I think he's still breathing." "Your Majesty," said one, "the man was possessed." "Yes," she replied. "With what you've all lost: courage."

She stood up and went to the window. Outside, the city buzzed with life. Merchants, beggars, soldiers, nuns. Everyone had a role, and they all played it well. Only she suddenly felt out of place.

"What if he comes back?" she asked the room. Silence. A laugh, cautious, polite. "Then we'll make history, Your Majesty." - "Then we'll change it," she said.

The confessor came and whispered something to her. A letter from Andalusia—from La Rábida. Fray Juan Pérez wrote that the sea is silent, but God speaks. Isabella read the lines, slowly, seriously. "He lives," she murmured. "Or God does it through him."

Ferdinand rolled his eyes. "We won the war, Isabella. Let's not dream again." - "Dreams are the only thing that makes us greater," she said.

In the corner sat an old diplomat, one who had survived too long. He whispered to another: "Women believe in signs. Men believe in cards. Both are wrong."

But the queen didn't hear him. She looked west. Not to where Columbus was—but to where her doubts began.

At court, jokes were told about the admiral without a sea. "He must have fallen off the edge," one said. "Or he changed his mind and is now praying in Africa." Laughter. But there was something else in their faces: fear. Because no one really knew whether the sea would end—or not.

Isabella left the hall, walked through the corridors, past frescoes, past golden doors. Every step echoed, heavy, determined. She entered her chapel, knelt, and closed her eyes.

"Lord," she whispered, "if he falls, let him not have fallen in vain. And if he wins, give me the courage to understand."

Out in the streets, a monk said Columbus was a fool who insulted heaven. Another swore he had seen visions. Both collected alms.

Spain had begun to believe in its own sanctity. And that was precisely what made it weak.

Isabella stood at the window again, alone, the wind playing with her veil. She looked into the distance, but there was no horizon. Only a gray sky, languid and lush.

"Even if you're dead," she whispered, "you've still changed me."

A servant entered. "Your Majesty, the council requests your presence." She nodded. "Tell them I'm coming. And tell them to leave the west on their maps." - "But Your Majesty, it's blank." - "Then write it larger."

She went out, and somewhere, far out on the water, a man coughed into the wind and wrote: *I don't think they know I'm still alive.*

The court of Castile was a circus of gold and prayer. Splendor, protocol, perfume. Men who knew too much and believed nothing, women who smiled as if it were their duty. Everything glittered, everything was rotten.

Columbus was number four on the list of trivialities, right after taxes and ahead of hunting results. No one wanted to admit they'd backed the wrong horse—or perhaps the right one, which was simply running longer than patience could last.

One bishop said, "He was a heretic. Pride is no way to heaven." Another countered, "But if he succeeds, it's divine guidance." The first one laughed. "Then God has become mercurial."

They sat in the council chamber, a sea of brocade and complacency. On the table lay maps—beautiful, old, fake maps. A scholar pointed to the edge: "The world ends here." Isabella looked at him. "Then you've never seen the sea."

The bishop coughed and muttered something about sin. Ferdinand rubbed his temples. "We have Granada," he said. "That's enough for a century of glory." "Glory fades quickly," said Isabella. "Like flesh in the sun."

A court financier, fat and confident, said, "Your Majesty, it was a losing proposition. Three ships, fifty men, one madman. We have more to lose if we continue to believe in him." Isabella replied quietly, "Perhaps we lose more if we don't."

Silence. Then laughter. Polite, measured.

Isabella stood up. "You all talk about losses," she said. "But none of you have ever risked anything that wasn't written down."

The room fell silent. Only the faint clinking of her armor beneath her dress could be heard.

"The man may be a fool," she continued. "But fools move the world. Wise men only manage it."

Ferdinand twisted his mouth. "Isabella, you love his idea more than him." - "I love that he acts while you pray."

In the corner stood Fray Juan Pérez, quiet, old, and patient. He stepped forward. "Your Majesty," he said, "I have prayed for him. And the sea answers slowly, but it answers."

Ferdinand waved his hand. "The sky never answers. Only the wind." Pérez smiled. "Then perhaps he has more faith than you, Sire."

A murmur, a hint of scandal. But Isabella smiled weakly. "Thank you, brother. The wind is enough for me."

Outside, it was summer. The fields burned under the sun, the land was lush and sluggish. Spain was large, yes—but large enough to lose itself in itself.

Isabella walked through the gardens, alone. The flowers stood in rows, tamed like the people. She thought of Columbus, of his restless hands, his gaze that never seemed to stick to a place or time. She almost envied him. He had nothing—and with it, everything.

A servant came. "Your Majesty, the treasury requests clarification. Should we allocate further funds for the Genoese if..." She interrupted him. "If he lives? Yes. And if not—then for the next person who dares."

The servant nodded, bowed, and left. She stopped and looked toward the west, where the sky was turning red.

"Perhaps," she murmured, "sometimes God needs fools to show that he's still there."

They continued arguing in the hall. About taxes, wars, the color of the new banners. No one noticed that the wind lifted the curtain in the window – quietly, like a greeting.

Far out at sea, Columbus wrote in his logbook: *I bet they already think I'm dead. And maybe I am. But my dream is still floating.*

And the sea, that old pig, laughed in the dark.

A courtyard is not a place—it is a rumor with carpets. And the rumor that now crawled through the corridors of Castile was simple, sweet, deadly: *Columbus is dead.*

No one knew where it came from. Perhaps from a clerk who drank too much. Perhaps from a merchant who knew too little. Perhaps from someone who wanted too much. But it was there. And it smelled good—of security, of order, of "we told you so."

The first to hear it were the clergy. They whispered it like a confession: "He has disappeared into the sea, the arrogant one." The Bishop of Salamanca said at Communion: "The Lord has taken the heretic." The faithful nodded. No one asked if the sea had taken the Lord in the meantime.

Then the courtiers came. They made jokes. "The Admiral of the Deep," said one, clinking glasses of wine. Laughter. "The man sought the West and found the East—in the belly of a fish." More laughter. But behind the laughter lay relief. For dead men are more comfortable than living dreamers.

Ferdinand took the rumor as confirmation of his sanity. "I told you," he said to Isabella. "Dreamers drown. Always." She didn't respond. She was reading a piece of paper—an old letter from Columbus that read:*If I go, I go for both of us.*

She folded it, placed it on the table, and looked out. The sky was clear, the wind calm. But there was a buzzing in her head.

The council met again. Golden chairs, leaden thoughts. The treasurer declared: "We will officially end support. No further funds, no investigations. It's time to bury the dream." "Buried?" asked Isabella. "Yes, Your Majesty. With dignity. Perhaps a mass." She laughed—cold, dry. "Drowned people don't need priests. Only witnesses."

A bishop intervened: "Your faith honors you, Your Majesty, but faith without proof is folly." – "Then that is your specialty," she said.

The hall fell silent. Ferdinand sighed. "We must move on, Isabella. There are other dreams." - "Not for me anymore."

She lay awake at night. Outside, the wind, inside, the silence. She thought of La Rábida, of Pérez, of that first day when Columbus came trudging in like a ghost with a purpose. She had seen something in his eyes then that she had never seen in any king, any priest, any husband—hunger. Not for power. For importance.

She stood up and walked through the empty aisles. Shadows, silence, gold everywhere. Everything was dead. Candles burned in the chapel aisle. She stopped and looked at the cross. "If he's dead," she whispered, "then take me too. I sent him."

But God didn't answer. Only the wind, blowing through the windows as if coming from far away.

The next morning, the rumor officially circulated. Clerks noted it, courtiers repeated it, and messengers carried it to the cities. *The Genoese and his crew are missing. No survivors.*

The news spread like a flood. Farmers told it at the well, priests preached it, and merchants laughed at it.

In Granada, they prayed for it. In Seville, they toasted it.

Isabella remained silent. She no longer accepted visitors, wrote no letters, and barely spoke. Her confessor asked, "Your Majesty, why this sadness? You barely knew him." She looked at him, wearily. "Sometimes it's enough to truly understand someone once."

Ferdinand gave speeches about God, victory, and order. The country rejoiced. But in every round of applause lay a faint hint of lies.

In the palace garden, under the orange trees, one lady-in-waiting said to another, "The queen looks like she's lost someone." The other laughed. "Just a fool." - "Sometimes fools are the only ones who know where things are going."

Isabella stood at the window, heard the laughter, and closed her eyes. "If you are dead," she said quietly, "then at least your spirit may be louder than their voices."

And outside, far out, beyond the horizon, a wave slapped against wood – rhythmic, stubborn, alive.

The sea had no idea it was making history. It was just doing what it always does: It remained silent while humans lied to themselves.

It was a hot afternoon in Valladolid when the first letter arrived. No royal seal, no drum roll. Just a messenger, dusty, pale, half-dead from thirst. He brought a message from Andalusia, from an old monk who believed too much in the wind. Fray Juan Pérez wrote: *A merchant in Huelva reports strange birds coming from the west. Unknown species. The sea is sending signs.*

The Chancellor read the letter, laughed, crumpled it, and was about to throw it away. Isabella took it from his hand. She smoothed the parchment, read it twice, then three times. Her fingers trembled slightly. "Birds," she murmured. "Heaven knows more than we do."

Ferdinand sighed and rubbed his temples. "Isabella, they're birds. Not angels." "Perhaps angels fly with dirty wings," she said.

The council laughed quietly. A polite, fake laugh that hung somewhere between fear and boredom. A scholar said, "Your Majesty, there are air currents. Sometimes animals get lost. It's nothing." Isabella looked at him. "And what if God gets lost too?"

Silence.

She stood up and went to the window. The sky was clear, cloudless. No wind, no sign. And yet – somewhere in the distance, in this nothingness, something stirred. A feeling. No knowledge, only a hunch.

Later that night, when everyone was asleep, she sat alone in her room. The letter lay before her, the seal half-broken, the writing pale. She tapped the words with her finger. *came from the west*. She smiled barely noticeably.

"If you are still alive," she said quietly, "then send me a sign that will prove them wrong."

The next day, the second letter arrived. This time from Palos. A fisherman had reported that the sea had changed—strange currents, warm, unfamiliar, as if coming from somewhere else. An old man swore he had seen a light on the horizon, green, flickering, wandering.

The clergy declared it superstition. The merchants laughed. The court clerks whispered. But Isabella had the messenger rewarded. "For courage," she said, "not for truth."

In the evening, she let herself be led out onto the balcony. The wind was strong, warm, sweet. It was coming—from the west. She smiled. "He's alive," she murmured. "I know it."

Ferdinand approached her, a cup in his hand. "You want to believe," he said. "That's fine. But faith doesn't pay soldiers." "Perhaps it will pay us a future," she said.

He sighed. "And if you're wrong?" - "Then at least I believed instead of calculating."

He turned and left. She stayed. The wind played with her hair, and somewhere deep in the distance, thunder could be heard, as if the sea were laughing.

The council was talking about Columbus again. The treasurer said, "We have to officially declare that he's dead." Isabella looked at him calmly. "Then declare God dead too. He hasn't been in touch for a long time."

The man fell silent.

Later, Fray Juan Pérez himself came to Valladolid. Old, tired, but with eyes that held more light than any candlestick. He stepped before the queen and knelt. "Your Majesty," he said, "the wind does not lie. I heard it. It speaks of return."

Ferdinand laughed. "The wind speaks to many fools, brother." Pérez looked at him. "Few listen, Sire."

Isabella ordered him not to be sent away. She had the letter read again, slowly, word for word. *Birds. Currents. Light.*

Afterward, she said, "If the sea truly answers, then it sends harbingers. And harbingers don't lie."

The court was silent. The courtiers looked at her as if she herself were the vision.

She didn't sleep that night. The wind came again—the same warm breath that smelled of salt and stories. She went to the window, closed her eyes, and breathed deeply.

"When you've done it," she whispered, "let them feel it before they believe it."

And outside, somewhere between heaven and hell, a piece of wood floated on the water. Bleached by the storm, embraced by salt. A number carved into it. A mark. A person had been here.

The sea brought it back, quietly, patiently, unerringly. To the coast of Andalusia.

And the next morning, when a boy found it and carried it to the convent, the queen's smile began to appear. Quiet. Tired. A genuine smile.

It began with a scream in the marketplace of Palos. A merchant ran, panting, his hands full of sand, as if he had pulled the message from the sea himself. "They're coming!" he yelled. "They're coming back!" No one believed it, of course not. Men who disappear at sea don't come back. They become part of it. But the man swore he saw ships, tiny on the horizon, under sail, torn to pieces, yet alive.

Some laughed, others ran. That same evening, all of Andalusia knew. *The Genoese's ships have been sighted.* The news was like fire – it burned through villages, monasteries, cities, burning in hearts that had long since grown cold.

In Valladolid, days later, it reached the court. A messenger, dirty, hoarse, half-starved, fell to his knees before the queen. "Your Majesty," he gasped, "Columbus lives."

The hall fell silent. No music, no rustling, no breathing. Only the dull beating of a heart—perhaps hers. Isabella stood up, slowly, pale. "What did you say?" "He's alive, Your Majesty. He's found land."

Ferdinand laughed, first in disbelief, then loudly. "Impossible!" – "He has found land," repeated the messenger. "He calls it *India's*."

The council jumped to its feet, voices, shouts, questions. *How many men? What treasures? What evidence?* Isabella heard nothing of this. She simply stood there, her hands pressed together, her eyes moist.

"He's alive," she said. Quietly. Almost like a prayer finally answered.

The treasurer, who had once called him a heretic, murmured, "Then God helped him." - "Or he did it without him," said Isabella.

Ferdinand turned to her. "If that's true, then he belongs to us." She looked at him. "He never belonged to us. We belong to him—at least today."

The next day, the court was a theater of panic and euphoria. The chancellor sent messengers in all directions. The clergy wrote sermons about divine guidance. The merchants spoke of profits, the generals of glory. Everyone suddenly wanted to have been there.

One of the courtiers, who had laughed at Columbus weeks earlier, now said, "I knew it. The man was blessed." Another nodded. "I've always said so." Isabella looked at them, long and silent, and said, "You never said it. You kept silent—and that's worse."

She ordered that an official reception ceremony be prepared—in Barcelona, when the ships arrived. And that no one, not a single person, should utter the word "fool" in her presence again.

At night, she sat alone, the monk's letter still in her hand. The wind was different now—stronger, livelier. She whispered, "You really did it."

Songs were sung again in the taverns. In the churches, they gave thanks to God. But the sea remained silent. It knew it wasn't defeated—just briefly outwitted.

Columbus, somewhere between heaven and land, sailed back. He looked different. Thinner, harder, quieter. He had seen land—strange people, strange colors, gold. But more than that: He had found the end of the world and discovered that it was only the beginning.

He wrote in the logbook: *They'll celebrate me. Then they'll hate me. But first they have to hear me.*

And in Spain, they were preparing for his arrival as if a Messiah were coming. Flags, speeches, trumpets. The same mouths that had mocked him now wanted to feed him.

Isabella walked through the throne room, silent and focused. "They won't understand him," she said. "But they will need him."

Ferdinand grinned. "He has gold?" "Maybe," she said. "But that's not what he brings." "And then what?" "A dream that no one can sleep through."

Outside, bells rang. Not for a victory, but for something greater: proof that the horizon had lied.

And in the distance, beneath a weary sky, three ships drifted home. Torn, cursed, immortal.

The sea was still. It knew this was just the beginning.

The news raced across the country, faster than horses, louder than bells. *The Admiral is back.* No king, no warrior—a man of salt and dust. But that was enough. Spain had another miracle, and miracles need faces.

In Palos, people ran to the shore. Women wept, men screamed, children ran barefoot through the sand. When the three ships appeared on the horizon—small, torn, black with soot—the world briefly held its breath. No triumphal procession, no trumpets. Only sails barely holding, and men who looked as if they were the sea themselves.

Columbus stood at the bow of the *Santa Maria*, thin, hollowed out, but upright. His skin was burned, his eyes glowed. No smile. Just that look that said: *I told you.*

When they docked, no one fell to their knees. Too tired. Too real. Instead, there were raised hands, pats on the back, curses, laughter. Tears that didn't know whether they were tears of joy or madness. One shouted: "He did it!" — another: "He's alive!" And both were worth the same.

Columbus stepped ashore and looked around. Everything was familiar and strange at the same time. The earth smelled different, too safe, too quiet. A

few farmers stared at him as if he were a ghost. He nodded to them. "I'm not one," he said.

The monks came, carrying crosses and holy water. They sang hymns, blessed him, blessed the ships, and blessed the sea, which only yesterday they had called the devil. One murmured, "An instrument of God." Columbus thought: *A tool, yes. But for whom, I don't know.*

Then the officials came, with their questions, lists, documents. *Gold? Slaves? Evidence?* Columbus didn't answer right away. He showed shells, colorful stones, a few parrots, feathers, and small pieces of gold. "Proof enough?" he asked.

They looked at him, dissatisfied. They wanted wealth; he brought a world.

He traveled on to Barcelona, escorted like a king, but not treated like one. They cheered him in the streets. Bells rang, children screamed his name. "Kolón! Kolón!" – a name that now resonated mightily.

Ferdinand and Isabella awaited him in the throne room. Gold, carpets, incense. Everything was exaggerated, everything was fake. Columbus entered, barefoot, wearing a robe of salt and sweat. He knelt, about to speak, but Isabella raised her hand.

"Stand up," she said. "A man who has expanded the world kneels before no one."

He looked at her – tired, grateful, empty.

"So you found it?" asked Ferdinand. "Yes," said Columbus. "And lost it." "Lost what?" "Sleep. Doubt. The old world."

A court official stepped forward and recorded everything. Columbus spoke slowly, honestly. About islands, people, smoke, colors, about something he couldn't explain. About a feeling greater than gold.

Isabella listened, silent, motionless. Only her fingers moved—unconsciously, rhythmically. When he finished, she said quietly, "You have changed the Earth." "No," Columbus replied. "I only saw it as it really is."

Ferdinand smiled. "And what does it bring?" "Everything," said Columbus. "And nothing you understand."

They celebrated him, of course. Processions, sermons, poems. Spain loved him now. The same people who had once mocked him sang his praises. It was a celebration that stank of hypocrisy and wine.

Columbus stood on the sidelines, not drinking, not laughing. The world was too loud, too narrow. He thought of the stillness of the sea, of the wind, of the night when the sky was too big to believe in gods.

Isabella approached him quietly, unaccompanied. "You did it," she said. "You broke the barrier." He looked at her, weary. "And now?" - "Now it begins."

She paused briefly. "I knew you'd come back." He nodded. "I knew you knew."

She smiled, barely visible. "Your faith sustained you." "No," he said. "My defiance."

And as he left, she knew that this man was no hero—but a storm in human form. And that no land he set foot on would ever sleep again.

Outside, they cheered. Spain believed in miracles again. But miracles cost money. Always.

And the sea, outside the city gates, was silent – and slowly retreated, as if it knew it would soon return to collect the prize.

The city was silent. No more cheering, no more bells ringing, only the distant clinking of cups in the taverns. The day had made Spain drunk—with pride, with wine, with the rumor of being immortal. But the night was sober. And it smelled of truth.

Columbus sat alone in the chamber he had been given. Golden curtains, carpets, candles—a cage of splendor. On the table lay his logbook, beside it a map, half empty, half made up. Outside, crickets chirped, somewhere the world snored. He picked up the cup, drank, and grimaced. The wine tasted of victory. And victory always tasted bitter.

He had the audience behind him, the ceremony, the king's fake smile, the queen's honest silence. They had thanked him, given him titles, made promises. But between all the words, he had heard something—the sound of possession.

They spoke of "our islands," "our admiral," "our new empire." He thought: *I found the way – and they want to collect the toll.*

He laughed quietly, almost friendly. "I guess that's always the way it is. One takes a risk, the rest make history."

He leafed through his logbook, reading the old entries. *Day 3: The men curse. Day 19: No wind, no faith. Day 25: We may already be dead. Day 33: Land.* He read it aloud, like a prayer that no one needed anymore.

Then he stood up and went to the window. The sky was black, clear, vast. No sea this time, just air, but the same silence. He took a deep breath. The Spanish air smelled of smoke, sweat, and memories.

He thought of the men sitting outside in the taverns, singing songs that no longer belonged to them. Of Pinzón, who didn't smile, of the others who had remained at sea. He thought of Isabella, who had looked at him as if she understood that he had lost something he had never possessed.

"I changed the world," he said quietly. "And I remain the same idiot."

He sat down again, took the pen, and wrote: *They think I've found land. But what I've found is hunger. And they'll never satisfy it.*

The candle flickered. The light danced on the paper, as if it itself hesitated to be part of this story.

He heard footsteps. A servant. "Your Majesty—the queen requests your presence tomorrow morning. A meeting." "Tell her I'm coming." The servant nodded and disappeared.

Columbus remained seated. He thought of the west, the wind, the faces of the strangers on the islands—brown skin, dark eyes, unafraid. They had looked at him as if he had come from heaven. Now he knew: he was hell.

He continued: *They call me Admiral. But I'm just the first witness to a crime no one has seen yet.*

Then he put the pen aside and extinguished the candle. Darkness. Only the moon.

He lay down on the bed, which was too soft, too clean, too far removed from the rhythm of the sea. He couldn't sleep. He heard a dog barking somewhere outside, a door slamming, a person laughing. Life, banal, infinite.

He thought: *Maybe that's it. Maybe the sea is the only place where you remain free.*

He smiled—a tired, honest smile. Then he whispered, "Thank you, old sea. You didn't swallow me. You just moved me."

And outside, far away in the darkness, a wave crashed against the cliffs – quiet, persistent, as if to say: *I'm still here. And so are you.*

Columbus closed his eyes. No hero, no god, no martyr. Just a man who had insulted the horizon and survived.

And while Spain slept, the sea began to dream – of more ships, more men, more blood.

Three ships, too small for the madness

They called it the second voyage, but in truth, it was the first lie. No more searching, no more faith, no more defiance. Only greed. Three ships had been a myth—now there were seventeen. Full of men, weapons, dogs, priests, and traders. No more room for doubt, no more space for miracles. Only calculation.

Columbus stood at the port of Cadiz, looking at the ships, the men, the chests, the gold that didn't yet exist but had already been sold. Voices, prayers, orders were everywhere. Spain was suddenly hungry—for more. And hunger makes you ugly.

He had grown older, his gaze harder, his hair grayer. The sea had marked him, but not broken him. He knew it wanted him back. He smelled it. The wind was coming from the west, warm, cynical.

"Admiral," said one of the new officers, young, smooth, ambitious, "it is an honor to serve you." Columbus looked at him. "Don't lie, boy. You serve gold, not me."

Behind him stood a priest, fat and pious, carrying a cross that weighed more than his faith. "The Lord will guide you, Admiral," he said. Columbus grinned. "The Lord wasn't here last time. Perhaps this time he'll come as a taxpayer."

The men laughed nervously. They knew this man was no saint, but they followed him anyway. Not because they believed—but because they had nothing else.

The queen had bid him farewell, quietly, with dignity, with a look that spoke louder than any words. "Bring her home," she had said. "The world you found." He had replied, "I will bring you what you deserve." She had nodded, but hadn't asked what that meant.

Ferdinand had appointed him a statesman, governor of the new lands. Title, power, pressure. No more room for romance. Columbus knew what that meant: He was now a tool, not a prophet.

The ships lay heavy in the water, packed with soldiers, carpenters, officials, even musicians. It smelled of iron, wine, sweat, and the beginnings of something filthy. The sea seemed to know that this time, not discovery was coming—but conquest.

He boarded the *Marigalante*, its new flagship. Bigger, cleaner, but soulless. No scratching, no trembling, no breathing like the old *Santa Maria*. Only wood worked.

He placed his hand on the mast and closed his eyes briefly. *You want me again*, he thought. *But this time I want you too.*

The drums beat. Commands, prayers, sails. Men raised anchor, shouted, cursed, laughed. Women waved from the shore, children screamed, dogs barked. Everything was like the first time, only louder, duller, less real.

Columbus stood at the helm, looking at the horizon he already knew. It felt like reopening an old wound. He whispered, "This time they'll make me rich. Or dead."

The wind came, slowly, then stronger. Sails filled, wood creaked, water splashed. And once again the land fell away behind them as if it had never been there.

The sun burned. Spain disappeared. Only the sea remained—that eternal, indifferent beast.

Columbus looked west. No God, no sign, no dream. Only duty.

He wrote in the new logbook:*Day 1. They call it the second ride. I call it the first punishment.*

In the evening, he sat alone on deck. Behind him, laughter, songs, dice games. In front of him, silence. The wind had shifted. It was the same wind as before, but it felt different—colder.

"You know what you're doing," he murmured. "You make me believe again, only to remind me later what you really are."

The sea was silent, but the waves moved, rhythmically, slowly, like a nod.

And somewhere deep inside, Columbus knew: He was no longer the discoverer. He was now the steward of the madness he himself had unleashed.

The second crossing was louder, harder, emptier. They had more ships, more men, more weapons—and less soul. Where dreams had slept on deck the first time, there now lay administration. Where courage had been, there was bureaucracy. And where faith had been, arrogance grew.

Columbus sensed it from the first day. The sound was different. No reverential silence before the sea, no trembling, no tension. Just noise. Men drinking, boasting, laughing, as if the ocean were a tavern. They believed the sea belonged to them because they had crossed it before. And the sea was silent—like something that knows it will have time to respond later.

Columbus stood on the deck of the *Marigalante*, his hands on the railing, and looked into the distance. The horizon was the same, but it felt smaller. Perhaps because he himself had grown larger. Perhaps because he had learned that size doesn't change anything.

He wrote in the logbook:*Day 7. More ships, fewer men. They look the same, but they dream differently—or not at all.*

Pinzón was no longer there. He had had enough of the sea, enough of Columbus. Instead, new officers—ambitious faces, smooth hands, clueless. They called him *Admiral of the Oceans* as if it were a joke. And he sometimes laughed along because it was easier than hating her.

At night, he heard the sea speaking. Not with words, only with movements. He understood every one. He knew when it was calm, because it was thinking, and when it was raging, because it was laughing. And now—now it was calm. Too calm.

Once a storm came, a short, violent one. The men screamed, prayed, and cursed. One said, "God is testing us!" Columbus shouted back, "God stopped listening to you long ago!" After that, there was peace. Only rain. Only silence.

He sat in his cabin, wet, tired, pen in hand. *I led them, and they survived. I saved them, and they call me mad. I bring them worlds, and all they want is gold.*

He drank. Cheap wine, which they had stored up as a thank you. It tasted like a memory.

Outside, men sang songs of glory. False voices, false notes, but honest in their longing for home. Some wept. One said, "The first time, we were heroes. Now we are workers." Columbus heard this and nodded. *Yes. Workers of madness.*

The wind shifted, the sky cleared. Birds appeared again. Not a good sign. Birds meant land, but this time the word smacked of responsibility, not hope.

On the twelfth day, they again saw seaweed, currents, and signs. The men cheered, but Columbus remained silent. He knew that land was no longer the goal. It was only the beginning of a new nightmare.

In the distance, a coast appeared. Islands, jungle, smoke. Beautiful, raw, real. The men called out, prayed, kissed the ground as soon as they touched land. Columbus walked behind them, slowly, silently.

He saw the trees, the light, the air that smelled of life. And he knew: This land wasn't for him. It belonged to no one. And that was precisely his curse.

He wrote: *Day 17. We're at the edge of the world again. But this time we're the danger.*

An officer approached him. "Admiral, shall we claim the land?" Columbus looked at him. "Claim?" He laughed, dryly. "You can't claim the sky, boy. But tell them anyway. They'll believe it."

They raised the flags, they planted crosses in the ground, they shouted *God and Spain!*— and the country responded with silence.

A few locals watched them from the forest. No fear, no greeting. Just eye contact. Person to person. And somewhere in between, the misunderstanding that would change the world.

Columbus nodded cautiously at them. "I'm back," he said. "I'm sorry."

And the sea that had brought him lay silently behind him, as if it knew that it would soon be needed again – this time not for dreams, but for prey.

They built huts, then houses, then rules. Sand became wood, wood became power. Columbus named the place *Christmas*— as a sign, as hope, as a joke that no one understood. He thought if he uttered the name God, perhaps heaven would listen. But God was far away, and Spain was closer.

The men were exhausted, arrogant, and hungry. They saw land, and land meant possession. For a few days they played explorers, then they became traders, then thieves. They traded pearls for nails, gold for broken pieces, laughing like children who set fire to an animal and say they just wanted to see how it glowed.

Columbus wrote: *Day 23. I've found a new world, and it begins the way the old one ended—with greed.*

He tried to create order. Rules, boundaries, structures. But order is a disease that men cannot endure for long. Soon there were arguments, blows, and revenge. A Spaniard was killed, and that was enough – suddenly it was no longer a land of discovery, but enemy territory.

"They're savages!" one shouted. Columbus replied: "And you're not?"

But no one listened to him anymore.

The priest preached about purification, the officer about honor, the merchant about profit. They built crosses, but no bridges. And the sea laughed.

The locals—friendly, curious, suspicious—understood nothing. They gave food, helped, pointed out water sources. And watched as the strangers built fences. One said: "You're building walls against the wind." Columbus understood him, even without the words.

He wrote: *We came to discover and brought possessions with us.*

He barely slept at night. The land smelled too sweet, too alive. No salt, no silence. Only crickets, fire, voices. He lay there, staring at the sky, wondering exactly when the dream had changed.

One morning, an officer arrived, bloodied and proud. "We punished them, Admiral. They stole." Columbus saw the corpses, burned huts, women screaming. "Stolen?" - "A knife, Sire."

He left. Speechless. He looked at the rubble, at the smoke, at the screams no one wanted to hear. And he knew: This was it. Paradise was over.

He wrote: *I crossed the border of the world to find her again. And she looked like me.*

Later, a storm came. Not a divine one, just wind, rain, and thunder. The huts collapsed, the sea rose. Men ran, cursed, and prayed. Columbus stood there, motionless, letting the rain pour down on him. *Finally something real*, he thought.

After the storm, everything was quiet. Half the supplies were gone, several men dead. The locals helped, again. And once again the Spaniards took what they wanted.

Columbus tried to maintain control. He gave speeches and wrote reports to Isabella, full of gold, hope, and lies. *Fertile land, gentle people, God is with us.* He hated every word of it, but he knew what they wanted to hear.

That evening, he sat by the fire, alone. A boy from the tribe brought him water, handed it to him carefully, and smiled. Columbus took it, drank, and nodded. "Thank you," he said. The boy understood the words and grinned. And in that moment, for a brief moment, the world was at peace.

Then screams were heard again from the camp. Arguments, blows, blood. Columbus didn't look. He knew the West was now dirty.

He wrote: *If I could do it over again, I would. Only this time I wouldn't tell anyone about it.*

The sea roared behind the hill. Indifferent, calm, ancient. It had brought him here to show him that every discovery ultimately finds only one thing: itself, in the worst possible light.

The days lost all form. There was no rhythm anymore, only heat, hunger, and strife. There were too many men, the land too alive, and Columbus was too tired to tame both. *Christmas* became a place where people died faster than they thought.

Once he saw a man smash another man's head in—over a piece of gold that wasn't gold at all, just shiny stone. No one intervened. No one had the strength to be surprised anymore.

The Spaniards sought gold in every handful of earth, in every smile of the locals. They saw wealth everywhere, and where there was none, they invented it. They thought paradise was a mine. And so they began to dig—in the ground, in people, in themselves.

Columbus wrote:*Day 40. I wanted to build a kingdom of God. It became a bazaar for greed.*

He tried to enforce rules. He appointed foremen, assigned tasks, and had camps set up. He wrote instructions to the officers, preaching order, discipline, and reason. They listened to him—and laughed as soon as he left.

The priest preached about sin and repentance, but he wore the most beautiful cross and took the largest share. Merchants distributed alcohol, soldiers took what they wanted. The locals soon understood what this meant: Those who give die more slowly.

At night, screams were heard. Spanish voices, foreign voices, all the same. Fire flickered, blood mingled with rain. Columbus walked through the camps, wordless, watching everything fall apart.

Once he found a woman – dead, burned, her hands bound. Next to her was a Spaniard, drunk and laughing. Columbus beat him until he stopped laughing. The men watched. No one intervened. No one knew who was to blame.

He wrote:*I am their admiral, and I cannot lead them. I am their priest, and I cannot convert them. I am their mirror, and I cannot look at myself.*

He sent reports to Spain. Full of hope, fictitious, clean.*Fertile soil, obedient people, gold in the river.* Words that sounded like wine but tasted like blood.

Isabella read them, far away, and believed what she wanted to believe. Ferdinand smiled and ordered ships to be loaded. Spain was addicted to new things, no matter who died for them.

But in the camp, no one spoke of glory anymore. Men whispered of escape. Others whispered of the devil. One said, "The sea was more honest." Columbus nodded.

One morning, shortly before sunrise, the natives arrived. Not with gifts, this time with spears. The attack was short, brutal, and just. The Spaniards screamed, shot, and burned. Columbus ran, fell, and got up again. Smoke, dust, and death were everywhere.

When the sun rose, *Christmas* Only ash remained. Men lay between charred beams, horses like shadows, the sky black. Columbus stood in the middle, breathing, coughing, silent.

He wrote: *Day 51. The sea has spat us out, the land is now devouring us.*

The few survivors wanted to return. "This isn't the Lord's land!" one shouted. Columbus looked at him. "Then call it by its proper name."

He gathered what remained—supplies, weapons, men, courage. Too little of everything. He knew they couldn't hold out long. And he knew no one would come to save them.

In the evening, he sat alone, his feet in the sand, the sea before him. The wind blew gently, almost friendly. "I know," he said. "You warned me."

He threw a stone into the water. Small ripples ran out, disappearing. "I've found something bigger than the world. And no one deserves it."

He looked up at the sky. No stars. Only smoke. Only silence.

And somewhere in the darkness the sea laughed – quietly, coldly, knowingly.

After the fire, nothing was the same anymore. The huts were dilapidated, trust was dead. The men were hungry, sick, and the sea seemed to be laughing at them. Columbus stood before the remnants of his empire and knew: order does not come from faith. It comes from fear.

He had new camps built, made of wood and threats. He appointed overseers, assigned men to groups, and wrote lists—all with a shaky hand but an icy gaze. *We must live*, he said. *Even if it's just to regret it later.*

He wrote: *Day 59. I rule over dust. But dust can be counted.*

The locals returned—cautious, angry, confused. They brought fruit, fish, and water. Columbus accepted and thanked them, but this time with soldiers behind him. The gifts became tribute. Friendship became a duty.

He summoned translators and ordered that each tribe regularly bring food and gold. Gold they didn't have, didn't understand, and didn't need. "Just a tribute," he said. "As a sign of peace." But peace was just another word for obedience.

One of the chiefs objected. Columbus ordered him to be hanged. Not because he wanted to—because he had to. At least, that's what he told himself.

He watched the man die, slowly, silently, without a scream. Only his eyes said it all —*You're the wild one here.*

Columbus wrote:*Day 62. I've replaced belief with rules. And the rules stink of blood.*

He knew he was changing. That something inside him had stopped asking why. He no longer thought about God, not about Spain, not about Isabella. Only about numbers, barrels, supplies. People became tools. Work, meat, statistics.

He had men whipped for stealing. Once, he had two deserting soldiers executed. "Example," he said. "For whom?" asked an officer. "For me," he replied.

The nights grew longer. He drank more. The wine was bad, but it helped quiet the voices. He heard them—the dead, the sea, the men who cursed him while calling him "Admiral."

He wrote:*I wanted to be a guide. Now I'm a guard in a madhouse.*

One of the priests, a young man, came to him. "Admiral," he said, "God is testing us." Columbus laughed hoarsely. "Then he should finally tell me what he wants." - "He wants obedience." - "Then he sent the wrong man."

He was tired. But power is a poison that works more potently on an empty stomach. He was beginning to get used to the feeling that everyone was afraid of him. It tasted stale, but honest.

He had reports written, embellished, clean.*Everything is under control. The population is cooperative. Prosperity is growing.*The lies came easily. He had learned that the truth brings no reward.

But at night, when the wind blew from the sea, he heard that roar again. No storm, no thunder—just the sea whispering:*I saw you. I know what you are.*

He went out, stepped onto the shore, and looked into the darkness. "I'm not a monster," he said aloud. "I'm just trying to survive." The sea responded with a wave, small, hard, right in his face. He laughed. "All right. You too."

He wrote:*Day 70. We are all equal. Except that the sea is more honest than humans.*

The next morning, two men were hanging from a tree. One was Spanish, one a native. Columbus saw them and nodded. "Justice," he said quietly. But the word tasted of ash.

He knew what was coming. Even more rules. Even more blood. Even more lies. And somewhere deep inside, he felt that he had long since crossed the line. Not the world's—the line of his soul.

It began quietly. No bang, no scream, no sign. Just this slow crumbling of order. First in the eyes, then in the voice, then in the mind. Columbus was still there, but something inside him had already given up.

The men hated him. Quietly, growing, steadily. They whispered as he passed, spat in the sand as soon as he was gone. He knew it. He did nothing about it. He had no energy left for lies, only for control. And control was all he had left.

He had men tied up if they spoke out. He starved them if they didn't work. He let them talk, and then he wrote down their words—as evidence, as justification, as a reminder that he was still the boss of chaos.

He wrote:*Day 88. I'm alone. And they leave me alone because they're afraid of losing me.*

The land itself seemed to mock him. The sun was too bright, the green too loud. He hated the colors, the smell of the fruit, the laughter of the birds. Everything sounded like life, and he felt dead.

Sometimes he went to the locals. He spoke to them, gestured, tried to understand them. But language is meaningless when someone comes to take. They looked at him with the same calmness with which one considers an animal that one must soon kill.

He wrote:*They have no books, no churches, no gold chains. But they have peace. And I hate them for it.*

At night, he drank. Alone. No longer drinking for pleasure or repression—but as a conversation. He talked to the wine, to the wind, to God, to himself. Sometimes one of them answered, but never the same one.

The officers argued among themselves. Who would get the most gold, who would get the most beautiful women, who would overthrow Columbus. One came to him, drunk, and shouted: "You're crazy!" Columbus replied: "Finally, you're saying something true."

He began to interpret the sky. Clouds, stars, birds. He saw signs where there were none. And where there were signs, he saw punishments. Once he said, "The sea is watching us. It never forgets." Someone laughed. Two days later, the man died, suddenly from a fever. No one asked what the connection was.

He wrote:*Day 97. I have no enemies. I only have mirrors.*

The men began to desert. First secretly, then openly. Columbus had them searched for, found some, and then hanged them. Not out of anger—out of habit. Justice had long since become routine.

He had bad dreams. Always the same: water turning to blood. Hands reaching out from the waves, faces whispering: *You promised us we would live.*

He woke up drenched in sweat, looked into the darkness, and said loudly: "I tried!"

The priest came and wanted to bless him. Columbus laughed. "Save it. God doesn't bless errors."

He had become thin. His eyes were sunken, his beard gray. He looked like what he had always been: a man who had gone too far to turn back.

Once, at morning roll call, he said: "I am the Admiral. I am the first person to deceive the world—and it still believes me." No one laughed. No one contradicted me.

He wrote:*Day 103. I speak to the dead. Perhaps they'll listen better.*

Then the rain came. Days, weeks, endlessly. The men slept in the mud, the food spoiled, the stench permeated everything. One of the officers said, "The land is cursing us." Columbus nodded. "Finally, something that takes us seriously."

At night, as water dripped through his tent, he stood up and stepped outside. Everything was dark. Only the sea, shimmering, calm, cold. He knelt, dipped his hands into the water, and whispered: "Take it back. I'll give it to you."

But the sea took nothing. It moved, evenly, indifferently. Like a memory too deeply embedded to disappear.

He wrote:*Day 108. I wanted to find heaven. Instead, I only learned how deep hell truly is.*

The mutiny didn't come suddenly. It came like everything else in this damned world: quietly, slowly, inevitably. First there were glances, then rumors, then voices in the dark. Men whispering while the admiral slept. Men who had counted for too long how many died, how little gold came, how empty the promises sounded.

Columbus knew. He heard them. He heard everything. The grinding of teeth, the hissing of knives, the hatred vibrating like insects in the sand. But he did nothing. He was too tired to be afraid.

He wrote:*Day 113. I have no subordinates left. Just men waiting for me to die so they can think they were right.*

Hunger came. Fever. The flesh rotted faster than hope. They boiled roots, ate rats, prayed, laughed. One said: "If we die here, at least they should know we lived." Columbus replied: "No one wants to know how to die."

He lost weight, lost voices in his head, and gained others. The dead men spoke to him, more quietly, more kindly than the living. He answered them. And no one asked with whom anymore.

An officer came into his hut, dirty, trembling, his hand on his sword. "You brought us here, Admiral. You betrayed us." Columbus looked at him. "I found you. This was your undoing, not my fault." The man drew his blade, but his hand trembled too much. Columbus stepped forward, took it from him, and placed it on the table. "Go to sleep," he said. "Tomorrow you'll need me again to hate you."

The next day, the officer lay dead on the beach. Suicide, they said. Accident, they thought. Punishment, he believed.

Columbus wrote:*Day 118. I'm the last man who believes in me.*

The men began to steal from each other. Food, water, women, breath. Each against each other, each for nothing. The natives stopped coming. The land had spat them out. Only the sea remained, motionless, ancient, weary.

Then the priest died. Fever. Columbus stood by his bedside, saw the sweat, the hands that still wanted to form a cross. "He prayed," someone said. Columbus nodded. "Yes. And God didn't listen again."

He had him buried without words. No amen, no blessing, no heaven. Just earth. And the sound of the shovels, which sounded like mockery.

He sat there for a long time afterward, in the rain, staring at the ground. "Perhaps this is the West," he murmured. "Not gold, not land, not glory. Just the end of the world—and no one notices."

A storm came. The last one. The huts were blown apart, men screamed, the sea lashed as if trying to clean up. Columbus clung to a mast, his skin torn by the wind, his face blank.

He screamed into the darkness, "Is this all you can do?!" And the sea answered. Not with waves, but with silence.

When it was over, almost nothing remained. A few men, a few boards, a few ghosts. Columbus walked across the wet land, barefoot, shivering, but alive.

He wrote: *Day 123. I saw the world. It saw me too. And we didn't like each other.*

Then he sent messengers. Messages to Spain. Reports to Isabella. Lies that sounded like prayers. *Country safe. People peaceful. Progress great.*

He knew they would believe it. They wanted to believe it. And he knew he would return—not as a hero, but as a guilty man with a halo of dirt.

At night, he sat on the beach, alone, naked, facing the sea. "You won," he said. "But at least you kept me."

The sea didn't respond again. It remained silent, rolling, breathing.

Columbus looked out. The wind smelled of salt and truth. He whispered, "I loved you more than God."

And somewhere deep in the water, right at the bottom, where no light reaches, something was laughing.

Men with fists instead of faith

They returned like shadows. No trumpets, no sermons, no kings. Just a few ships, half-rotten, half-empty, and men who looked as if they had seen the devil—and helped him sleep.

Columbus stood on deck, thin, pale, with eyes that no longer believed anything. Spain lay before them, calm, golden, lush. The country that had sent him to find dreams now wanted proof. And proof stinks of blood.

There were no crowds at the harbor, no banners, no bells. Only officials. With parchments, with questions, with doubts. "Where is the gold?" "Where are the riches?" "Where are the men you took with you?"

Columbus didn't answer immediately. He looked them in the face, one after the other, like someone who has long known he's lost. "Gold?" he finally said. "There's gold. But not for you."

They wrote. They whispered. He laughed. Not a good laugh, more like the laugh of someone who's forgotten what it's for.

The men went ashore. Most were sick, many were broken. Some kissed the ground, others spat on it. Spain watched them, disgusted, disappointed. The hero was back—but he smelled not of victory, but of sea and sin.

One bishop said, "He has seen too much." Another replied, "Or too little."

Columbus was summoned to the king. Again, that hall, again gold, incense, hypocrisy. Isabella saw him, and her gaze was different. No glamour, no pride—sorrow. She knew he had lost something that would never return.

"You suffered," she said. "I lived," he said. "And what did you find?" He hesitated. Then: "What you don't want to see."

Ferdinand stepped forward. "We need results, Columbus. Not poems." "I brought you a world," Columbus replied. "But you want a bank statement."

A murmur, a whisper, a quiet anger in the room.

The Treasurer stepped forward. "Your Majesty, the Admiral has abused his power. There are reports of violence, of tyranny." Columbus turned to him slowly. "Abuse of power? I used it because you gave it to me. And now that it smells of sweat, you want it back?"

Isabella remained silent. Ferdinand did not. "We will examine the reports." Columbus nodded. "Examine them. But also examine your conscience. It was your dream, not mine."

He later wrote in his logbook: *I brought them land, but they wanted heaven. I brought them people, but they wanted slaves. I brought them truth, but they wanted gold.*

He was officially honored, unofficially shunned. A hero who talked too much. A prophet who had brought the wrong god with him.

People were talking in the taverns. "The Genoese has gone mad." "He's talking to the sea." "He has blood on his hands." "He changed the world." And someone said, "So what?"

Columbus walked through the streets, heard the voices, smelled the bread, saw the women laughing. It all felt fake, too smooth, too clean. He missed the stench of salt, the cries of men, the sound of truth.

He knew they would send him back soon. They had to. Spain was greedy, and greed needs someone to carry it.

He looked up at the sky and grinned. "You want to try again? Fine. I'm not dead yet."

He wrote: *I'm no longer the person who left. But they're sending me as if I still were.*

And so he stood there again, on the threshold of the unknown. A man with fists instead of faith. No longer a dreamer—just proof that you can't trick God twice.

This time everything was different—and yet exactly the same. Ships again, men again, the sea again. But no one sang anymore, no one prayed aloud. The songs had fallen silent, faith replaced by payroll. Spain no longer sent believers, but believers.

Columbus stood on the quay at Sanlúcar, grown old, hollow. His face wrinkled and salty, his hands covered in scars, his eyes dull but still sharp enough to smell hypocrisy from a hundred meters away. He knew they no longer admired him. Now they watched him as one watches a sick animal, needed one last time for work.

Ferdinand was cool. "You'll get ships. But fewer. And men—soldiers, not dreamers." Columbus nodded. "Soldiers can't dream. That's fine."

He knew they no longer believed in him. But they didn't believe in anyone else either. Spain needed new stories, and he was still the only one who knew how to start them.

He wrote:*Day 1. I set off to find something that no longer exists. Maybe myself.*

The men he got weren't sailors. They were convicts, cynics, thieves, murderers. Spain sent hell to sea, led by a man who believed he could still tame it. They called him behind his back. *Old Town*—the old madman. He heard it, grinned, and said nothing.

On board, the air smelled of iron, fear, and guilt. They were sailing in a direction no one understood. Columbus barely spoke, only commands, no more sermons. He had stopped romanticizing the sea. Now it was a tool. He looked at the waves and thought: *We both know this is the last time.*

The journey was harder. Fewer supplies, more mistrust. The men grumbled, cursed, and counted. They wanted gold, women, and glory. Instead, they got rain, hunger, and an admiral who talked to stars.

Columbus noted: *Day 16. I talk to heaven. It remains politely silent.*

One night he stood alone at the wheel, the sky black as pitch. The stars glowed like old lies. He whispered, "Show me the way again. After that, you can come and get me." And for a moment—just one—he thought he heard a faint whisper from the depths: *Only one of us is coming home.*

The next morning, two men were found dead. A dispute over water, it was said. One with his throat slit, the other with his eyes open, as if he had understood something as he died that the others would later learn. Columbus wrote: *Day 23. The sea is taking advances again.*

The wind was capricious, the mood worse. The men began to talk about him. *He is old. He is blind. He is leading us to death.* Columbus heard, as always. He said nothing. Only occasionally did he smile, that tired smile that was more of a threat than a gesture.

Then land came. Not what they were looking for. No gold, no cities, no wonders. Only islands, jungle, swamp. Men jumped ashore, chopped down trees, built huts, and destroyed before they understood.

An officer approached Columbus. "What is this, Admiral?" "Somewhere between heaven and error," he said.

They found people—suspicious, tired, alert. No joy, no wonder. Only this mutual recognition: *We know what you bring.*

Columbus gave the order: Remain friendly, act, learn. But friendliness doesn't last long when hunger is greater than hope. That same week, the first village burned.

He wrote: *Day 31. I've stopped counting reasons. I'm just counting days.*

At night, when the camp was asleep, he went to the sea. The wind was warm, the waves small. He spoke to the water as if to an old friend who had long since forgotten why they liked each other. "I know," he said. "I should never have come back."

And somewhere out there, beyond the horizon, the sea laughed – so quietly that only he could hear it.

The camp smelled of fear. Not of death—that came later—but of that sweet stench when men know they're losing but still pretend not to believe it. It was everywhere: in their hands, in their eyes, in the food.

Columbus sat in front of his hut, his hands shaking, his beard gray, his skin like leather. He was still writing, because writing was the only proof that he wasn't insane.

Day 38. I lead an army of animals. And I am their king.

The men had stopped listening to him. They worked when they wanted. They stole when they could. And when they were caught, they laughed. "What do you want to do, Admiral? Hang us? All of us?" He nodded. "If it helps."

They hated him, but they needed him. No compass, no direction, no hope without him. He was the last shred of meaning they still knew, even if they didn't like it.

He introduced new punishments. No more sermons, no more prayers. Only whips, hunger, fear. He had men crucified, their hair cut, their hands branded. "Order," he said. "Spain wants order." But order and madness look similar if you look too closely.

Once, a young soldier came to him, barefoot, bloody, with tears in his eyes. "I can't do this anymore, Admiral." Columbus looked at him for a long time. "Me neither," he said. "But we'll do it anyway."

He wrote:*Day 44. Every new day is just a repetition of what we should already regret.*

The locals gradually disappeared. No more trade, no more gifts. Only arrows from afar, shadows between the trees. Sometimes a dead man was found by the river; sometimes one of the Spaniards disappeared without a trace. Columbus knew they were taking revenge. And he understood them.

He sent out scouts, patrols, and warning shots. But the country didn't respond. It simply continued to take. Silently. Patiently.

He began to talk to God. Not to pray—to talk. "You wanted this, didn't you?" he said. "You wanted to see what happens when you overwhelm Heaven."

No answer, of course. Just wind.

An officer came and said, "The men want to go back. They say you've lost your mind." Columbus laughed. "Then they're finally being honest." "You can't stop them." "Yes, you can. With fear."

And he held on. For a while. Long enough for the hatred to grow like weeds.

At night he woke up, drenched in sweat. He dreamed of the sea creeping toward him, waves of voices. They cried:*You brought us here. You're staying here.*

He wrote:*Day 50. I'm no longer afraid of the sea. I'm afraid it will forget me.*

One morning they found two bodies. Bound, abused, Spanish. No doubt who it was. The men wanted revenge. Columbus nodded and ordered the counterattack. Villages burned. Children died. Women were abducted. It wasn't a war, it was a purification. And Columbus stood there, amid the smoke, watched the country die—his country—and said, "So this is what civilization looks like."

He wrote:*Day 54. I'm no longer an admiral. I'm God's accountant. And his balance sheet is in the red.*

The men truly began to fear him. Not because he was strong—but because he became like them. They saw in him what they themselves had become: animals with Bibles.

One said, "He discovered the world and lost his humanity." Another replied, "Perhaps there never was any."

Columbus heard this and remained silent. Only the pen continued scratching.
Day 59. I never did it to be a hero. I just wanted them to hear me. Now they hear me—and I hate what I'm saying.

In the evening, by the fire, he saw the men singing. False, empty songs. He stood up, went out, and looked at the sea. Dark, quiet, endless. He whispered, "You are the only thing that has never lied."

And for a moment, a damned tiny moment, he thought, the sea answered – with a soft, tired murmur that sounded like: *I know.*

It began with a slap in the face. No shot, no scream. Just a hand, a face, and the moment when no one pretended there was order left. A drunken officer hit a man who had insulted him. Columbus intervened, demanding calm, but intervened too late. Two men drew knives. One fell. Then another. And suddenly it was no longer an argument, but a signal.

The mutiny wasn't an uprising. It was a decision that had been made long before anyone had spoken it out. The men had nothing left to lose—except an admiral who reminded them too much that they could fail.

Columbus heard them whispering at night. *He's old. He doesn't know anything anymore. He's a ghost.*

And he thought: *Yes. But I'm the ghost who brought you here.*

In the morning, the camp was emptier. Fifty men were missing, with their weapons and provisions. They had fled into the woods, their own rules, their own laws. The rest remained silent, working mechanically, as if waiting for someone to take on the responsibility no one wanted anymore.

Columbus called them together. "You are Spaniards," he said. "You are the king's men!"

One shouted back: "We are men of hunger!" Laughter. Then silence. Then hatred.

He looked into their faces, dirty, sunburned, empty. There was nothing left to guide them. Only bodies that still functioned.

He wrote:*Day 63. I'm no longer an admiral. I'm just a shadow with a title no one ever speaks.*

A messenger arrived – the deserters had attacked a village, killed locals, and kidnapped women. Columbus sent riders, orders, and prayers. Everything came too late. The land smelled of smoke. Again.

He stood on a hill, saw the flames, smelled the burning flesh, heard the screams. "This is Spain," he said quietly.

His officers began making their own decisions. One had prisoners shot, another began claiming land as if he were king. Columbus yelled, threatened, and pleaded. But once lost, power smells like blood. And blood attracts.

One night they came. No shots, no commotion. Just footsteps. Lots of them. They entered his tent, silently, with torches, with ropes. Columbus saw them coming but didn't get up. "You know what you're doing?" he asked calmly. The leader nodded. "We'll take what you destroyed." Columbus grinned. "Then take the blame too."

They tied him up, roughly, hastily, uncertainly. One whispered: "You have led us to ruin." Columbus: "I merely showed you what you are."

They beat him out of fear, not anger. It wasn't revenge. It was cleansing.

He later wrote, with a trembling hand:*Day 68. I have fallen, but not defeated. You can bind me, but you cannot free me.*

They locked him up—an old shed, a few boards, a hole in the roof. No light, only the smell of salt, sweat, and iron. Outside, he heard the men laughing, arguing, drinking. The sound of freedom, as they imagined it.

He spoke to the wind. "So this is the end?" he asked. The sea, somewhere beyond the jungle, answered with its eternal breath.

After days, a young, nervous officer arrived. "Admiral, they want to take you back to Spain. In chains." Columbus nodded. "Finally, someone wants to bring me home."

The officer hesitated. "You could escape. There are ways." Columbus laughed hoarsely. "I've already fled. From reason, from faith, from heaven. Where else can I go?"

They placed iron shackles around his wrists. Heavy, rusty, honest. He looked at them, smiled weakly. "It's fine. I've earned my kingdom."

He wrote:*Day 71. They've captured me. But I'm free. Because I have nothing left they can take from me.*

As they brought him onto the ship, the sea stood there—still, gray-blue, infinite. It watched as the man who had once conquered it walked onto the deck in chains. One sailor whispered, "Is that the Admiral?" Another, "No. That's just the price of the dream of the West."

And the sea, that old bastard, glittered in the sunlight—like someone who had just told a good joke and didn't need to explain it to anyone.

The ship smelled of iron, damp wood, and shame. Columbus sat in the hold, chained like a thief, while men laughed above him as they tried to spell his name. Every wave sounded like a mockery. No prayer, no wind, no consolation. Only the sea, accompanying him, like an old enemy who allowed itself the luxury of seeing him survive.

He wrote, on scraps of parchment, with a shaky hand:*Day 4. They call me prisoner. I call them witnesses.*

He barely spoke, ate little, and never slept long. At night, he heard the rats, the water, the footsteps above him. Every now and then, a sailor came by, curious, fearful. "You're the admiral?" one asked. "I used to be," Columbus replied. "Why am I in chains?" "Because I did what they wanted." The boy looked at him, didn't understand, and left.

The journey was quiet. No storm, no drama. Only time. And time is the cruelest punishment.

When they docked in Cádiz, there was no crowd, no music, no reception. Just officials with lists. One stepped forward: "Christopher Columbus?" "Something like that," he said. "In the name of Their Majesties, you are being questioned." Columbus nodded. "Then at least let me shower."

They led him through the streets, in chains, through a Spain that didn't know whether to celebrate him or curse him. Children stared, women whispered,

men spat. One shouted: "There's the fool!" Another: "There's the one who betrayed God!" Columbus smiled. "Both are true."

The palace was quiet, cool, and artificial. He stood again where he had once prayed. Only this time he wasn't kneeling.

Isabella came, slowly, solemnly, pale. No jewelry, no pomp. Just that look—sad, alert, human. She saw the chains, saw the eyes, saw everything. "What has become of you?" she asked. "What you made of me," he said.

Ferdinand came later, cold, correct, calculating. "You have brought us shame." Columbus: "I brought you the world." "And set it on fire." "You wanted fire."

Isabella remained silent. Her fingers trembled slightly. She stepped forward and placed her hand on his shoulder. "You will be judged," she said quietly. "Already done," he replied.

He later wrote: *I stood before kings and had more courage than all of them. And they called me a heretic because I understood the sea better than the sky.*

They took away his title, his honor, his command. But they couldn't take away what had made him sick: his dream. It was in him, like salt in his blood.

A messenger brought him wine, bread, and ink. He laughed and continued writing. *Day 12. They have dethroned me. But the sea still waits. I hear it. Every night.*

Isabella visited him one last time. No witnesses. No crown. Just a woman who understood that greatness is always dirty. "If you had the choice again," she asked, "would you do it again?" He looked at her for a long time. Then nodded. "But this time I'd tell God to stay out of it."

She nodded. "Maybe he already has it."

He smiled weakly. "Then at least I was consistent."

When she left, the room remained silent. Only the scratching of his pen, the clinking of chains. Outside, the wind could be heard. The same wind that had once carried him west—only more wearily.

He wrote: *I'm not a hero, not a martyr. I'm a man who's sailed too far to find his way back.*

That night he dreamed of the sea. No storm, no fear. Only silence. Waves that breathe. Water that whispers: *You are still mine.*

And Columbus, half awake, half dead, whispered back: "I know."

The chains were gone, but he missed them. Freedom is a joke if you don't know what to do with it. Columbus sat in a small room in Seville, writing petitions, petitions, and requests that no one wanted to read. The room smelled of ink, dust, and futility. He wrote day and night. Letters to Ferdinand, to Isabella, to the treasurer, to God. Always the same request: *Give me back what I was.* He got answers. Polite lies in beautiful Latin. *Your merits are undisputed, but the circumstances...*—the word "circumstances" became a dagger.

He wrote: *Day 34. I was the admiral of the world. Now I'm a suppliant in a country that steals my maps.*

Sometimes visitors came. Merchants, monks, curious scribes. They looked at him as if he were a fossil. "You've found the West?" they asked. "Yes," he said. "What was he like?" "Like us. Only more honest."

Some laughed. Some were silent. No one understood.

He lived on alms, on memories, on words. People avoided him, but his name remained. Everyone knew him, but no one wanted to know him.

Isabella sent him an invitation one day—not a command, just a faint hint of grace. The court wanted to see him again. He came, old, bent, but clean. The sea was still in his eyes, dark, deep, deadly.

In the throne room, Ferdinand spoke first. "We have examined your work. You have been wronged. Your title is restored." Columbus nodded. No thanks, no cheers. Just that quiet, bitter smile. "I have lost nothing you can give me."

Isabella stepped forward and placed her hand on his forehead. "You did the impossible," she said. "And paid for it," he said. "Perhaps it was worth it." "Perhaps," he replied, "but not for me."

He wrote: *I have my name back. But it's heavier than the chains.*

They offered him one last expedition. Not a grand one, not a celebrated one. Just another attempt to explore the south, where the sea ceased to explain itself. He accepted. Not for fame, not for gold—for peace. "Perhaps this time the sea will let me sleep," he said.

Ferdinand shook his head. "You're incorrigible." Columbus grinned. "That was my job."

He walked through the streets, and people whispered again. This time differently. Not hatred, not mockery—just that quiet wonder when someone, despite everything, still stands.

A young scribe asked, "Why are you sailing again?" Columbus replied, "Because I never arrived."

He wrote:*Day 3. I don't want to prove anything anymore. I just want to know if the sea still recognizes me.*

He sailed again. Smaller ships, younger men, less faith. No more fanaticism—just experience. And experience is like rust: It slowly eats away at you, but you learn to live with it.

He stood on deck, the wind in his beard, the water black and honest. "Well, old friend," he said. "Still there?" The sea didn't answer. It didn't need to.

He wrote:*I've learned that fame is just another name for memories. And memories hurt, if they were real.*

He was old. Too old. But at sea, he still felt whole. On land, he was a legend; on the water, he was just another of the many madmen who believe infinity can be calculated.

And as the sun rose over the Atlantic, he thought:*I didn't do it for her. I did it for myself. And that was the biggest mistake—or the only real thing.*

The final voyage began without drums, without prayers, without a king. Just a few men too young to be afraid and an admiral too old to lose them. The ships were small, fragile, and tired like their crew. They sailed south, to where the maps ended and the water grew darker.

Columbus stood on deck, his gaze fixed on the horizon. The sea was calm, but it had that stillness you only recognize after knowing it for too long—the silence before the truth.

He wrote:*Day 7. I'm not exploring. I'm returning.*

The men whispered. They said the admiral was talking to himself, to the wind, to spirits. One said he saw him at night at the bow, barefoot, his hands raised, whispering, "I'm here." But no one asked who he meant.

The days burned. The sky was white, the sea glowed. Salt ate into the skin, the water stank of decay. Food was scarce, patience even more so. One cursed: "This isn't a sea, it's a grave." Columbus nodded. "And yet it floats."

He wrote:*Day 12. I hear them laughing—those who are no longer here. The sea remembers better than people.*

A storm came. Not a real one, not like before. Just rain, wind, waves, enough to wear them down. The sails ripped, the men screamed, the ships groaned. Columbus stood in the middle, holding onto the mast, his eyes wide open, and whispered, "I'm home again."

When the storm subsided, one of the ships was gone. Men dead, supplies gone. Those who remained looked at it as if it were a curse in human form. "You're bringing death, Admiral!" Columbus: "I'm only bringing whatever was there. You just missed it."

They wanted to overthrow him, but they couldn't. Not because they loved him—because they knew the sea would swallow them up faster without him.

He wrote:*Day 18. I am her compass, even though I've long since rusted.*

The shores they reached were strange, beautiful, indifferent. No gold, no cities, no God. Just trees, wind, and dirt. Columbus was sick. Fever, aches, loose teeth, and burned skin. He laughed at himself, coughed up blood, and said, "I am the man who found the world—and now I don't even have his shoes."

Once, at night, when the men were asleep, he stood at the bow again. The sea was black, still, infinite. "I've been looking for you," he said quietly. "All my life. And you've never been anywhere but here." He placed his hand on the water, felt the cold, the trembling, the eternity. "I wanted to possess you," he whispered. "But you kept me."

He wrote:*Day 25. I believe the sea is God. Only more honest.*

The men wanted to turn back. Columbus nodded. "Do what you must." He knew they wouldn't make it without him, but that wasn't his problem anymore. He had done his part.

The fever returned, stronger. He lay in his cabin, drenched in sweat, delirious. He saw faces—Isabella, Ferdinand, the men he had lost, the sea smiling and kissing his forehead. "I did it," he murmured. "I found the end."

The young helmsman sat next to him. "Do you want the priest, Admiral?" Columbus smiled weakly. "I had my confession. It was salty."

He wrote his last sentence, shaky, barely legible: *I made the world round and broke myself because of it.*

The next morning, he was quiet. The wind blew gently, the sun was mild. The men stood there in silence, no one knowing what to do. One whispered, "He looks peaceful." Another replied, "He looks as if the sea has finally taken him."

They threw his body into the water, just as he would have wanted—without a priest, without a song. Only the splashing sounded like a period after a sentence that was too long.

And the sea took him – quietly, gently, finally. No waves, no thunder. Just a breath, a whisper.

Finally you're back.

Farewell to Palos – with salt and doubt

When the news came, it was quiet. No drum roll, no ringing, no cheering. Just a messenger walking through the streets of Valladolid, dusty, thirsty, indifferent. "Columbus is dead," he said, and people shrugged as if he had mentioned the name of a stranger.

Spain had other worries. War, gold, intrigue, plague. The man who had changed the world was now merely a footnote in the accounts of the courtiers who had never liked him. They spoke of him as if a score had finally been settled. "He was useful," said one. "He was inconvenient," said another. "He was superfluous," said the third—and this was the most honest of them.

In Palos, they told each other stories. Children played with shells and said the sea had taken him because it missed him. Old men drank cheap wine and said, "He was crazy. But at least he had courage."

And in the churches? They preached about humility. The admiral, for example, became the wrong kind. Too proud, too obsessed, too human. They made him a sinner so they could feel righteous.

He once wrote:*If they forget me, the sea will remind them.*

And the sea did. Every time the sun set and the waves glowed like liquid gold, for a moment you could see a silhouette, upright, motionless, somewhere on the horizon. No ship, no person, just memory with poise.

His letters, his cards, his warnings gathered dust in the archives. Officials read them, didn't understand a word, and stamped them. *Admiral Christopher Columbus – completed.*

That's it.

But somewhere, out on the water, the sea knew better. It still bore traces of its ships, tiny splinters of wood, salt, blood. And it held onto them, like a collector who knows he has an original that no one recognizes.

In Seville, people said he had spent the last few nights sleeping with his eyes open, murmuring and whispering. "I saw the end." – "What was there?" – "A beginning."

Nobody understood, but everyone nodded, because that's what you do when someone says something that's bigger than life.

Ferdinand and Isabella received reports of his death. The king read briefly and sighed. "So be it." The queen was silent. There was something in her eyes that looked like remorse—or weariness. "He changed the world," she said quietly. "And we sold it," Ferdinand replied.

He once wrote:*I built Spain a kingdom in water. But they preferred one made of stone.*

And history did what it always does: It made him a legend so that it no longer had to understand him.

In Palos, an old cross remained at the harbor, weathered and lonely. No one knew exactly why it stood there. Only when the wind blew from the sea did it sound as if someone were whispering:*I'm not finished yet.*

And somewhere out there, deep beneath the waves, the sea laughed – quietly, long, honestly.

After his death, the scribes came. They always come. They came with pens, ink, gold edging, and the fear of God. They wrote what they wanted, not what was. And so the tired, sick, broken Columbus became a saint of progress.

"He opened the world," they wrote. "He brought light into the darkness," they raved. They wrote of courage, vision, divine guidance—not a word about whips, hunger, or madness. Not a single sentence about burned villages, about fever, or about chains.

They made him an instrument of God because they were too cowardly to admit that he was an instrument of Spain. And in their books, Spain became a Chosen Land, not a robber with a priestly blessing.

One of the chroniclers, a fine man with clean hands, wrote: *Columbus was a light in a dark world.*

A sailor who had known him later read this and said, "Then I was the damned darkness."

This is how legends are born. Not from truth, but from boredom.

They erected statues in the cities. Stone, bronze, proud, empty. The admiral, pointing at the horizon—as if he knew where he was going. Tourists came, children marveled, priests blessed. No one asked why his eyes were always closed on all the statues.

He once wrote: *If they ever cast me in stone, they should show me with my eyes closed. So they know they're blind.*

The sea saw the monuments and grinned. It knew that no stone lasts forever, but salt does. And every year, when the tide came in, it crept closer to the foundations, licking them, as if in reminder: *I knew him. You didn't.*

They taught his name in schools. Christopher Columbus – the discoverer. They called him a hero, a visionary, the father of innovation. They ignored the fact that every "new" makes someone old. That every "discovery" means burning somewhere.

A teacher said to his students, "He brought faith." An old fisherman who heard this murmured, "He brought hunger and fever."

But nobody listens to Fischer.

Isabella died, and with her, the last shred of humanity left in his history. Ferdinand continued to rule, soberly, efficiently, and coldly. He once said, "Columbus was necessary." That was his kind of obituary.

He once wrote: *When they need me, I am their prophet. When they're full, I am their ghost.*

And so he remained both a prophet and a ghost. The man quoted but not read. The hero celebrated because he was unknown.

Sometimes, when a storm was brewing over the Atlantic, sailors would say they saw him. A silhouette on the waves, barefoot, silent, with his hand on his heart. Some swore they heard him curse. Others that he laughed.

The sea kept the secret. It was the only thing that belonged to it.

And every time a ship left the coast of Palos, the wind whispered – quietly, barely audibly, but honestly:
He never returned. No explorer ever does.

They buried him twice. First in the monastery, later in the cathedral. Some said a third time somewhere overseas, because Spain didn't know what to do with what it didn't understand. A man who had found the end of the world—and now belonged nowhere.

The funeral wasn't one. No people, no procession. Just monks, quiet chanting, a few candles flickering as if they were afraid. The coffin was simple, the earth hard. A storm raged outside, as if the sea were trying to get the last word. One monk whispered, "He found the New World." The other replied, "And it devoured him."

In the palaces, people still talked about him—briefly, casually, between wars and taxes. "A difficult man," they said. "But useful." Useful—the ultimate praise for all who were greater than their masters.

Spain became rich, powerful, and cruel. Gold flowed, and so did blood. It filled the treasuries and drained souls. Priests blessed, soldiers burned, merchants counted. And above all this lay the name that began it all—Columbus. No one pronounced it. But everyone knew he was in everything.

He had opened the West, and that was the mistake. Because wherever people enter, they bring with them what they are—greed, fear, God. And God, who was always too good to intervene, fell silent again.

He once wrote: *I thought the West was a direction. But it was a mirror.*

The mirror remained. Spain gazed into it, year after year, and enjoyed it. Ships came and went, countries became maps, people became numbers. It all began with a dream—and ended with accounting.

One chronicler said, "He discovered the New World." Another whispered, "And we lost the old one."

But chroniclers rarely whisper out loud.

The sea watched as one's work was sold, as one's face was printed on coins, as one's guilt was carved in marble. And it remained silent, because it knew that every lie would eventually flow back to it.

One night, many years later, an old captain recounted seeing something in the middle of the Atlantic. A light, faint but persistent. It moved slowly, as if someone were walking on the water. He swore he heard a voice, rough, quiet, hoarse: "I'm still on my way."

No one believed him. But a young sailor wrote it down in his logbook. And at dawn, when the sky was blood red, he saw something in the waves that looked like a face—old, tired, but grinning.

Maybe it was just the sea mocking itself. Maybe it was memory. Maybe it was both.

For somewhere, deep down, between salt, wreckage, and stories, he lies. Not a king, not a saint, not a hero. Just a man who thought he could trick the heavens—and discovered he only fell further.

And the sea? It tells the story. Whenever the wind blows from the west, you hear it whispering—quietly, harshly, with a hint of laughter:

The damn dream was worth it.

The West was no longer a promise, just a direction taken often enough until it felt like a dead end. Spain had grown satiated, fat on gold and debt. Churches grew, and so did graves. The streets smelled of power, the sky of silence.

People still talked about Columbus, but only when doing business or filling books. In the taverns, his story was told with less dust and more rum. "He

found paradise," one said. "And forgot to come back." Another laughed: "Maybe it just spat him out."

The sea was still, so still it sounded almost offended. The waves rolled in sluggishly, as if tired of the drama. It had seen kings die, empires crumble, heroes invented. It had learned that fame is only the sound that remains when the wind stops.

He once wrote: *I crossed the sea to find God. And I found myself. Unfortunately.* No one read that sentence. Maybe that was a good thing.

In Palos, by the harbor, the old cross still stood. It was rotten, crooked, eroded by the wind. No one cared for it. A child asked his mother, "Why is it there?" "Because someone wanted to leave," she said. "And did he come back?" She smiled sadly. "Only the sea came back."

At night, you could hear the water rushing, soft, rhythmic, almost friendly. It no longer told stories, only memories. No heroes, no wars, no kings. Only breath, waves, silence.

An old fisherman said, "The sea never forgets." Another nodded. "But it never forgives either."

And somewhere deep down, in darkness and salt, lies what remains of Columbus—no body, no glory, only a direction. A movement. An eternal "onward."

Maybe this was his heaven. No place, no angels, no crown—just endless blue and the sound that never left him.

The sea didn't take him to punish him. It took him because there was no one else who would have understood.

On the horizon, as the sun set, one sometimes saw a light. Small, distant, restless. Some said it was a ship. Others said it was a memory. Perhaps it was just the sea erecting a monument to itself.

And when the wind blew from the west, it brought with it this smell—salt, smoke, sweat, hope, madness. An entire continent, distilled in one breath.

So the dream ends. Not with thunder, not with applause. Only with water beating against stone, always the same, always honest.

And somewhere, between the wave and the wind, a voice sounds, hoarse, defiant, tired:

I was there.

The sea doesn't answer. It doesn't have to.

The years turned into centuries, and Spain forgot what it had once dreamed of. It built churches, colonies, cathedrals, brothels, and debts. Everything shone, everything stank. The world was now a sphere, as Columbus had said, but no one remembered that someone had lost almost everything for it.

They now called him *Explorer, hero, missionary* Words like polished silverware—beautiful to look at, but cold to the mouth. In schools, they painted him in gold and white. A noble man, with a map, a cross, and a crown. No wrinkles, no scars, no guilt. They made history look so clean that it was almost sterile.

A teacher said, "He brought civilization." A student asked, "And what came before?" The teacher remained silent, smiled, and changed the subject.

That's how memory works: you repaint it until it no longer hurts anyone.

But sometimes, when the wind blew from the Atlantic, you could smell it. That old, honest scent of salt, blood, and fire. Then the fishermen, the elderly, the drinkers knew: the sea speaks again.

They said you could hear his voice if you stood alone on the quay at night. No singing, no words. Just this deep, ragged roar that sounded like the breathing of a man who couldn't stop dreaming.

One wrote in his diary: *The wind sounds like someone is laughing. Not mockery, more like someone who finally gets it.*

In the cities they built monuments, streets, and holidays. *Columbus Day* was born—a convenient lapse of guilt in the calendar. It was celebrated with parades, cannons, and flags. And the sea laughed a little louder every year.

An old sailor who had drunk too much once said, "If Columbus could see this, he would drown himself again." Another replied, "He would drink first."

Historians argued, politicians talked, moralists wrote. Was he a hero or a devil? Explorer or murderer? Prophet or fool? And the sea, which knew him, said nothing. It had already given the answer long ago.

He once wrote:*I am proof that you can reach heaven – and that it's not worth it.*

No one quoted that. Too real. Too dangerous. Too true.

The world became wider, faster, more crowded. Ships became steamers, then steel giants, then airplanes. But every departure sounded the same: a coughing engine, a person hoping, a sea waiting.

And somewhere out there, among shipwrecks and glass fish, he still lies. Not as a hero, not as a sinner—just as a reminder that the greatest discovery is always one's own abyss.

If you fly over the Atlantic at night and look down, you might see it. A tiny, angry dot in the endless black. No statue, no grave. Just movement. Just defiance.

The sea keeps him. Not out of love, not out of guilt—out of respect. Because it knows: He was the only one who meant it.

At some point, they started to dig him up again. Not with shovels—with words, microphones, documentaries, hashtags. Everyone wanted a piece of him, but no one wanted all of him. Some called him a pioneer, others a monster. No one knew him.

In New York they carried signs:*Columbus was a murderer.*

In Madrid they gave speeches:*Columbus was the beginning of civilization.*

In Havana they drank rum and said:*He betrayed us all.*

And somewhere deep down, between the salt and the shadows, he must have laughed. Such a dry, tired, honest laugh. One that says:*You still don't get it.*

Because Columbus was never the hero. Never the villain. He was simply the first to say out loud what everyone was thinking: that the world was too small for its own lies.

They erected statues—and tore them down again. They wrote books—and burned them again in debates. He was a ghost who couldn't decide which side of history he wanted to haunt.

A young historian said on television: "Columbus represents the beginning of imperialism." An old sailor in the audience murmured: "Columbus represents the sea. And the sea eats everyone equally."

So he became important again. Because you need guilt when you're full. Because you need heroes when you're afraid. He became a projection screen, a mirror with salt rims. Everyone saw themselves in it – and no one liked what they saw.

He once wrote:*I found the world, and it didn't ask me.*
This sentence was missing from all school books.

The churches continued to pray for his soul, as if that would change anything. The Pope once mentioned him in a speech—something about courage, faith, and divine providence. The wind blew through St. Peter's Basilica, and for a moment, it sounded as if someone was laughing.

In Palos, at the harbor, someone still came every year and threw flowers into the sea. No one knew who he was. An old man, with a gray beard and a faded coat. He stood still, stared out, muttered something, and left again. Some said he was crazy. Others said he was a descendant. Perhaps he was simply someone who had understood.

The sea took the flowers as it takes everything. Without thanks, without judgment, without end.

His maps, his letters, his mistakes hung in museums. Glass in front, dust behind. Children walked by, tourists took photos. No one read what was written. Only one paused, for a long time, and whispered: "He was right. But it wasn't worth it."

The sea, off the coast, continued to roll. Calmly. Slowly. As if it were saying:*Finally someone who listens.*

The world celebrated progress. Airplanes, satellites, moon landings. But it all began there, with three piles of planks on a sea that understood it more than any crown.

He once wrote:*I wanted to reach heaven. I ended up in the water. Maybe that's the same thing.*

And maybe that really was it.

At least the sea always knew it.

The world kept turning. The maps became more colorful, the lies more precise. They called him *Christopher Columbus*, *Cristóbal Colon*, *Colombo*— every language wanted a piece, no one wanted the whole man.

The West had long since been built up, loud, and sated. But somewhere in the wind, something of it remained, a trace of salt, sweat, and defiance. A remnant of longing that no wall, no king, no church could ever truly quell.

That night, alone on his bed, half feverish, half dreaming, Columbus thought he heard the sea calling. Not loudly—quietly, familiarly, like a memory finding its way back.

He stood up, staggering, drenched in sweat, and opened the window. There was no ocean, only fog. But he smelled salt.

He looked out and saw it: the coast of Palos, the cross at the harbor, the ships, young and shining, as they had been then. And above it all, the sky—deep, blue, infinite. He stepped out, barefoot, lost in thought. The pavement beneath his feet grew wet, the wind grew stronger, the air saltier.

He left. Not really—but something inside him was moving. Before him lay the sea, so clear, so calm, that he knew it had never been gone. He smiled, like someone who had finally understood the joke that had tormented him his entire life.

He stepped in, step by step. The water was warm, soft, like skin. It reached his knees, then his chest. He closed his eyes. And the sea came towards him—not as an enemy, not as a grave. As a mirror.

He didn't speak, didn't think, barely breathed. He let himself drift, not his body, only his thoughts.

And somewhere between sleep and memory he heard it whisper, rough and friendly:

You're not finished yet.

He opened his eyes. The sea was gone. He lay in bed, the sky gray, the morning cold. He was breathing heavily, but he was alive.

"Not yet," he murmured. A faint smile, almost childlike, flitted across his face.

Outside, the wind roared. It sounded like the sea.

The endless ocean and the cursing crew

The sea was vast, but not solemn. It stank of fish, sweat, and fear. No divine splendor, no heroic departure—just three old ships, too small for what they were meant to do. Wood creaking, ropes singing, men cursing. Palos lay behind them, smaller than Regret. Ahead: nothing.

Columbus stood at the bow of the *Santa Maria* and pretended to believe what he said. "The West, men, there lies our glory!" he shouted, and the sea answered with a gust of wind that smelled of rain. The men cheered weakly, because that's what you do when someone pays. Then they spat, laughed, and examined the barrels.

They were afraid, but they didn't know it yet. Fear comes creeping at sea, like decay—first a smell, then a taste, then everything.

The sun blazed. The water was blinding. For days, nothing but sky and salt. No birds, no fish, no sign. Only west, always west. And every day pulled a piece of certainty from their bones.

Columbus wrote in his logbook: *Day 3. The men are silent. I've said enough for everyone.*

And he did. Stories, maps, signs. He saw islands in the clouds, coasts in the waves, a miracle in every damned gust of wind. He believed in the West like a drunk believes in the next bottle—because anything else would be worse.

The men watched him. Whispering, skeptical, suspicious. They saw him stay awake at night, staring at the water as if it were talking to him. Some said he heard voices. One whispered, "The old man is possessed." Another replied, "Good. At least one of us is."

The sea grew rougher. Rain, wind, torn sails. A man fell overboard, and no one jumped after him. Columbus watched as the waves took him. "God rest his soul," he said aloud. Quietly, he said, "If he exists."

At night, they sat together, smoking, drinking, telling each other old stories about mermaids, sea monsters, and the edge of the world, where you fall into nothingness. Columbus listened, remained silent, and smiled. He knew they believed he was leading them to their deaths. And perhaps he was right.

He wrote: *Day 6. The sea is not an enemy. It's just honest. It shows us who we truly are.*

Sometimes he looked east, back—the horizon was empty. No trace of home. Only the sky, slowly losing its color. He knew: There's no turning back now. Not for him, not for the men, not for history.

He looked into the depths, the dark, endless blue that swallowed everything that looked too long. "If you're going to get me," he said quietly, "at least do it with style."

And the sea was silent.

The fourth day was the day the men stopped singing. Until then, they had still been roaring songs, dirty, simple, old things that smelled of home. But songs need land, and all they had was water.

The wind was gentle, the sun stood still, and the sea lay there like a mirror, lying to everyone. No waves, no sound, just heat. One man vomited overboard, another prayed, a third laughed, simply to hear something.

Columbus stood in the middle, his hat tilted low, his gaze steady. "It's normal," he said. "The sea is testing us." "Then it should finally say something!" someone shouted. "It doesn't talk to everyone," Columbus replied. And that was the wrong thing to say.

The men cursed. Not loudly, not openly – quietly, between their teeth. Some began to *the madman* to name. Others called him *the blind*. But at night, when the wood creaked and the stars stood like nails in the sky, they heard him praying. Not to God. To the sea.

He wrote: *Day 9. The men are losing heart. I'm losing sleep.*

The rations were getting smaller, the water foul. One opened a barrel and found green algae inside. "This is your holy west!" he shouted. Columbus calmly replied: "No. This is your faith, if it lasts long." A punch followed. Then two. Then silence. Columbus wiped away the blood and laughed. "At least now you believe in something real."

A storm came, short, brutal, almost merciful. The men screamed, the masts creaked, the wood creaked. One was struck by lightning. When the rain stopped, they looked at him with that look that asks: *Who's next?*

Columbus wrote: *Day 11. God is not on this ship. Only the sea.*

He began to talk to himself. About stars, about currents, about the line where sky and water kiss. "There it is," he said. "There it lies." A young sailor asked, "What?" "The end of fear."

The men avoided him. One said, "He hardly sleeps. Hardly eats. Talks to the waves." "Maybe they'll answer," another said. "Then he's lost." "Then he was already lost."

On the twelfth day, they found a seagull. Dead, dried up, a breath of hope with feathers. Columbus picked it up and held it up. "Land is near," he said. The men looked at him with an expression that showed neither faith nor hatred—only weariness.

He wrote:*Day 13. I have to invent miracles for them so they don't kill me.*

In the night, a rumbling was heard, then voices. Two men were arguing, one of them drawing a knife. Columbus intervened. No more authority, only instinct. "If one of you dies," he said, "it will only be because the sea wills it. Not because you will."

The knife fell. The wind returned.

And Columbus looked into the darkness, into nothingness, into everything – and whispered: "I hope you know what you're doing."

The sea answered with a laugh. Or it was just the wind.

The wind shifted. Slowly, imperceptibly, like an animal returning only to play. The sails hung limp, the water was smooth, endless, insultingly calm. Not a bird, not a shadow, not a sign. Just sun, salt, silence. One man said, "The sea is laughing." Another, "No. It's waiting."

Columbus wrote:*Day 16. I feel it watching me.*

He had dark circles under his eyes, his hands trembled, his lips chapped. But his voice remained firm, because it had to be. "We are close," he said every morning. "The land is there." There. Always there. A finger pointing into the void.

The men listened to him, but they didn't believe him. Not anymore. They did what they were supposed to, mechanically, silently, like dead men who still have tasks to perform.

At night they dreamed of water laughing at them. One screamed in his sleep, calling for his mother, another prayed, a third cursed God, Columbus, the sea. And the sea was silent.

Columbus often stood alone at the stern, staring into the ship's wake, which immediately closed again. There was no sign that they had ever been there. He whispered, "We're disappearing, and that's called progress."

On the eighteenth day, they found flotsam. A piece of wood, round, polished. "Land!" someone shouted. Columbus picked it up and looked at it for a long time. "Made by human hands," he said. "A sign." The men cheered. One wept. And that night, they believed again—in short, cheap, beautiful.

He wrote:*Day 18. They need hope like bread. I bake it from lies.*

But the next morning there was nothing again. Just the horizon, naked, brazen. Something broke inside them. No rebellion, no scream—only this silence, which says more than anything.

A sailor approached Columbus, young, thin, and burned. "Admiral," he said quietly, "if there's no land there, they'll kill you." Columbus looked at him, smiling almost gently. "Then let's hope land isn't too far away." "And if it is?" "Then at least we'll die moving."

On the twentieth day, the water stank. The bread was hard, the wine sour. Men spat blood. They began to hear voices—from the sea, from the wind, from themselves. One swore he saw a face beneath the waves. Another claimed the sea called him by name.

Columbus pretended he didn't hear anything. But at night he whispered back.

He wrote:*Day 21. The sea speaks. Not in words. In hunger.*

The men began to look at him as a victim, not as a leader. They no longer talked about gold, fame, or God. Only about water. "If he's lying," said one, "we'll throw him overboard." "If he's right," said another, "what do we have left?" No one had an answer.

Columbus looked at them all, tired, penetrating, with eyes that had seen too much. "You're afraid of the end," he said. "I'm afraid there isn't one."

And for a moment the sea believed him.

The sun burned as if it had its sights set on them. No wind, no shadow, no sound except the creaking of the wood and the whispering of the men. The ocean lay there, smooth, shining, endless—like an animal sleeping but with its eyes open.

Columbus stood at the helm, looking west. Always west. His skin was burned, his lips chapped, his eyes red like wounds. He no longer looked like an admiral. More like a prophet who had stood in the desert too long and forgotten why.

He wrote:*Day 23. The sea no longer smells. Only hunger.*

The men avoided him. They whispered, murmured, and kept in groups. At night, when the lantern light danced across the planks, their shadows were visible like a conspiracy in motion. No one laughed anymore. Only whispers—names, threats, prayers—occurred.

One of the sailors, a burly man with a scar above his eye, said, "The old man is leading us to death." Another nodded. "Or to hell." "It doesn't matter. It just takes longer."

They counted the days. They counted the clouds. They counted their sins. But they no longer counted land.

Columbus knew what they were thinking. He saw it in their faces—that trembling, that flinching when his name was mentioned. "They no longer believe in me," he wrote. "So I believe twice as much."

He began to see signs where there were none. A piece of driftwood that looked like a hand. A cloud that settled like a shore. A school of fish that surfaced briefly—proof! He called the men together. "Look!" he said. "Land is near!" They came, looked, saw—nothing. "You don't see it," he said. "But I do." And that was the moment they finally stopped believing him.

A sailor spat into the water. "He's talking to ghosts." Another: "No. With himself." "What's worse?" "When the sea answers."

Columbus lay awake at night. He heard the cracking of wood, the whispering of water. He thought he heard voices—not loud, just like memories. "You wanted to find me," said the sea.

"I found you," he whispered. "Then go deeper."

He stood up, walked barefoot to the bow, and looked into the darkness. "Not yet," he murmured. He was afraid the sea liked him.

The next morning, a man was missing. No one asked where he had gone. No one wanted to know.

The mood changed. Hunger set in. The stench became sweet, heavy, like regret. Columbus spoke of God, but his voice was empty. "Believes," he said. "In what?" someone asked. "In what remains." "And what remains?" He remained silent.

He wrote:*Day 26. When hope stinks, it smells like people.*

One came to him, whispering cautiously. "Admiral... they're talking about tying you up. If we don't see land soon..." Columbus nodded. "I know." "What to do?" "Continue sailing."

He went back to the bow, looked to the west as if an answer lay there. And somewhere between sky and water, something flickered—a light, a glow, a dizziness. He smiled. "There," he whispered. "There it is."

But the sea just grinned. It knew he saw nothing—only himself.

It began quietly. Everything begins quietly. A few too many glances, a few orders that no one obeys anymore. One laughed as Columbus spoke. Another spat as he walked by.

The sea was calm, so damn calm you could hear the madness.

Columbus knew what was coming. You see it when you're old enough. "They are ready," he wrote. "Not for land. For blood."

The men's eyes were hollow, their lips burned, their skin cracked like old rope. Hunger, sun, salt—the three saints of the sea. They sat together, spoke little, drank whatever was still burning, and whispered: "If we turn back, we live." "If we continue, we die." "Then let's choose."

Columbus stood on the quarterdeck, alone, as always. He knew they were counting. Hours, days, reasons. He saw their faces—suspicious, sweaty, empty. Men who had hoped for too long.

The first one came at night. A sailor, young, stubborn, with a knife in his hand. "We'll turn around," he said. Columbus looked at him, calm, tired, but clear. "And where to?" he asked. "Back." "Back where to?" The boy hesitated. "Home." Columbus laughed, rough, short, honest. "Home is just another place where you're afraid." The boy raised the knife. "Stab," said Columbus. "But

then steer the ship." The boy lowered his hand. "You're crazy," he whispered. "I know," said Columbus. "That's why I'm here."

By morning, everyone knew what had happened, even if no one said anything. The mood was different—no more mutiny, just waiting. Waiting is worse than hatred.

Columbus wrote:*Day 28. They'll kill me if a miracle doesn't come. Maybe none will. Maybe I am the miracle.*

At noon, the helmsman stepped forward, a powerful man with a cold gaze. "Admiral," he said. "The men want an answer. How far is it?" Columbus looked at him, squinting against the sun. "One day. Maybe two." "You said that yesterday." "Then it's truer today."

The men murmured. Columbus stepped forward, standing on the planks, without hat, without dignity, only his voice. "You think I've deceived you," he cried. "Yes!" one shouted. "I gave you hope!" "Lies!" "Lies last longer than courage!" he roared back.

They were silent. One rarely hears the truth at sea.

"Listen!" he said more quietly. "If we turn back, we're dead. If we keep going, we might be alive. I'll take the maybe." Then he turned away, as if it were a done deal.

No one moved. The sea was silent. A knife fell to the ground, clanging, and the sound was enough to break the moment.

In the evening Columbus wrote:*Day 29. I have her back. Not her faith, but her fear. And fear is enough.*

The night came without stars, only darkness, black, fat, endless. The sea was smooth, the wind dead. He stood alone at the bow, his hands on the wood, his breathing heavy.

"You almost took her from me," he said. The sea was silent, but somewhere in the void a wave moved, small, sluggish, like a nod.

Columbus closed his eyes. "I'll stay," he whispered. "Until you speak."

And the sea, the old bastard, remained silent. For it knew: He would wait. And it loved those who wait.

The sun was low again, as if it had grown tired of the spectacle. Three ships, three dozen men, a sea that makes you forget everything that ever had meaning. The sky was clear, too clear. The light cut through them like a knife through bad flesh.

Columbus stood at the railing, his hands torn by the rope, his lips chapped by the salt. He barely spoke anymore. Sometimes he mumbled numbers. Stars. Distances. A private prayer of mathematics and defiance. He had passed the point of belief. Now all he knew.

He wrote:*Day 30. I no longer trust signs. Only direction.*

The men were quiet. That dangerous silence familiar to anyone who's ever listened to a storm before it hits. One was sharpening a knife, another was tying a rope around his arm as if practicing. No one was singing, no one was cursing. Even the rats were silent.

They smelled of death, but they still had a pulse. Columbus sensed it the way one smells rain before it falls.

The helmsman came to him, his voice harsh with silence. "Admiral, they're planning something." Columbus nodded. "I know." "And?" "Let them." "If they kill you?" "Then at least they'll know where to go."

The helmsman stared at him as one might stare at a man already living beyond reason. "You're crazy," he said. Columbus smiled. "That's why I'm going first."

In the evening, the sky was red. Not a good red. That heavy, bloody red that reeks of trouble. The men sat together, silent, in the corner of the deck, the light of the lanterns like little hells around their faces. One whispered, "Tomorrow." Another, "Yes. Tomorrow." That was all it took.

Columbus wrote:*Day 31. I can feel them when they sleep. Their dreams are loud. They dream of land and murder. Maybe that's the same thing.*

He went to the bow, looked west, again and again into that goddamn west that didn't move. The sea was black, motionless, beautiful, and empty. "Show yourself," he whispered. "A leaf. A bird. A damn piece of dirt. Just anything." But the sea gave him nothing.

He thought of Isabella, of her eyes, of the court, of the lies he'd told to make her believe him. He laughed briefly. "I'm a fool with a compass," he said. Then he whispered, "But I'm right."

Something moved behind him. Footsteps. Lots of them. He didn't turn around. He knew they were coming. He wanted to know.

"One more day," he said quietly, without turning around. "One more day, and you'll find land or my grave."

No one answered. Only the sound of hands holding knives and breathing that sounded like anger.

He smiled. "I've faced worse opponents," he whispered. "For example, myself."

Then he sat down. The wind came back, weak but real. The sails stretched, the water shimmered briefly, as if the sea had decided to prolong the game a little longer.

Columbus wrote:*Day 32. I'm still alive. Maybe out of spite. Maybe because the sea still needs me.*

The night came clear and blue, so still that you could hear every breath. The moon hung large over the water, fat, mocking, like an eye that sees everything and says nothing. The ships glided lazily, as if they had lost the strength to stay still. No wind. Only the faint creaking of the wood, which sounded like a final thought.

Columbus stood at the bow, his cloak open, his gaze fixed. He knew what was coming. The air smelled of metal, sweat, and decision.

"Tonight," he wrote, "they're not talking anymore. Tonight they're doing."

He saw them in the shadows. One hand on the knife hilt, one on the rope, one on prayer. Men who had hoped too long and believed too little. A whisper ran across the deck, quiet as a disease.

"Now," said one. "Not when he's looking at us," answered another. "He's always looking." "Then close your eyes."

Columbus turned around, slowly, calmly, like one who was already dead. "So," he said. "There you are." No anger, no trembling. Just weariness, so heavy it almost sounded.

The leader, a broad-shouldered man with scars on his forehead, stepped forward. "We turn around," he said. "No," Columbus replied. "Then you die." "Then I die moving."

The men moved closer, the wood creaking beneath their feet. "You lied to us," one said. "I led you." "Where?" "Further than you thought you could go."

A knife flashed in the moonlight. Columbus took a step forward, very close. "Do it," he said. "Then you'll be the man who found half the world."

The man raised the knife, his hand shaking. But he didn't stab.

Far away, across the sea, there was a scream. Another sailor shouted, "Light! There's light!" Everyone turned. A spark, a glimmer, barely visible, but real. Not a star. Not a dream. Something else. "Land!" one cried. "Land!" another cried. And suddenly everything was different.

The knives fell, the men ran, laughed, screamed, prayed, wept. Columbus stood there, still, unmoving, the wind returning, and the moon watching. He closed his eyes, letting the sound flood through him—faith, relief, salvation, madness.

He wrote:*Day 33. I heard it. The word that redeems and curses me: land.*

He went to the railing and looked out. There it was—a shadow on the horizon, flat, dark, real. He was breathing heavily. "There you go," he whispered. "I did it."

The helmsman came to him, panting, dirty, with tears in his eyes. "Admiral... you were right." Columbus smiled weakly. "I know. But that was never the problem."

Behind him, they cheered, fell into each other's arms, and kissed the deck floor. Men who had just been murderers became believers again. And Columbus stood there, looked out, and knew that it wasn't a victory. Only a postponement.

He wrote:*Day 33, night. They think the land is salvation. I know it's the beginning of the end.*

He saw the moon, saw the sea, saw the men. Then he whispered, "Thank you, old bastard."

And the sea, the old animal, remained silent as always – content.

Calm and rotting water

The sea stood still, as if dead. No wind, no sound, no whisper. Only the crackling of the wood under the sun, roasting it like fish on an old grill. The men had stopped cursing. Even hatred needs movement. Now there was only breathing and waiting.

Columbus wrote:*Day 34. The sea has lost its pulse. Perhaps we have too.*

The water was green, putrid, with that slimy skin that only stands when it's dying. Barrels tipped over, dead fish floated by, like warnings without text. The stench was everywhere—a mixture of sweat, salt, despair, and slow death.

A sailor opened a barrel. The water inside was brown. "We're drinking filth," he said. Another laughed, a short, dry laugh. "Then at least we're drinking ourselves." No one objected.

The men lay around, naked to the waist, burned, emaciated, with eyes that looked as if they didn't want to go back into their skulls. One sang softly, off-key, just to remind himself that his voice was still there.

Columbus walked across the deck, barefoot, his skin chapped, his beard gray with salt. He talked to himself, quietly, incomprehensibly, always the same words: "Soon. Very soon." But the sea laughed. Not loudly—you only heard it if you knew it.

He wrote:*Day 35. I learned that silence can be louder than thunder.*

The sky was a sheet of white. No clouds, no shadows, just embers. The men cut strips of cloth and tied them around their heads, looking like wounded in an invisible war.

One suddenly shouted, pointing west. "Smoke!" Everyone jumped up, running, stumbled. Nothing. Just haze, shimmering air, illusion. The man collapsed, laughing hysterically. "I saw it! I swear!" Columbus looked at him, said nothing.

He knew the taste of deception. It's sweet, brief, deadly.

The nights grew worse. No wind, no sleep. Only the sound of skin tearing and teeth grinding. One man began to talk, nonstop, about demons in the water. Another answered him as if it were normal. The ship became an insane asylum with sails.

Columbus looked at the sea as one looks into the eyes of an animal one has fed. "You want to test us," he said. "But I'm no longer afraid." And the sea answered with nothing—the cruelest kind of consent.

He wrote:*Day 36. Calm is not a state. It's a judgment.*

The men drank rainwater from cloths, prayed, laughed, and cried. Some whispered that they had seen shadows beneath the ship—huge, black, motionless shapes following them. One claimed to have heard a voice, deep in the water. Columbus asked, "What did she say?" "That we're too late."

He laughed. "We always are."

The air stood still, the sea rotted, and the sun watched as they slowly became things that were no longer human.

The sea lay there like a corpse, glistening, heavy, incredibly calm. Only an occasional bubbling, as if something below were laughing. The ships hung fast, their sails slack like old lungs. The men barely moved. Movement requires faith.

One coughed up blood. Another cut his hand, just to see if it was still red. A third died. Just like that. No scream, no prayer, no reason. They threw him overboard, and the sea took him, silently, politely, as always.

Columbus stood by, remained silent, and wrote:*He is at home.*

The barrels stank. The water was a broth, warm and bitter, with small creatures moving about.

One called them "souls," another "damnation." Columbus drank anyway.

His face had become hard, his skin cracked, his eyes dull. He looked as if he'd long since outlived himself—and that was the worst part. He walked across the deck, talking to the wind that wasn't there. "I know you'll come back," he whispered. "You always come back."

The helmsman stared at him. "You're talking to air, Admiral." "Better than to you."

The men now openly hated him. One muttered, "If we die, he'll put it in his book." Another, "Perhaps that will save him. Words swim better than we do."

Columbus continued, with a trembling hand:*I can smell death. It smells like algae and bad wine.*

A few men began to see things. Lights underwater, shadows moving with the ship. One swore he saw a woman, naked, beautiful, with eyes like salt. "She beckoned to me," he said. "She told me to jump." And he jumped. No one tried to stop him.

The sea closed over him, and the deck was silent. Columbus wrote:*Day 38. One more. I'm lost count.*

The stench grew worse. Skin, wood, sweat, decay. Everything mingled, a single breath of guilt. The fish stayed away. Even they knew when enough was enough.

There was no more sleep at night. Only dreams, heavy, sticky, with voices whispering:*Back...*

Columbus sometimes stood up, looked into the darkness, and whispered back:*Never.*

He wrote:*Day 39. I no longer believe in direction. I follow what remains.*

The next morning, they found a dead animal, half fish, half something. No one knew what it was. Columbus looked at it and smiled. "Proof," he said. "Of what?" asked the helmsman. "That even the sea is sick."

And at that moment, everyone on board knew that none of them were completely healthy anymore.

Day 40. The sea is a pane of glass. So still that you can hear your own heart beating—and wish it would stop.

The sun hangs as if tethered. No wind. No sound. Only the cracking of the wood, stretching under the heat and silence. The water stinks. Thick, warm, rotten. A giant soup pot of salt and death.

One of the men has started talking to a rat. It listens to him. Another mutters prayers, mixing them with curses. "If God were here," he says, "he would have jumped long ago."

Columbus stands there, barefoot, his feet chapped, his face burned. He looks as if he has swallowed the sea and can no longer get rid of it. He writes:*Day 40. The men are rotting. So am I. Only on the inside.*

The food is bad, the water worse. The barrels crack. Sometimes you can hear dripping. "These are our days," someone says. "Drip, drip – another one gone."

Columbus hardly speaks. When he does, it sounds like prayer, but without faith. "It's a test," he says. "By whom?" "By the one who made us." "Then he was drunk." Columbus smiles. "Then he's right for me."

At night they are silent. No singing, no fighting. Only breathing. That tired, wet breathing you hear in the dying. Sometimes someone screams in their sleep. Then silence again. The sea is too smooth to be real. It looks as if it has forgotten them.

Columbus writes:*Day 41. I talk to the sea. It no longer answers. Perhaps it's listening.*

One of the men is cutting his hair because it itches. Another is counting his fingers, repeatedly, as if afraid they might diminish. They smell of salt, blood, feces, and fever. Of people who have been human for too long.

A young sailor, barely twenty, approaches Columbus. "Admiral," he says, "how long?" "Until we arrive." "And if there's nothing there?" "Then at least there'll be peace."

The boy nods, walks away, and jumps into the sea. No one screams. No one moves. Just the splash, then nothing.

Columbus sees it and says quietly: "One less to share paradise."

He writes:*Day 42. The sun is burning us out. The sea is quietly devouring us. God watches and remains silent. As always.*

A few men begin to taste sand—even though there isn't any. They lick wood, spit blood. One whispers that he can smell the earth. "Where?" asks another. "In the water." "Then drink."

Columbus watches, silent, trembling, awake. He knows they are lost—but that was always the plan. He writes:*Day 43. I don't believe in heaven. Only that someone will laugh when we sink.*

The sea sparkles, friendly, innocent. Like a cat that has just eaten.

Day 44. The sea has no color left. Only this dull blue that looks like a scar. The sun hangs above them like a gallows, and the air is so thick that every breath hurts.

The men are no longer men. They're just bodies, functioning because they've forgotten how to do things differently. Skin on salt, flesh on wood, blood in their mouths. They don't sleep. They die piece by piece, hour by hour.

One of them lies there, eyes open, mouth dry. "I smell it," he says. "What?" "Us." Columbus hears and nods. "Good. Then we're still alive."

He writes:*Day 44. I've stopped counting how many are dead. Maybe we all are. Only some know sooner.*

A few men have started cursing the sea. They throw cups, wood, words. "Take us!" they shout. The sea doesn't respond. It smiles. You don't see it, you feel it.

Columbus sees it too. He sees the waves barely moving, like skin over something grinning beneath. He laughs. "You're better than God," he says. "At least you lie honestly."

The helmsman comes to him, pale, trembling, with a blank expression. "Admiral, the men are talking..." "Let them talk. It's the only thing they can do." "They say you're the curse." "Then let them pray."

The helmsman nods and walks away, staggering as if he were already half in the water.

Columbus remains alone. He looks at his hands—thin, burned, with salt crusts over the knuckles. "I underestimated the sea," he says quietly. "I thought it was just deep. But it's alive."

He writes:*Day 45. The sea doesn't want heroes. It wants stories. And blood is its currency.*

Some men have a fever. They talk incoherently, laugh, cry. One thinks he's already arrived. "I see trees," he says. "I see women." Columbus looks at him. "Perhaps you're already dead." "Then it's nice there." He dies that same night.

They throw him overboard. No prayer, no word. Just a dull splash, sounding as if the sea had yawned in agreement.

Columbus stands beside him, his eyes closed, his head bowed. He whispers: "You'll get them all, you bastard. But not me."

He writes:*Day 46. I'm the last one who still believes. And I don't know what.*

At night, he sees things. Shadows beneath the surface. Faces in the water. Some laugh, some scream. At one point, he thinks he sees his reflection—but it's waving at him.

He wants to scream, but doesn't. He smiles.

"I know what you want," he says. "But you have to wait."

The sea remains calm. It can wait. It has time. Columbus does not.

Day 47. No wind, no shade, no sound. Just that buzzing in my head that comes when too much sun meets too little sense.

Columbus hardly sleeps anymore. When he does, he dreams. He dreams of water speaking to him. Sometimes it sounds like a father, sometimes like a joke.

You wanted me, now you have me.

He replies:*I wanted land.*

Land is just water that is afraid.

Then he wakes up with salt in his mouth and blood on his teeth.

The men are barely human anymore. Their skin is gray, their eyes yellow. They no longer speak—they are wheezing. A few lie still, but still alive. Others talk to things that aren't there.

One calls the sea "mother." Another calls it "whore." Both are right.

Columbus writes:*Day 47. We stink of grace. When God smells us, he hides.*

The food is gone. The water tastes of iron. Someone drinks his urine. Another steals bread from a dead man. No one condemns it. Morality evaporates at 40 degrees.

The helmsman comes to Columbus. "Admiral, the men are finished." "We're all finished." "I mean dead." "Then they'll finally be quiet."

The helmsman spits, walks away, curses quietly. He no longer believes in land, not in stars, not in Columbus. Only in death, which is too slow.

Columbus looks at the sun, sees black spots, sees things that aren't there. He laughs. "You want to break me," he says to the sea. "But I was already broken."

He writes:*Day 48. I've learned that madness is simply the truth without a break.*

At night, he begins to talk to the stars. He counts them, whispers names to them. Isabella, Diego, Fernando. Sometimes one answers—or he believes it. "There's land," says the star. "Don't lie to me," whispers Columbus. "I am your land."

In the morning, he tells the men he has seen signs. They look at him, hollowed out, half dead, half faith. "How far?" one asks. "One day," says Columbus. No one believes him, but everyone pretends to.

A man dies while drawing water. He falls forward and remains lying there. Columbus says, "He is free." Another replies, "He is wiser than we are."

The sea remains still. No wind, no comfort. Only this quiet bubbling, which sounds like mockery.

Columbus writes:*Day 49. The sea doesn't want us. It wants to keep us.*

He thinks of home—but it smells of mold and guilt. He thinks of land—but it smells of death. He thinks of nothing—and that's the most beautiful thing.

In the evening, he sees something dark on the horizon. A stripe, a shadow, a nothingness that looks different from the other nothingness. He smiles, quietly, almost tenderly. "There you are," he whispers. "I knew you'd come."

He points to the men, but no one sees. "There!" he says. "Where?" "Where you're not looking."

He writes:*Day 50. I saw it. Maybe it was the fever. Maybe it was paradise. Maybe the same thing.*

Day 51 or 52, no one knows anymore. The days lie on top of each other like dead fish. The sea stands still, smooth as glass, but it smells as if it were rotting. Sometimes Columbus thinks it's breathing – quietly, slowly, with pleasure. The men lie around, half awake, half dead, skin burned, lips chapped. One talks about wind, another about shadows. No one knows if it's real.

Columbus sits at the helm, his eyes empty, his beard covered in salt. He hardly writes anymore, but he does it out of habit. *I underestimated the sea*, he scribbles. *It's not a place, it's an opinion*. He walks across the deck, barefoot, the planks glowing, his feet tearing open. The wood creaks beneath him, as if complaining that it's supporting him.

The men watch him. Their faces are made of stone, of hunger, and of hatred. One whispers, "He's the reason God has forgotten us." Another replies, "Maybe he's God." No one laughs. No one laughs anymore. Laughter is for people with hope.

The water in the barrels is bad. Warm, thick, bitter. It tastes of rust and fear. A man faints after drinking it, falls to his knees, then forward. No one goes there. No one prays. Columbus sees it, nods, and writes: *One more. The ocean counts better than I do.*

The helmsman arrives, pale, trembling, his eyes red from the salt. "We're trapped," he says. Columbus smiles. "In paradise, perhaps." The helmsman laughs, coughs blood, and whispers, "If paradise smells like this, I want to go to hell." Then he leaves, slowly, like someone who doesn't know what to do with himself.

At night, a wind blows, barely more than a breath, but real. The sails tremble, the wood creaks. For a moment, it sounds as if everything is alive again. The men raise their heads, stare upwards, smell hope. Brief. Cheap. Like a joke no one understands anymore. Then the air is still again.

Columbus stands at the bow. The sky is black, the sea glistens, rich and lifeless. He feels the warmth on his face, that buzzing in his head that comes when you haven't slept for too long. He whispers: "The wind is afraid of us. It knows we're empty."

He goes into his cabin, sits down, and looks at his hands. They are trembling, thin, transparent. *Day 53. I no longer believe in direction. Only in movement.* He smells mold, salt, death. The sea drips through the cracks, and he smiles.

In his mind, he sees land—green, lush, peaceful. A dream with a wet edge. He says, "You're coming. I know you're coming." Outside, someone is screaming because a barrel has burst. Another is praying, someone is laughing. Everything sounds the same.

Columbus puts down his pen. "Not today, you old bastard," he says to the sea. "Not today." And the sea responds with a single, deep burble—quiet, almost like agreement.

Day 54. The sea moves. At first barely noticeably, then truly. A wave, small, timid, honest. The sails stretch, the wood creaks, and the sound everyone had forgotten returns: wind. Only wind, but it sounds like a promise. The men stand

up, stagger, laugh, cry. Some kiss the planks, others spit on them. Everything comes alive again, even the hatred.

Columbus stands there, silent, his head tilted slightly, as if listening to the wind. He smells salt, real salt, not the stale poison of the past few weeks. He smiles. "Finally," he says, "you cowardly bastard."

The men cheer, shout, and pray together. The helmsman raises his arms and shouts: "He did it!" Columbus hears, but he doesn't believe it. He knows the sea gives nothing without a reason. It has tested them, tortured them, and drained them—and now, when they're half dead, it gives them wind. This is no mercy. This is the second round.

He writes:*Day 54. The wind is back. The sea hasn't forgotten us. It's just made us mature.*

They set the sails, slowly pushing forward again. The men laugh, but their laughter is thin, brittle, like something that has lain beneath their skin for too long. The sky gathers clouds, gray, heavy, dirty rags that move like tired animals. It smells of storm. Of life. Of danger.

Columbus stands at the helm, his hands shaking, but he holds on tight. The helmsman says, "We'll make it, Admiral. I can feel it." Columbus replies, "Me too. And that's the worst part."

He thinks of the dead, of the faces the sea has preserved. Of the screams no one heard. The sea gives wind, but takes away memories. That's the deal.

In the evening, the sky turns red, a restless red, too beautiful to be true. The sea roars again, greedily, alive, and the men almost dance, staggering, drunk with movement. Columbus watches them, silent, half-smiling, half-empty.

He writes:*Day 55. The wind sings again, and the men think it's a song. I know it's laughter.*

At night, he stands alone at the bow, the wind hitting his face, salty and warm. He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath. There it is again, that voice, quiet, ragged, familiar.

I haven't forgotten you.

"I know," he whispers.

Are you ready?

He smiles. "I never was."

The waves crash harder, the wood creaks, the ship groans with it. Somewhere, someone screams, someone prays, someone vomits. Life, everywhere, ugly, real.

Columbus looks into the darkness, where the sky begins, and thinks: Maybe there's land there. Maybe there's nothing there. Maybe there's just the sea reflecting itself.

He writes:*Day 56. We're moving again. I don't know where. But the sea knows. And that's enough.*

Then he puts down the feather, looks up, and feels the wind growing stronger. "All right," he says. "Then show me what else you have."

And the sea, the ancient beast, answers with a laugh of water, wind, and darkness. The silence is over. Now the end begins.

Mutiny in the Moonlight

Day 57. The wind blew back like a debtor who pays late. First quietly, then loudly, then too loudly. The sails stretched, the planks screamed, the sea lashed back. The men laughed, screamed, cursed, prayed—all at once, like animals who had forgotten why they can talk.

Columbus stood at the helm, his face wet, his hair wild, his eyes like two little wars. The wind lashed at his face, but it didn't budge. "Finally," he cried, "finally you're awake again!" And the sea answered with a crash—a wave as high as guilt, as hard as truth.

One man was swept away, another hung from the rope, screaming, praying, cursing. No one helped him. The wind took him, and the sea took the rest. Columbus later wrote:*Day 57. The wind brings life. Life brings death. The sea laughs at both.*

The men regained their strength, and with it came the hatred. One kicked the railing, another shouted at Columbus. "This is your fault, Admiral! Your damned idea!" Columbus smiled, his face contorted by the salt. "Ideas are always to blame."

The storm grew worse. Water lashed across the deck, waves crashed overhead, voices were drowned out. The sky was black, the sea gray, and everything in between was noise. A mast broke, crashed into the deck, and shattered. One died in the process, or perhaps even before. No one heard it.

Columbus held on tight, gripping the rudder with both hands, his body heavy, his eyes wide. He could see nothing, only white, spray, chaos. And in the midst of it all, he thought: *I've arrived. Not in the West, but in the innermost.*

When the storm subsided, they stood there, soaking wet, tired, and empty. The sea was rough, but alive. They had survived, but no one knew why. Columbus wiped the water from his face and laughed, short, deep, and honest. "You're still alive," he said. "It was worth it." Someone spat at his feet. "Worth it? For whom?" Columbus didn't answer.

He went to the bow and looked up at the sky, which opened up. Clouds drifted away, stars appeared—tired, like spectators after a performance that was too long. He wrote: *Day 58. The storm washed them, but didn't cleanse them. And it didn't cleanse me either.*

At night, the moon rose. Large, silver, indifferent. The men slept restlessly, wet, smelly, alive. Columbus stayed awake. He walked across the deck, listening to the creaking, the breathing, the dripping. The wind continued to roar in his head, even though it was quiet outside.

He thought of land, gold, fame, everything that had brought him here—and how far away it was now. He laughed softly, tore the pen from his belt, and wrote: *Day 59. I'm more afraid of calm than of storms. The storm was genuine.*

Then he looked out, the moon reflected in the water, and he whispered, "I know you're not finished yet." And the sea, the old, hungry beast, moved almost imperceptibly—like a nod.

Day 60. The storm was over, but no one trusted the calm. The sea moved gently, almost friendly, and that was precisely what frightened them. Columbus knew they would hate him now. No wind, no thunder, no enemy—just him. And that was enough.

The men whispered again. That whisper quieter than the wind, but louder than any prayer. They crouched in groups, their eyes empty and their hands full. Knives. Pieces of wood. Anything that could cut. One said, "Once we get rid of

him, we can turn back." Another nodded. "If he's right, we're dead anyway."
"Better sooner than."

Columbus sat in his cabin and wrote: *Day 60. They're thinking about mutiny. So am I. Against the sea.*

He heard footsteps outside, the creaking of wood, quiet breathing. He stood up and opened the door. The moon fell over them all—pale, silent, observing.

"Come in," he said calmly. No one moved. "Come on. You want to do it."

One stepped forward, the one with the scar over his eye. Knife in hand, his gaze hard but not sure. "We've had enough," he said. "No land, no wind, no truth. Just you and your damned west." Columbus nodded. "Then kill me." Silence. The man blinked, raised the knife. "But first," said Columbus, "explain to me where we are." "At sea." "So nowhere." "Yes." "Then kill the one who brought you here. Maybe it will bring you back."

The man trembled. The moon reflected on the blade. Behind him, someone whispered, "Go on!" Columbus took a step closer. "If you do it, you'll still die. Just more slowly."

He smiled. No madness, no courage—just that weariness that remains when you've seen everything. "I never lied to you," he said. "I just believed that lies would save us."

One spat on the ground. "Faith kills." "No," said Columbus, "fear kills. Faith only holds it."

The wind picked up. Gently, barely noticeable, but real. The men noticed. One raised his head and looked out. "Wind," he whispered. Everyone turned. The sky moved, the sails fluttered. For a moment, it looked as if the sea itself had taken sides.

Columbus smiled. "You see," he said, "even the sea wants me to live."

The man with the scar lowered the knife. "You're crazy." "I was crazy before you were born."

He stepped back, the wind increased, the men swayed, looking at each other, uncertain, exhausted. One laughed, a short, crooked sound. "The sea loves him more than us," he said. Columbus replied, "Perhaps I'm just talking louder."

He went out, left them standing, and stood at the bow. The wind was stronger now, the sea alive. He looked out, in the direction everyone hated. West. Always west. He wrote:*Day 61. They wanted to kill me, but the wind wouldn't allow it. I think it's laughing at us.*

At night, all one could hear was the wind and the sea. No more whispering, no more knives. The men slept as if they had forgotten how. Columbus stayed awake. He knew this wasn't over yet.

He whispered, "Just a little further, old friend. Just a little further." And the sea answered with a deep, long breath.

Day 62. Morning came quietly. No storm, no scream, only the rustling of sails and the soft dripping of water on wood. The men stood scattered, pale, silent, with faces that didn't know whether they were alive or lost. No one spoke of the night. No one had to.

Columbus stood at the front, his hands on the railing, his face turned into the wind. His eyes were red, his lips chapped, but he smiled. Not out of joy—out of defiance. "You were late," he whispered into the wind. "But you came."

The helmsman came to him, his gaze lowered. "They're not talking anymore, Admiral." "Then maybe they'll listen again." "To what?" "To the sea. At least it lies beautifully."

The helmsman remained silent. He knew that Columbus no longer distinguished between prayer and madness. Perhaps it didn't matter.

The men began mending the sails, scrubbing the deck. The kind of movement you make when you don't want to think. One hummed quietly, off-key, like a child trying to hide their fear.

Columbus wrote:*Day 62. They're still alive. And that's worse than if they weren't.*

At midday, a seagull appeared. White, small, alone. It flew over the ship, circling, screeching. A sound that sounded like a joke. One of the men shouted, "Land!" Everyone looked up. Only sky. Only sea. But the seagull stayed.

"She's not coming out far," said the helmsman. Columbus nodded. "Then there's something there."

A sigh of relief went through the ship. No cheers, no screams. Just that incredulous, exhausted breath you take when you don't dare to hope.

Columbus looked at the seagull as if it were a sign. Maybe it was. Maybe not. But signs are only what you make of them. He wrote:*Day 63. A seagull. Maybe heaven. Maybe a lie. I'll take both.*

In the evening, the men sat quietly. No one cursed, no one laughed. One spoke quietly of the land they would soon see—green, warm, full of water. The others listened, staring at the ground. Dreams are cheap, but they keep you awake.

Columbus remained on deck. The wind was there, steady, calm, as if the sea were seeking reconciliation. The moon hung large again above everything, pale, ancient, bored. Columbus looked at it as if it were an old friend. "You were there," he whispered. "Last night. You saw how close it was."

He smiled. "But that's the beauty of death—it's polite. It waits."

The helmsman came again. "If you're wrong, Admiral, history will curse you." Columbus nodded. "And if I'm right, history will curse me too. That's the game."

He wrote:*Day 64. The wind is our judge. The moon is our witness. I remain the fool who knows the way.*

Late that night, while the men were asleep, Columbus looked out again. He thought he saw something to the west—a shadow, a dark stripe, too far away, too flat, too real. He blinked, rubbed his eyes, looked again. There was nothing. Only the sea, which looked as if it had smiled briefly.

He took a deep breath and wrote another sentence:*Day 64, night. I believe the land will come when we stop believing in it.*

Then he put down the pen, closed his eyes, and the sea breathed with him.

Day 65. The wind persisted. Not too strong, not too light—like a bad joke the sea is playing on them. The sails were well set, the sun was burning, and the men were talking again. Just differently. Quieter. More cautiously. In that tone you use when you don't know whether you're lying or praying.

Columbus watched them. His hands were sore, his nails black, his eyes sunken. He wrote because writing was movement.*Day 65. The men are smiling again. I think that's more dangerous than their hatred.*

A second seagull came. Then a third. They circled, screamed, and disappeared. One whispered, "This is land, Admiral. I swear." Columbus nodded. "Then swear quietly. The sea doesn't like being safe."

In the afternoon, branches drifted by. One fished one out—smooth, round, strange. "Look! Wood!" The men cheered. Columbus picked it up, turned it, and smelled it. Salt, resin, sun. "Fresh," he said. "Not far."

They stared at him, at the stick, at the West. One laughed. Another cried. A third kissed the wood. Columbus didn't smile.

He wrote:*Day 66. The sea has a sense of humor. It offers hope in small portions.*

At night, they dreamed of land. They talked in their sleep, saying things like "trees," "women," "water." A chorus of half-forgotten wishes. Columbus lay awake. The wind sang through the ropes, the ship creaked like old leather. He whispered, "Show yourself at last." The sea answered with a whisper that sounded like breathing.

In the morning, a flower floated by. Yellow. Tattered, but real. The men looked at it as if it were a god. "Land!" one shouted. "Very close!" Columbus stood still, watching the small thing spinning, slowly, indifferently. He nodded. "Yes. Very close."

He wrote:*Day 67. The sea spits out memories. Perhaps it's testing us. Perhaps it's laughing.*

In the evenings, they sat together, smoking the remains of dried cigarettes that smelled of everything but hope. One of them talked about what he would do first if they saw land. Another listened as if it were a fairy tale. Columbus didn't listen. He looked into the darkness, where sky and water became one. He saw something. Or thought he saw something.

A line. A movement. Not a dream, not a play of light. Something solid. Something that wasn't waves. He blinked, took a deep breath. "Maybe," he said quietly. The helmsman looked at him. "What?" "Nothing. Not yet."

He wrote:*Day 68. I think the sea is letting us play. And we like to play.*

Late at night, fog rolled in. Thicker than ever before. Everything disappeared. Sky, sea, men—everything became gray, soft, formless, and meaningless. One person cried out, "I can't see anything!" Columbus replied, "Then you're finally seeing properly."

He stayed at the railing, his hand on the wood, his gaze to the west. There was something there. He felt it. No sign, no sound, no star. Just this dull pulling, like hunger. He whispered, "There you are. I know you are."

And the sea was silent—but it wasn't silent like death. It was silent like someone grinning.

Day 69. The fog still hung low, like a heavy, wet rag over everything. The sea was smooth, but not still. It hummed. Not loudly, but deeply, like a sound you can't hear, only feel. The men stood on deck, shivering despite the heat, talking quietly, staring into the gray wall that took everything from them.

Columbus stood there, motionless, his hands on the wood, his eyes half-closed. He smelled something. Something different. Not salt, not sweat, not death. Something green. He opened his eyes, said nothing. Only a barely audible "Now."

The helmsman came to him, pale, tired, but alive. "Admiral... it smells different." Columbus nodded. "That's what proximity smells like." "Proximity to what?" "To everything we've lost."

One of the men began to laugh. First quietly, then louder, until it sounded like a scream. "He did it! The fool really did it!" Others joined in, uncertain, half believing, half praying. Columbus turned around and looked at them. "Not yet. We're still between heaven and jokes."

He wrote:*Day 69. I smell land. Or hope. Maybe that's the same thing.*

The sun fought its way through the fog, slowly, cautiously, like someone afraid to reveal too much. The world became brighter, but not clearer. Only the shadows grew smaller. One pointed west. "There! I swear, there was something!" Everyone stared. Nothing. Just gray, moving.

Columbus smiled thinly. "The sea is playing with us. It wants applause before it releases us." The helmsman whispered, "Perhaps that's his joke." Columbus nodded. "Then he's old. But good."

The men waited. Hours, days, seconds – no one knew anymore. Time was just a sound. The fog eventually tore open, slowly, in shreds. First a strip of sky, then a patch of sun, then more. And then something was there. Far away, small, dark, but different from water.

Columbus blinked. "Damn." The helmsman saw it too. "What's that?" "A promise."

He wrote:*Day 70. Something dark in the west. No star, no dream. Something that stays when you look at it.*

The men began to talk, loudly, in confusion. "There! There! Do you see it?" - "I see it!" - "I don't!" - "Then you're blind!" Columbus raised his hand. "Quiet!" Everyone fell silent. Only the wind continued to speak.

"We're heading for it," he said calmly. "Slowly. Without cheering. The sea is listening."

The men nodded, some with tears in their eyes, others with blank expressions. They had lost too much to be happy and too little left to be afraid.

Columbus stood there, looking west, toward the direction that had been his entire life. He whispered, "If you're land, be real. I have no more lies left."

And the sea, the old, cruel beast, fell silent again—but this time it wasn't mockery. It was respect.

Day 71. The fog was gone, the skies were open. The sea shimmered, calm, deceptively calm. No storm, no curse, no gust of wind too many. Only this hint of anticipation hanging over everything, like the silence before a gunshot.

The men stood on deck, barely speaking, looking only westward. For days, the same direction, the same spot, the same unrest in their eyes. They smelled something, felt something, but couldn't grasp it. Columbus saw it too—not with his eyes, but with what remains when his mind has gone berserk.

He wrote:*Day 71. The wind smells of land. Of dirt. Of life. I think the sea is giving up.*

A seagull came. Then two. Then many. They circled, screamed, perched on the ropes, and wouldn't be driven away. One of the men began to cry. Just like that, silently, openly. Another kissed the wood beneath his feet. Columbus stood still, nodded slowly. "Now even the sea believes in me."

The helmsman came, pale, trembling, but with a genuine smile. "I smell earth." Columbus nodded. "Me too." "Then it's time." "Maybe. Maybe it's just the sky playing a trick on us."

The helmsman shook his head. "No, Admiral. I've smelled the sea all my life. This is new." Columbus placed his hand on his shoulder. "Then hold on tight. When you see what you think, you'll feel sick."

He wrote:*Day 71, evening. The men are smiling. I'm not. I know what truth smells like—it stinks of disappointment.*

The sun slowly set. The sky turned red, gold, bloody. The sea reflected it, beautiful and indifferent. The men sat together, whispering stories about palm trees, springs, women, gods. Columbus listened, remained silent, and looked west.

Images ran through his mind, jumbled, wild, messy. Isabella. Gold. Cards. Death. He saw it all before him, like a bill that would soon have to be paid. He laughed softly, almost tiredly. "Soon," he whispered, "soon you'll be more than delusion."

A gust of wind came, warm, soft, different than usual. The men sat up. The smell was stronger now. No longer of salt, but of dirt, wood, earth—real, raw, foreign. Columbus felt it in his stomach. No longer a dream. No God. No coincidence.

He wrote:*Day 72. The sea is losing ground. The West finally has a face.*

At night, no one slept. They stood on deck, watching, barely speaking. One murmured prayers, another counted stars, one held up an empty bottle as if it were a symbol. Columbus remained at the bow, alone, unmoving.

He looked out into the blackness, which was no longer empty. He whispered, "I know you're there. I know you're waiting for me." And the sea, the old monster that had loved him, hated him, and tested him, was silent—like one who finally gives in.

Day 73. Before sunrise, the wind came. Warm, soft, sweet. It smelled of earth. Of something they had all forgotten. The men stood on deck, exhausted, dirty, silent. No one dared to speak, as if any word could break their balance.

Columbus stood at the front, motionless, his eyes half-closed. He knew it was happening today. He felt it in his bones, where the pain resides. The sea was calm, but not dead. It waited. He wrote:*Day 73. The sky breathes differently. So do I.*

The moon faded, the night fell apart, the sun crept over the horizon. And there it was. A shadow. Flat. Dark. Not water, not light. Something else. Something real.

One of the men saw it first. A simple sailor, pale, with torn hands and open lips. He blinked, squeezed his eyes shut, gasped—then he screamed. "Land! Land! I see land!"

At first, no one believed it. Then they all saw it. A strip, barely more than a breath wide, but solid. Earth. A scream rippled across the deck, loud, raw, dirty, real. No cheering, no song, no prayer—just that sound people make when they realize they've lived too long.

The men fell into each other's arms, laughed, cried, and prayed. One fell to his knees and kissed the wood. Columbus stood there, staring at it, motionless, as if he had seen it a thousand times before.

He wrote:*Day 73, dawn. They scream. I don't. I knew it. And knowledge doesn't scream.*

The helmsman came to him, trembling, his eyes moist. "Admiral... we did it." Columbus nodded. "Yes." "You did it." Columbus looked at him. "No. The sea allowed it."

The sun rose higher, the land became clearer. Green stripes, rocks, trees—everything blurred by embers and salt tears. The men threw hats in the air, jumped, screamed, called for God, for their mothers, for everything they had ever lost.

Columbus remained silent. He thought of all the faces the sea had kept, of the nights, of the salt in his wounds, of the silence that was now gone. He whispered, "You lost, old bastard."

But the sea remained silent. It remained silent not as one defeated—but as one who knows that the game has only just begun.

He wrote:*Day 73, noon. Land. It looks like salvation, but smells like temptation. I think the sea is laughing.*

The men called his name, cheered, shouted "Admiral!" "Hero!" "Blessed!" Columbus looked at them, his face impassive. "You have no idea," he said quietly. "About what?" "What it costs to be right."

He turned away, looked once more over the railing, into the water that had almost swallowed him. "Thank you," he whispered. And the sea answered with a single, deep burble—soft, old, content.

Then he looked west again. There was land. Real, solid, there. And Columbus knew he had arrived—but not where he thought.

A cry: "Land!"

Day 74. The morning was golden, but the gold was dirty. The sun came out, as if it had been waiting all this time to see the victor. The sky was clear, the sea smooth, and there it lay ahead—land. Green, damp, shining. Too real to be a dream.

The men screamed, laughed, prayed, fell to their knees. Some kissed the deck, some wept like children. They hugged each other, talked over each other, laughed too loudly, as if afraid that if they remained silent, the land would disappear again.

Columbus stood there, motionless, looking at the coast. Palm trees, rocks, a strip of white sand, light hanging in the water. It smelled of earth, of heat, of life. He wrote: *Day 74. The sea has kept its word. But every word has teeth.*

The helmsman came to him, his face open, almost young. "Admiral, we're here!" Columbus nodded. "Yes." "We made it." "No. It made us."

He slowly walked forward, picked up the bronze binocular frame, and looked through the cloudy glass. There were birds, steam over the forest, movement. Something was alive there. Something they weren't.

"People," he said quietly. The helmsman stared at him. "You see them?" "I see everything."

He wrote: *There is land. And the land sees us.*

The men cheered, calling for God, for glory, for wine. One pulled out an old flag, another drew a cross in the dirt. They wanted to celebrate before they understood. Columbus let them. He knew that the first cheer is the loudest—and the last before the truth comes.

He stood at the bow, alone, his face in the wind. The sea glittered behind him, the land glowed before him. Between the two lay everything he ever wanted—and everything that had destroyed him.

He whispered, "So that's it." But it wasn't over. It was never over.

He wrote:*Day 74, noon. I've found the end. It looks like a beginning.*

In the afternoon, there was movement along the shore. Shadows, small figures, naked, brown, nimble. They stood there, staring back. Not fear. Just curiosity. Columbus looked at them through the glass, long, silently. "They don't know they've been discovered," he said. The helmsman didn't understand. "What do you mean?" "That's the beauty of innocence—it never knows when it's going to die."

He turned away and wrote:*People. Friendly. Maybe. We'll ruin it.*

The sun burned, the sea smelled of salt again, but differently—like something that's finished. The men sang, danced, and drank the last of the water. Columbus looked out, the land in sight, madness at his heels. "So there you are," he whispered. "The West. The damned West."

He grinned. No pride. No triumph. Just weariness that was too old for joy. And in the distance, where heaven and earth met, the air sparkled—like laughter.

Day 75. The morning was bright, too bright. The sea stood calm, as if watching them leave. The boats were launched, the men jumped in, laughing, shouting, praying. The sand was close, just a few strokes away, but everyone knew they were crossing a border no one knew.

Columbus sat at the front of the boat, his hand on the side, his eyes fixed on the land. The sun burned his face, the salt stung his wounds, but he didn't feel it. He was too far away from pain, too close to what he believed to be truth.

He wrote:*Day 75. We're driving toward the end of the world, and it looks like a garden.*

The oars moved steadily through the water, which was shallow, warm, and sluggish. It smelled of plants, of earth, of everything they had left behind at sea. Birds circled, calling, strange sounds, bright and mocking.

The men chattered over each other, their voices shaky and feverish. "Palm trees!" - "Fruit!" - "Women, perhaps!" - "God has seen us!" Columbus said nothing. Words were too cheap now.

The boat slid onto the beach. The sand was white, damp, and firm. Columbus stood up, slowly, swaying. The men cheered, jumped into the water, fell to their knees, kissed the ground, laughed, cried, and prayed. One fell over, just like that, from exhaustion.

Columbus stopped, barefoot, his feet in the sand, his head slightly bowed. He wrote:*Day 75, morning. I did it. I'm standing on the lie that came true.*

He pulled out a small flag, the royal coat of arms, and planted it in the ground. The fabric fluttered weakly, stirred by the wind, sneered at by the sea. "In the name of the Crown of Castile," he said, his voice hoarse and shaky. "And in the name of the Lord." No one was really listening. They shouted, drank, and sang, as if the sea had been finally conquered.

Columbus looked toward the horizon. There they were—the strangers. Dark skin, bare shoulders, painted faces. They stood silently at the edge of the forest, watching, curious, unafraid. One smiled. An honest, simple smile.

Columbus nodded slightly, as a greeting, or as a sign. He whispered, "So there they are. The first to believe us. And the last to regret it."

He wrote:*They look at us as if we were gods. I wish they knew that gods lie.*

The sun rose higher, the sea glittered, the land breathed. The men brought gifts—glass beads, fabric, mirrors. The strangers laughed, touching the metal, the colors. One touched Columbus's beard, cautiously, as if testing its authenticity. Columbus laughed. An honest, tired laugh. "More real than you think," he said.

He wrote:*They're friendly. That makes them lost.*

In the evening, they sat in a circle on the beach, fire, voices, smells. The sea roared as if it were applauding—quietly, mockingly. Columbus looked out into the darkness, where water and night kissed.

He knew he had won. And that this was the beginning of defeat.

He wrote:*Day 75, night. I've found paradise. And I'm bringing the devil with me.*

Day 76. The morning was soft, golden, heavy with warmth. The beach lay there like a promise no one understands. Columbus sat on the sand, barefoot, his gaze fixed on the horizon, where the sea glittered like a memory one cannot shake. His hands trembled, but not from fear. Just tiredness. Too much life, too little sleep.

He wrote:*Day 76. I made it. But I don't know if I deserve it.*

The men gathered wood, laughed, sang, and plundered the sun. They were human again—loud, greedy, and dirty. They ran through the water, screaming for food, for women, for God, for everything they had lost. The strangers watched, smiled, gave fruit, laughed, and touched the weapons as if they were toys.

Columbus observed them. Their faces were calm, open, peaceful. No hatred, no hunger. Only curiosity. He wrote:*They are beautiful. Not like humans, but like animals who haven't yet sold the sky.*

He gave one of them a coin. The man took it, turned it, smelled it, laughed, and threw it into the sand. No interest in metal. No interest in value. Columbus smiled. "You'll learn," he said quietly.

He walked through the camp and spoke to the helmsman. "They're friendly," he said. "We used to be, too." "They think we came from the stars." Columbus nodded. "Then we should behave until they realize we're from the filth."

The sun burned. The sea roared, indifferent, as if it already knew how it would end. The men built a wooden cross and stuck it in the sand. One murmured a prayer. Another belched. That was their mass.

Columbus wrote:*Day 76, afternoon. I put God on the beach. Let's see if he stays.*

Later, one of the strangers brought fish, fruit, and water in a gourd. Columbus took it, drank it, and nodded gratefully. The man smiled, proud, as if he had performed a miracle. Columbus placed his hand on his shoulder. "Thank you," he said. The man didn't understand a word—but he understood everything.

The men began to talk about gold. Always gold. Always that word that weighs more than anything else. "They have chains," one said. "See? Golden chains!" Columbus heard the word, fell silent, and something inside him shrank. He wrote:*The word has been spoken. It always begins with gold.*

In the evening, they sat around a fire. Smoke, voices, the sea beyond. One played a reed flute, the sound thin, brittle, beautiful. Columbus listened, smiling, but his eyes stared into the void. He whispered, "The sea didn't kill us. It brought us here to do it."

He wrote:*Day 76, night. They dance. I count shadows. The West laughs.*

He saw the strangers laughing, drinking, and dancing with his men. He saw their faces—young, peaceful, innocent. He knew what was coming. Not today, not tomorrow, but soon.

He whispered, "One of us will destroy the other. We just don't know who will laugh first."

The sea answered with its old, indifferent roar. And Columbus knew that this time it wasn't laughing at him—but at those who were too friendly.

Day 77. The land smelled of sugar and smoke. Of life that had yet to know iron. Columbus stood on a small hill, saw the men down on the beach, barefoot, tanned, wild. They laughed, hunted, traded things with the strangers, drank the water that tasted of heaven. For a moment, it seemed as if they had succeeded—as if they were redeemed.

He wrote:*Day 77. Paradise can be quiet when no one is looking.*

The strangers approached. They brought baskets of fruit, fish, and colorful feathers. The men offered glass beads, mirrors, and iron rings. Laughter alternated with laughter. The air vibrated with movement, words no one understood.

Columbus watched. He saw the hands touching, the gleam in the eyes—and the slight tremor that came when someone first asked for gold.

One of the sailors pointed at the locals' bracelets. "That one, Admiral. It's gold." Columbus nodded slowly. "I know." "They just have it. Worthless." "Then we'll show them what value means."

He wrote:*The gold shines differently in the light of the sky. Perhaps because it doesn't smell of blood here yet.*

The sun was high, the sand glowed. One of the strangers brought Columbus a fruit, cut it open, and offered it to him. Juice dripped onto his fingers, sweet, red, and vibrant. Columbus tasted it, nodded, and smiled. "Good," he said. The man laughed, understanding, even without language.

"You are innocent," said the helmsman. "No one is innocent," replied Columbus. "Just not yet guilty."

In the afternoon, they built huts out of palm leaves, draped cloth over the poles, and lit fires. The sea lapped gently, the land sang softly, like a tired animal. The men were happy. At least, they thought so.

Columbus walked along the shore, his feet in the water, the light at his back. He saw the footprints in the sand—bare feet, strangers' feet that had come and gone. He wrote:*They come to us like children. We view them as prey.*

The night came, soft, warm, and languid. The men slept, the strangers sang somewhere in the darkness. The sky hung low, the stars glowed like wounds. Columbus sat alone, continuing to write, slowly, with a heavy hand.*Day 78. I've seen them. People who still believe. It won't be long.*

He remembered the queen, her eyes, her trust.*Gold, Christoph, she had said. Bring me gold.*

He felt the word in his bones, cold, hard, old.

He looked out, where the sea lay in darkness. It was calm, almost peaceful, but he knew this silence. It was the same as it had been back then, before the mutiny. The silence before the storm. He whispered, "You know I'll come back." The sea didn't answer. It didn't have to.

Columbus looked up at the sky. He smiled. "I've found land," he said. "But I think it found us first."

Day 79. The morning was beautiful. Too beautiful. The kind of beauty that screams:*Enjoy me while you can.* The air was sweet, heavy with fruit, smoke, and skin. The men woke late, drank, laughed, and stumbled between tents and fire pits. The strangers brought gifts again. Baskets filled with colorful things that smelled of life. One gave Columbus a small bird with green feathers. He let it fly.

He wrote:*Day 79. Heaven gives. People matter.*

Two men were sitting on the beach with one of the strangers. They were pointing at his chain, at the small gold plates on it. Smiles, gestures, hands. The stranger didn't understand, laughed, wanted to touch them. One of them grabbed his arm. Not firmly, but too firmly. Columbus saw it, went over, and placed his hand on the sailor's shoulder. "Not yet," he said quietly. The man nodded, let go. The stranger stepped back, smiling uncertainly.

"Gold," said Columbus, without raising his eyes. "You can smell it, can't you?" The sailor grinned, embarrassed and dirty. "It's here, Admiral. I can feel it." "Yes," replied Columbus. "But you can feel it too."

He wrote:*The gold is there. It waits, patiently, like a god with a sense of humor.*

Later, the helmsman arrived. "They say there's more," he said. "Rivers full of gleam. Mountains of metal." Columbus nodded. "And you believe it?" "I believe anything if it gleams." "Then you're just like them back home."

He looked at the sea, lying there calmly, innocent as a child. He knew it was watching everything.

He wrote:*Day 80. I've found land, but the sea won't let me go. Maybe that's its trick.*

In the afternoon, the men began trading. Mirrors for jewelry, knives for feathers, cups for shells. Laughter, shouts, amazement—and in between, that sparkle in their eyes that no one could control. Columbus stood there, watching. "You're trading sky for glass," he said. No one listened.

One came to him, excited and sweating. "Admiral, they've shown where it came from. Gold, real gold!" Columbus smiled almost imperceptibly. "Of course they have." "We should—" "Yes," he interrupted. "We should."

He wrote:*The West was never a direction. It was a hunger.*

That evening, they sat by the fire again. One of the men held a golden piece in his hand, barely larger than a thumb. He turned it in the light, smiling like a child. "This is it," he said. "This is the beginning." Columbus nodded. "No. This is the end."

The strangers sat by, smiling, offering fruit, laughing, unaware of what they saw. Columbus looked into their faces—clean, open, alive. He knew they would soon look different.

He wrote:*Day 80, night. We smiled at them. And they smiled back. That's how every misfortune begins.*

Late, when the fire was almost out, Columbus went to the water and looked out. He whispered, "Do you see that, old beast? I've found your land." The sea shimmered, peaceful, but he felt it—that laughter beneath the surface. "I know," he said. "You only lent it to me."

Day 81. The sun rose early, too brightly, too close. The sea shone as if it knew something. The men got up early, driven, nervous. They spoke more quietly, looked over their shoulders more often. The strangers returned, friendly as always, with fruit and laughter. But the laughter was different. Shorter. More cautious.

Columbus felt it immediately. This trembling in the air that had nothing to do with wind. He wrote:*Day 81. Peace has an expiration date. I think ours ends today.*

Something was missing from the beach. A knife. Nothing big, nothing significant—but it was enough. One man shouted, "They've taken it!" Another added, "The savages are stealing!" Columbus approached, slowly, calmly, like a doctor to a dead man. "Who saw what?" No one. "So one of you is lying," he said.

The sailor who had shouted first pointed at one of the strangers. "He there! I saw it!" The stranger didn't understand. He stood there, smiled, held up a shell, and wanted to show it. Columbus took it, turned it over, and handed it back. "The knife will be found," he said calmly. "And if not, we'll make a new one."

He walked away, hearing the men cursing behind him. He wrote:*Fear smells early. Like blood before a wound.*

By afternoon, the knife was back. Someone had found it, at the edge of the camp. No one said anything. The strangers' smiles remained, but the lightness was gone. They came later, stayed for shorter periods, and laughed more quietly.

Columbus observed them. He knew that look—the same one animals have just before they flee. He wrote:*You sense what's coming. We do too. No one can stop it.*

In the evening, the men drank too much. The helmsman sat next to Columbus, his eyes red, his voice heavy. "They like us," he said. "For now." "Maybe we'll stay here." Columbus smiled. "No one stays where it's peaceful."

A sailor came staggering, his face red, his hands full of sand. "Admiral! You've got it! Gold! A chunk this big!" Columbus raised his hand. "Later." "But—" "Later!"

He wrote:*Day 82. I hear the sea laughing, even when it's still. It knows what greed can do.*

Late that night, when the fire had burned down, Columbus stood alone on the beach. He saw the lights on the water, saw the shimmer above the waves that sounded like breaths. "I've outlived you," he whispered. "And now I'll start imitating you."

The sea responded with a dull thud, a wave that rolled onto the shore and disappeared again. Columbus nodded. "Yes," he said. "I know."

He returned, the men snoring, the land smelling of smoke and sleep. A silence hung over everything, too heavy to be real.

He wrote:*Day 82, night. Paradise still holds. But the rift is growing.*

Day 83. The sun was already up when the first cry came. No seagulls this time, no wind—just that raw, human sound cutting through everything. Columbus emerged from his hut, his face in shadow, his shirt open, his hand on his sword. They stood on the beach—his men, and a few of the strangers. Dust, sweat, breath, tension. One lay in the sand, his forehead bloody. Another held a stick, breathing heavily.

"What was that?" Columbus asked calmly. No one answered. "I asked: What was that?"

The helmsman stepped forward. "A misunderstanding," he said, too quickly. Columbus's gaze lingered on the blood in the sand. It looked almost beautiful in the light. "Blood always understands something," he said. "Only rarely the right thing."

The sailor with the cane cursed: "That bastard stole my gold!" The stranger, young and frightened, shook his head, talking to him, quickly, in a language that sounded like music. Columbus raised his hand. "Quiet."

He slowly approached the stranger and stopped in front of him. The man was breathing shallowly, his hands shaking. Columbus looked into his eyes. There was fear, yes—but also pride. He wrote:*Day 83. I see the look we're going to teach them.*

Columbus bent down and lifted the piece of gold from the sand. Small, misshapen, worthless to anyone who hasn't yet learned. "This?" he asked. "For this?" The sailor nodded, his voice loud, angry, drunken. "He took it!" Columbus looked at him. "And you?" "What?" "What did you take?" The sailor remained silent.

Columbus turned the gold between his fingers. The light flickered, like a promise. He whispered, "That's how it always begins." Then he threw it into the sea. A quiet *plash*, and it was gone.

The sailor screamed, trying to follow, but Columbus held him back. "Leave it. The sea only takes what's its own." The stranger still stood there, breathing heavily, understanding nothing—but perhaps everything.

He wrote: *Day 83, noon. The sand now knows blood. Now it belongs to us.*

By the afternoon, the laughter was gone. The strangers stopped coming. No fire, no singing. Only silence. The men worked, but without rhythm. Every glance was sharper, every word heavier.

Columbus went to the water, sat down, and looked out. "There it is," he said quietly. "The beginning of the end."

The helmsman approached, quietly and cautiously. "They'll come back tomorrow. Maybe."

Columbus nodded. "Perhaps. But they'll laugh differently." "And us?" "We too."

He wrote: *The sea was honest. The land is polite. Both kill you—just in different ways.*

As the sun set, the sand glowed red. Not from blood, not from the twilight—but from what was to come. Columbus saw it, felt it, and the sea was in his mind again. "I was stupid," he said. "I thought the worst was behind us."

He stood up and went back to the camp. The men were snoring, drunk, tired, empty. He looked at them—heroes, slaves, children. Then he wrote the last sentence of the day:

Day 83, night. We've entered paradise. Now we'll teach him how to lose.

The Island of Deception

Day 84. The wind stood still, as if afraid to speak. The sun burned over the beach, the men shuffled through the camp like old dogs. No more laughter. No shouts. Only the cracking of wood, voices that came too late.

Columbus sat in front of his hut, his back leaning against a palm tree. He didn't write immediately. He thought. About what he saw. About what he was doing.

About what was to come.

Day 84. The land is friendly. But it lies better than the sea.

The strangers returned, cautiously, in smaller numbers. They brought fruit, fish, and a smile. But their eyes were different. No more wonder. Only that cautious blink that says: We know what you want. Columbus stood up, went toward them, signaled, nodded, spoke softly. One understood a word, two, three. "Friend. Peace."

One of the strangers smiled, but not genuinely. Columbus knew that smile. The smile that says: We know you're cheating us, but we'll go along with it until we have to.

He wrote:*You know it. So do I. But no one knows when it'll tip over.*

The men continued building. Tents, camps, small huts, a wooden cross that stood in the wind like a threat. The helmsman came to Columbus, sweating, nervous. "They say this is an island, Admiral." Columbus looked at him. "And?" "You said we were on our way to India." Columbus smiled thinly. "Perhaps India is bigger than we thought." "Or smaller." "Or it was never there."

He wrote:*Day 85. We call it India. Because we're afraid to call it anything else.*

Later, they sat by the fire, the wood crackling, smoke rising. The strangers brought food again, danced, laughed, and spoke in their musical language. One pointed to the sky, to the stars, and said something Columbus didn't understand. Columbus nodded, as if he knew. "Yes," he said. "Up there. Always up there."

He knew he was lying. But he lied like someone who did it out of duty. He wrote:*I tell them we come from heaven. But heaven would be ashamed to know us.*

Columbus lay awake that night. The moon was large, cold, and clear. He heard the sound of the sea, saw the shadows of the men groaning in their sleep, their hands twitching. Dreams of gold, of glory, of hunger. He thought of the word "island." He didn't like it. Islands were traps, places where you felt safe until you couldn't leave.

He wrote:*Day 86. I think the land is keeping us here. Not out of kindness. Out of curiosity.*

The next morning, one of the strangers came with a piece of gold. Small, flat, round. He gave it to Columbus and pointed to the hills to the west. Columbus looked at the piece, weighed it in his hand, felt the weight—not much, but enough. He smiled. "There," he said quietly. "That's where the rest begins."

He wrote:*The land whispers. And I listen. This is my fault.*

The helmsman stepped beside him, his expression serious. "You believe him?" Columbus nodded. "I believe anything that glitters." "That will kill us." "Perhaps," said Columbus. "But not today."

He looked to the west, where the sky faded into haze and dreams. "The Island of Deception," he whispered. "A beautiful name for the beginning of the end."

Day 87. Morning came with a wind. Light, warm, sweet. The air smelled of rain and dirt, of leaves, of something alive and would outlive them all. Columbus stood on a hill, looking out over the green land that stretched beneath him like a body. Too beautiful, too large, too still.

He wrote:*Day 87. If this is India, then God was drunk when he built it.*

The men walked in groups, hacking their way through the thicket. Machetes, voices, sweat. Sounds everywhere: birds, insects, the rustling of animals that had more right to this land than they did. Columbus followed, slowly, with the gaze of a man who has lost himself and won't admit it.

They found huts made of palm wood, round, clean, and tidy. No pomp, no gold, no wealth. Just life. The strangers there laughed, offering water, fruit, and peace. One of the sailors asked, "Where is it?" Columbus turned around. "What?" "The gold. The treasure." Columbus looked at him for a long time. "Perhaps this is it." The sailor laughed harshly. "Then we sailed for nothing." Columbus nodded. "Perhaps."

He wrote:*The land shows us beauty, and we ask about weight.*

At midday, the heat was oppressive, heavy, and sticky. One of the men collapsed, gasping, his face red, his body empty. They carried him back, pouring water over him, cursing, praying. He lay there, breathing, but with difficulty. Columbus looked down at him. "He wanted gold," he said. "He found dust. It's almost the same thing."

They marched on. Through streams, through forests, through shadows that smelled like fog. One found a small vein in the stone, golden, thin, flat. They

shouted, cheered as if it were the crown itself. Columbus looked, then away. "This is nothing," he said. "This is just a taste."

He wrote:*Day 88. The gold is here. But it only reveals itself to the blind.*

By evening, fog lay over the land, thick, soft, and damp. The men were silent, exhausted, but their eyes were shining. They whispered of wealth, of Spain, of glory. One laughed, another prayed, another wept. Columbus sat by the fire, his face etched with smoke. "This," he said quietly, "is not land. This is a test." The helmsman nodded. "By whom?" "By everything that believes us."

He wrote:*I talk to trees. And they listen. Maybe I've finally arrived.*

At night, he dreamed of gold. Not in his hands, but in rivers, in walls, in the sky itself. Everything shone, everything smiled. When he awoke, his face was wet—from sweat or from the sea, he couldn't remember.

He walked out, barefoot, through the grass, into the darkness. The moon hung over the land, old, indifferent. "Show yourself," he whispered. "I'm already crazy enough."

He thought he heard a voice, somewhere in the wind. Not the sea, not the sky—the land itself. It said nothing, but it sounded as if it were smiling.

Columbus wrote:*Day 89. I think the land is speaking. And I understand every word.*

He sat there until morning, his eyes wide open, the gold in his head, the laughter in his ears. The men slept, the fire died, the night remained.

And somewhere out there, between the trees, something shimmered. Perhaps light. Perhaps madness. But it shone.

Day 90. The sky hung low, the light shimmered over the leaves. The air was humid, thick, and difficult to breathe. Columbus led the way, sweat on his brow, dirt on his hands, a look of madness in his eyes. Behind him trudged the men, tired, silent, half human, half machine. They carried sacks, weapons, tools, hope—and the smell of fear.

Columbus wrote:*Day 90. I think the country is watching. It wants to know how far we'll go.*

They followed a stream, clear, cool, and lively. One dipped his hands in, drank, laughed, and wiped his mouth. "Sweet!" he exclaimed. Columbus looked at him. "Everything is sweet before it poisons you."

In the afternoon, they found an old settlement. Huts, dilapidated, entwined with roots. Signs on the walls: circles, lines, faces. No one understood them, but they looked like warnings. One spat. "Wizards," he murmured. Columbus stepped closer, stroked a carved spiral with his hand. "No," he said. "Only people who noticed earlier."

He wrote:*Day 91. Every clue I find leads me back to myself.*

They continued on, deeper into the land, which became increasingly dense. No more paths, only shadows, roots, voices. At night, they heard sounds—screams, footsteps, whispers. Maybe animals, maybe not. One said he had seen figures among the trees, with glowing eyes. Columbus said nothing. He saw them, too.

He wrote:*Day 92. I've forgotten what's real. Maybe it never was real.*

In the morning it rained. Warm, heavy, loud. The heavens opened as if to wash them away. The men stood still, letting themselves be soaked, lowering their weapons. Columbus stood there, arms outstretched, face up. The rain ran over him, and he laughed. "See?" he cried. "Even heaven has pity!"

The helmsman approached him, dripping wet and stunned. "You're crazy, Admiral!" Columbus nodded. "Finally, someone's noticed."

They rested in a hollow between tall trees, water dripping from everywhere. One of the men pulled out a map, written on wet parchment. "Here," he said. "Here we are. If that's true, then..." Columbus took it from his hand, looked at it, and smiled. "If that's true, we'd be dead long ago." He crumpled it up and threw it into the fire.

He wrote:*Day 93. Maps lie. The land doesn't. It shows you who you are.*

The men began to grumble. One wanted to go back, another said they were lost. Columbus heard them, but the words passed him like flies. He saw only the image in his mind—rivers of gold, cities of light, an empire that belonged to him. "Just a little further," he said. "Just a little further." No one objected anymore. They knew they were trapped—in his belief or in their fear, it didn't matter.

He wrote:*Day 94. I am a king without a country. But the country already belongs to me.*

That night he dreamed that the earth spoke. A deep, calm voice that said:*You are too late.*

He woke up, his heart pounding, the sky black, the fire almost out. "I know," he whispered. "But I'm staying."

He looked out, where the darkness vibrated, where the land breathed as if it were alive. And for a moment he thought he saw it smile.

Day 95. The sun burned, but there was no light. Only heat, pressing down like a hand on the back of your neck. The jungle was silent, no wind, no birds, nothing. Only this buzzing, which you don't hear but feel. The men walked more slowly, with empty gazes, dirty faces, mosquitoes on their skin. Columbus led the way. Barefoot, sweating, with a gaze that no longer saw anything.

He wrote:*Day 95. I hear the land breathing. It sounds like tiredness.*

They found a river. Wide, sluggish, greenish, with a sheen that, if you looked too long, looked like gold. One of them bent down, dipped his hand in, and laughed. "It glitters!" Columbus stepped closer and saw that it was only sunlight. No metal, no treasure. Just illusion. "Everything glitters here," he said. "Even the dirt."

He wrote:*Day 95, afternoon. The land reflects us. And I don't like the image.*

The helmsman came, his face gray, his gaze blank. "We should turn back," he said. Columbus shook his head. "Back where?" "To the sea." "The sea spat us out. We belong here now." "Here? There's nothing here!" Columbus smiled. "Then we'll fit in nicely."

The men began to curse, loudly, openly. One kicked a tree, another threw his weapon into the water. "Screw the gold! Screw the West!" Columbus looked at them, calm, almost sad. "Now you're honest," he said.

He wrote:*Day 96. They hate me again. Which means they're still alive.*

Later, they found a valley full of fog, grass, and silence. Columbus stopped, his eyes half-closed. He saw something—a city, shining, silent, made of stone and light. He smiled and pointed. "There!" The men looked—and saw nothing. "There!" he cried. "Don't you see it?" The helmsman approached cautiously. "What do you see, Admiral?" "Gold," whispered Columbus. "God. Everything."

The men looked at each other, silent, aghast. One murmured, "He's through." Columbus turned around, his eyes wide, his face twisted. "I'm closer than you!" he shouted. "You're just afraid to see!"

He wrote:*Day 96, evening. I saw it. And they don't believe me. Like children who deny heaven because it's too big.*

No one slept at night. One disappeared. They found him in the morning—dead, on the shore, face up, eyes open, mouth full of earth. No one said anything. No one asked. Columbus stood there, looked at him, murmured, "The land has kept him. It takes sacrifice."

He wrote:*Day 97. The jungle speaks in corpses. I understand every word.*

The helmsman came to him, with the voice of a man standing on the sidelines. "We have to go back, Christopher." Columbus laughed softly. "Back? There's no such thing. Only onward." "Where to?" "To where the gold laughs."

The men looked at him, eyes full of tiredness and fear. He was their admiral, their prophet, their curse. And they knew they would follow him—not because they wanted to, but because no one knew where else to go.

Day 98. Morning came like a blow. Sultry, humid, loud. The air vibrated, insects buzzed, trees whispered, water gurgled. Everything sounded alive, but wrong. Too loud, too close. Columbus sat by the river, his face dirty, his eyes empty. He wasn't writing. He was staring. One of the men approached him. "Admiral, we have to go back." Columbus blinked. "Back?" "We're losing men. Three are sick, one is gone." "Gone?" "He runs at night. Talks to shadows." Columbus nodded. "Then he'll adapt."

He wrote:*Day 98. The land speaks louder. I hear it in my dreams. It says: Stay.*

Later, fog rolled in. Thick, heavy, gray. The men walked slowly, stumbling, cursing. One shouted, "We're going in circles!" Columbus laughed. "Of course. That's how the earth goes—it spins." The helmsman grabbed him by the arm. "Enough! You're leading us to our deaths!" Columbus looked at him, calm, icy cold. "I brought you into life. You brought death with you."

He wrote:*Day 99. They want to hang me. I'd do it, too.*

In the afternoon, rain came. Not normal rain. Heavy drops, warm, greasy, like sweat. Everything steamed, everything stank. One of the men fell down, lay

there, and didn't move. Another began to scream, his face contorted, his hands bloody. Columbus stood there, water dripping from him, his hair sticking, his eyes glowing. "You don't understand," he said. "The land is testing us." "The land is devouring us!" someone cried. Columbus nodded. "So is God."

He wrote:*I see faces in the rain. Maybe they're the ones who stayed.*

At night, voices came. Not those of men—others. Soft, quiet, many. Columbus stood up and went outside. The jungle glowed in the moonlight, like a wet body. "What do you want?" he asked. No answer, only the rustling of leaves. He laughed. "Me neither."

He continued on, barefoot, alone, to the river. The water was black, smooth, still. In the mirror, he saw himself. Or something that resembled him. "You're late," said the reflection. Columbus nodded. "I'm lost." "You've lost them all." "I'm just looking for gold." The reflection laughed. "You're looking for forgiveness."

He wrote:*Day 100. I spoke with my face. It lies less than the queen.*

The next day, two men were gone. Only their weapons remained. The others didn't speak. One wept, another laughed, a third prayed. Columbus sat silently, heard the land breathing, heard the madness among the trees. "It wants to keep us," he whispered. "It's acquired a taste for it."

The helmsman came to him, dirty, thin, his voice barely more than wind. "Admiral, we must go. Now." Columbus nodded. "I know." "Then let's go!" "But where to?" Silence. "Back," the helmsman finally said. Columbus smiled sadly. "Back is only where one doesn't yet understand."

He wrote:*Day 101. I think I've arrived. Only no one knows where.*

At night he dreamed again. This time the sea was there—black, laughing, alive. It said:*I showed you what you wanted. Now look at what you are.* He woke up, drenched in sweat, his heart pounding. He laughed. Loudly. Long. Honestly.

He went out, saw the land moving in the moonlight, and whispered, "You are like me. Beautiful, false, and insatiable."

Day 102. No wind. No sound. Only this damp silence that eats into your ears. The jungle stood there like a wall, the water stank of life. The men were silent, exhausted, empty. They barely ate, barely spoke. Every thought was heavy,

every word too much. Columbus wrote:*Day 102. I think the island is eating us, but not with its teeth. It's simply sucking us in.*

The helmsman came to him, dirty, pale, with eyes that no longer saw anything. "We have to go," he whispered. Columbus nodded. "We're going." "No, I mean—away." "From what?" "From you."

He turned and left. No more words, no goodbyes. Just gone, into the trees. Columbus watched him go. "He won't make it far," he said. "No one makes it far here."

In the afternoon it rained again. A thick, warm rain that sounded like a whisper. The men crawled under tarps, but the rain penetrated everything. One hit a tree trunk, screaming at the heavens: "Why?!" Columbus laughed. "Because he can."

He wrote:*The land is laughing. I hear it. Maybe I am the laughter.*

Later they found the helmsman. He was lying by the river, his face in the mud, his hand outstretched as if trying to grab something. No wound, no blood. Just empty. Columbus stood beside him, looked down, nodded. "He's found it," he said. "What?" someone asked. "Quiet."

The men began to whisper, not about gold, but about curses. One said they had been cursed ever since they saw land. Another swore he heard women's voices singing at night. Columbus listened, silent, his eyes half-closed. He knew those voices. He heard them, too.

He wrote:*Day 103. The island speaks to everyone. Only I understand it.*

During the night, fog came. Thick, cold, strange. No animal made a sound. Even the water was silent. Columbus went out, saw nothing, only white. He heard footsteps. "Who's there?" No answer. "Show yourself!" A shadow moved, slowly, softly, too human to be wind. Columbus drew his knife. "You're late," he said.

He wrote:*I spoke to God last night. Or to myself. Hard to say.*

When morning came, two men were gone. No scream, no struggle, no trace. Only silence. The others stared at Columbus, a look that said it all. He smiled. "You think I'm to blame." No one objected.

He sat down, put the knife beside him, and picked up his pen.

Day 104. I believe I am the land. I grow, I rot, I breathe. And I lie well.

At midday, they found tracks—bare feet, small, flat, in the mud. Not theirs. Columbus followed them, slowly, silently. The men hesitated. One whispered, "We shouldn't." Columbus looked around. "Then stay." He moved on.

The tracks led deeper into the forest, to a hill. Smoke rose. Voices, laughter. He stopped, breathed, felt the trembling in his chest. "There," he said quietly. "That's where my dream lives."

He wrote:*Day 104, evening. I think I've found what I'm looking for.*

The men stayed behind, one murmuring a prayer, one cursing, one weeping. Columbus stood alone, before a smoke that smelled of life. And somewhere between the leaves and shadows, he saw that golden light again. It flickered, danced, beckoned. He stepped closer.

And the island, that great, breathing illusion, smiled.

Day 105. Columbus woke up in the mud. His shirt soaked, his hands open, covered in dirt. No idea how long he lay there. No fire, no voices, no men. Only the rustling of leaves and the buzzing of insects. He sat up, slowly, like someone being reborn but wishing he hadn't. The sun was too bright, too close, too wrong. He blinked, saw the remains of the camp. Abandoned. Decaying. Wood in the dirt, pots in the grass, a shoe, a piece of cloth, blood. He wrote:*Day 105. I think I survived. But no one else will confirm it.*

He called. "Juan! Rodrigo! Pedro!" Echo. Nothing more. He laughed. A dry, hollow laugh that no one should hear. "Good," he said. "Then at least you'll be on time for your death."

He stood up, staggering, and walked through the camp, searching. No bodies. No trace. Only the land, silently watching. "You took them," he said. "Or they took you. It doesn't matter."

He wrote:*Day 106. The island eats slowly. It chews on memories.*

At noon, he found the helmsman—or what was left of him. He was hanging from a fork in a tree branch, dry, rigid, with his eyes open. No wound, no blood. Just that smile that meant no good. Columbus stopped and nodded. "I should have hanged you too," he whispered.

He wrote:*Death here doesn't smell like an end. It smells like a beginning.*

Later, he heard them again—the voices. First quiet, then louder. Not evil, not friendly. Just there. They whispered in the language of the trees, in the breath of the wind, in the dripping water. He answered. Loudly. "I'm here!" he cried. "I did it! I did it all!" Silence. Then that laughter. Not human, not divine. Just laughter.

He fell to his knees, pounding the ground with his fists until blood drew blood. "I only wanted the West," he said. "Only a damned West!" The country was silent. It didn't need to answer. It had long since understood him.

He wrote:*Day 107. I am the West. I am what you find when you go too far.*

He wandered on, barefoot, without direction, without a goal. The sun became an eye that watched him. The trees became figures that followed him. The water laughed at his steps. He talked to shadows, to animals, to himself. "You thought I'd find gold," he murmured. "I found guilt."

He wrote:*Day 108. I lost them all. And they lost me first.*

In the evening, the wind came. Finally, wind. It smelled of the sea. Columbus stopped, raised his head, and took a deep breath. "It's you," he said. "You old bastard." The wind roared, and for a moment, it sounded as if the sea were laughing.

He smiled. For the first time, without madness, without anger, without pride. Just tired. "I'll be back," he whispered. "But this time as a lie."

He wrote:*Day 109. I saw paradise. It had teeth.*

Night fell hard, fast, black. Columbus lay at the edge of the forest, his eyes open, his gaze fixed on the stars. They looked like holes in the sky through which God had let fall everything he was tired of.

"I understand," he said quietly. "I was never the discoverer. I was the discovery."

He closed his eyes. The land continued to breathe. And somewhere, deep in the jungle, something new began to grow—quietly, patiently, knowingly.

Strangers with dark skin and open hands

Day 110. The sea smelled of iron when they saw it again. It lay there, flat, calm, a mirror without a face. The sun hung low, red as a wound. Columbus stopped, his feet in the sand, his heart somewhere between madness and memory. He wrote:*Day 110. I'm back to square one. Only older, dirtier, and without faith.*

A few men remained with him—four, maybe five. The rest had vanished into the land, swallowed up, lost, died, or simply left. Their faces were blank, burned by sun and fear. One coughed blood, one talked to himself, one wept quietly.

They reached the old camp. The huts were still standing, half-ruined, eroded by rain. The wooden crosses lay in the dirt, the fire long gone. Columbus looked around as if checking if he was really there. "So this is it," he said. "Our paradise." No one answered.

He wrote:*Paradise always looks like a ruin if you visit it too often.*

In the afternoon they came—the strangers. Quietly, cautiously, emerging from the forest. No longer smiling, no longer singing. Just observing. Their eyes dark, alert, watchful. Columbus stopped, raised his hand in greeting. They did nothing. No gesture, no word. Only silence. Then one stepped forward. Tall, young, painted. He said something, calmly, slowly, emphatically. Columbus didn't understand a word, but the tone—he knew the tone.

"They're telling us to go," one of the men whispered. Columbus nodded. "And where to?" "Back to the sea." "I've already been there."

He wrote:*Day 111. They talk to us like we're ghosts. Maybe they're right.*

One of the strangers brought water and placed it in a wooden bowl. Columbus approached, took it, and drank. "Thank you," he said. The man nodded, no smile, no anger. Only that quiet politeness that was worse than hatred. Columbus looked at him. "I didn't mean to," he whispered. The man said nothing. He turned around. He left.

He wrote:*I wanted land. I found people. And they silently hate me.*

In the evening, they sat by the fire. Columbus, the few men, and somewhere in the darkness, the strangers, their eyes glowing in the light. "They're watching us," one said. "Yes." "Then why are they helping us?" Columbus looked into the flames. "Because they know we'll soon be dead."

He wrote:*Day 112. The grace of the strong is the finest knife.*

It rained during the night. The wind blew from the sea, bringing salt and longing. Columbus lay awake, listening to the rain drumming on the roof. He thought of the queen, her voice, the words he promised her.

Gold, Christoph. Bring me gold.

He laughed softly. "I bring you the truth," he whispered. "But it weighs less."

In the morning, the camp was silent. Not a bird, not a wind, not a word. Columbus went to the sea and looked out. The waves beat lazily against the shore, like a heart that won't stop, even though it's tired. "I'm back," he said. "But no one was waiting for me."

He wrote:*Day 113. The sea looks at me like an old friend who knows I'll lie again.*

Behind him, the strangers moved, silent, slowly, like shadows. Their faces calm, their hands open, empty, peaceful. And Columbus sensed that in this emptiness lay more power than in all his maps, ships, and queens.

Day 114. Morning came with smoke and humid air. The sea was calm, too calm, as if it had held its breath. Columbus sat on a rock, barefoot, pen in hand, his gaze somewhere between the horizon and hell. He wrote:*Day 114. The island acts as if it's forgotten. But it's still watching us.*

The strangers arrived earlier that day. No smiles, no noise—just movement, precise, quiet, almost beautiful. They brought fruit, fish, water in gourd bowls. Their faces were serene, but their eyes saw everything. Columbus took the gift and bowed slightly. He felt the gaze of the young man who had brought the water yesterday—firm, calm, proud. "Friend," said Columbus, the word heavy in his mouth. "Amigo." The man said something back, quietly, almost in a whisper. Columbus understood only:*Go.*

He wrote:*They help us disappear faster.*

Later, they sat by the fire. Two worlds that warmed each other but didn't touch. The men spoke little, chewed hard bread, and drank the salty water they themselves had held captive. The strangers watched them, whispering, laughing—not in mockery, but in amazement. Columbus looked at them, thinking:*I once laughed like that, too. In front of the ships.*

One of the men, young, stupid, full of fear and alcohol, pointed at the skin of a woman sitting across the fire. Dark, shining, beautiful. He grinned. Columbus

noticed it immediately.

"Leave it," he said. The man continued to grin. "I just..." "Leave it." The man laughed, loudly, dirty, drunkenly. The strangers fell silent.

Columbus stood up, stepped forward, and struck him in the face. "Learn," he said. The man fell, the sand absorbed his blood. "Learn while you still have teeth."

He wrote:*Day 114, evening. I save her from us. But not for long.*

The night was silent. No wind, no rain, no laughter. Only the crackling of the fire and the distant sound of the sea. Columbus sat awake, his eyes heavy, his head full of voices. He thought of what they were here: guests, enemies, beggars, gods on leave.

One of the strangers approached quietly. The young man. He held something in his hand—a piece of wood, carved, round, smooth. He gave it to Columbus. "For me?" Columbus asked. The man nodded. No words. Just that serious, calm gaze.

Columbus looked at the wood. It was a face—his. Raw, angular, fake, but recognizable. He smiled. "You saw me." The man didn't answer. He turned around. He left.

Columbus wrote:*I gave him my face, and he gave it back—made of wood. Perhaps that's fairer than I deserve.*

Later, when the moon came out, Columbus placed the wooden face next to him. It looked at him, silent, cold, honest. "Perhaps you are the better of the two of us," he said.

He thought of the queen, of Spain, of God, of all the false promises that had made the journey across the ocean worthwhile. And he knew that none of them belonged here.

He wrote:*Day 115. I'm learning the language of hands. It speaks more than our prayers.*

In the morning, as the sun rose above the trees, the young man returned. This time he brought nothing—no food, no water. Just a look that said:*We know what you're looking for. We also know you don't deserve it.*

Columbus nodded, understanding. "I know," he whispered. "I know."

Day 116. The morning came harshly. No wind, no shade. Only sun—brutish, direct, merciless. The air smelled of salt and dust, and the men were irritable. They hadn't eaten for too long, hadn't found their way for too long, and had been Columbus for too long. One cursed while gathering wood, another kicked a rock. Columbus listened, silent. He knew that was the sound just before a fire.

He wrote:*Day 116. The silence is breaking. Everything is breaking. And no one notices.*

At midday, the strangers arrived. More water, more fruit. Friendly gestures, calm movements. But this time, none of them lingered too long. Their eyes moved from face to face—suspicious, alert. The young man was there too, the one with the wooden face. Columbus nodded to him. The man returned the greeting, but there was no warmth left in it. Only recognition—the kind you give to enemies you don't yet want to kill.

A sailor, the same one Columbus had beaten two days earlier, stared at them. "They're laughing at us," he said. Columbus looked at him. "They're laughing at themselves. We're just the mirror." The man spat in the sand. "I'm sick of mirrors."

He went to one of the strangers and pointed to his bracelet—gold. Thin, plain, but gold. "That one," he said. "Trade." The stranger shook his head. The sailor laughed. "Yes." Columbus stepped forward. "Leave it." "I just want to see it," said the man. "I said leave it." The stranger stepped back. The sailor grabbed it.

It happened quickly. A movement, a scream, a stone flying. Then blood. The stranger fell, his face in the sand, red, silent. Everything froze. No sound, no breath, no wind.

Columbus stood there, his sword half-drawn. The men stared, the strangers too. Then came the scream. Loud, raw, ancient—not a word, not a sentence, only pain. The strangers leaped forward, sticks, stones, hands. One struck Columbus in the shoulder, he staggered, almost fell. Another stabbed with a wooden spear, striking the sailor in the chest. He fell, gurgling, into the fire.

Then silence. Again. No fight, no victory, no end. Just that smell—blood, smoke, earth.

Columbus stood there, panting, sweating, half-blinded by the smoke. He saw the young man, the one with the wooden face. He stood still, spear in hand, his

face blank. Their eyes met. No hatred, no triumph. Only what remains when everything has been said.

Columbus whispered, "I understand you now." The man said something quietly, but Columbus did not understand. Perhaps it was *Go*. Perhaps *Stay*. Perhaps *Too late*.

He wrote: *Day 116, evening. The sand tastes of guilt. I think I offended God by finding it.*

Night came with rain, loud and warm. The men sat silently, no one speaking. One was bleeding, one was praying, one was laughing hysterically. Columbus sat alone, staring into the darkness. He thought of Spain, of the court, of the shining halls, of the false promises.

Gold, Christoph. Bring me gold.

He looked at his hands—brown, dirty, shaking. No gold. Just dirt.

He wrote: *Day 117. I've deflowered paradise. And now it weeps over us.*

Late that night, the young man returned. Without a weapon, without a smile. He stood at the edge of the camp, rain dripping from his face. Columbus raised his head.

"I know," he said quietly. "I know." The man turned around and walked back into the forest. Not a word. Not another look. Columbus knew: This wasn't a farewell. This was a judgment.

He wrote: *Paradise doesn't forgive. It only forgets slowly.*

Day 118. The rain had stopped, but the water remained. Puddles, steam, drops, sweat. Everything smelled of decay. The sun rose lazily over the hills, a red, tired eye. Columbus sat by the fire, which was barely burning. The smoke rose thinly, gray, faint, like a lie no one believes anymore.

The men were silent. No one wanted to speak first. One sat there, blank-eyed, his hand on the bandage on his chest. Another carved a piece of wood with trembling fingers, aimless, shapeless. Columbus wrote: *Day 118. Heaven acts as if nothing happened. Perhaps that's mercy. Or indifference.*

Traces of battle lay on the beach. Blood in the sand, charred wood, a broken shell. The strangers were gone. No sign, no shout, no song. Only this feeling that they were standing somewhere in the shadows, watching. Columbus felt it on the back of his neck—those eyes, invisible, awake, silent.

One of the men said, "They're coming back." Columbus nodded. "Of course." "What do we do?" "Wait." "For what?" Columbus looked out to sea. "For what we deserve."

He wrote:*The sea is talking to me again. It says: I told you so.*

Around midday, they drank the last of the clean water. One threw the jug into the fire as if it were some kind of victory. Another laughed briefly, a rough, broken laugh that sounded more like tears. Columbus said nothing. He watched the smoke rise, tremble, and disappear. Like everything else here.

He wrote:*Day 119. Smoke is the honest part of the fire. It just goes away when it gets too much.*

In the evening, they saw lights. In the distance, between the trees, small, flickering. "They're there," someone whispered. Columbus nodded. "Should we keep watch?" "No." "Why?" "Because it won't change anything."

He remained seated, looking into the darkness where the lights danced. Not threatening, not friendly—just present. Like the memory of a guilt no one wants to confess.

He wrote:*Day 119, night. They let us live. This is their revenge.*

In the night, someone spoke in his sleep. Words, fast, unintelligible. Then he screamed. He woke up. "They were here!" he cried. Columbus looked at him, calm, blank. "No," he said. "They don't have to come anymore. They are within us."

He walked out, barefoot, through the sand, toward the sea. The sky was black, the water still. He smelled salt, blood, despair. "I tried," he said. "No one can do more than that."

He wrote:*I talk to God and he answers with ebb.*

In the morning, when the sky was grayer than the night, he saw them again. Up above, at the edge of the forest. Shadows, figures. No movement. Only glances. Columbus raised his hand. No answer. Then one turned around and disappeared. The rest followed.

He knew they wouldn't come back. Not with a smile. Not with peace. Only with patience.

He wrote:*Day 120. We are not explorers. We are memories that have become too loud.*

He looked out to sea, the sun slowly rising. The water glittered. Not beautiful. Just indifferent. Columbus closed his eyes, and in his head was again that thought that never left him:

I did it. And all I found was myself.

Day 121. The fire was out. Not extinguished—drowned. Rain, again. Warm, sticky, endless. Everything smelled of rot, of wet wood, of death taking its time. Columbus sat in the shade, his hair matted, his shirt open, his hands trembling. His pen scratched across the thin, brittle paper.

Day 121. The sea is silent. The sky pretends it knows nothing. I'm the only one still lying.

One of the men died during the night. Fever, trembling, not a sound. In the morning, he was simply silent. They carried him out and threw him into the sand because the ground was too wet for a grave. Columbus stood beside him, nodding as if it were routine. "One less who doubts," he said. No one laughed.

He wrote:*Dying here is polite. It knocks before coming in.*

At midday, they shared the last of the bread. One piece per man, hard as stone, salty with sweat. One wanted more, another drew a knife. Columbus stood up, his voice calm but sharp. "Better cut him properly if you're going to stab him." The man stared at him, then dropped the knife. Columbus stepped closer, took the piece of bread, bit into it, and chewed slowly. "See?" he said. "That's how it's done."

He wrote:*Day 121, afternoon. Order is when someone holds the knife first.*

Later, a fever set in. First one, then two. Their skin was hot, their breath was short, and they were shaking incessantly. Columbus mixed water with ash and gave it to them to drink. One vomited it up, one died, one laughed. "I'll heal you," Columbus said. "I'll heal you all." But he didn't sound like someone who believed it.

He wrote:*Day 122. I stopped praying. Not out of anger. Out of respect.*

At night, they heard drums again. Not close, but there. Muffled, rhythmic, ancient. No threat, no call—just memory. One of the men whispered, "They're celebrating us." Columbus looked at him. "No. They're counting."

He wrote:*The strangers wait. Not for victory. For silence.*

The next morning, one was gone. No struggle, no scream, no blood. Just his footprints in the sand, all the way to the sea. Then nothing. Columbus stood on the shore, looking out. "Perhaps it called him home," he said. One replied: "He couldn't swim." Columbus smiled. "Perhaps this time, he could."

He wrote:*Day 123. I'm starting to envy her.*

At midday, the three of them sat around the fire. Three out of twenty. The rest were gone—in the jungle, in the sea, in fever, in dreams. Columbus drank the last of the water and passed the rest. One took it, one didn't. "You hate me," said Columbus. No one answered. "Good," he said. "Then at least you'll stay awake."

He wrote:*Hate is the last proof of life.*

Later, as the sun set, Columbus went to the sea. The waves were flat, sluggish, but they smelled of homecoming. He looked out, saw nothing—and that was precisely what calmed him. "I found you," he whispered. "And lost you. Everything as it should be."

He wrote:*Day 124. I think God has a sense of humor. I don't anymore.*

Then night came. Dark, wet, heavy. No stars, no wind. Only rain and the slow breathing of the island that had heard everything. Columbus lay awake, the wooden face beside him. It grinned, even though it wasn't. "At least you're staying honest," he said quietly. "Perhaps you're the only one who understands me."

And somewhere in the darkness, between the waves and the jungle, something laughed—not loudly, not mockingly. Just knowingly.

Day 125. The sky was gray, the sea black, and Columbus knew he was waking up again, even though no one was demanding it anymore. The men were gone. No shout, no step, no breath. Only footprints in the sand, half-washed by the rain. He stood up, staggering, his shirt torn, his beard matted, his face burned. *Day 125. Everyone's gone. Maybe I was never there.*

He walked through the camp. The smell of smoke was old, the fire cold. A cup lay there, a bowl, a piece of meat riddled with maggots. He kicked it, weakly, senselessly. Then he saw the wooden face. Lying in the sand, half-buried. The

eye was broken, the mouth crooked. He picked it up, wiped it. "Well, old friend," he said. "Now we're truly alone."

He wrote:*I talk to wood. And it listens better than God.*

He searched for water. The river was muddy, the sea too bitter. He drank anyway. It burned, but he laughed. "This is what life tastes like," he said. The wind blew faintly from the land, bringing the smell of rot, leaves, rain, and blood. "I know you," he whispered. "You were here before I discovered you."

He wrote:*Day 126. I feel like the country remembers me. But not in a friendly way.*

In the afternoon, he heard drums again. Distant, muffled, steady. Not a song—a clock. He set off, staggering, barefoot, through the mud, through roots, through shadows. The sounds came closer. Then silence. Only the rustling, the breathing, the crackling of the leaves. He stopped. "I'm here," he said. No answer.

He laughed. "Come on. Eat me. You deserve it." The country remained silent. It didn't have to.

He wrote:*Day 126, night. I know I deserve it. I just don't know what for, exactly.*

He saw faces again. Between the trees, in the smoke, in the water. Dark eyes, calm mouths. They looked at him, without anger, without pity. He stepped closer, tried to speak, stumbled. Fell in the dirt, lay there. He smelled earth, blood, sweat. "I just wanted the West," he whispered. "Just a little bit of truth." Then he laughed. Loudly, hoarsely, like someone who finally understands.

He wrote:*Day 127. The West has always been within me. And now it's rotting out.*

He found an abandoned totem pole. Carved faces, raw, strong, strange. He placed his hand on it, feeling the wood warm from the day. "I don't deserve you," he said. Then he placed his own wooden face next to it. "But maybe you'll listen to each other."

He wrote:*Day 127, evening. I'm giving back my face. Maybe I'll get some peace in return.*

The sun set behind the trees, the sky burned, the sea shone like metal. Columbus sat there, sweating, freezing, listening. He heard nothing. And that was precisely peace.

"All right," he whispered. "Then call me madman, explorer, liar, whatever you will. I'm just someone who's gone too far."

He wrote:*Day 128. I saw the world. It was round. And empty.*

He fell over, sleeping on the sand, his eyes open. He dreamed of sails, wind, laughter, queens and priests who praised him while hating him. In his dream, he stood on the ship, alone, the crew made of smoke, the sea of glass. "I did it," he said. The sea laughed.

When he awoke, everything was quiet. No wind, no rain, no sound. Only light, bright, too bright. He whispered, "Still there?" Nothing answered. And that was the first thing that made sense.

Day 129. He walked because he could no longer do anything else. The sun stung, the air shimmered, and the earth was soft beneath his feet—so soft that it almost held him, as if to say:*Stay here, you old fool.*

But Columbus continued on. Always toward the sound. The sea. The only thing that had never lied to him, because it didn't need language.

He wrote:*Day 129. I'm going home. But no one is waiting.*

His legs were thin, his skin gray, his lips open, his eyes sore from the light. Every step was a battle between body and will. He saw shadows again between the trees—the strangers. The same ones who had brought him water, the same ones who had cursed him, the same ones who now simply looked at him. No anger, no triumph. Only that solemn, endless silence that comes with people who have understood more than they wanted to.

Columbus stopped. "I'm going," he said. "You win." No one answered. One stepped forward, slowly, carefully, as one does with a dying person. He handed Columbus a bowl of water. Columbus took it, drank, and almost choked. "Thank you," he whispered. The man nodded. No gesture, no smile. Just recognition. Then he turned and walked back into the grass.

Columbus wrote:*Day 129, evening. They forgave me without saying it. That's worse than hate.*

He continued walking until the ground turned to sand. There it was again – the sea. Vast, endless, ancient. It lay there like a mirror for everything that no longer needed him. He fell to his knees, laughed, cried, coughed. "I'm back," he said. "But this time I won't stay long."

He wrote:*Day 130. The sea knows no sin. Only return.*

He crawled into the water. Cold at first, then warm, then nothing. The waves enveloped him, the salt burned his wounds, but he felt nothing. Only this pulling sensation—gentle, indifferent, like a mother forgetting her child.

He looked back. The coast was empty. No huts, no men, no strangers. Only sand. Only light. Only the past.

He whispered, "I brought you land. And you took me away."

He wrote – his hand trembling, the ink watery, the letters crooked:
Day 130, night. I'm leaving now that I've arrived.

He dropped the book beside him, half in the water, half in the sand. The sea took it, like everything else. One page at a time.

He sat until the waves washed over him. His eyes half-closed, his face calm, his smile small. Not peace—only the end.

And when the sun rose, there was nothing left. No Columbus, no book, no face. Only footprints in the sand, erased by the sea's breath.

Pearls, smoke and false promises

Day 131. They found him on the beach, half dead, half dream. The men from the other ship, those who had stayed behind because they thought the admiral had made it. He lay there, his face like leather, his eyes open, his hair covered in sand. One hand still held the wooden face, the other the logbook—swollen, wet, but there.

"He's breathing," said one. "Then he's alive," said another. "Or he refuses to die," murmured the third.

They pulled him onto the boat, wrapped him in canvas, and gave him water. Columbus slowly opened his eyes, blinking against the light.

"Spain?" he whispered. "Not yet, Admiral," said one. Columbus smiled weakly. "Then the West is still alive."

He wrote:*Day 131. The sea spat me out. Perhaps I was hard to digest.*

It was quiet on the ship. No one spoke about what they saw. The men whispered about the dead, the strangers, the gold that wasn't gold. Columbus heard them, remained silent, and let them talk. Everyone needed a story to survive the fear.

In the evening, he sat on deck, wrapped in an old cloth. The sea was calm, the sky clear, and the wind tasted of homecoming and guilt. He wrote:*I'm on my way to people who only hear what glitters.*

One of the sailors approached him, young, with salt in his hair. "Admiral," he said cautiously. "What should we say?" Columbus looked at the water. "Tell them we've found paradise." "And what else?" "Tell them it's waiting."

He wrote:*Day 132. I'll become a myth before I can wash myself.*

The days passed slowly. The sea was kind, perhaps out of compassion. No storm, no thunder, no wind to slow them down. Columbus often lay on deck, half asleep, half awake, whispering to himself. "Gold," he said. "Pearls. Smoke. Everything that glitters."

One of the men asked, "Admiral, was there really gold?" Columbus looked at him, long and tired. "Enough," he said. "To lie."

He wrote:*Day 133. I know what they want to hear. I also know they deserve it.*

At night, when the ship groaned and the water whispered, he spoke to the sea. "You let me live," he said. The sea responded with a gentle rumble. "I know," whispered Columbus. "So I can bring the rest."

He wrote:*Day 134. I am the messenger of an illness. But she will love me for it.*

As the first light of Spain appeared on the horizon, a heaviness settled over him. He smiled, but without joy. "Homecoming," he said quietly. "Or a repeat."

He wrote:*Day 135. I'll tell them what they want to hear. I'll lie, as is proper.*

And when they entered the harbor, the people cheered as if a king had returned. Columbus saw them, heard them, smelled the wine, the greed, the

sweet perfume of civilization. And he knew the island was still within him—quiet, breathing, waiting.

Day 136. They docked in Cadiz at dawn. The sky was clear, the water still, and the harbor stank of salt, fish, and anticipation. People crowded the quay. Men in dirty shirts, women with baskets, children with eyes that still believed. And among them, merchants, clerks, officers, all with the greed of an entire continent in their eyes.

"There he is," someone shouted. "The Admiral!" The word rolled over the crowd like a wave, growing larger, louder, wrong. Columbus stepped to the railing, his face pale, his hands thin, his hair gray. He smiled faintly as they cheered.

They celebrate what they don't understand, he thought.

He wrote: *Day 136. I am the hero of a story I made up.*

They carried him ashore. He felt the pavement beneath his feet, the warmth of the ground, the weight of glory. A woman pressed flowers into his hand, a boy wanted to touch him. He smiled, nodded, played along. "What did you find?" someone called. "What you wanted," he said. The crowd laughed, clapped, shouted.

He wrote: *Spain smells of wine and lies. I missed both.*

That evening, he stood before the queen. Isabella—flawless, silent, dangerously beautiful. Her gaze was cold, but her voice warm as she said, "You've done it, Don Cristóbal." He knelt down, feeling the wood of the floor press against his wounds. "Your Majesty," he whispered. "I have brought you a new paradise." "Gold?" she asked. He smiled. "Soon."

He wrote: *Day 136, night. I sell dreams like wine. The emptier the bottle, the more expensive.*

They asked about the people, the islands, the fruits, the gods. Columbus talked, talked, talked. About pearls and smoke, about spices and wonders, about skies that burned brighter than here. He spoke of kingdoms of sand and water, of gentle peoples who were only waiting for Spain to redeem them. He talked until even he almost believed it.

He wrote: *Lies taste better when they smell of salt and blood.*

At night, he lay in a bed that was too soft, too clean, too strange. He tossed and turned, sweated, dreamed. He saw the island again, the shadows, the wooden face. "I did it," he said in his dream. And the island answered: "So did we."

He woke up, drenched in sweat, breathless. He went to the window and looked out over the city. Lights, smoke, voices everywhere. He saw the ships in the harbor, the new ones that would soon be leaving again—bigger, greedier, emptier. He smiled bitterly. "You don't understand," he whispered. "You'll never stop."

He wrote:*Day 137. I'm back in sinners' paradise. It's more comfortable, but louder.*

The next morning, a messenger arrived from the court. "The queen wants to see you again," he said. Columbus nodded, took the cloak, and placed it over his shoulders. He looked at himself briefly in the mirror—a face of shadows, wrinkles, and salt. He smiled. "A saint looks different," he murmured. Then he left.

And as he walked up the streets, the people cheered him, he thought:
You are celebrating the beginning of something that will consume you all.

Day 138. The palace of Granada gleamed like a freshly polished sin. Marble, gold, incense, voices whispering as if every word were dangerous. Columbus walked slowly through the halls, the echo of his footsteps resounding like a confession. He was thin, tired, but his eyes still sparkled—not with pride, but with defiance.

He wrote:*Day 138. I'm walking through gold, but it smells like dirt.*

Two guards opened the door. Inside, Isabella waited, dressed in silk and steel at once. She wasn't sitting—she was enthroned. Beside her was a scribe, and next to her was a man who looked like he was there to say no. Columbus bowed deeply. "Your Grace," he said, "the world has gotten bigger." Isabella smiled thinly. "So they say. But what have you brought?" Columbus hesitated. "Hope," he said. She nodded. "And gold?" "Not yet."

The clerk made a note. The "No" next to her exhaled audibly.

He wrote:*Day 138, afternoon. I brought the truth, and they call it lack.*

"You said there are lands full of wealth there," said Isabella, folding her hands. "So it is," said Columbus.

"And why do you only bring stories?" He smiled. "Because stories are gold before you lift it." She leaned forward slightly. "And how much does the next story cost?" "Courage," he said. "And ships," she replied.

He remained silent. The man beside her cleared his throat. "Your Majesty, the Admiral is exhausted. Perhaps..." "He's awake enough to dream," Isabella said. Then she looked directly at Columbus. "I want results, not miracles, Don Cristóbal."

He wrote:*She believes in God, but not in me. Perhaps that's her only flaw.*

Columbus stepped closer, daring a look at her hands—soft, but strong. He knew she could kill without doing it. "Your Majesty," he said softly, "I have seen men who fear paradise. I have trodden lands that pray without knowing what sin is. I have found riches you cannot count." "Then bring them to me," she said simply. "I need ships." "And you will have them—if you prove to me that your gods are stronger than theirs."

He nodded slowly. "Believe me, Your Majesty, I almost drowned my god. He can swim."

A smile flitted across her face—the cold smile of a woman who briefly considers whether she loves someone before selling them. "Good," she said. "You get your ships. But this time you're not sending just hope. This time you're bringing what glitters."

He bowed deeply, felt the scribe's gaze, the scratching of the pen. He knew this wasn't an order. It was an ultimatum.

He wrote:*Day 139. I'm back on track. Only the wind smells of blood.*

As he left the room, he heard her say quietly, "He believes in God, but God does not believe in him."

He smiled as he closed the door behind him. "God doesn't believe in anything," he whispered.

Outside in the hall, a servant stood, handing him a piece of paper—a letter, a permission, a promise. Columbus took it and looked at it. The ink shone like oil. "Second voyage," he murmured. "Second hell."

He wrote:*Day 139, evening. I persuaded the devil to lend me wind again.*

And as he left the palace, the sun low, the sky red, he knew that the queen's smile was nothing more than the first sunburn of damnation.

Day 140. The shipyards of Seville resounded like a heart attack of wood and metal. Hammers, saws, voices, orders. Men sweated, cursed, drank. Ships rose from the muck, with names that already reeked of doom. Columbus stood on the quay, his face in the shadow of his hat, and watched them. He wrote:*Day 140. I'm building myself a second grave. Only bigger and more expensive.*

The new ships were different. Wider, heavier, armed. No room for explorers anymore—only for soldiers. He saw the men who were signing up. Not the naive ones from the first time. Here stood robbers, soldiers of fortune, licensed murderers. Men with muscles, scars, and a look that said:*I want what shines, no matter what the cost.*

One approached him, a bear of a man, bearded, scarred, eyes like iron. "Admiral?" he asked. "Yet," said Columbus. "They say you've found paradise." "I've lost it," said Columbus. The man grinned. "Then we'll find it again. And take it with us."

He wrote:*Day 141. The new men don't talk about God. Only about prey. Perhaps more honest that way.*

Later, he sat in a tavern by the harbor. Cheap wine, bad cheese, loud voices. On the wall hung a picture—crudely painted, ridiculous—of himself, with crown, sword, and golden cross. He laughed loudly, coughed, and spat. "If this is the West," he muttered, "then it was never me."

A young clerk sat down next to him. "Admiral," he said, "the queen sends you greetings. She wants reports, figures, lists." Columbus looked at him wearily. "Write: Hope. Two dozen tons. Departure in two weeks."

He wrote:*Day 141, night. I've learned how to portion the truth.*

The days passed. More ships arrived, more men, more noises. Chains lay between the barrels of provisions. Columbus saw them, but didn't ask. An officer grinned. "For labor." "Or for us?" Columbus asked. The officer remained silent.

He wrote:*Spain isn't preparing for discovery. Only for possession.*

A priest stood on the quay. Young, clean, with shining eyes. "Admiral," he said, "you have begun God's work." Columbus nodded. "Then pray that he finishes

it." The priest smiled. "He will accompany you." "He did last time, too," said Columbus. "He just stayed on dry land."

He wrote:*Day 142. Heaven sends me blessings like bills—without mercy, but on time.*

In the evening, as the sun hung low, Columbus returned to the shipyard. He saw the ships in the twilight. Hulls like beasts, sails like lies. He stroked the wood, felt the smooth surface. "You and I," he said quietly. "We'll do it again, won't we?"

He wrote:*Day 143. I know what's coming. And I'm going anyway. Because no one else is.*

The next day he met the Treasurer of the Crown – a man with a pointed beard, a thin voice, and a cold gaze.

"Admiral," he said, "your expedition is costing more than it's bringing in." Columbus nodded. "Yet." "If you fail, you'll lose everything." "I never had anything," Columbus said. "That helps."

He wrote:*Day 143, evening. I play for guilt, not for gain.*

And as he left the city, the air smelled of rain, wine, and impending disasters. The bells rang, somewhere a woman laughed, somewhere someone prayed for money. Columbus continued on, his gaze directed westward, to where his lie waited for him—patient, immortal, beautiful.

Day 144. Seville smelled of rain, sweat, and ship's tar. The sky hung leaden over the harbor, the wind still, as if even God were holding his breath. Men everywhere—shouting, carrying, drinking, cursing. Barrels, ropes, animals, weapons, crosses. And in the midst of them, Columbus, the admiral, pale and thin, but with that gaze still directed westward.

He wrote:*Day 144. Second trip. Second sin.*

Eleven ships lay ready. Their sails mended, their names burned into the wood, as if the wood knew it would soon cry out.

Marigalante, Cordera, Gallega, Vizcaína, Santa Clara...

Every name sounded like a prayer with a rusty knife in the back.

The men on board were no longer explorers. They were hunters, gatherers, debtors, convicts. Spain had sent its rats because gold needs no morals.

Columbus watched them laugh, sing, and drink. One peed in the water, another blessed it. "This is what faith looks like," Columbus murmured.

He wrote:*Day 145. The devil is coming along this time, but at least he's paying for provisions.*

A priest stood on the quay, the same one as before. He swung the cross, blessed the ships, and sprayed water that no one wanted. "God be with you," he cried. Columbus smiled thinly. "If he finds room."

Then the queen came. Not herself, of course, but her voice in the form of a messenger—young, smart, clean. "In the name of Her Majesty," he read, "she commands you, Columbus, to expand the Lord's kingdom, spread the faith, and increase the wealth of Spain." Columbus nodded, bowing slightly. "Tell her," he whispered, "I'll do it in that order—only backward."

He wrote:*Day 145, noon. Heaven has a sense of humor. It lets me preach about greed.*

Then the wind came. Finally. Heavy, salty, impatient. The men ran, pulled ropes, shouted orders. Wood creaked, water foamed. A scream, a crash, and the ships slowly detached themselves from the quay—one by one, like animals finally set free.

Columbus stood at the bow, his hand over his eyes, the city shrinking behind him. He saw the crowd waving, shouting, cheering. Children on their fathers' shoulders, women with shawls, merchants with eyes that already count. And in between, the priest, raising the cross, while he himself didn't believe it.

Columbus raised his hand and smiled—tired, hollow, honest. "Adiós," he whispered. "I bring you the truth wrapped in gold paper."

He wrote:*Day 146. The West is calling again. I'd rather be deaf.*

The sun set, the land disappeared. Only sea. Endless, indifferent, knowing. Columbus looked out, the water calm, almost friendly. "Well, old friend," he said quietly. "It's just the two of us again."

He took the logbook, the pen, and dipped it in ink.
Second trip. Day 1.

He paused, then wrote:*I know what's coming. And I'm going anyway.*

Night fell, heavy and damp. The men sang, drank, argued. And somewhere between their voices, the lapping of the waves, and the creaking of the wood, Columbus heard something laughing. Not loudly. Just so he could hear it alone. He knew exactly who it was.

He wrote:*Day 147. The devil is sitting in my cabin. And he's bringing wine.*

Day 148. The wind blew from the south, warm and humid, smelling of land even though there was none. Eleven ships, eleven curses. The waves were calm, but the men were not. Columbus stood at the bow of the Marigalante, his face tanned by the wind, his eyes red from salt and lack of sleep. He wrote:*Day 148. The sea is calm. That's never good.*

Below deck, it stank of sweat, fish, fear, and cheap rum. One man prayed, one cursed, one wept. One carved crosses into the wall as if wood would listen. One talked to the water, calling it mother. Columbus let them do as they pleased. He knew men need something that doesn't answer them back.

In the evening, an argument broke out. One barrel of wine too many opened, one word spoken too loudly, a knife drawn too quickly. A man fell. Columbus came over, saw the blood on the wood, and simply nodded. "Who?" he asked. "He started it." "Then he'll stop now," said Columbus.

He wrote:*Day 148, night. At sea, one doesn't die of sin, but of boredom.*

The days flowed into one another like old ink on wet paper. Wind, sun, waves, voices. Columbus slept little, wrote much. He heard voices in the wind, sometimes his name, sometimes laughter. "I know you're there," he said into the darkness. The sea responded with a dull thud against the hull.

He wrote:*The sea speaks in pain. I'm slowly understanding the language.*

Day 150. A storm was brewing, swift, silent, like a thought one had repressed. Clouds, black as pitch. Thunder, wind, rain—the usual drama, but this time it sounded personal. The ships rocked, men shouted, ropes snapped, sails flapped like torn prayers. Columbus stood on deck, his hands on the railing, his face wet, his heart still. "You want me again, don't you?" he yelled into the darkness. The sea answered with a wave that almost swept him away.

He laughed. "Not today!" Then he fell to his knees and prayed—not to God, but to the wind.

He wrote:*Day 150, night. I'm back in your hands, old friend. Squeeze harder if you can.*

The storm subsided after hours, but no one knew how long it had really lasted. Three men were missing, a mast broken, a ship drifting away. The sun returned lazily, as if nothing had happened. Columbus stood there, looking out at the water. "A fair price," he murmured.

He wrote:*Day 151. Death doesn't incur debts. He collects in cash.*

The men were quieter afterward. They looked at him with suspicion, fear, that look you give to animals you still feed but no longer like. One asked quietly, "Admiral, where are we really going?" Columbus smiled. "West." "And if there's nothing there?" "Then we're finally there."

He wrote:*Day 152. I lead them into the void. And they follow, because at least there's direction.*

At night he sat alone in his cabin, the logbook open, the candle almost burned down.

The wood cracked, the sea whispered, and water dripped somewhere on the wall. He stared at the flame, heard that laughter again—quiet, familiar, like from another time. "I know you're laughing," he said. "Me too."

He wrote:*Day 153. I talk to shadows, and they respond politely.*

The sea became calm again, too calm. The men began to murmur. Of bad luck, curses, madness. One said, "He's taking us to nothingness." Another, "The nothingness belongs to him."

Columbus heard. He smiled. "True," he whispered. "But you're guests."

He wrote:*Day 154. I'm no longer afraid. Just routine.*

And at night, when the sea was as smooth as glass, he saw it again—the island, far back in his mind, made of smoke and voices, of guilt and memory. "I'll be back," he said softly. The sea was silent. And that was answer enough.

Day 155. Three weeks of easterly winds. The sea was calm, the sun pale. The men barely spoke. Only the bare necessities: food, watch, and water. Columbus wrote:*Day 155. We move, but nothing moves.*

The silence was worse than any storm. No bird, no fish, no sign. Only the constant creaking of the wood—as if the ship itself were praying. One of the men said he had seen lights in the night. Another said they were stars. A third remained silent and drank.

Columbus listened, but his gaze remained blank. "There are lights everywhere," he said. "But hope is rare."

He wrote:*Day 156. I think the sea is following us. It's becoming as empty as we are.*

In the evening, the wind smelled different. Salt, yes—but also earth. Something warm, heavy, real. Columbus raised his head and sniffed. "Land," he said quietly. No one answered. Then, after a moment, someone whispered, "Not again."

He wrote:*Day 157. Land. And no one is happy.*

They saw it the next morning—a strip of green on the horizon, hard to believe. Some men were kneeling, one was spitting, one was crying. Columbus stood at the bow, his gaze fixed on the land. He saw it, but didn't believe it. "Again," he murmured. "The game begins."

He wrote:*Land. Again. Like a bad joke with divine signature.*

The men whispered about gold, about women, about gods who could be tamed. Columbus heard it and remained silent. He knew the tone. Greed always sounds like hope before it stinks.

In the evening, they lit a fire on deck, sang, drank, and laughed. Columbus remained alone, sitting on a chest, his logbook on his knees. He wrote:*Day 158. I no longer feel anything when I see land. Only shame.*

He thought of the first island, of the faces, of the rain, of the wooden face in the sand. He thought of the man with the calm eyes. "You were right," he whispered. "We're just bringing fire."

The night was silent. No wind. Only the gentle lapping of the sea. Columbus looked up at the sky; the stars glowed like scars. He whispered, "This time, no paradise. This time, punishment."

He wrote:*Day 159. I'm coming back. But I never left.*

In the morning he saw the coast clearly—palm trees, sand, smoke. Smoke. A thin stripe above the trees.

He knew someone was there. He felt it.

"Prepare yourselves," he said quietly. One asked, "For what?" Columbus looked at him. "For repetition."

He wrote:*Day 159, evening. I hear drums before they play.*

And as the sun sank behind them, the land before them glowed, and the sky colored like a knife, Columbus knew that the sea had tricked him once again. He had found land—but never left himself.

The first death on new soil

Day 160. They landed at sunrise. The water was shallow, warm, and sluggish. The sand was white as bone, the sky too blue to be real. Columbus stood barefoot on the shore, his cloak wet, his hair sticky with salt. Behind him were the men, tired, pale, with eyes that could no longer marvel.

He wrote:*Day 160. Second paradise. The same hell.*

The land was silent. No bird, no wind, no sound. Only the breathing of the world—slow, deep, watchful. Columbus bent down, took a handful of sand, and let it trickle through his fingers. "There," he said. "Your gold." One laughed briefly, another spat.

They built a camp at the edge of the forest. Tents made of canvas, fires made of wet wood, crosses made of broken masts. One sang to calm himself, another prayed, a third drank until he fell asleep. Columbus watched and wrote:*Day 160, evening. Paradise smells of sweat and fear.*

The next morning, they found tracks. Naked, small, light, in the sand. "They know we're here," said Columbus. "What do we do?" one asked. "Nothing," he said. "Wait."

But they never waited well. By midday, two men were already preparing to follow the trail. "We're just looking," said one. Columbus nodded. "Look. But remember what you're looking at."

He wrote:*Day 161. The land has eyes. I can feel it in the back of my neck.*

The men returned. Not with gold, not with loot—with stories. They talked of huts, smoke, voices, shadows. "They're watching us," one said. Columbus nodded. "Of course."

He looked out at the sea, which shone like a giant scar. "They're waiting," he whispered. "And that's worse than not waiting."

He wrote:*Day 162. It's not new territory. It's just land that didn't want us.*

In the evening, the first stranger arrived. Quietly, slowly, cautiously. A man, almost naked, painted, his eyes black and calm. He stood at the edge of the camp, not speaking a word. Columbus stepped forward, his hand raised. "Friend," he said. The man was silent, looked at him—not with fear, but with curiosity. Then he turned and disappeared.

Columbus wrote:*He knows we're staying. This is the beginning of the end.*

The night was long. The men talked quietly, drank, whispered about gold, about women, about war. One said, "We'll take it before they hide it." Columbus heard, but said nothing. He looked into the flames, which danced like memories. "We won't take anything," he murmured. "We'll only lose it."

He wrote:*Day 163. I hear drums in the wind. Maybe it's just my teeth.*

In the morning, a dead man was found. Not one of them. One of the others. He lay on the beach, his body slashed, his expression blank. One of the sailors said, "This is a warning." Columbus nodded. "Or an invitation."

He wrote:*Day 163, evening. The blood on the sand doesn't belong to anyone. Not yet.*

And when the sun set, the sea turned black, and the forest began to whisper, Columbus knew they had arrived—not in the New World, but in the old curse that had only been waiting for a new face.

Day 164. The sun rose harshly over the hills, burning away the remnants of the night as if angry with everything that lived. The camp was silent. Only the crackling of wood, smoldering damply somewhere, sat Columbus by the fire, his eyes empty, his logbook on his knee. He wrote:*Day 164. It's getting warmer, but no one notices.*

On the beach, men collected wood, stones, anything they could find. One, out of boredom, was building a wall. Another was hammering crosses into the

ground, as if trying to pin God to it. Then the shadows came. Out of the forest. Slowly, silently. Five, six, maybe more. Columbus saw them first, stood up, and raised his hand. "Stay calm," he said.

The men did what men do when they smell fear—they reached for their weapons. "No!" Columbus shouted. But one shot. Just one. That was enough.

A dull thud, a scream, smoke, sand. A stranger fell. And with him fell the silence.

He wrote:*Day 164, noon. The first shot is never an order. It's a confession.*

The others ran back into the woods. One of the sailors laughed nervously, another cursed, one began to pray so loudly it sounded like mockery. Columbus stood there, his hands shaking, his face pale. "Who did it?" he asked. No one answered. He looked at the man still holding the musket. "Put it down," he said quietly. The man grinned. "I was defending us." "From what?" "From them." Columbus approached, slowly, dangerously calm. "They had no weapons," he said. "Maybe later." Columbus looked at him, long, blank. Then he slapped him across the face with the flat of his hand. "You started it," he whispered. "And I'll finish it."

He wrote:*The sea has lent me death, and I pay with blood.*

Later, the forest burned. First small, then larger. The men screamed, laughed, and shot into the darkness. Columbus stood at the edge of the flames, his face in the firelight, his logbook in his hand. "Stop it!" he yelled. No one heard.

The smoke rose high, thick, black, stank of death, wood, and fear. Sparks flew over their heads like little sins in a hurry. Columbus looked up at the sky, saw the fire dancing, and whispered, "I bring light, she said. I only bring smoke."

He wrote:*Day 165. Paradise burns quietly. It has practice.*

In the night, screams came from the forest. Short, sharp, human. Then silence. One of the men returned covered in blood, staggering, grinning, crying. "I got him," he said.

"Who?" asked Columbus. "One of them." "Is he alive?" The man grinned wider. "Not anymore."

Columbus nodded slowly, walked past him, sat down, and wrote:
Day 165, night. I can no longer count who is human here.

The sea was black. The wind blew from the land, bringing the smell of ash. He thought of the first voyage, the first fire, the hands that had opened. He saw them again now—the same hands, only this time with stones in them.

He wrote:*I should never have come back. I'm too good at losing.*

In the morning, the camp was silent. No one spoke. The air was thick, sweet, sickly. Columbus went to the beach and looked out. A piece of wood floated in the water, charred. He picked it up and turned it over in his hand. "From the wall," he said quietly. "Or from God."

He wrote:*Day 166. I found land. And lost it. On the same day.*

And when the sun rose again, it glowed not like hope, but like a reminder that the sky erases nothing—it only watches.

Day 167. The morning was deceptively beautiful. A golden sky, a calm sea, a wind that smelled as if it wanted to forgive. The men stood wearily around the fires, their faces pale, their hands dirty, their eyes empty. Columbus looked at them and knew they hadn't understood—that they thought it was over. But nothing is ever over when blood touches the sand.

He wrote:*Day 167. The land doesn't forget. It's just waiting for us to believe it.*

Around midday, the first arrow came. Quietly. Quickly. It hit the man drawing water in the neck. No scream, just a dull thud. Then another. And another. Suddenly, movement everywhere—shadows among the trees, voices, screams. The men grabbed weapons, ran, stumbled, fired blindly. Columbus stood there, amidst the chaos, his sword half-drawn, his face blank.

"Cover!" someone shouted. "Where to?" another shouted. No one knew.

He wrote:*Day 167, noon. The sky was too blue. I should have known.*

They didn't fight. They fell. One by one. The camp burned again, this time not by their hand. Arrows, smoke, blood, sand. One man ran screaming into the water, fell, and stayed there. Another prayed loudly, was hit, and fell on his own Amen.

Columbus ducked behind a barrel, his logbook under his jacket, his sword in his hand. He saw one of his men crawling toward him with a spear in his stomach. "Admiral..." he gasped. Columbus bent down. "Don't say it," he whispered. The man died.

He wrote:*Day 167, afternoon. I'm surrounded by dead people who speak my language.*

The smoke settled, the wind shifted, the forest fell silent again. Columbus emerged from his cover, slowly, like an animal certain the trap was about to snap shut. Bodies everywhere, ash everywhere. He saw them—the strangers—at the edge of the forest. No triumph in their faces. Only duty. One looked at him, raised his hand—not in greeting, not in threat. Just as if to say:*Now you know how it feels.*

Columbus nodded. "Yes," he whispered. "Now I know."

He wrote:*Day 168. The West has struck back. And it was just.*

The night afterward was quiet. He sat alone, the fire small, the sea black. He drank what was left: wine, salty and warm. He looked into the flames and spoke softly, more to himself than to God. "I brought you what you wanted—and you showed me what it cost."

He wrote:*Day 168, night. I wanted to make history. Now I can smell it.*

In the morning, he counted the survivors. Eleven men. Out of almost a hundred. The rest: smoke, sand, memories. One asked, "What do we do now?" Columbus looked at him. "Live," he said. "If possible."

He wrote:*Day 169. I have seen death. He wears no crown. Only patience.*

And when the sun came out again, Columbus saw that the sea remained still, as if it had known everything, as if it had laughed, only quietly, like an old friend watching you lose.

Day 170. The camp stank of death. Not of fresh death, but of that which remains, of that which eats into wood and skin. Columbus sat on the beach, gazing at the sea, which once again acted innocent. The sun was shining, the wind was warm—as if nothing had happened. He laughed softly. "Nice trick," he said to the sky.

He wrote:*Day 170. Paradise is empty. Only sin still dwells here.*

The men buried the bodies. Not properly, not out of respect—simply because they could no longer bear the stench. Sand, dirt, wood over the top, done. One made the sign of the cross, another cursed, a third vomited. Columbus watched, making no gesture. He knew it was too late for signs.

In the afternoon, rain came. Short, hard, loud. It extinguished the fire, washed blood, cooled the earth. A blessing, some said. A mockery, thought Columbus.

He wrote:*Day 171. Heaven pretends to be clean. But it's just washing its hands.*

They tried to rebuild the camp. Without a plan, without faith. A few huts, a new fire, a few words that no one heard. Columbus walked among them, saw their faces—hollow, empty, swollen with salt. They looked at him as one looks at a man who has awakened the monster. He nodded. "You're right."

He wrote:*Day 172. I am the Admiral of Nothingness.*

At night, the wind came out of the forest again. It brought no whispering, no whistling, only this slow, dry rustling—as if the trees were laughing at them. Columbus couldn't sleep. He went to the sea, sat down, and wrote.
I wanted land. Now I have a grave.

His beard had turned gray, his hair thin, his skin cracked. He looked older than Spain was old. "I've seen too much," he said aloud. The wind answered with sand in his face.

He wrote:*Day 173. The land wants to forget us before it knows us.*

The men talked about escape. Back to the ships, back to Spain, back to something they still knew. Columbus heard this and remained silent. One came to him, young and trembling.

"Admiral, we have to leave. This... this is eating us." Columbus nodded slowly. "It's already eating me."

He wrote:*Day 174. I don't talk to them anymore. Only to the silence.*

The next day, one died. Not in battle, not from an arrow, not from fever—just like that. He didn't wake up. They threw him into the sea. No one prayed. Columbus watched as the waves took him. "He made it," he said quietly.

He wrote:*Day 174, night. I envy those who are already gone.*

The camp slowly rotted. The rations became bad, the water molded, the meat stank. And yet they stayed. Out of fear, out of spite, out of stupidity. Columbus no longer knew which reason was his.

He wrote:*Day 175. I'm not sure anymore if I was the one who wanted all this.*

At night, he sat alone by the fire. He talked to the shadows, called them by name. Sometimes they answered. Not with words, but with the rustling of leaves, the lapping of waves. He would nod, write, drink, laugh. "Perhaps I was never here," he said. "Perhaps I'm dreaming Spain."

He wrote:*Day 176. I'm lost between heaven and water. And no one's looking.*

And when the sun rose in the morning, he stood there, barefoot, pale, his hands open. He whispered, "I just wanted to know how far it would go." And the sea answered with nothing—and that was enough.

Day 177. The sky was pale, the sea dull, and the men barely spoke. The camp smelled of salt, death, and old flesh.

Columbus sat on an overturned barrel, his logbook on his knees, his hands black with dirt. He wrote:*Day 177. We're still alive. But no one knows why.*

Hunger came slowly. It first took their strength, then their reason, then their humanity. Some men caught fish, others stole them, still others prayed that no one would catch them. One was caught stealing. Columbus had him whipped. Three times the man fell over, and at the fourth blow he remained lying there. Columbus watched without blinking. "This is what order looks like," he said.

He wrote:*Day 178. I am the judge in a hell I built.*

At night, voices came. Not from the forest, not from the men—from his head. Quiet, persistent, sweet. They spoke of the West, of splendor, of wealth that lay just a hand's breadth below in the ground. He listened, laughed, cried, wrote:

The gold is talking. And I'm finally listening.

The next day he dug. Like a man possessed. With his bare hands, then with wood, then with an old knife. He wasn't looking for anything specific. Just confirmation. The men saw him, whispered, laughed at first, then stopped. One came to him. "Admiral, what are you doing?" Columbus looked up, his eyes glowing. "I've found what we lost." "What?" "Reason."

He wrote:*Day 179. I've stopped believing in God. Now I pray to the radiance.*

And then—a scream. One of the men had found something in the river. Small, yellow, round, shiny.

Gold. Just a piece, barely bigger than a fingernail. But it was enough.

They ran together, pushing, talking over each other. Columbus took it in his hand. The thing was warm from the sun, heavier than it had any right to be. He turned it, saw it sparkle in the light. He smiled. "There it is," he said. No one dared to breathe.

He wrote:*Day 179, evening. A piece of heaven in the dirt. And we call it God.*

From then on, everything changed. They dug everywhere. With knives, with nails, with their bare hands. No sleep, no prayer, just shoveling and screaming. Columbus watched, let them dig, let them hope. He knew it was madness. But he couldn't stop.

He wrote:*Day 180. I'm a priest again. Only the religion is different.*

At night, rain came, heavy, loud, hard. The ground turned to mud, the golden shimmer disappeared. The men cursed, cried, and argued. One drew a knife, another screamed, a third fell. Blood mixed with the dirt. Columbus stood there, wet, trembling, laughing. "This is what creation looks like," he said.

He wrote:*Day 181. We pray in blood. And it answers honestly.*

In the morning, he found the river red. Someone had fallen in, and no one pulled him out. He swam for a moment, then stopped. Columbus stood on the bank, watching. "He's found it," he said quietly. "Gold like peace."

He wrote:*Day 182. Gold has us. It laughs in the rain.*

And as the sun rose over the charred palm trees, the steam rose from the wet sand, and the men dug in the mud like dogs, Columbus knew he was back at the beginning. Only this time, God was no longer involved—only he and what glittered.

Day 183. It was quiet. Too quiet. The camp was just a collection of sounds that used to be called life—coughing, cursing, digging, breathing. Columbus sat amidst the muck, his logbook open, his fingers trembling. He wrote:*Day 183. We are no longer men. We are mirrors that only want to shine.*

Their faces were yellow, burned by sun and hunger. Hands trembled, eyes flickered. One laughed for no reason, another talked to the sand. One pounded on the ground until his fingers broke. "There must be more," he cried. Columbus watched, silent.

He wrote:*The gold is within us, and that is the disease.*

At night, the men crawled into their huts, if you could still call them that—half tents, half graves. They whispered, quarreled, dreamed aloud. One said Columbus had cursed the gold. Another said he himself was the curse. Columbus heard this and laughed. "Both are true," he said.

He wrote:*Day 184. I am prophet and plague in one person.*

The next day, there was an argument. Two men fought over a piece of metal that glittered in the light. One drew a knife, the other a stone. A blow, a scream, blood. Columbus stepped in, was pushed, fell, got up again. "Enough!" he yelled. No one listened. Then he shot. Only once. The noise died down. One lay, the other stared. Columbus lowered his weapon, breathing heavily. "Now you can hear me again," he said.

He wrote:*Day 185. I rule over corpses that are still breathing.*

The sea remained calm. It no longer laughed. It watched. In the evening, Columbus went out and stood on the shore, barefoot, looking at the surf. He spoke to the earth. Not praying, but accusingly. "Why did you take us?" he asked. The wind answered, damp and salty:*Because you came.*

He wrote:*Day 186. I talk to the ground, and it has more sense than I do.*

The men became sick. Fever, wounds, voices. One cut himself to find the gold beneath his skin. Columbus held him tight, but he bit, screamed, laughed. "It's glowing," he shrieked. "I can feel it!" Then he died. Columbus looked into his eyes until they fell silent. "You've found it," he whispered.

He wrote:*Day 187. Madness shines brighter than gold.*

A storm came at night. The sea raged, the wind roared, the camp shook. Columbus stood in the midst of it, the rain lashed, the flames devoured what was left standing. He laughed, screamed, and cried. "Come on!" he roared to the sky. "Take it all! You started it!" The thunder answered—loud, indifferent.

He wrote:*Day 188. I'm just an echo. And it echoes damn well.*

In the morning the ships were awry, the camp destroyed, two men dead, three missing.

Columbus gathered what remained—the book, a knife, a handful of mud. He looked around and whispered, "I've almost managed to find nothing."

He wrote:*Day 189. The West is rotting. And I am with it.*

And as the sun set, red as old blood, Columbus sat down, his face blank, his hands dirty, his mind still. He looked into the distance where the sea met the sky and said, "If God looks at me now, he's surely laughing."

Day 190. The sky was white. No blue, no gray—simply empty. The sea stood still, as if it had grown tired of reflecting the madness. Columbus lay in his hut, his face sunken, his lips dry, his eyes half-open. He sweated, shivered, spoke. Sometimes loudly, sometimes only in his thoughts. No one listened.

He wrote:*Day 190. I've overdone life.*

The fever came in waves. Sometimes it was hot, sometimes cold, sometimes quiet, sometimes roaring. He saw things that weren't there—faces, hands, the sea flowing backward. He heard the men arguing, singing, dying—but their voices came from his head. He laughed. "Finally, you're speaking honestly," he murmured.

He wrote:*I've found heaven. It stinks of filth and whispers my name.*

At night he sat upright, naked, with the logbook in front of him. He wrote with a shaky hand, using blood instead of ink.

I am God. And he invented me.

Then he laughed until he coughed.

In the morning, he was found outside, barefoot, in the sand. He was talking to the ground. "I know you hear me," he said. Then he knelt down, putting his ear to the earth. "She's breathing," he whispered. "And she hates us."

He wrote:*Day 191. The earth is alive. And it wants us dead.*

The men avoided him. They whispered about him, called him crazy, cursed, lost. But they still followed him when he spoke. Because no one else knew where to go. He was now a prophet against his will. A preacher of salt and guilt.

Someone asked him, "Admiral, why do we stay?" Columbus smiled. "Because the sea doesn't want us," he said. "And the land recognizes us."

He wrote:*Day 192. I'm home. In punishment.*

The fever continued to rise. He saw the gold everywhere—in the sun, in the water, in the men's skin. He tried to wash it away. He scrubbed, rubbed, until the blood came. "Get out of me," he whispered. "Get out, you filth." But the gold remained.

He wrote:*Day 193. I'm gilded inside. And that's worse than sin.*

At night, he crawled back to the sea. The water cooled him, carried him briefly, then dropped him. He lay there, half in the water, half in the sand. "I betrayed you," he whispered. "But you betrayed me more often."

He wrote:*Day 194. I want to go back. But no one knows where.*

Then came a moment, still, clear, eerie. The fever subsided. He saw the sky—vast, bright, empty. He understood. The gold was never a goal. It was a test. And he had passed by losing.

He smiled. "All right," he said quietly. "So be it."

He wrote:*Day 195. I found it. The end has no beginning.*

The next morning, he stood back in the camp, weak but erect. The men looked at him, uncertain, almost reverent. Columbus raised his hand, slowly, calmly. "We're going," he said. "Back." "Where to?" one asked. "It doesn't matter," he said. "The main thing is, we're gone."

He wrote:*Day 196. I'm still alive. Unfortunately, long enough to know.*

And as they pushed the boats back into the water, the wood splintering, the sails torn, Columbus knew the land would never forget them. He looked back and whispered, "I saw you. And that was my mistake."

The sea was silent. As always. And that was precisely what made it divine.

Gold – the word that made everyone sick

Day 197. The sea was calm, but no one believed him. Three ships, half-eaten, full of men who smelled of decay. They were sailing east, or what they thought was east. Columbus stood at the helm, his face burned, his lips bloody, his eyes tired. He wrote:*Day 197. We're going back into the belly that spat us out.*

The men spoke little. Only the clang of metal, the rustling of sacks, the wheezing of feverish people. They guarded small piles of sand in which they hid tiny gold pieces—as if they were gods. No one trusted anyone. One died in the night, and in the morning his bag was missing.

Columbus saw it, said nothing. He knew it was only the beginning.

He wrote:*Gold has us. And it divides us like bread.*

The wind was fair, the sky clear. A few seagulls came, cried, and disappeared again—as if they were lost. The men prayed when they saw the birds. "Land," they said. Columbus nodded. "Your old land. With new lies."

He wrote:*Day 198. I smell Spain and I feel sick.*

At night, he couldn't sleep. He heard the sea gently lapping against the hull. Each beat sounded like a heartbeat, each heartbeat like a memory. He saw faces—those from the land, those from the camp, those from the fire. All looked at him, with the same expression: *Why?*
He answered in the dream: *Because I could.*

He wrote:*I'm the first person to export hell.*

On the third day, a man fell overboard. No one jumped after him. Only Columbus looked down, long and silent. He saw the sea closing in, calm, clean, final. "He's lucky," he said.

He wrote:*Day 199. Death has style at sea. On land, it's just business.*

When they finally saw land—Spain, old, familiar, false—no one burst into cheers. They saw it, but didn't believe it. Columbus stood at the front, leaning on the railing. "There," he said quietly. "The land that never has enough."

He wrote:*Day 200. Back in the nest. The stench remains.*

There was silence in the harbor. No crowd, no queen, no music. Only clerks, guards, a few curious faces. They saw the men disembarking like ghosts—rags, scars, sacks full of earth. One fell, one laughed, one wept.

Columbus was the last to leave the ship. He stepped onto the quay, barefoot, pale, with a blank expression. The ground felt strange. "Welcome home," someone said. Columbus nodded. "If you say so."

He wrote:*Day 201. Spain hasn't changed. It's just me who's rotting differently now.*

An official came, fine, neat, with a voice made of paper. "Admiral, the queen awaits a report." Columbus smiled weakly. "I'll bring her what she wanted." "Gold?" asked the man. Columbus shook his head. "Illness."

He wrote:*I carry the spark. The rest burns on its own.*

That evening, he sat in a tavern, alone, his head in his hands. The wine tasted of iron, the air of sweat. He heard the talk—gold here, islands there, wealth everywhere. His story had outlived him, and now it was being sold.

"Columbus," said one, "the man who found paradise." He laughed. Loudly, hoarsely, bitterly. "Paradise?" he murmured. "I merely found the entrance to greed."

He wrote:*Day 202. I'm back. But what I brought will never go away.*

And as he walked through the streets that night, he smelled the wind—sweet, heavy, expensive. Gold. Gold everywhere. In thoughts, in dreams, in prayers. And Columbus knew: He had found the word that made everyone sick.

Day 203. The palace smelled of roses, incense, and lies. Columbus stood in the hall, dirty, thin, burned, while the courtiers whispered and giggled like children who see a monster but don't know if it bites. A messenger had announced his arrival:*Don Cristóbal Colón, Admiral of the Ocean, discoverer of the New World.* He wrote:*Day 203. They call me an explorer. I just found the mirror.*

The queen entered—in gold, in power, in cold. She was older, harder, and she knew what she wanted: not a fairy tale, but coins. Columbus knelt. "Rise," she said. He did. Her eyes slid over him, examining him, as if he were a coin she was holding up to the light. "You did it," she said. Columbus smiled wearily. "I survived."

He wrote:*I talk to her like she's God. But God pays better.*

She had him report. And he talked. About islands, rivers, forests, people—and gold. Always gold. How it shimmered, how it bent, how it shimmered in the rivers like promises. The courtiers snapped at every word like dogs at bread. Isabella listened quietly, motionless, only her fingers playing with a chain of pure gold.

"And you say," she asked, "there's more of it?" Columbus nodded. "Infinitely," he lied.

He wrote:*Day 203, evening. I've learned: the bigger the lie, the holier it sounds.*

She stood up and approached. Her gaze was bright but empty—the light of a candle that burns only for itself. "You have done great things," she said. "Spain owes you thanks." "I'll take it in coins," whispered Columbus. She barely smiled. "You'll get ships. And men. Even more." "More?" he asked. "We'll take what's ours," she said.

He wrote:*Hunger is now at its peak.*

At the edge of the hall, merchants, clergy, and soldiers whispered. Everyone looked at Columbus as if he were the key to a locked chest. One stepped forward, a man with a fat face and soft hands. "Admiral," he said, "you have opened the gate. Now let us enter." Columbus nodded. "Just be careful it doesn't swallow you all whole." The man laughed. "Gold doesn't eat anyone, Admiral." Columbus smiled thinly. "Not yet."

He wrote:*Day 204. I am the saint of a religion no one wants to profess.*

In the evening, he stood outside again, the courtyard behind him, the sky gray, the air heavy. He felt emptier than when he left. Inside, there was only rustling—the sound of gold falling through hands, of coins telling stories, of voices praying because they count. "I gave it to them," he whispered. "The fire. Now they must carry it."

He wrote:*Day 204, night. I poisoned Spain, and they call it wine.*

As he left, the queen called after him: "Don Cristóbal! You have led Spain to glory!" He didn't turn around. He knew that fame is merely the perfume of greed.

And at night, as he sat alone in his room, cup of wine in hand, logbook before him, he heard them—the coins. They sounded like rain. Except that rain washes. And gold makes you dirty.

He wrote:*Day 205. I found the West. And he now lives in Madrid.*

Day 206. Madrid smelled of rain, perfume, and anticipation. A people who had been poor for too long suddenly had a new prayer:*Gold*. Gold. The word rolled through the streets, from taverns, churches, brothels, even from schools. Everyone spoke it as if it were salvation. Columbus saw it in people's faces, on their lips, in their eyes. He wrote:*Day 206. I invented a word that sounds like hope and tastes like death.*

He became a hero. Flags, bells, wine, women. They poured him cups, kissed his hands, patted his shoulders. "The man who found heaven!" one cried. Columbus smiled, drank, and remained silent. The screams from the camp echoed in his head. And he knew: Heaven and hell were the same color.

He wrote:*They celebrate me because they don't understand me.*

In the church a priest gave a sermon about him.

The Admiral is God's instrument, he said.

He enlarged the world and strengthened faith.

Columbus sat in the back, in the shade, drinking quietly from a bottle. "If God used me," he whispered, "it wasn't for faith."

He wrote:*Day 207. I am proof that sin is profitable.*

His story was sold in the taverns. Printed, embellished, lied. He read it—about miracles, wealth, pagans who became Christians. Not a word about blood, hunger, fever. Only splendor. He laughed so hard he cried. "I'm better off dead," he murmured. "I'm more believable then."

He wrote:*Day 208. Spain prints lies in gold frames. I sign them with silence.*

Then the traders came. They brought maps, plans, calculations. "How much gold is there?" they asked.

"More than here," Columbus replied. "How far?" "Far enough not to regret it."

They nodded, wrote, calculated, laughed. He drank.

He wrote:*I see them lighting themselves up, and I light them.*

At court, there was talk of new voyages. Ten ships, a hundred men, a thousand dreams. Everyone wanted their share. Even the monks wrote petitions. "In the name of God," they said, "and profit." Columbus stood beside them, saw the theater, the golden robes, the clean hands yearning for dirt. He whispered, "You don't know what you're getting." Someone grinned. "Yes, riches." Columbus smiled vacantly. "No. Mirrors."

He wrote:*Day 209. I see it in her eyes – the fever. And I'm the mosquito.*

In the evening, the queen returned. "You have changed Spain," she said.

Columbus nodded. "I know." "You gave him hope." "I gave him hunger." She

smiled thinly. "Hunger is good. It fuels." Columbus looked at her, long and calm.

"He eats too." She turned and left.

He wrote:*Day 210. I showed her the mirror. She saw herself and called it sun.*

The nights grew louder, the days shorter. Rumors of gold grew faster than children. Maps were sold before they were drawn. Men signed before they knew where they were going. Columbus watched them do the same as he did—blindly, proudly, confidently. He laughed softly. "I am their father," he said. "And their punishment."

He wrote:*Day 211. The gold now has wings. And I'm just dust.*

And as he looked out the window one night, over the rooftops, over the bells, over the people, he knew: What he had been seeking had long been there—in every head, in every hand, in every prayer. And it would never disappear.

He wrote:*Spain shines. And the shine is rot.*

Day 212. The bells rang as if it were Easter, but it was just a market. A gold market. Everything revolved around it. Cards, coins, promises, wooden relics supposedly from the New World. People lined up, buying hope in bags. Columbus walked through the crowd, his hat low, his gaze blank. He smelled the sweat, the money, the lies. He wrote:*Day 212. I see my work. It has teeth.*

They talked about him everywhere. In taverns, on pulpits, in brothels. Everyone had an opinion, no one had a clue. Some called him a saint, others a heretic, but everyone called him *useful*.

He drank in a corner, listened, and laughed quietly. "Saint?" he murmured. "I am the mold in God's bread."

He wrote:*Day 213. My name shines on lips I never wanted to kiss.*

The first new ships set sail. Young captains, pompous words, ignorant of the sea. They drank before they sailed, spat in the water, and swore to glory. Columbus watched them from the quay, his cloak wrapped tightly around his shoulders. He knew they would return—broken, bloody, or not at all. He wrote:*I see them driving like children who want to catch fire.*

A few weeks later, the first ship returned. Torn, empty, and stinking. Three survivors. They told stories—of fever, arrows, hunger, and gold that was worth more than lives. Columbus listened, smoked, and remained silent. One asked him: "Why did you do this to us?" Columbus smiled sadly. "Because you wanted to."

He wrote:*Day 214. I am merely the echo of their wishes.*

The city now smelled of gold dust and decay. Men returned, sick, mutilated, but with bags full of dirt, which they sold as riches. The people cheered nonetheless. "Heroes!" they cried. Columbus saw their eyes—yellow, sick, greedy. "You're dead," he whispered. "You just don't know it yet."

He wrote:*Spain shines like a corpse with lipstick.*

At court, merchants boasted, priests blessed new ships, and the queen smiled. "The empire is growing," she said. Columbus nodded. "Like a tumor." "You speak too gloomily, Admiral." "I just see clearly." She laughed. "Then you'd better close your eyes."

He wrote:*Day 215. I talk to kings, and all they hear is coins.*

At night, he dreamed of the sea. Not the blue, smooth one, but the black, bubbling one. He saw faces in it—men, women, children, all made of earth. They looked at him, asking nothing, complaining nothing. They just waited. Columbus woke up, drenched in sweat. "I know," he whispered. "I'll be back."

He wrote:*Day 216. I sleep in guilt and wake in gold.*

The next day, he stood on the balcony of his lodgings, looking down at Madrid. The city moved like an animal—huge, greedy, alive. "I built it," he said. "And no one will thank me." He thought of the sea, of the men, of the land they had burned.

He thought of the eyes of the first dead man on the beach. And he knew he would never get to heaven again—because he had invented it on earth.

He wrote:*Day 217. I sold God. And Spain paid cash.*

In the evening, someone knocked on his door. A messenger, young, clean, smiling. "Admiral," he said, "the queen requests a new expedition. Even bigger." Columbus nodded. "Of course," he said. "Even bigger. Even deeper. Even emptier."

He wrote:*Day 218. I've tamed death. Now Spain wants to ride.*

And as he closed the door behind him, he knew he would go back to sea—not out of courage, not out of faith, but because Spain remained hungry and he was the only one who knew where the food lay.

Day 219. The palace was louder than ever. Merchants, soldiers, scribes, clergymen—all talking at once, all wanting the same thing:*more.*

More gold, more land, more wonders, more war. Columbus sat on a bench at the edge of the hall, watched the hustle and bustle, and drank wine that tasted of metal. He wrote:*Day 219. I'm the fossil they touch before they sell.*

They talked about him, not with him. "The Admiral found it," one said. "He'll bring riches!" "And fame!" "And God's blessing!" Columbus laughed aloud. "And the devil with him," he cried. They looked briefly, then away again. He had become decoration—useful as long as he shone.

He wrote:*I am the parrot in the cage of Spain.*

Then the bishop came. Fat, warm, smiling. "My son," he said. "You have done great things." Columbus drank. "I wrote blood in the sand." The bishop nodded as if he hadn't heard. "And you will do even greater things." "No," said Columbus. "Only worse things." The bishop smiled. "That's called history."

He wrote:*Day 220. God blesses everything that brings profit.*

In the next room sat the queen, surrounded by maps and advisors. She nodded to him, coolly, controlled, politely. "Admiral," she said, "we're equipping. Ten ships this time." Columbus bowed. "And men?" "As many as you can command." He nodded. "And what if I lose them?" "Then God sends new ones."

He wrote:*Spain only prays when it counts.*

A nobleman approached, young, perfumed, and confident. "I'll accompany you," he said. "I want fame." Columbus looked at him. "You want gold." "Both," the man grinned. "You'll get neither." "Then at least legends." Columbus nodded. "I have enough of those. You may bury them all."

He wrote:*Day 221. I'm talking to kids in armor.*

In the evening, he stood alone in the yard again. The sun burned, the air shimmered. He heard the voices from inside, laughter, commands, prayers, lies. He felt something loosen inside him—like a screw finally loosening after years. "I set them on fire," he whispered. "And now they're infesting me."

He wrote:*Gold is the new god. And I am its prophet with a fever.*

A servant brought him a letter—from the treasurer. "Your share, Admiral." Columbus opened it.

Gold, sealed, clean. He held it in his hand, turning it in the light. He felt nothing. No pride, no triumph, only cold. "So this is it," he murmured. "The currency of the void."

He wrote:*Day 222. I'm rich. And that's the worst punishment.*

Later, night came. He sat by the window, the moon hanging over Madrid like a pale eye. He thought of the sea, the men, the screams, the fire. And the hands reaching for him, back then, on the beach, in the smoke. He drank until the wine turned bitter. "I'm going out again," he whispered. "But this time I know where it leads."

He wrote:*Day 223. I am the Admiral of Repetitions.*

In the morning, he was called back to court. The queen spoke briefly, clearly, coldly. "You will sail again, Admiral. For Spain, for God, for glory." Columbus smiled wearily. "For guilt," he said. She barely nodded. "That too."

He wrote:*Day 224. I'm going back. Not because I want to—because I have to. Someone has to finish writing the curse.*

And as he walked through the palace gates at dusk, document in hand, he knew: They had replaced him—not with a man, but with a word.

Gold.

And the word spoke louder than any truth he had left.

Day 225. The port of Cádiz vibrated like a cut vein. People everywhere—sailors, traders, priests, whores, children, thieves. Everyone smelled of salt and hope. Ten ships lay ready, painted, blessed, cursed. Columbus stood among them, silent, with a face that had seen too many nights. He wrote:*Day 225. I'm standing at the edge of the world again, and this time I know it's looking back.*

The crowd cheered. They shouted his name, threw flowers, coins, and prayers. An old man called out, "Bring us wealth, Admiral!" Columbus smiled weakly. "I'll bring you mirrors, old friend." "How?" asked the man. "You'll see."

He wrote:*They're celebrating me because they don't yet know it's my funeral.*

The sailors were young, too young. Hard faces, but children's eyes. They laughed, drank, boasted, swore glory. Columbus looked at them, remembering the faces of the first voyage—those who never returned. He whispered, "You will learn that glory is only hunger in a clean guise."

He wrote:*Day 226. I already know them all. Only their names are new.*

A priest arrived, fatter than the cross he carried. He blessed the ships, threw holy water, and muttered Latin formulas that even God no longer understood. Columbus didn't kneel. He stood, his hat low, his gaze out to sea. The priest saw this and frowned. "No more faith, Admiral?" Columbus nodded. "Only experience."

He wrote:*Day 226, evening. I've prayed enough to know that answers are overrated.*

The sun slowly sank into the water, red as a wound. The ships creaked, the wind carrying the first commands. Columbus walked across the jetty, step by step, the wood beneath his feet as old as he was. A boy called out, "Admiral, what are you looking for this time?" Columbus stopped and looked at him. "Salvation," he said. "But I'll take proof, too."

He wrote:*Day 227. I'm lying again, and it feels like coming home.*

The deck smelled of tar, sweat, and salt. The men worked, laughed, and cursed. Columbus walked slowly, touching the railing as if petting an old animal. "You and I," he murmured. "Once again, you old bastard."

He wrote:*The sea is breathing me in again. Maybe it won't spit me out this time.*

A messenger arrived from the mainland. A final letter from the queen. "For Spain," it read. "For God." Columbus read it, laughed, tore up the paper, and threw it into the water. "For no one," he said. "Only for me."

He wrote:*Day 228. I've stopped collecting reasons. I'm just taking in the wind.*

The night came, warm, full of voices, music, and wine. Whores danced on the quay, priests prayed, merchants counted. A sailor beat a drum as if it were a heart. Columbus sat alone at the stern, the stars above him, the sea below. He drank, wrote, and was silent. "This time," he whispered, "I'm going to my own grave."

He wrote:*Day 229. I no longer drive to find. I drive to lose.*

And as the sun rose over Cadiz the next morning, Columbus stood at the helm, the sails full, the wind merciful, the sea smooth as glass. He looked back at the

city—gold in the roofs, greed in the streets. "I made you," he whispered. "Now you're destroying me."

He wrote:*Day 230. The West is calling again. But this time it sounds like laughter from the grave.*

And then the sea rose, the sails stretched, the coast disappeared – and Columbus knew that this time he wouldn't come home, even if he survived.

Day 231. Three days at sea, and the sky was too clear. Too clear, too quiet, as if someone had turned off the world's sound. The men were still singing, but their voices already sounded hollow.

Columbus stood at the helm, his face dry from the salt, his eyes empty. He wrote:*Day 231. The sea looks at me like an old enemy, waiting for revenge.*

On the fourth day, a strong, warm wind blew, smelling of seaweed and iron. The sails billowed, the ropes creaked, the wood growled. One of the men spat overboard and said, "The sea is in a good mood." Columbus nodded. "Because it knows we believe it."

He wrote:*Day 232. Trust is the cheapest currency at sea.*

At night, the stars shone too brightly, too close. Columbus stared up and thought they must be burning because God had forgotten them. He heard the men whispering—about gold, about fame, about women in foreign lands. "This time we'll really find it," one said. Columbus drank, laughing softly. "You'll find it," he said. "But not what you're looking for."

He wrote:*I am once again a teacher for the Course into Nothingness.*

On the sixth day, a dispute arose between two men over a coin that one wore as a talisman. One said it brought good luck, the other, it brought death. They fought until one fell. Columbus had him thrown into the sea. "There's enough gold down there," he said.

He wrote:*Day 233. The ocean is the honest version of Spain.*

The nights became restless. The ship creaked, the wind shifted, the waves whispered. Columbus barely slept. He heard voices from the water—quiet, patient, mocking. Sometimes he thought they were calling his name. "Not yet," he whispered. "I'll be back."

He wrote:*The sea never forgets. It collects bills.*

On the eighth day, fog rolled in. Thick, gray, thick as breath after a fever. You could hardly see your hand in front of your face.

The men fell silent, then nervous. One prayed aloud, another laughed too long. Columbus stood on deck, smelling the dampness, tasting the salty sweat. "The West is hiding again," he said. "Because it knows we're looking."

He wrote:*Day 234. I am a prisoner of my own horizon.*

The fog persisted for three days. They heard cries in the distance, perhaps birds, perhaps ghosts, perhaps nothing at all. One of the men said he saw faces in the haze. Columbus nodded. "Me too." "Were they dead?" "Everyone is at some point."

He wrote:*The sea paints memories with watercolors.*

On the eleventh day, the fog lifted. The sun rose harshly, brightly, mercilessly. The men blinked, laughed, cheered—too soon. Columbus remained silent. He knew silence was only the breathing of the next storm. And he felt the sea speaking to him again—not in words, but in the rhythm of the waves, in the cracking of the wood, in the dull thumping below deck.

He wrote:*Day 235. The sea speaks again. And this time I listen.*

At night, when the wind was asleep and the water was smooth as glass, he saw it: beneath the surface, deep down, a shimmer. Not gold, not light—something else. Something moving, slowly, alive. He stared down until he felt dizzy. "You wait," he whispered. "So do I."

He wrote:*Day 236. I've seen hell. It glitters.*

And when morning came, the sea calm, the men tired, the sky too beautiful, Columbus knew they were long lost. Not in direction, but in purpose. They were no longer sailing toward a destination—they were merely fleeing from what they had left at home: the truth.

He wrote:*Day 237. We're not driving anymore. We're rotting in circles.*

And the sea, full and knowing, carried her on – slowly, surely, patiently like a god who has learned that punishment needs no haste.

Return of the hero who wasn't one

Day 301. The sea gave them back. Not willingly, but rather bored. Two ships down, the men half-dead, their faces thin, their eyes empty like empty cups. Columbus stood on deck, his hair gray, his skin made of salt. He wrote:*Day 301. The ocean only spits out what even it can no longer digest.*

They saw Spain on the horizon. A line, a stain, a promise. One of the men began to cry, another laughed hysterically. Columbus said nothing. He had stopped believing he would ever return home. Spain was just another harbor of guilt.

He wrote:*I come home like a dog that has lost its bone.*

When they docked, there was no reception. No trumpets, no queen, no cheers. Just customs officials, clerks, a few curious children. The air smelled of city, dirt, and routine. Columbus was the last to disembark. He felt the ground beneath his feet and sensed he had become a stranger. "I've been sailing too long," he murmured. "The land is rocking."

He wrote:*Day 302. Spain has forgotten me. I'm just an echo now.*

The scribes came with questions, endless questions. "How much gold?" "How many islands?" "How many men lost?" Columbus no longer answered with numbers.

He said, "Enough." "Of what?" one asked. "Of everything."

He wrote:*I don't count coins anymore, just ghosts.*

They brought him to court. Not in a parade, but as one brings a delivery—on time, but without joy. The queen received him in a new hall, larger, shinier, colder. She smiled thinly. "Welcome back, Admiral." Columbus nodded. "I'm not one anymore." "Yes," she said. "You have enlarged Spain." "And diminished it," he murmured.

He wrote:*Day 303. They see greatness only in maps, never in graves.*

A servant brought him wine. He drank, tasting nothing. "How was the journey?" she asked. Columbus looked at her for a long time, without blinking. "Long," he said. "And worthwhile?" He laughed. "For whom?" She remained silent.

He wrote:*Day 304. I speak in riddles because the truth is indecent.*

His name was everywhere in the city again: books, songs, statues.

Columbus, the discoverer. Columbus, the chosen one.

He read one of the new pamphlets, full of lies, and laughed aloud. "I'm not the man in these pages," he said. A boy asked, "Then who are you?" Columbus looked at him. "The one who regrets it."

He wrote:*They need me as an image, not as a person.*

In the evening, he walked alone through Madrid. No one recognized him, and that was the best thing that could have happened to him. He saw beggars, vendors, children with empty bowls.

He heard them talking about gold as if it were a cure. He stopped and whispered, "I brought you the poison."

He wrote:*Day 305. Spain has the fever, and I'm patient zero.*

Later, at the inn, he drank with some old sailors. One asked, "Is it getting better out there?" Columbus looked into the cup. "No," he said. "Only deeper." They laughed, toasting him. He laughed along—the laughter of a man who knows the joke's on him.

He wrote:*I am the hero you need to lie to yourself.*

And as he lay that night on his straw bed, the logbook on his chest, the sound of the sea in his ears, he knew: He hadn't returned home. He was merely stranded.

Day 306. The wine tasted of dust, the air of mistrust. Columbus was back in Spain, but Spain was no longer the country he had left. It was bigger, louder, greedier—full of men talking about lands they had never seen. He wrote:*Day 306. Everyone is now an explorer, as long as they don't set out.*

They had written songs about him. Children sang them in the streets, whores hummed them in bed, priests preached them from the pulpits. Columbus, the saint of horizons. He heard it, laughed softly, coughed, drank. "If I am holy," he said, "then God has a sense of humor."

He wrote:*I am the statue in front of my own grave.*

They whispered in the alleys. "He overdid it." "He was never there." "He failed." Others said, "He brings gold."

Both sides were right. Columbus walked past them, his hat low, his footsteps heavy. No one saw the man. They saw only the image they needed.

He wrote:*Day 307. I am both a legend and a lie.*

Then came the church. A letter, a seal, a cross. They wanted to hear what he had seen—but not what was real. A bishop asked, "Did you convert any pagans?" Columbus replied, "A few. Before we killed them." The bishop gave a thin smile. "I mean it." "Me too."

He wrote:*I tell the truth, and it sounds like blasphemy.*

Another priest asked, "Do you have proof of paradise?" Columbus nodded. "Yes." "Where?" "Buried." "How can you tell?" "By the guilt it leaves behind." The priest crossed himself. "God bless you, Admiral." Columbus smiled. "It doesn't."

He wrote:*Day 308. The church wants stories, not confession.*

Later, he was summoned to the palace. Not to the queen this time—to men in furs, with ink on their fingers and lies on their tongues. "Admiral," they said, "your report is... disturbing." "Then it's true." "You're exaggerating." "No," said Columbus. "I'm just remembering." They smiled thinly. "We must adapt your words. For the people." "For the fairy tale," he murmured.

He wrote:*Day 309. Truth here is just raw material for propaganda.*

He was put on display again. Banquets, receptions, speeches. He stood on stages, raised cups, and smiled. But his gaze always went over the heads—to where the sea must be. One of the courtiers said, "You seem sad, Admiral." Columbus replied, "I'm just sober."

He wrote:*I drink less since I realized that dreams lie even when you're drunk.*

At night he lay awake, the window open, the city noisy. He heard the merchants talking about new voyages, about gold, about fame. About *the Sea*. But they spoke as if it were now their property. He laughed softly. "You won't survive."

He wrote:*Day 310. I opened the world, and now the scum is crawling out.*

The next day, a boy came to him, no older than twelve. Barefoot, dirty, curious. "Are you the admiral?" Columbus nodded. "And you saw the end of the world?" Columbus looked at him, smiling wearily. "No," he said. "I was."

He wrote:*Day 311. I'm still alive. But only because the lie feeds me.*

And as the sun set, the light lay red over Madrid, and the wine glistened like blood in the cup, Columbus knew that his fame would outlive him—but was worth less. He whispered, "I didn't discover anything. I just lost my faith, and that pleased them."

He wrote:*Spain loves me because I am their alibi.*

Day 312. The letters arrived daily. They bore seals, signatures, and decrees. They questioned, demanded, accused, and praised. All at once, all meaningless. Columbus sat at the table in his quarters, his head in his hands, his logbook open, his pen blunt. He wrote:*Day 312. I'm no longer an admiral. I'm an administrative error.*

A clerk came, pale, polite, with the voice of a man who had never felt the wind. "Your report, Admiral. We need details." "Which ones?" "Quantities. Measurements. Values." Columbus smiled wearily. "I can only count you dead." The clerk actually wrote it down, as if it were a number. "Good," he said. "We'll add that later." Columbus laughed loudly, bitterly, and for a long time. "Add me to it right away."

He wrote:*Bureaucracy is the sea without waves. You drown slowly but surely.*

Then came the envious ones. Young noblemen, captains without scars, men with shining shoes and empty hearts. "The admiral exaggerated," they said. "He was never there." "He betrayed the crown." Columbus heard, remained silent, and drank. One of them approached him, arrogant, his eyes moist. "Your fame is fading, old man." Columbus nodded. "Like yours before it begins."

He wrote:*Day 313. I'm not fighting anymore. I'm just waiting until they realize I never won.*

People whispered about him in the church. "He doubts the faith." "He speaks of ghosts." "He doesn't see miracles." A monk said, "He's corrupt." Columbus laughed. "I'm just honest." They hated honesty more than heresy. So they blessed him, as one blesses an animal before slaughtering it.

He wrote:*The Church loves sinners as long as they pray. I drink instead.*

Things were getting worse at court. The reports about the second voyage stank of blood and truth. The Crown wouldn't hear it. "We need hope, Admiral," one said. Columbus nodded. "Then look elsewhere." "You bring shame." "I bring facts." They wrote it down in a protocol:*The admiral shows signs of mental confusion.*

He wrote:*Day 314. Intelligence is a crime here.*

Then came a new order: He was to justify himself. In court, before God, before people who had never had wet feet. Columbus appeared in a black cloak, unwashed, unyielding. "You are accused," said the judge. "I was already condemned before I set sail," Columbus replied. "You led men to their deaths." "They were alive when they set sail. No one can promise more than that."

He wrote:*I am guilty of telling the truth. And that never expires.*

The session lasted hours. Witnesses, documents, lies. Columbus spoke little, saw much, sometimes laughed. At the end, they said: "You remain admiral. But under supervision." He nodded. "Under whose?" "Under God's," said the judge. "Then I'm safe," said Columbus.

He wrote:*Day 315. I lost, but the sea won. It remains free.*

They continued to whisper in the city.

Columbus is old.

Columbus is crazy.

Columbus was never a hero.

He walked through the streets, listening to every word, but they bounced off him like rain on stone. He knew the worst thing wasn't the mockery, but the forgetting. And that came quietly.

He wrote:*Day 316. I've become history. And history devours its parents.*

That evening, he sat in a tavern, alone, the wine warm, the air thick with smoke. A young sailor sat down next to him. "You're Columbus, aren't you?" Columbus nodded. "What's it like out there?" He looked at him, tired, honest. "Like here," he said. "Only more honest."

He wrote:*At least the sea has the decency to drown you.*

And when the night came, dark, heavy, endless, Columbus looked out the window and knew: He had enlarged the world—and wiped himself out. And that was probably fair.

Day 317. Madrid had grown louder, full of voices recounting his life without knowing it. New men returned from new voyages—boastful, bloody, confident of victory. They told stories that sounded like his own, only cleaner. Columbus sat in a tavern, listening, smoking, drinking. "That's what I said," he muttered.

"No," laughed the young officer. "Admiral de Torres said that." "Then he was drunk." "Perhaps," grinned the man. Columbus grinned back. "Then he's right."

He wrote:*Day 317. I am a shadow whispering its own name.*

The newcomers had shining armor, clean hands, and no understanding. They talked about honor, order, and glory—words that meant nothing at sea. Columbus saw their faces, young, complacent, and empty. One asked him, "You were there, Admiral. What did you really find?" Columbus drank and wiped his mouth. "Myself," he said. "And that was the worst of it."

He wrote:*The young talk about victory. The old know it wasn't one.*

The queen had fallen ill. She no longer received anyone. The letters remained unanswered, the payments were not forthcoming. Columbus sent a report anyway—half report, half confession. No reply. No seal. Only silence. He knew silence was the most polite no in history.

He wrote:*Day 318. I used to be useful. Now I'm just a memory with a beard.*

His body began to fail. Fever, trembling, back pain, as if he were still carrying the whole world on his back. He wrote anyway, daily, compulsively. He wrote because otherwise the sea would have become too loud in his head.

I am not dead, he wrote. I'm just forgotten too soon.

One of his sons came to visit him. Bartolomé, quiet, serious, with eyes that saw more than they should. "Father," he said, "they speak ill of you." Columbus nodded. "Then I'm famous." "You should defend yourselves." "For what?" "For your name." Columbus laughed, coughed. "My name has long been sold. Without me."

He wrote:*Day 319. Family is the echo that remains when fame fades.*

New ships moored at the harbor. Other admirals, other fleets, other dreams. Columbus went over and watched them set sail. He smelled the tar, heard the wood creaking, the water lapping. One of the sailors called out, "Admiral! With us again?" Columbus smiled. "No," he said. "The sea has hated me enough already."

He wrote:*Day 320. I've stopped hoping for waves. They no longer carry me.*

In the taverns, people were now talking about others—Vespucci, Pizarro, Cortés. New names, fresh fame, the same greed. Columbus drank, listened,

noded.

One said, "These men are changing the world!" Columbus laughed dryly. "Then at least they're destroying it with style."

He wrote:*I'm the first stone on the avalanche slope. The rest rolls by itself.*

His hands trembled as he wrote. He felt his strength draining, his body giving way. But his mind remained clear—too clear. He saw everything, understood everything, couldn't change anything. "I'm still here," he said to his reflection. "But no one's looking anymore."

He wrote:*Day 321. I am the ghost in the story that scratches the walls.*

And when night came, he sat alone again, the window open, the wind cold. He saw the stars, thought of the first day, the first dream of the West. And he whispered: "I should never have left. But someone would have."

He wrote:*Day 322. I was just the first to admit it.*

Day 323. Winter came early, with rain and forgetfulness. Columbus froze even with blankets, coughed, and woke up in the night drenched in sweat. He still wrote, though his fingers were stiff. He wrote because otherwise he would have lost himself.

I'm still here, he noted. *But I dissolve between lines that no one wants to read.*

The letters he sent to the court all came back. Some unopened, some with notes in the margins—small, cold sentences in an unfamiliar hand. "Unclear report." "Too melancholy." "Not in the spirit of the crown." Columbus laughed bitterly. "I've never been in anyone's spirit."

He wrote:*Day 323. My truth has become useless. Too real to print.*

Once, he was finally allowed in. Not to the queen—to the officials, the new masters of fame. They wore perfume and politics on their faces. "Admiral," said one, "we thank you. But you understand that Spain must move on." Columbus nodded. "Oh yes," he said. "Only no one asks where." Another smiled: "Your name will remain." "Then we've both lost," said Columbus.

He wrote:*Fame is the politest way to be forgotten.*

At home, he lay awake for hours later, the wind pushing against the shutters. He heard the city breathing, the distant laughter of soldiers, the calls of prostitutes, the rolling of wagons. And somewhere in between, ever so quietly

– the sea. He swore he heard it. "I haven't forgotten you," he whispered. "You haven't forgotten me either."

He wrote:*Day 324. The sea is my judge, and it has time.*

His sons came less often. They had their own struggles, their own scores to settle. Bartolomé sometimes read to him what was now being written about him. "The Admiral brought fame and fortune," he read. Columbus snorted. "And ruin. Read that too." "It doesn't say that." "Then write it down."

He wrote:*Day 325. History is a brothel, and everyone pays with truth.*

The neighbors whispered that he had gone mad. He talked in his sleep, with the sea, with ghosts, with himself. Once, early in the morning, he was found outside, barefoot, in the fog. "I'm just looking for the coast," he said. "Which coast?" asked the farmhand. "The one that still knows me."

He wrote:*I've drawn more maps than God has countries, and none of them lead home.*

He aged rapidly. His hair was white, his back was bent, his gaze sharper than ever. He saw through people as if he already knew what they would forget. "You have everything," he said to a merchant. "And soon nothing." The man didn't understand. Most didn't.

He wrote:*Day 326. I'm talking in the future tense, and no one notices.*

Then a letter arrived, thin, clean, cold: The crown officially thanked him for his services. A tenth of the promised share was granted to him—in silver, not gold. No audience. Not a word from the queen. Only ink. Columbus laughed long, dryly, like a man who understands everything and believes nothing anymore. "So this is what eternity looks like," he said.

He wrote:*Day 327. I'm paid. And this is the true ending.*

In the evening, he stood at the window, looking into the darkness. He thought of the first day when he smelled the sea, of his first dream of the West, of the feeling that anything was possible. Now he smelled only the rain, the wet wood, the mold of his own legend. "I was never a hero," he whispered. "I was just there early enough."

He wrote:*Day 328. I'm not a discoverer. I'm proof.*

And when he let the pen fall, the light flickered, and the wind brought its salty breath again, he knew he didn't need to write anymore—the sea had long since learned his story by heart.

Day 329. Winter lingered as if testing him. Columbus sat in a room that smelled of damp wood, ink, and lost time. He coughed blood but continued writing. *I'm still alive, he wrote, but that is not progress.*

His doctor, a fat man with cold fingers, said, "You need to rest, Admiral." Columbus grinned. "I've been resting for ten years. It's called forgetting." The doctor sighed, prescribed herbs, blessings, and expensive lies. Columbus drank wine instead. "At least it helps with remembering," he said.

He wrote: *Day 329. Medicine heals the body, but the body is not the problem.*

Bartolomé returned. He had new stories, new rumors. Other admirals, new discoveries, gold, slaves, glory. Columbus listened, laughing weakly. "They think they're discovering something," he said. "But they're just walking in my shadow." "You should be proud," said the son. "I am," said Columbus. "But it still stinks."

He wrote: *I was first. And that's no consolation.*

At night, he dreamed of the sea again. But it was different now—still, smooth, empty. No wind, no calling, just the endless expanse, and somewhere far away, his name dissolving like foam. He woke up, sweating, panting. "I know," he whispered. "I'll be there soon."

He wrote: *Day 330. The sea is patient. It knows that everyone will return eventually.*

In the morning, a letter arrived—small, inconspicuous, the seal royal, but cheap. He opened it with tired fingers. An offer. Another voyage. The last one. Not from the court itself, but indirectly, from people who wanted to buy new dreams with old names. Columbus smiled. "Of course," he said. "They want to see the old fool row again."

He wrote: *Day 331. I am the king's clown, and the applause is silence.*

He went out into the courtyard, leaning on his stick. The sun was too bright, the air too heavy. Children played, laughed, and threw stones into puddles. One called out, "Admiral, bring us gold!" Columbus stopped, looked at him, and

noded. "I'll bring you something better," he said. "What?" "The truth." "How much does it cost?" Columbus smiled. "More than you have."

He wrote:*Day 332. Children ask questions more intelligently than kings.*

In the evening, an old friend came—a sailor from the first voyage, toothless, limping, half-blind. They drank together, laughed briefly, then the friend fell silent. "I still dream about it," he said. "About what?" asked Columbus. "About the island." Columbus nodded. "Me too. But not about the land. About the way there." They clinked glasses. Two ghosts in the twilight.

He wrote:*We are the last ones who still know that it wasn't paradise.*

His body continued to give way. His hands trembled, his back ached, his heart stuttered. But his gaze remained sharp, cold, alert. "I'll see the sea again," he said. The doctor laughed. "Then you'll see the sky." Columbus grinned. "Then I'll go swimming."

He wrote:*Day 333. Death invited me once before. I declined. This time I'm bringing wine.*

And when night came, cold, silent, endless, Columbus sat at the window again. He heard the sound of the wind, but to him it was the sea. He whispered: "I'm coming, you bastard. But this time I decide where."

He wrote:*Day 334. I'm old, but not defeated. I just don't have any opponents anymore.*

Then he put down his pen, closed his eyes, and smiled. Not happily. Just honestly.

Day 335. The morning was gray, the light dull, his breathing heavy. Columbus sat at the table, his ink empty, his fingers cold. He had lain awake all night, counting what was left—a few coins, a name, a cough that sounded like the end. He wrote nonetheless:*Day 335. I'm still alive because the sea has forgotten.*

The letter lay before him. An offer, half promise, half temptation. Another voyage, short, poorly paid, ill-equipped. But it was the sea. That was enough. Columbus read the lines, snorted, smiled. "They're sending me off again," he said. "Because they hope I won't come back."

He wrote:*I'm cheaper dead than alive. So I'm going again to disappoint them.*

Bartolomé found him there, at the table, with the map in his hand. "You can't sail anymore," said the son. "I can do anything that hurts," Columbus replied. "You're sick." "I was never healthy." Bartolomé shook his head, angry, sad, helpless. "Why again?" Columbus looked at him, his eyes calm. "Because it's still there."

He wrote:*Day 336. Everyone has their god. Mine is salty and unpredictable.*

He stood up, slowly, like a man negotiating with his shadow. His legs trembled, but they carried him. He went to the window. The air smelled of spring, of water, of return.

He smiled. "Do you see it?" he asked quietly. "Out there, where the sky begins to lie?" The son stepped beside him, seeing nothing but fog. "There," whispered Columbus. "That's where it's waiting."

He wrote:*I have nothing left to find, but still something to lose.*

Later, the doctor returned, talking of rest, recovery, and humility. Columbus was barely listening. "You're going to die," said the doctor. Columbus grinned. "I've been told that by waves bigger than you." "I mean, soon." "Me too."

He wrote:*Day 337. I've survived more deaths than God cares to count.*

Night came, silent, like an animal testing him. He sat at the table again, the wine almost empty, his hand trembling but firm. He drew lines on the map, senseless, wrong, beautiful. It wasn't about places. It was about driving. Again. Again.

He wrote:*The goal was never land. It was movement.*

The next morning, he had himself taken to the harbor. Two men helped him, one cursing, the other silent. The air smelled of salt, and the water was smooth. He stood there, leaning on his stick, looking at the ships. Not many. Small, crooked, cheap boxes with sails. He grinned. "Fits," he said. "The gods love bad ships."

He wrote:*Day 338. I never needed beauty, only direction.*

A young sailor recognized him. "You're Columbus!" "Sometimes," he said. "You're sailing again?" "Yes." "Why?" Columbus smiled. "Because the sea knows me. And no one else."

He wrote:*Water never forgets you. Even if you die dry.*

Then he climbed aboard, slowly, majestically, like a king without a kingdom. The wind played with his cloak, the sun stung. He smelled the sea, took a deep breath, coughed, and laughed. "So there you are," he said quietly. "I missed you, you bastard."

He wrote:*Day 339. I'm back where it all began. Maybe I'll get there this time.*

And as the ship broke away, the ropes fell, the wood creaked, the waves rose, Columbus knew he would not return. But he was finally back where no one asked him if it had been worth it.

He wrote:*Day 340. The rest belongs to the sea.*

Cheers, lies, jealousy

Day 341. Madrid was a circus of cheers and venom. No sooner had anyone heard that Columbus had set sail again than the howling began. Streets filled with voices, market criers, poets, priests—all shouting the same word:*Hero*. But they meant something else. They meant:*Finally someone who dies for us again*.

Columbus had barely disappeared over the horizon when new songs were already being printed.

He brings paradise.

He sails in God's name.

Nobody wrote:*He flees*.

No one wanted to read that. In the taverns, they toasted him, drank to his name, and then spat into the cup.

"Someone like him," said a merchant, "he never comes back. And that's good for business."

He wrote (in a letter that was never sent):*Day 341. I am more famously absent than alive.*

At court, the courtiers grinned behind their fans. "He's getting old," they said. "He's weakening." "Maybe he won't even make it to India." "Then we'll just rewrite it." The pen was always faster than the sea. And lies dried more easily than blood.

In the chapel, they prayed for his safe return. But the priests were thinking of gold, not grace. One bishop whispered, "God bless his journey." Another, "And our income." Amen.

He wrote:*Prayer is just a business model with better acoustics.*

Isabella listened to the reports. She remained silent. Her body had grown weary, her faith heavy. She gazed into the candle flame, thinking of the man with the rough beard, whom she had once called "Admiral." "He will not return," she said quietly. A servant asked, "Shall we pray, Your Majesty?" She shook her head. "No. He knows himself where God dwells."

He wrote:*Day 342. I continue sailing in their minds, but no one knows where.*

And while the country celebrated, while the bells rang, while poets composed verses about him, those who truly knew him sat quietly in the taverns. Old sailors, with salt in their bones and waves in their eyes. One said: "He won't come back." Another: "Maybe he doesn't want to." They clinked glasses, remained silent, drank to a man who had long since become more legend than flesh.

He wrote (last sentence of the night):*Spain rejoices, but the sea laughs. It already knows the end.*

Day 343. The palace smelled of ink, fear, and vanity. The men who knew too much and had experienced too little sat over maps and reports. They talked about Columbus as if he were a number, not a person. "He overestimates himself," said one. "He's wrong," said another. "He'll fall," said the third, and they all nodded, satisfied, like scribes explaining the storm in paragraphs.

The courtiers hated him. Not because he had failed—but because he had dared. He had remained a stranger, a man without pedigree, without inheritance, without grace. One who dreamed in the wrong language. And they didn't like dreamers who had succeeded.

He wrote (in his logbook):*Day 343. In Spain, they're now counting my mistakes. I'm counting the stars. Same work, only more honest.*

In the halls of the palace, rumors hissed like snakes. There was talk of abuse, of brutality, of blasphemy. The priests nodded, the nobles smiled, the merchants feigned surprise. "He was too rude," they said. "Too greedy." "Too common." And one whispered, "Too successful." That was the true sin.

A young sailor, barely over twenty, had returned from the last ship. He brought stories with him—dirty, raw, real. Of fever, violence, of Columbus commanding himself as if he were God. The courtiers listened to him, drank in his courage, then his words, then his testimony. At the end, it was written: *The Admiral is dangerous.*

He wrote: *Day 344. If you're a hero long enough, they'll start calling you a tyrant.*

The queen remained silent. She had the reports examined, the numbers, the dead, the ships. But there was something else in her eyes—weariness. A quiet knowledge that truth and utility rarely mix. "He has brought us wealth," said one of her advisors. "And unrest," she whispered. "Which weighs more, Your Majesty?" She looked at him. "Depends on who's doing the counting."

He wrote: *The Crown has learned to weigh guilt in gold.*

In the city's taverns, they told new stories. About another admiral, younger, more God-fearing, more Spanish. They called him the future. Columbus was past. And the past sells well as long as it's quiet.

A poet wrote: *Columbus opened the gate so that Spain could enter.*
A dealer wrote below: *And he stayed outside.*

He wrote: *Day 345. I've become her fairy tale. And fairy tales aren't allowed to have teeth.*

By the end of the week, everything was decided without anyone saying it out loud. Columbus was officially a hero—and unofficially finished. They would drink to him, they would celebrate him, they would replace him. The queen signed the new expeditions with a steady hand. Then she said quietly, "May the sea keep him."

He wrote (with the last ink of that night): *I'm still alive, but my place in history has already been taken.*

Day 346. Spain glowed. Not with pride, but with acquisitiveness. The reports from the New World came faster than the ships—with gold dust, with smells, with blood between the lines. And every new word that crossed the Atlantic became cleaner, shinier, more usable. They washed his deeds until they looked like miracles.

Columbus was now proof of God's plan. And at the same time, the reason why more weapons were needed.

He wrote (from the logbook, at sea):*Day 346. They pray for me because they believe in my gold, not my soul.*

New tapestries hung in Madrid. They depicted him with a halo, his hand on the mast, the cross behind his back, his gaze directed toward heaven. A hero made of cloth. The queen had them consecrated, the church blessed them, the people bought prints of them in the market. And no one could smell the sweat, the fever, the filth that went with them anymore.

The sermons now spoke of the "Second Eden." "God has shown us through the Admiral that paradise lies on earth!" The priest shouted, the crowd cheered, and in the back row sat an old sailor who just shook his head. "Eden stinks of corpses," he muttered. But no one heard him.

He wrote:*Day 347. They turn blood into incense.*

In the inns, the traders told new legends. Of golden rivers, of gentle natives, of cities of silver. "The Admiral saw them," they said. "The Admiral described them." "The Admiral," thought Columbus, somewhere out at sea, "invented them to stay alive."

He wrote:*I lied to hope. They believe to forget.*

At court, his name became a coin. People paid with him. They traded with him. They blessed documents with *In the name of the Admiral*. The queen knew she had created a myth that could no longer be stopped. A myth was useful—it ate no food, asked no questions, and could be used until it stank.

He wrote:*Day 348. I am now holy, and that is the worst thing that can happen to a sinner.*

But the more Spain rejoiced, the colder it became in the palace. People talked about the next destination, about new lands, about even greater conquests. Columbus's name remained as a foundation—but no one looked anymore. Like an old coin that had passed through too many hands too often.

One diplomat said, "He was the beginning." Another, "And now he's an obstacle." They both nodded, drank, and smiled.

He wrote:*Day 349. Fame is the polite form of repression.*

And when the bells rang in the night, because another ship full of gold had arrived somewhere, the queen stood at the window and looked into the darkness. "He was a tool," she said quietly. A monk behind her whispered, "Of God?" "Of greed," she answered.

He wrote:*Spain is praying to me. And I'm praying that they'll finally stop.*

Day 350. In Spain, they told stories about him that he barely recognized. They performed plays, wrote poems, sang songs, and painted pictures. The admiral as a prophet who had tamed the sea. The admiral who spoke with angels. The admiral who was said to have seen the face of God. He himself would have laughed about it if it hadn't been so sad.

He wrote (at sea, in his logbook):*Day 350. I am the hero of a religion I never founded.*

The printers were busy. Books about his voyages, about miracles, about divine missions. Columbus, the saint of progress. Columbus, the messiah of commerce. Columbus, the man who saved the world. He read one of them, sent to him—his name in bold, his face fake. "Nice work," he murmured. "Too bad it's about me."

He wrote:*I only wanted to go west. Now I've become a direction.*

The new captains talked about him as if he were already dead. "He broke the sea," said one. "He was the first, but not the best," said another. "He was lucky," said a third, young, arrogant, clueless. Columbus sat nearby, listening, smiling quietly. "Lucky?" he said. "Then I wish you a damned lot of it."

He wrote:*Day 351. They call it luck because they're afraid of consequences.*

In churches, he was painted on walls. Kneeling, praying, illuminated. A monk asked, "What did he really look like?" "Like a miracle," replied the painter, wiping the sweat from his brow. Yet Columbus had never prayed kneeling, only cursed standing. But truth sold worse than grace.

He wrote:*I was never religious. I was just desperate for direction.*

The court held a feast in his honor. Without him. They toasted, talked, sang. A new admiral stood up and delivered a speech. "We are continuing his work!" Applause. "He showed us the way!" Applause. "He is the father of our empire!" Even more applause. Columbus had long since been out at sea, somewhere

between storm and star, coughing, writing, laughing. He would have spurned the wine.

He wrote:*Day 352. I am their father. And they are my punishment.*

The queen read reports of new discoveries. Other names were beneath them. Other signatures, other victories.

Columbus only appeared in the margins—as a memory, as a quote, as a footnote. She put the text aside and sighed. "That's how all explorers end," she said. "From storm to footnote."

He wrote:*Day 353. I am history's footstep, disguised as a footnote.*

And at night, when the sea was still, when the men slept and only the wind whispered with the sails, Columbus heard it again—the calling, the breathing, the ancient song of the water. He laughed softly, wearily, honestly. "I know, I know," he whispered. "You were always more honest than they."

He wrote:*I don't belong to Spain. I belong to the sea. And the sea doesn't want heroes.*

Day 354. Banners bearing his face now hung in the streets. Only it wasn't his. Smoother, younger, more beautiful—the way people prefer to see legends. Columbus had long since become a symbol, and symbols don't age. They lie to themselves forever young.

He wrote (at sea):*Day 354. I found the land, but lost myself. Now they find me again, every day—only not the real me.*

The new reports about the New World came like a wave. Reports of other admirals, other heroes, other gods. His name was still on the first pages, like a worn talisman. But the gold they found had long since taken on other faces. He read a document that an officer brought him —*"Thanks to the discoverer Columbus, whose work is completed by our heroes of faith."*

He laughed. "Complete," he murmured. "As if truth were a house that could be finished."

He wrote:*I was the first stone. And now they're dancing on the foundation.*

In the taverns, they told each other that Columbus had long since gone mad. That he talked to the sea. That he saw gold in the water. That he had offended God. "He went too far," said one. "He saw too deeply," said another. "He survived too much," said no one.

He wrote:*Day 355. If they don't understand you, they call you sick. If you're right, they call you dead.*

In Madrid, there were now competitions: whoever knew more about Columbus was allowed to dine at royal tables. Poets, priests, merchants – all competed to interpret him better than he had understood himself. A young scholar wrote a book: *“Colón – God’s chosen one.”*

Another wrote: *“Colón – the tool of the devil.”*

And both received praise. Because both fit the market.

He wrote: *I am the canvas on which they paint their own stupidity.*

The Queen spoke to the people. She stood on the balcony, looking out over the cheering crowd. "He has brought glory to Spain!" Cheers. "He has spread the light of faith!" More cheers. "And he has opened the world!" The people roared, the bells rang, the sky shone brightly. But below, in one of the alleys, an old man murmured: "And hell, too."

He wrote:*Day 356. Glory is a grave with a golden inscription.*

The courtiers whispered about his return. "When he comes back, he should report." "If he survives." "If he's still alive." And one whispered, "If not—so much the better." They laughed, clinked glasses, and acted as if they deserved it.

He wrote: *I can feel it. They're waiting for my death like a delivery from overseas.*

Then night came, and the sea was black, still, and endless. Columbus stood on deck, the wind cold on his face, the sky full and empty at once. He thought of Spain, of the cheering crowds, of the faces that had never seen him. He whispered, "You celebrate me because you lie to yourselves." Then he looked at the water, which moved as if it were breathing, and smiled. "But you," he said, "at least you're honest."

He wrote:*Day 357. I am no hero, no sinner, no prophet. I am simply the one who set out when no one dared.*

And as he lowered his pen, he knew that the celebration in Spain was over before it had even begun. Jubilation, lies, jealousy—the triad of an empire that has defeated itself.

Second ride, double hell

Day 358. They called it the second voyage, as if it were just a repeat. But Columbus knew: nothing repeats itself, except mistakes. This time there were seventeen ships—too many, too loud, too greedy. Over a thousand men who imagined they were making history, while they were merely cargo. Monks, soldiers, traders, convicts. Everyone wanted gold, no one wanted the truth. Columbus stood at the quay, watched them board, saw the metal in their eyes. "This time," he murmured, "I'm not sailing with explorers. I'm sailing with vultures."

He wrote:*Day 358. Greed carries crosses, and no one notices the difference.*

The wind was light, the sea calm as they set sail. The ships creaked, the men sang, drank, and boasted. Columbus wasn't listening. He had his maps before him, the old lines, the new dreams, all stained, wine, salt, and sweat. He no longer drew paths, only escapes.

He wrote:*I no longer drive to find. I drive to forget.*

The sun burned, day after day, the sky cloudless as if in mockery. The men played dice, argued, and fought. One was thrown overboard for cheating at cards. Another for talking too loudly about the admiral. Columbus saw it, but said nothing. The sea was judgment enough.

He wrote:*Day 359. I've stopped trying to save her. The sea does a better job.*

At night he dreamed of Spain. Of the halls, the cheers, the false faces. He saw himself, on tapestries, holy, untouched. And he woke up, sweating, laughing, bitter. "Holy," he whispered, "holy is he who dies too soon."

He wrote:*I saw the sky. It smells of mold and perfume.*

After three weeks, the water began to rot. The barrels leaked, tongues grew dry, and the bread turned green. A sailor came to him, begging for wine. Columbus gave him his ration. "Thank you, Admiral," said the man. "You're fair." Columbus laughed. "No. I'm just thirsty for something else."

He wrote:*Day 360. I'm drinking hope now. Tastes like rust.*

The men began to doubt. They cursed, prayed, threatened. "He doesn't know where," said one. "He's led us before," said another. "Yes," roared the first, "but this time the sea wants to keep him." Columbus heard them, remained

silent, stared into the darkness. He knew that sound—the fear on the verge of collapse. And somewhere deep inside, he felt it too.

He wrote:*Day 361. I'm on course. But the goal is missing.*

The night was still, the water smooth, the sky clear. A star fell, slowly, beautifully, indifferently. Columbus watched it. "Perhaps that was the sign," he murmured. "Or just a farewell."

He wrote:*I'm going again. But this time no one is curious.*

Day 362. The wind shifted, but not like before—now it came in fits and starts, capriciously, like an animal that no longer knows its direction. The sails flapped, the men cursed, the ropes creaked like teeth. Columbus stood on deck, his face to the wind, and felt that something was wrong. "Heaven is testing us," said a monk. Columbus grinned. "Heaven isn't testing anything. Heaven is just watching us tear ourselves apart."

He wrote:*Day 362. The storm is merely a reflection of the crew.*

They were barely human anymore, more like starving people on two legs. The bread had long since gone bad, the water murky, the fish lean. One died while eating—choked, just like that. Another fell from the yardarm because he was gorging himself while cursing. Columbus watched as the men threw him into the sea, without prayer, without honor. "The sea has an appetite," he murmured. No one laughed.

He wrote:*The water takes what the sky leaves.*

At night, the sounds came. A whimpering somewhere between the planks, a whisper from the sails, voices that belonged to no one. The men believed in demons, in curses, in spirits from the deep. Columbus believed in fatigue. He spoke loudly to break the silence. "If there's anything alive there," he said, "let it come here. I have questions."

He wrote:*Day 363. I'm talking to shadows now. At least they're not giving stupid answers.*

One of the officers approached him, his eyes hollow, his beard covered in salt. "Admiral," he said, "the men doubt." "They always do," Columbus replied. "More so this time." "Then they should pray." "To whom?" Columbus laughed. "To whoever is listening." "And if no one is listening?" "Then they just talk louder."

He wrote:*I'm not a preacher. I'm just the guy who doesn't throw up when the rocks are rocking.*

The days grew longer, the voices shorter. The sun burned, the water stank, and every breath tasted of fear. Columbus sat at the helm, writing, reading old lines he himself had forgotten. "What am I looking for?" he asked quietly. The helmsman beside him didn't answer. He had fallen asleep standing up.

He wrote:*Day 364. I'm looking for the point where hope becomes habit.*

A man began to sing. Slowly, out of tune, beautifully. A song about returning home. Another joined in, then another. Soon the whole ship was singing—broken, crooked, desperate. Columbus listened. For a moment, it sounded almost human. Then one toppled forward, mid-chorus, and lay there. No one stopped.

He wrote:*Day 365. Music is when dying gets a beat.*

The night was warm, the air heavy. Columbus stood at the bow again, looking out. The sea shone black, smooth, silent. He looked into it as if he wanted to understand. "I know," he whispered. "I'm tired of myself, too."

He wrote:*I think the sea is breathing with us. It's just moaning more quietly.*

And somewhere in the darkness, between sky and water, something laughed. Not evil. Just knowing.

Day 366. The sea lay there like a dead mirror. No wind, no sound, no promise. The sails hung limp, the wood creaked, the men sweated and cursed until they were too weak to curse. It was as if the sea had held its breath. Columbus stood on deck, staring at the smooth surface that no longer wanted to tell him anything. "Offended?" he murmured. "Or fed up?"

He wrote:*Day 366. The sea is calm. I'm not. So I lose.*

The water began to smell. Not of salt, but of iron and decay. The barrels were almost empty, the last drops bitter, warm, stale. One man drank his own piss, another killed a bird he had found in the sail. They ate it raw. A monk made the sign of the cross, but his hands trembled. "God is testing us," he said. Columbus laughed. "Then he should test us fairly."

He wrote:*I'm no longer afraid of God. I'm thirsty.*

The days crawled by. The sky was so blue it hurt, the light too bright, the water too smooth. Sometimes Columbus thought the sea was whispering. Sometimes it was deliberately silent. And sometimes he thought it was no longer thinking at all. He began to talk to himself, loudly, calmly, matter-of-factly.

"Christopher," he said, "you're a fool." "True," he replied. "But you're a bigger one." The helmsman heard him and pretended he hadn't heard.

He wrote:*Day 367. I talk to myself because the others aren't listening, and God doesn't understand Spanish.*

A sailor died in the night. No fever, no fall—he simply stopped. The men threw him overboard. The water remained smooth. "Not even hunger," one said.

"The sea doesn't want him." Columbus watched until the body disappeared.

"Perhaps it has taste," he murmured.

He wrote:*The sea only eats what it understands.*

The next morning, someone shouted. "Land! Land to the west!" The men ran, staggered, laughed, cried. Columbus came slowly, his hand over his eyes.

Nothing. Only clouds, flat, dirty, deceptive. The man who had shouted it was beaten. Not because he had lied, but because he had hoped.

He wrote:*Day 368. Hope is the most dangerous tool on board.*

The night was hot. Columbus lay awake, listening to the men murmuring. They whispered his name. Not admiringly. Not respectfully. Like a curse. One said, "He cursed us." Another, "He sold God." And one, quietly, coldly, "We should throw him overboard. Then the wind will come." Columbus smiled in the darkness. "Perhaps you're right," he whispered.

He wrote:*I am their victim before they realize they themselves are lost.*

Then, just before dawn, the sea moved—barely perceptibly, like a breath.

Columbus sat up, smelled the wind, felt the tension in the wood. "Come on," he said. "Wake up, you old beast." And when the first gust of wind came, it blew across the deck like a mockery.

He wrote:*Day 369. The wind is laughing. And I'm laughing along.*

Day 370. The wind returned, but not as they needed it. It came like anger. The sails tore, the masts creaked, the water beat against the wood as if it wanted revenge. Columbus held on to the railing, his eyes open, his lips dry. The men screamed, prayed, fought.

A priest fell to his knees, a soldier kicked him away. "Your God can't row!" he roared. Columbus laughed, loudly, wildly, honestly. "Finally, someone says it."

He wrote:*Day 370. The storm has more truth in its mouth than the Bible.*

The sea raged for three days. They lost two ships, three men, and sixteen barrels of water. One jumped voluntarily, screaming, laughing, splintering. Another clung to the cross of the mast until it broke. Columbus watched, silent, empty, knowing. "It's not the wrath of God," he murmured. "It's just the sea that's bored."

He wrote:*I've stopped begging for mercy. I just want things to finally be honest.*

When the storm subsided, the silence was worse. The men sat there, soaked, exhausted, empty. They looked to him, not as a leader, but as a reason. One came to him, his face contorted, his voice hoarse. "What for, Admiral? What is all this for?" Columbus looked at him. "For what lies beyond." "And what lies beyond?" Columbus was silent. He no longer knew.

He wrote:*Day 371. I'm no longer looking for land. I'm looking for meaning.*

At night, the whispering began again. Not about him—with him. Voices from the darkness, quiet, strange, familiar. "You should have stayed," they said. "You should have died," others said. Columbus answered, "I know." He looked out into the water, and for a moment he thought he saw faces—men who had already fallen, swimming, calm, with their eyes open. "I'm coming," he whispered. They nodded.

He wrote:*Day 372. The sea has better company than the court.*

On the fourth day, the first blow fell. Two men argued over bread, then over debt, then over everything. One drew a knife, the other a Bible. Both fell. Columbus stepped between them, slowly, unwaveringly. "Enough," he said. One of the sailors spat at his feet. "You are the devil, Admiral." Columbus smiled. "Then you finally have someone to believe in."

He wrote:*Day 373. Everyone needs a god. I'll just give them one made of flesh.*

That night, he heard the sea again. But this time it wasn't laughing. It sighed, deep, sad, ancient. "I know," whispered Columbus. "I deserve it." The sky remained black, the water still. Only the planks spoke—the slow groan of something that still lives, but no longer wants to.

He wrote:*I'm still here. And this is my punishment.*

And somewhere far out, beyond the darkness, thunder sounded, like a final round of applause.

Day 374. The wind was gone, the water calm, the men silent. They looked like corpses who had forgotten they were dead. The sun came out, as if nothing had happened, as if the storm were merely a bad dream. Columbus stood on deck, his eyes red, his beard salty. He breathed slowly, searchingly, almost suspiciously. "That's it?" he asked. "So simple?" The sea was silent. And that was precisely what made it so dangerous.

He wrote:*Day 374. The silence after the storm is worse. It reeks of guilt.*

The men began to talk again—carefully, quietly, as if words might break. One muttered a prayer, another cursed, a third laughed hysterically until he was howling. Columbus let them. He knew that every voice here was merely an attempt to hold on to reason. A monk approached him, his hands trembling. "You have guided us, Admiral. Perhaps we are saved." Columbus looked at him. "Saved?" "Yes." "Then look around." The monk did so. Then he fell silent.

He wrote:*I'm no longer a leader. I'm just the last person who still knows why it hurts.*

The sun burned again, the skin burst, the salt ate into wounds that no one counted anymore. An officer came to Columbus, pale, thin, with a broken look. "Admiral," he said, "we survived." Columbus nodded. "And?" "And... what now?" Columbus grinned. "Now we pretend it was worth it."

He wrote:*Day 375. Survival is not mercy. It's the burden of proof.*

At night, he barely slept. He saw faces staring at him, faces he himself had thrown into the sea—or should have thrown. He heard voices repeating his commands, only distorted, as if coming from the belly of the sea. "You wanted it," they whispered. "I wanted land," he whispered back. "You wanted guilt." He laughed. "Maybe. At least it's real."

He wrote:*Day 376. I found everything I wanted to avoid.*

In the morning, land came into sight. A line, barely visible, but real. The men screamed, laughed, fell to their knees, kissed the wood they had hated. Columbus stood there, calm, still, empty. He knew what was coming. New land, old greed, the same hell—only with palm trees. He looked at the horizon,

blinking against the light. "Very well," he said quietly. "Then the drama continues."

He wrote:*Day 377. We're here. And this is the worst part.*

As the ship approached the coast, Columbus turned toward the sea. "I'll come back," he said. "If they try to kill me again." Then he turned away. The sand waited. So did hell.

He wrote:*End of the second run. Beginning of the penalty.*

Jungle, hunger, mosquito hell

Day 378. They called it land, but it smelled of decay. The ground was damp, the green too bright, the air too thick to breathe. Swarms of mosquitoes, bigger than thumbs, persistent as guilt. The men stumbled, coughed, and spat. One fell into the sand and kissed it, another vomited on it. Columbus stepped beside it, looked around. "So this is it," he murmured. "The promised land." A priest raised his hands. "God has guided us!" Columbus nodded. "Then he has a sense of humor."

He wrote:*Day 378. Land. Warm, loud, hostile. I almost feel at home.*

They built camps. Wood, wet leaves, sweat. Nothing held, everything broke. The fire wouldn't burn, the water wouldn't flow, the men wouldn't obey. The mosquitoes came in clouds. They settled on skin, eyes, and lips, drinking blood like wine. After two days, everyone looked like lepers. "Admiral," said an officer, "we need a miracle." Columbus looked at him. "I only have maps."

He wrote:*Hell has no fire. It sweats.*

No one slept at night. The chirping, the buzzing, the whimpering from the forest, all too loud, too close, too strange. One man ran out screaming and never returned. Another hacked open his foot in a panic, thinking a snake was holding him. Columbus watched as they slowly lost their minds. He knew it wasn't the jungle that killed them. It was the silence afterward.

He wrote:*Day 379. Humans can tolerate noise better than senselessness.*

On the fourth day, they found a river. Clear, treacherous, calm. The men jumped in, drank, bathed, and prayed. An hour later, three died. Their

stomachs bloated, their eyes white. The water was poisoned—or they were. Columbus stood on the bank, watched the bodies float. "You wanted baptism," he said. "Now you have it."

He wrote:*I think God bathes here too. Just on the wrong side.*

The sun was high, relentless, as they moved on. The ground sucked at their boots as if it wanted to keep them. The men cursed, the monks prayed, Columbus was silent. He felt the land looking at him—not as an adversary, but as a witness. "I know," he murmured. "I'm no better."

He wrote:*Day 380. The jungle doesn't lie. That's why everyone hates it.*

And that night, when they finally sat by the fire, which was burning this time, Columbus sat still and listened. Not to the animals. Not to the men. But to the land itself. It breathed. Slowly, deeply, dangerously. Like the sea. "Second voyage, double hell," he murmured. "And I've only just begun."

He wrote:*The sea wanted to kill me. The land wants to keep me.*

Day 381. The camp stank. Of sweat, blood, rot, and hopelessness. The fire burned weakly, the wood was wet, the water was sickly. Columbus sat on a rock, his face hollow, his gaze empty. He saw men dying, not loudly, not heroically—just quietly, like candles that have run out of air. "How many?" he asked the clerk. "Ten, Admiral." "Today?" "Only today." Columbus nodded. "At least steadily."

He wrote:*Day 381. Death is more punctual here than the sun.*

The mosquitoes were everywhere. They flew into mouths, eyes, and wounds. The men hit each other to get rid of them. A priest shouted that they were demons. A sailor laughed. "Then at least they're eating fairly." Columbus grinned, bloody honestly. "God has a sense of humor. He sends us tiny executioners."

He wrote:*Hell has wings and buzzes.*

The food ran out. What they hunted killed them. What they ate made them sick. One bit into a fruit that looked like salvation and died with a smile. Another hacked meat from a dead horse that had been lying in the sun for two days. Columbus smelled it but said nothing. He knew hunger was stronger than dignity.

He wrote:*Day 382. Man is the only animal that prays before eating.*

The men began to doubt him. "He doesn't know where he's going," they said. "He's leading us to the grave," others said. Columbus heard this, remained silent, and continued writing. One stepped before him, his face covered in stitches, his gaze hollow. "Admiral," he said, "are you afraid?" Columbus nodded. "Every day." "And why are you laughing then?" "Because no one else can."

He wrote:*I don't laugh because it's funny. I laugh so it doesn't stop.*

At night, fear crept out of the jungle like fog. Animals screamed, leaves rustled, something growled that no one wanted to see. A monk preached loudly to drown out the noise. "God is testing us!" A sailor yelled back: "Then let him try it himself!" Columbus sat among them, drinking from his canteen, grinning wearily. "I'd even let him row," he said.

He wrote:*Day 383. The jungle doesn't talk. It only listens until you betray yourself.*

In the morning, a man was found hanging from a tree, his tongue black, his eyes open. No one asked why. No one prayed. Columbus looked at him, then into the forest. "One less to notice," he said. Then he turned away.

He wrote:*The country is more honest than Spain. At least here you die without a contract.*

And as night came, and the wind flattened the flames, Columbus thought back to the sea. "You were cruel," he murmured. "But you never bit me."

He wrote:*Day 384. I'm starting to miss the water.*

Day 385. The air was thick as soup, breathing was painful. The sun burned the minds out of their heads, the jungle devoured the rest. The men barely slept, talking in their fever, laughing as they died. One woke up in the night, screaming that ants were stealing his skin. Another said he saw angels—with knives. Columbus recorded both as if they were the weather.

He wrote:*Day 385. When reason evaporates, only truth remains. And it's ugly.*

The fevers came like gifts. First sweat, then trembling, then smiles. Some danced, others prayed, all died. A priest shouted that this was God's cleansing.

Columbus looked at him, saw the blisters on his skin. "Then he cleaned himself thoroughly," he said. The man died smiling.

He wrote:*Those who believe in heaven have it easier when hell begins.*

The meal was long over. The men chewed bark, grass, leather. One was cutting meat from a dead comrade. No one stopped him. Columbus looked, not away. "At least make a cross," he said. The man did so. Then he continued eating. And Columbus wrote.

He wrote:*Day 386. Morality is a luxury that hunger cannot afford.*

An officer, otherwise cold and disciplined, began to preach. He told them that the land was cursed, that they would die for having set foot on it. Columbus laughed dryly. "Then at least we were right that it's there." The officer stared at him. "You're crazy." "Finally," said Columbus, "someone's noticed."

He wrote:*Reason is the first victim. The second is you.*

At night, screams could be heard from the forest. Not animals. Men. Lost, abandoned, or those who never wanted to return. Columbus sat by the fire, listening, drinking, writing. "We are not lost," he murmured. "We have arrived." A monk looked at him in horror. "What are you talking about?" Columbus pointed to the sky. "From up there. No one is home there either."

He wrote:*Day 387. The jungle doesn't pray. It feeds in silence.*

The next day, three men were found dead—side by side, arms around each other, as if intentional. One held a piece of paper in his hand: a map. Columbus took it, looked at it, and laughed. A circle, no destination, no end. "Better than mine," he said.

He wrote:*I think the land is marking us as we walk on it.*

In the evening, the rain came. Hard, loud, endless. It extinguished the fire, the hope, the remnants of order. Columbus stood in the middle of it, letting himself get soaked, looking up at the sky. "Come on," he cried. "Clean me up!" The rain responded with mud.

He wrote:*Day 388. God washes with dirt. Maybe that's fair.*

And in the darkness, amidst lightning and roar, Columbus thought: The sea was never my enemy. It was here.

This living grave that breathes and thinks and devours you, without anger, without reason.

He wrote:*I've found the West. And it doesn't want me.*

Day 389. The camp was no longer a camp, but a graveyard that still breathed. Tents collapsed, men crept like shadows among the corpses. No one spoke anymore. They huffed, they coughed, they waited. Columbus sat by the fire, if you could call it that—a smoking hole in the earth. He wrote because it was the only thing that hadn't yet rotted.

He wrote:*Day 389. When death becomes part of everyday life, politeness begins again.*

The jungle crept closer. It sent roots, vines, sounds, all at once. At night, there was rustling, cracking, and hissing. By morning, things were gone—weapons, barrels, people. "The natives," someone whispered. "The land," said Columbus. "The land eats what moves."

He wrote:*Man thinks he owns. The earth laughs and waits.*

One of the men, half-naked, half-dead, emerged from the forest. His body was covered in bites, his gaze empty. "I saw God," he murmured. Columbus asked, "So?" "He was barefoot." Then he fell over and died. Columbus nodded. "Sounds like him."

He wrote:*Day 390. Revelations here stink of blood.*

A few survivors wanted to return to the sea. "At least there's wind out there," one said. Columbus looked at him, long and calm. "And then what?" "Then we die there." Columbus nodded. "Sounds logical." They left. No one came back.

He wrote:*I envy them. Not their courage, but their goal.*

One of the monks began to hear voices. He was preaching against the forest. "Satan lives here!" he shouted. Columbus laughed. "Then he has taste." The monk tried to hit him, but fell because his legs betrayed him. Columbus helped him up and gave him water that tasted bad. "God is testing me," whispered the monk. "No," said Columbus. "He's just watching to see if you notice."

He wrote:*Day 391. Faith is a trick you forget when things get serious.*

In the evening, they heard drums coming from the forest. Long, deep, steady. A few men ran in panic, others remained petrified. Columbus sat there, drinking, listening. "Music," he murmured. "Finally, something without morals."

He wrote:*The stranger has more tact than we do.*

The rain returned. It fell on tents, corpses, wounds, thoughts. Everything sounded the same. Columbus leaned back, looked up at the sky, which no longer made any distinctions. "I give up," he said. "But with style."

He wrote:*Day 392. The West is not a place. It is a state.*

And as night fell, slowly, warmly, mercilessly, he knew: No one here was a conqueror anymore. Only prey, still breathing.

Day 393. He woke up because his body was shaking, as if he were afraid of himself. The fever had finally caught up with him—justice that takes its time. Sweat, cold, flames under his skin. He saw double, talked to trees, wrote with fingers that barely knew what ink was anymore. "How many are still alive?" he asked a shadow. "Fewer than yesterday," the shadow answered. "Good," Columbus murmured. "Then at least we're being consistent."

He wrote:*Day 393. I'm not sick. I'm just on the same frequency as the country.*

The mosquitoes hummed melodies in his ears that sounded like truth. The water tasted of metal, the sky of fire. He lay in the dirt, half-conscious, half-awake, and felt the jungle embrace him. Not angrily. Just matter-of-factly. "I know," he whispered. "You're just being honest."

He wrote:*Nature forgives nothing, but it never lies either.*

The men still standing stopped talking to him. They saw him not as an admiral, not as a leader, not as a prophet. Just an old man writing against something that had no eyes. One approached him, paused, and said, "Why are you still writing?" Columbus grinned. "Because otherwise it'll eat me." "And if it eats you anyway?" "Then at least someone will read it."

He wrote:*Day 394. I'm writing against disappearance. Maybe it's enough for a paragraph.*

The jungle slowly took everything back. Tents, wood, weapons, people. The earth opened up, swallowing what it didn't like. In the end, all that remained was smoke, dirt, and the rustling of leaves. Columbus walked through what had

once been a camp and stepped on a helmet, half rusted, half cursed. He picked it up, turned it in his hands, and put it on his head. "Now I'm an admiral again," he said, laughing.

He wrote:*If you fight too long, even madness becomes routine.*

The fever came in waves. He talked to God, to the sea, to himself, to the earth. No one answered. "Everyone's busy," he murmured. "As usual." He looked up at the sky, searching for stars, but found none. Only clouds, heavy, fat, indifferent. He nodded. "This is what truth looks like."

He wrote:*Day 395. I've discovered the world. But she wants to remain anonymous.*

Then the rain came again, so heavy that the fire was extinguished, the last supplies were washed away, and the ground swallowed them all—slowly, relishably, like an animal that knows no one else will bother it. Columbus fell into the mud, half laughing, half praying. He looked into the darkness and whispered, "You win. But I was there."

He wrote:*Day 396. End of camp. Beginning of confession.*

And that was it. The jungle was silent. And Columbus laughed softly, as if he had finally understood what it had all been about.

Blood in the sand of Hispaniola

Day 397. They called it a "settlement." A few huts, a few graves, a cross. A bad joke in the middle of a good land. The sand was red with clay—or blood, no one asked anymore. Columbus stood at the edge, his beard covered in salt, his eyes weary. "So this is civilization," he said. A monk nodded reverently. Columbus grinned. "Then hell is just the next step."

He wrote:*Day 397. We have begun to insult the Earth.*

The men built with trembling hands. They chopped wood, hauled stones, cursed and prayed alternately. A few natives watched them from a distance—silent, upright, curious. No one dared to wave to them. Columbus felt her gaze, the weight of her calm. "They know more than we do,"

he murmured. A soldier laughed. "They know nothing." Columbus looked at him. "Then they are blessed."

He wrote:*The wise build houses. The wise leave them standing.*

On the third day, the first quarrel broke out. One man stole bread, another caught him, and both reached for knives. Columbus intervened, but his voice was already too weak. "We are brothers," he said. "We are hungry," one answered. And the other stabbed. The sand took the blood without protest. Columbus looked, not away. "Now we belong," he murmured.

He wrote:*Day 398. Every beginning smells of iron.*

They found gold—not much, but enough to destroy everything. A few grains, shining, innocent. A soldier lifted them into the sun, screamed, laughed, and fell to his knees. "God has blessed us!" Columbus saw the gold, saw the gleam, saw the greed in everyone's eyes. He knew what that meant. "Here we go," he said. No one understood him.

He wrote:*Gold is the only thing that turns people into animals without them realizing it.*

The natives approached, cautiously, friendly. They brought fruit, water, and smiled. One man took the offerings, another wanted more. Then the first blow fell. And then the second. And then many more. Columbus screamed, but no one heard him. He saw paradise turn red and knew: Now it was over.

He wrote:*Day 399. Man can kill even peace if he has nothing else to kill.*

That evening, Columbus sat alone. The sea roared, the wind smelled of smoke. He looked at his hands—dirty, shaky, old. "I wanted to find paths," he whispered. "Now I'm finding graves." Then he drank from his canteen, closed his eyes, and the sea seemed to laugh.

He wrote:*Day 400. Hispaniola. Beautiful, corrupt, honest.*

Day 401. The morning smelled of fire and regret. Smoke drifted over the camp, voices shouted, metal sang. A few of the natives had fetched weapons during the night—sticks, stones, anger. The Spaniards answered with swords, muscle, fear. No orders, no plan—just fury. Columbus arrived too late. The sand was wet, the sea calm. He saw it, nodded, whispered: "There you have found your gold."

He wrote:*Day 401. Once blood is warm, no one listens anymore.*

The priest spoke of punishment. "They are heathens!" he cried. "God demands justice!" Columbus looked at him, tired, empty. "Then let God take them," he said. "I am no executioner." But the men were. They stormed, burned, plundered, killed. Women, children, shadows. The sea carried the screams away like evidence. Columbus sat on the edge, his face in his hands. "I wanted land," he whispered. "Not guilt."

He wrote:*I found America. And lost it before it even began.*

The days that followed were quieter, but worse. Flies buzzed, corpses rotted, the sun burned as if it were proud. The men laughed at what they had done. "We tamed them," one said. Columbus looked at him. "You just proved you're worse." The man laughed. "Admiral, you've gone soft." "No," said Columbus. "I never was."

He wrote:*Day 402. Victory is just a more elegant word for loss.*

The natives who survived continued to bear fruit. They came with bowed heads, slowly, cautiously, without looking. Columbus saw it, felt shame, but also helplessness. He wanted to talk, explain, apologize—but words had become ridiculous. One of the men asked, "Why are they still coming?" Columbus replied, "Because they know we won't."

He wrote:*The strong never talk to the weak. They count them.*

That night he dreamed of Spain. Of wine, candles, voices, of clean light. He woke up, surrounded by dirt, full of insects, and laughed. "God, you're a lousy joke." No one answered. Only the sound of the sea roaring—indifferent, endless, beautiful.

He wrote:*Day 403. I now understand why the devil fell. He just saw how things really work.*

The next morning, a young soldier came to him. His hands were shaking, his eyes red. "Admiral," he said, "I killed a woman. She smiled before I did it." Columbus was silent for a long, very long time. Then he said, "Then she was wiser than all of us." The man began to cry, and so did Columbus. But neither of them knew why.

He wrote:*Day 404. Man can't lose. He can only prove he deserves it.*

And as the sun set, the sand smelled of blood again. Hispaniola. A word that sounded of the future and tasted of sin.

Day 405. They now called it a "colony." A big word for a few tents, buried hopes, and men who had more dirt than soul.

Columbus wrote orders that no one read and enforced rules that no one respected. "Work, pray, obey," was written on a board above the gate. A dead man lay beneath it. No one knew who would bury him. No one wanted to.

He wrote:*Day 405. Order is when chaos wears a uniform.*

The gold flowed sparsely, but the blood flowed reliably. They sent men inland to find more. Some came back, half dead, some not at all. Those who stayed told stories: of rivers of metal, of gods with dark skin, of trees that could whisper. Columbus listened, but took no note. "They're inventing hope," he said. "That's dangerous."

He wrote:*When truth dies, faith begins to lie.*

The natives now worked for them. They carried stones, wood, and water until they collapsed. An officer said, "They must learn." Columbus replied, "What?" "Obedience." Columbus looked at him for a long time. "I thought we invented that one." The officer grinned. "Then we'll just teach it back." Columbus walked away so he wouldn't watch.

He wrote:*Day 406. I never wanted anyone to resemble me.*

At night, crying could be heard from the huts. Not loud, not for long, just honest. Men, women, children—everything blurred into a sound that no one wanted to distinguish anymore. A priest prayed louder to drown it out. Columbus drank to forget it. The moon hung over the settlement like an eye that saw everything and changed nothing.

He wrote:*The light is neutral. Only humans have intentions.*

On the fifth day, a report came from the north: A revolt. A few natives had raised their weapons against the guards. The response was swift, brutal, and thorough. Columbus read the report, put it away, and went outside. "How many?" he asked. A captain said, "Enough to set an example." Columbus nodded. "Then we've learned something." "What?" "How to lose without realizing it."

He wrote:*Day 407. We call it progress when no one shouts anymore.*

The sun fell hard on the sand. The sea was near, but no consolation. Columbus stood at the edge of the camp, watched the men digging, the women carrying, the children staring. He knew this would remain. Not as glory, but as a smell. "I wanted the West," he whispered. "Now I have it in my mouth."

He wrote:*Day 408. The New World stinks of the old.*

And when night came, everything smelled of iron. This was now their everyday life: prayer, command, blood. And an admiral who finally knew that discovery and damnation are the same thing.

Day 409. The sand had hardened, the blood in it old. The men no longer talked about returning home, but about orders they no longer wanted to obey. Columbus saw it coming—the stares, the silence, the twitching of the jaws as he passed. He had too many words, they too many reasons. "Admiral," one said, "this isn't a ship. You no longer have a sea to command." Columbus smiled. "Then I'll just find a new one."

He wrote:*Day 409. I am a captain without a sea, a king without a land, a God without a church.*

A captain named Montalvo came to him, broad, young, with too much sun in his head. "You're too soft," he said. "I'm old," Columbus replied. "Old is soft." "And young is stupid." Montalvo grinned. "Then we're even." That evening, two huts burned. No one knew who did it. But Columbus knew it was just the beginning.

He wrote:*Discipline is the best word for fear.*

The men demanded more gold, more women, more power. Columbus had only words left. "You wanted wealth," he said. "Now you have it—in your grave." One man laughed loudly. "At least we tried!" Columbus nodded. "Yes. And you succeeded: robbing the heavens." The man wanted to strike, but didn't. Not out of respect. Out of tiredness.

He wrote:*Day 410. No war is fought over gold. Only because people can't stand themselves.*

A messenger arrived during the night. Another post, further south, had disappeared. No fire, no bodies, only silence. Columbus sent men. Three returned. One without a hand, one without a brain, one with a smile that wouldn't go away. "What did you see?" Columbus asked. "Nothing," they said. And that was the worst part.

He wrote:*Nothingness is more honest than man. It demands no excuses.*

The officers began to meet—not with him, but about him. They whispered in tents, behind barrels, over meals. He heard them, pretended not to. "They're planning something," said a monk.

Columbus grinned. "Of course. Everyone wants to write history, but no one wants to read it." The monk didn't understand. "They'll overthrow you." Columbus drank. "Then at least I'll have a view from below."

He wrote:*Day 411. I'm tired of giving orders. Perhaps obedience is a better punishment.*

The next day, the wind blew from the east. Heavy, hot, smelling of rain and metal. Columbus stood at the edge of the settlement, the sun in his eyes, and knew: They hated him not because he was wrong. But because he had known it before they were.

He wrote:*Day 412. The prophet never lives long enough to be proven right.*

Day 413. The men spoke openly. No longer behind tents, but in front of him. They drank, shouted, laughed. A soldier threw a piece of bread at his feet. "Here, Admiral. This is your order." Columbus picked it up, bit into it, and chewed slowly. "Tastes like dirt," he said. "So, like the truth." Then he left. The laughter continued.

He wrote:*Day 413. When they laugh at you, you almost have them under control again. Almost.*

The next morning, Montalvo—the captain—was found dead. His throat slit, his hand still on his weapon. No one confessed, no one questioned. Columbus looked at the body, the face peaceful, almost beautiful. "He was in a hurry," he murmured. A priest said, "That's murder." Columbus nodded. "Or self-defense in slow motion."

He wrote:*At least a dead person is silent.*

The mutiny came not like a storm, but like mold. Slowly, quietly, everywhere. Orders were ignored, guards slept, supplies disappeared. Columbus still wrote because writing was the one thing that refused to betray him. One entered his hut, shouting, "You've messed up!" Columbus didn't look up. "I know." "And you still write?" "That's precisely why."

He wrote:*Day 414. I'm no longer their admiral. I'm their alibi.*

The night brought rain and revenge. Two men broke into an officer's tent, killed him, took his wife, and set everything on fire. Columbus stood in the rain, the fire at his back, the wind in his face. He yelled, but no one heard him. One approached him, his face black with soot. "You brought us here!" Columbus nodded. "I never promised you it would be nice." Then he left. He knew it was over.

He wrote:*Day 415. I knew the direction, but not the destination. Nobody does that.*

In the morning, smoke hung over Hispaniola. The palm trees stood like witnesses, the sand was black, the sky gray. A few survivors crawled through the camp, searching for water, shade, anything that looked like life. Columbus sat there, his knees drawn up, his eyes red, his pen still in his hand. "We have not failed," he whispered. "We have arrived." No one objected. That, too, was a sign.

He wrote:*Day 416. Blood in the sand. And nothing else.*

Then he closed the book, the sea roared in the distance, and the sun rose over a land that wanted no witnesses. The New World – born of lies, baptized in smoke.

Priests, whips and broken bones

Day 417. A new sound over the island—the crack of whips, the dull crack of wood on skin. The priests had decided that discipline was divine. Columbus stood by, watched, and remained silent. He no longer had the heart for indignation. One man was whipped for not praying. Another for praying, but too quietly. The sand absorbed it all without protest.

He wrote:*Day 417. Order smells of blood and incense.*

The church was now the center. A cross made of rough wood, crooked, rusty, but higher than anything else. Men knelt before it, who would steal again that evening. Columbus watched the spectacle with a blank expression. "You really think this holds them?" he asked a priest. "Faith holds everything," he said. Columbus laughed dryly. "Then hold on tight."

He wrote:*God is the final official in chaos.*

The whip was the new prayer. Those who doubted got it. Those who remained silent got it. Those who breathed sometimes got it too. Columbus wrote reports to the court, describing order, diligence, progress. He knew it was a lie. But truth no longer had a course for Spain. "They want success," he muttered. "So they'll get it."

He wrote:*Day 418. The liar survives because honesty is hungry.*

A monk named Esteban approached him, his eyes bright, his mouth full of slogans. "Admiral," he said, "we must convert the unbelievers." Columbus replied: "Those who are still alive?" "All of them!" "And if they don't want to?" "Then let them learn." Columbus drank and looked at him. "You are more dangerous than any disease."

Esteban grinned. "I am God's tool." "Then God hopes for bad craftsmen."

He wrote:*When saints hold whips, paradise is sold out.*

At night, one heard chants—monotonous, loud, desperate. The priests preached against the darkness, as if it could hear them. Columbus sat aside, writing, drinking, thinking. "Perhaps," he said quietly, "there's no hell at all. Only people who organize it." He laughed, but no one laughed with him.

He wrote:*Day 419. I'm stranded in sadist heaven.*

The next morning, two men were found dead behind the church. One had hanged himself, the other holding the rope. "Suicide?" someone asked. Columbus shook his head. "No. Just going home."

He wrote:*If you pray long enough, you'll become mute. And then useful.*

And as the day ended, the light fell askew over the huts, and the evening bell rang, Columbus knew: God was never far away. He was simply already there—with a stick in his hand.

Day 420. The priests marched through the camp early in the morning, barefoot, their crosses raised, their voices hoarse. They sang of salvation, but every verse sounded like a command. Columbus watched them go, the sun burning on their shaved heads. "Saints with sunstroke," he muttered. A soldier laughed and was immediately beaten. "Blasphemy!" a monk yelled. Columbus intervened, slowly, calmly. "Leave him alone. He was just laughing. That's rarer here than mercy."

He wrote:*Day 420. Religion can be recognized by the volume of its threats.*

The natives now had to line up every morning. They were given new names, new prayers, new rules. Their old gods were burned, their faces beaten until they nodded.

A monk preached: "He who does not believe will be purified!" Columbus stood nearby and watched as an old man with mute eyes was whipped. "He is already pure," he said quietly. No one was listening.

He wrote:*Conversion is just a nicer word for suffocation.*

In the evening, the priests came to him. Esteban spoke first. "Admiral, you must support us. The pagans are stubborn." Columbus drank and looked into his glass. "Perhaps they're right." "About what?" "That your god is a bad host." Esteban slapped the table. "You're obsessed!" Columbus smiled. "Then at least there are two of us."

He wrote:*Day 421. Those who believe too much can no longer see anything.*

The Spaniards began hammering crosses into the ground—everywhere, like markers. They said the land now belonged to God. Columbus watched as the natives stood by, silent, tired, submissive. One of them approached him, pointed to the cross, and said something in their language that Columbus didn't understand but felt. "He asks why your God needs wood to stand," an interpreter translated. Columbus nodded. "Because otherwise he would fall over."

He wrote:*The weak need symbols. The strong know they only take up space.*

Later that day, Esteban forced a woman to kiss the cross. She wept, whispering something that sounded like a prayer, but certainly wasn't one. Columbus saw it, went over, and took the monk by the arm. "Enough." "She must believe!" "She's long believed—that you're a pig." Esteban raised his hand, and Columbus grasped it, firm, old, angry. "I've been in storms," he said. "You are not a storm." The monk stepped back.

He wrote:*Day 422. I'm too old to watch saints get dirty.*

At night, Columbus stood by the sea. The wind blew off the land, smelling of smoke and sin. He thought of Spain, of candlelight, and cold churches. "They pray because they're afraid," he said. "And I, because I once was." Then he threw his pen into the water. "You write on, God. I'm tired."

He wrote:*I don't believe in anything anymore. And that feels almost clean.*

Day 423. Esteban preached every day now. Not for God, but for power. His voice was loud, raw, ragged, like metal over stone. He spoke of purification, of will, of sacrifice. The men listened because they needed someone to command. Columbus stood by, silent, and watched as faith became a uniform again. He had sensed it—he knew that kind of light that blinds instead of warms.

He wrote:*Day 423. When God has soldiers, the devil is unemployed.*

Esteban had crosses erected where people had died. He called it a "sign of victory." Columbus called it a "proof of shame." They stood facing each other, one with a Bible, the other with a look that had seen too much. "You want to save the country," said Columbus. "I want to save souls!" "Then start with yours." Esteban laughed, that cold, empty laugh that men have when they feel safe. "Your time is over, Admiral." "Then let me know when yours begins."

He wrote:*The Bible in the wrong hand is a dagger with psalms on it.*

The whip grew louder again. They beat to teach. They killed to convert. And each time Esteban cried out, "In the name of the Lord!" Columbus sat in the shade, drinking, and writing down the names of the dead as best he could. Not out of duty, but out of defiance. "If no one prays," he murmured, "at least I will, in ink."

He wrote:*Day 424. The writing is the latest thing that doesn't bleed.*

A young priest came to him, pale, nervous, his hands shaking. "Admiral," he whispered, "I don't believe anymore." Columbus nodded. "Then you're healthy." "But I'm scared." "Then you're still human." The boy looked at him. "What should I do?" Columbus smiled. "Don't pray. Think." The next day, the boy was gone. No one was looking for him.

He wrote:*Those who think die faster here than those who sin.*

Esteban began to preach about Columbus. "The Admiral has lost his mind! The devil is whispering in his ears!" Columbus sat in the front, drinking, smiling. "Finally, an honest sermon," he said loudly. The crowd murmured. Esteban shouted, "He must repent!" Columbus stood up, stepped before the cross, and placed his hand on it. "Here I am," he said. "But God is not at home." Then he left. No one stopped him.

He wrote:*Day 425. I touched the cross. It felt nothing.*

At night, a storm came from the sea. It tore down crosses, tore tarpaulins, and broke doors. Esteban cried out that it was the wrath of God. Columbus looked up to the sky. "If that's wrath up there," he said, "then it has good taste."

He wrote:*Maybe the thunder is just applause.*

And when the rain fell, the fire went out, and the cross lay in the mud, Columbus knew: Nothing on this island was sacred.

Day 426. The wind was blowing from the sea, but it smelled of fire. Esteban had convened a tribunal—a word that sounded in his voice like a scream in Sunday clothes. Before him knelt men, broken, naked, bound. Spaniards, natives, anyone too quiet or too honest. Columbus stood aside, his face in shadow, watching as judgments were passed that had long been decided.

He wrote:*Day 426. He who administers justice needs no judge, only an audience.*

Esteban read from the Bible in a voice like iron. "The Lord tests His own!" Columbus laughed softly. "Then he should finally take notes." One of the men screamed, another prayed, a third laughed hysterically as the whip struck flesh. The cross above the square swayed in the wind, as if trying to turn over.

He wrote:*The cross is the oldest gallows in the world.*

The priest had the "sinners" scourged, then baptized—blood on skin, water on blood, a neat symmetry for a dirty game. Columbus approached, looked into Esteban's eyes, and said, "You killed God and kept the desk." Esteban hissed, "You're lost!" Columbus nodded. "But at least you were willing."

He wrote:*Day 427. There are no heretics, only people with too good memories.*

In the night, screams came from the church. A fire, or perhaps just voices. Columbus stood before it, drank from his bottle, watched the shadows dance on the walls—the priests who were beating, the worshippers who were falling. A boy ran out, covered in blood, his eyes empty. "God was inside," he whispered. Columbus nodded. "And he didn't introduce himself, did he?" The boy shook his head and fell over.

He wrote:*The sky is empty, but the cellars are full.*

The next day Esteban hung a sign:
"Faith through obedience."

Among them were three dead men, neatly lined up as evidence. Columbus walked by, slowly, calmly, placed a stone on the central body, and said, "There. My prayer." Esteban watched him, his lips thin, the cross in his hand. "Your time is over, Admiral." "Perhaps," said Columbus, "but at least it was real."

He wrote:*Day 428. Faith has won the war. But no one wants to see victory.*

In the evening, the sky over Hispaniola fell into a dull silence. The air was thick with the smoke of burnt prayers, the sand black with the blood of converts. Columbus sat alone, the wind cold on his face, and thought: If God looks now, he will turn away.

He wrote:*I saw the New World. It ate God.*

Day 429. The sun rose red over the huts, as if it itself were frightened. Esteban held mass—in the middle of the square where blood had dried yesterday. His voice echoed over the palm trees, the wind carrying them away like garbage. Columbus stood at the edge, drinking and writing. "Today is Sunday," someone next to him said. Columbus nodded. "Then it will be especially dirty."

He wrote:*Day 429. Faith loves to celebrate itself in the dirt.*

After the mass, Esteban came to him. He smelled of sweat and incense, the perfect mix for power.

"You must repent, Admiral," he said. Columbus looked at him for a long time.

"For what exactly?" "For your doubt, your weakness, your arrogance!"

Columbus laughed. "Then at least I am truly guilty." Esteban raised the cross like a sword. "You are a tool of Satan!" "And you are made of wood."

He wrote:*I have learned: Whoever talks to God is mostly talking to himself.*

The men paused, watched—the admiral against the priest, two ruins in human form. "You have destroyed order!" cried Esteban. Columbus approached, his voice calm, almost friendly. "I have only seen it as it is." "You have despised the light!" "No," said Columbus, "I have only learned that it blinds." Then Esteban struck. Not with the whip, not with the sword, but with the cross. Wood against flesh, faith against fatigue. Columbus staggered, fell, laughed.

He wrote:*Day 430. I tasted heaven. It was made of dust.*

Later, Esteban was found dead in his hut—head crushed, hands clasped, the cross beside him. No one knew who had done it. Columbus said nothing. He stood before the body, looked down at the priest, and murmured, "Perhaps

God has remembered after all." Then he left, slowly, like someone in no hurry because everything is already over.

He wrote:*Day 431. One saint less. One person more.*

By evening, the church was burning. No one put it out. The men stood before it, silent, as if they had finally understood. Columbus watched, the fire reflected in his eyes, like a confession no one wants to hear. "This is what salvation looks like," he said quietly.

"Hot, ugly, honestly." Then he turned away and walked towards the sea.

He wrote:*Day 432. I no longer believe in anything that can be built.*

And when the last cross fell, the sky grew dark, and the sea smelled of salt again instead of blood, Columbus knew: The West was not a place. Only a dream, and dreams don't last when priests touch them.

The Admiral loses his mind

Day 433. He woke with salt on his tongue. Not from the sea, but from the blood he had bitten, sometime during the night, when his body rebelled against itself. The camp was silent, too silent. No singing, no orders, no prayers. Only the sound of the wind through palm trees that acted as if they had never seen anything. Columbus sat down, pushed his hair back from his face, and whispered, "I'm still here." But his voice sounded like a memory, not proof.

He wrote:*Day 433. I lose myself in the silence,
and it sounds better than any command.*

His head buzzed like a ship's bell, a low, constant drone that never stopped. Sometimes he thought the sea had returned, but it was only his blood rushing. He saw figures, shadows, faces—all familiar, all dead. Esteban, Montalvo, the boy, the native woman with the silent eyes. They stood around him, saying nothing. He laughed because at least they were listening.

He wrote:*Day 434. I have company,
but no more questions.*

Sometimes he walked through the ruins of the church, now a nest of soot and bones. He found a charred cross, picked it up, and blew off the ashes. "So,

there you are again," he said. "Don't worry, I'm not praying. I'm just talking so I can be heard." Then he placed it in the sand, the way you place an empty bottle to mark the spot where you've finally drunk too much.

He wrote:*Day 435. I talk to things,
that no longer exist,
and they are right.*

The men avoided him. They called him "the old man," "the nutcase," "the Admiral of Ghosts." He heard them laughing, but it didn't bother him. "Laughter is good," he said to a tree. "Laughter means you're still alive. Or that you think you are." Then he laughed along. And for a moment, it sounded genuine.

He wrote:*Day 436. If you are alone long enough,
even madness becomes polite.*

At night, the sea returned. Not outside, but within him. He heard the creaking of wood, the slapping of waves, the wind tearing sails. He heard men screaming, not in pain, but in fear of nothing. He stood up, staggered out, looked at the horizon, which wasn't one—only darkness laughing at him. "I'm coming," he murmured. "I'm coming."

He wrote:*Day 437. I hear the sea in my skull.
It learned my name.*

And when morning came, Columbus lay on the beach, his hands in the sand, his face wet, and whispered: "I'm on my way again."

Day 438. He awoke with sand in his mouth. Not from sleeping, but from talking in his dreams. He had given orders to men who were long dead. He had hoisted the sail that was no longer there. And when he opened his eyes, he saw the sea—only there was none. Just mist, wind, and a flickering heat that made everything seem as if it were breathing.

He wrote:*Day 438. I sail in my head,
and the course is backward.*

He heard voices. Not loud, more like a buzzing under his skin. They said things he knew, in languages no one spoke anymore. "You knew," they whispered. "You wanted it." Columbus shook his head. "I just wanted out," he said. "Out of the old, into the unknown." But the unknown had kept him, like an innkeeper who realizes his guest can never pay.

He wrote:*I wanted to discover the world.
Now she discovers me – layer by layer.*

The sun burned, and the jungle was noisy again. Columbus saw movement in the shadows—sails, he thought.

White sails stretched between the trees like ghosts missing the sea. He started running, stumbled, fell, and when he got closer, they were leaves, large, still, indifferent. He laughed, coughed, rolled onto his back, and looked up at the sky. "You're bad sailors," he muttered. "None of you knows where north is."

He wrote:*Day 439. I find water everywhere,
except where it helps.*

At night, he talked to the moon. He called it "Mr. Compass" and asked it for its course. The moon didn't answer, but it moved—that was enough of a sign for Columbus. He got up and walked toward the light, for hours, until he reached the beach again. "I've arrived," he said. Then he laughed so loudly that even the waves stopped.

He wrote:*Day 440. I follow signs,
that I invent myself.*

The next day, a fever came. Hard, cold, greedy. He lay in the shadow of a broken hut, saw faces that weren't faces—kings, queens, men with hats of gold. They nodded to him, said, "You did it." And he nodded back, because it was easier than thinking. Then he saw the sea—finally, clear, close. He got up and went in until the water took him.

He wrote:*Day 441. I'm going sailing again.*

When they found him, he was lying in shallow water, his face half submerged, his eyes open, a smile as thin as wind. He was still breathing. "Admiral?" someone asked. Columbus whispered, "Already on his way."

Day 442. He laughed when he woke up, just because. Not because there was something to laugh about—but because he remembered that no one was there anymore to think he was crazy. The wind sounded like wine, the sea like a cheap joke. He had dreamed again—of Spain, of soft hands, of money that never came, of kings who smiled while they bled him dry. "I was their tool," he said aloud. "A compass with debts." Then he spat in the sand, almost hitting the mark.

He wrote:*Day 442.*
I used to be someone who wanted something.
Now I'm just proof that wanting is deadly.

He talked to the air, because at least it didn't contradict him. "Do you remember, Columbus?" she asked. "Palos, the first wind, the smell of hope?" He nodded, took a sip from his canteen. "Yes. Tasted like fear." Then he laughed again, briefly, evilly.
"I was looking for paradise and found humanity instead."

He wrote:*If you sail too far,*
you find yourself –
and immediately wish you were blind.

The sea whispered at night, really, not in his head—he heard it through the waves, as if someone were speaking beneath the surface. "Back," it said. "To what?" "To you." "There was never anything there," he answered. Then he held his hand in the water, let the waves run over his fingers. Warm, alive, real. For the first time in weeks, he felt something, and he didn't like it.

He wrote:*Day 443.*
The sea speaks to me,
and it lies less than humans.

In the distance, he saw smoke—a camp, perhaps, or just the sky, which didn't know what to do with its anger. He went. Every step sounded like a farewell. In the sand lay remnants of wood, a broken barrel, a shell, and a skull. "I know you," said Columbus. "You once listened to me." Then he sat down next to him, leaning against it, as if this were the last friendship that made sense.

He wrote:*I talk to bones,*
because at least they honestly keep quiet.

That evening, he found a bottle of wine—flat, half-empty, perfect. He drank it, looked at the sky, which looked like an old map—washed out, torn, full of mistakes. "That's where I wanted to go," he said, and downed the rest. "But I've already been there."

He wrote:*Day 444.*
I have arrived,
but nobody invited me.

Then he fell asleep, his head on the sand, the sky on his forehead, the sea in his ears—and this time he didn't dream anything. Which was perhaps the best thing that had happened to him in years.

Day 445. Columbus woke up and knew immediately he'd lost his mind. Not in one great moment, not with a scream—it had just happened, like when a door closes and you realize you've stayed inside. He talked to things that didn't answer, and the best part was: they never contradicted him. The sun was too bright, the shadow too loud. The sea seemed to be watching him, like an old acquaintance who didn't speak out of pity. "So, you're back," he murmured as the roar grew louder. "Or I'm gone again." It made no difference anymore.

He wrote:*Day 445. I can no longer touch the world, but it scratches from within.*

He saw faces in the water. Sometimes they smiled, sometimes they screamed. Esteban was there, still with his cross, but it was made of gold, and every time Columbus blinked, he saw himself in it. "I killed you," he said. "That's only half true," Esteban replied. "You killed yourself too." Columbus nodded. "Then we're even." The waves erased the conversation, but he knew it would return—like everything one tries to forget. Memory was now a storm that never ended.

He wrote:*I don't know what's memory and what's imagination. Maybe it was always the same.*

He walked through the camp, or what was left of it. Empty huts, charred posts, a few bones that no one counted anymore. He spoke to each of them, calling them by name, as if that would bring them back. "Here, Montalvo, your damned sword. And you, Esteban, your Bible, there's still blood in it, go ahead and take it back." The wind answered with a sound like laughter. Columbus laughed along, because that was all that remained. "You've won," he said aloud. "It just took me longer to realize it."

He wrote:*Day 446. I'm having conversations with the dead because the living are too polite.*

At night, he sat on the beach and drew maps in the sand—lines, islands, winds, anything that represented direction. But every time he finished, a wave would come and wash them away. He watched his work disappear, again and again. First he cursed, then he laughed, then he cursed again. "Good work, God," he cried into the darkness. "You're the better admiral!" The sky didn't answer, but

a star fell. Columbus raised his head and grinned. "Well, at least one of them falls when I say so."

He wrote:*I can no longer distinguish whether I am praying or cursing – but the result is the same.*

In the morning, he was seen walking barefoot through the sand, his eyes red, his shirt open, his skin burned. He held a shell to his ear, listened for a long time, and nodded as if someone had said something wise. "Yes," he murmured, "I know, but I'm not coming back this time." Then he laughed, quietly, like someone who had finally understood. He looked toward the sea, raised his hand as if in greeting, and said, "You're the only one who remained honest." And for the first time in weeks, his voice sounded clear, almost content.

He wrote:*Day 447. I've finally found peace – amidst the noise.*

Day 448. The morning was quiet, too quiet, as if the world had briefly stopped breathing. Columbus stood up, barefoot, shivering, but awake. The wind brushed against his skin like a memory. He felt the pulse of the sea as if it were within him. "I hear you," he said softly, "but this time I'm staying here." His voice sounded clear, almost calm, like someone who has understood everything, only too late. He looked at the waves pretending to be innocent and thought of everything they had swallowed—ships, men, prayers, hopes. He grinned. "You are better than God. You make no promises."

He wrote:*Day 448. I no longer believe in heaven. I believe in depth.*

The fever returned, but this time it was gentle. No pain, no trembling—just a buzzing in his head that carried him. He talked to God, without anger, without respect. "You could have told me something, you know? A sign, a gust of wind, a bit of honesty. Instead, you send priests and storms." He laughed, coughed, and spat blood. "If you wanted to punish me, you would have left me in Spain." Then he raised his head, looked up at the sky, which was blue like mockery, and whispered, "I'm tired, old man. Find someone new to play with."

He wrote:*I prayed, cursed, begged—and everything sounded the same. Maybe that was the answer.*

He wandered through the camp, slowly, as if saying goodbye. The air was hot, the ground trembled slightly beneath his steps. He stopped in front of a broken barrel, looked inside, and talked to his reflection. "So, Christopher, that's it. No glory, no gold, no applause. Just sand, salt, and the wrong side of history." The

face in the water grinned back. "You've sailed too far, friend." Columbus nodded. "I know. But someone had to do it." Then he kicked the barrel, the water ran out, and the face disappeared. "Damn it," he said. "Now I'm alone again."

He wrote:*Day 449. I'm talking to myself because no one else is listening—and it's the most honest thing I've ever done.*

At night, he stood on the beach, the sea dark and still, like a promise no one wants to keep. He held a burning torch in his hand, the flame trembling in the wind. "I am the Admiral of Nothingness," he said. "Captain of the spirits, commander of dreams no one wanted." Then he threw the torch into the water. It hissed, flickered briefly, and went out. The sea remained black, proud and indifferent. Columbus nodded. "Good." He lay down, his head in the sand, his eyes open, and whispered, "I have arrived."

He wrote:*Day 450. The goal is where you stop defending yourself.*

In the morning, he was found sleeping—or something resembling it. His face calm, his hands open, as if he had finally let go. The sun rose over Hispaniola, and the sea glittered as if it knew it had won. And somewhere, among the salt, blood, and madness, lay a man who changed the world—and lost himself in the process.

He wrote (the last thing found):*I was the first to think the earth was round. And the last to regret it.*

Chains for the explorer

Day 451. The sky over Hispaniola was clear as the ships arrived. No storm, no thunder—just sails, white and clean, as if they had never borne a lie. Columbus saw them from the beach, leaned on a stick, and knew immediately: This wasn't a visit, this was the end. The men who disembarked wore armor, had shining faces and empty eyes. Officers of the Crown. He laughed softly. "Now things are getting polite again." One approached him and read something—words about order, duty, treason. Columbus nodded after each sentence. "Sounds like you know me," he said. Then he held out his hands, without resistance. "Come on. Get your gold back."

He wrote:*Day 451. When they put chains on you, you know you're important again.*

They bound him with iron, cold and heavy, as if to remind him that dreams weigh. A young soldier asked, "Why did you do that, Admiral?" Columbus looked at him, tired but not bitter. "Because no one else would leave." The boy remained silent. "And would you do it again?" Columbus grinned. "Of course. Only this time I'll take fewer idiots with me." The guards laughed briefly, then fell silent again. The sea roared as if it didn't want to interfere.

He wrote:*Chains are more honest than crowns. At least they keep their promises.*

The journey back began in silence. No cheers, no hymn. Only the creaking of the planks and the dull clang of his iron with every step. Columbus sat on deck, gazing at the ocean that settled over him like a blanket of memories. "So, old friend," he murmured, "you've won." The sea answered with wind. He nodded. "I know." The men on the ship avoided him. Some out of respect, others out of superstition. One spat over the railing and said, "He's offended God." Columbus turned around. "If he exists, he was there."

He wrote:*Day 452. I'm not afraid of the journey home. Just the reception.*

At night, he dreamed of Spain again—the streets, the churches, the courtiers' polite venom. He saw himself standing before the queen, barefoot, old, in chains. She would smile, politely and coldly. "You made history," she would say. And he would reply, "No. I merely started it." Then he would wake up, drenched in sweat, and laugh. "If that's fame, then the devil was the better diplomat."

He wrote:*The Crown loves you as long as you're useful to it. After that, it calls you a visionary—that sounds cleaner than madman.*

On the eighth day of the return voyage, a storm blew up. The ship creaked, men prayed, one fell overboard. Columbus sat there, his hands bound, his eyes calm. "I've survived worse," he said. The captain asked, "What?" Columbus looked at him. "Hope." Then he closed his eyes, and for the first time in weeks, he slept peacefully, while the ocean raged like a judge finally receiving evidence.

He wrote:*Day 453. I'm back at sea—but this time she's carrying me, not I her.*

Day 454. The ship docked in Cádiz, silent, without trumpets, without spectators. No hero, no welcome, only rain. Columbus still sat bound, the iron cold and familiar. As they brought him ashore, a child cried, "That's him! The man who discovered the world!" The mother pulled him away, whispering, "Don't look." He laughed. "That's right, boy. Never look too close, or you'll see too much." The soldiers pushed him forward, over cobblestones that smelled of horses and betrayal. He knew every step was a thing of the past, one no one wanted anymore.

He wrote:*Day 454. Fame has a shorter breath than dizziness.*

They took him to Seville, a room in a dungeon beneath a chapel—God above him, rats below. A clean hierarchy. He sat in the darkness, listening to masses being sung above. Every chant was like mockery. He whispered, "He must love you, Esteban. You're closer." Then he laughed, coughed, and wrote on the wall with a piece of charcoal: *I didn't fall, I landed.* The guards read it later and didn't understand a word.

He wrote:*In Spain, people talk about honor until it becomes uncomfortable.*

After a few weeks, officials arrived—fine gentlemen, fat fingers, thin questions. "Why did you betray the crown?"—"I only disappointed them." "Why did you allow violence?"—"Because it worked." "Why did you take gold?"—"Because it was there." One diligently took notes, the other sighed. "You're cynical, Admiral." Columbus grinned. "I'm honest. It's almost the same, but more expensive." Then they stopped laughing.

He wrote:*Day 456. Truth is not a good commodity.*

The queen finally let him come—not out of mercy, but because silence had become too loud. The court hall was large, shining, full of unseeing eyes. Columbus entered, the iron still on his wrists. She looked at him, coolly, politely, professionally. "Christopher," she said, "you have brought honor, but also shame." He nodded. "The two go well together." "Why?" she asked. "Because without one there is no other." A murmur went through the hall, but Columbus remained calm. "I brought you an empire," he said, "and you gave me a prison. That's fair." She looked at him, said nothing. Then she waved her hand dismissively.

He wrote:*Majestic silence – the most polite death sentence.*

After the audience, he was sent away, not executed, not celebrated. Simply dismissed, like an old dog that had barked too long. Outside, it rained again, a thin, fine rain that made everything even. Columbus raised his head, letting the water drip onto the chains. "At least he's honest," he murmured. "Heaven pisses on everyone." Then he laughed—loudly, genuinely, filthily. A guard said quietly, "He's crazy." Columbus turned around. "I'm cured."

He wrote:*Day 457. I'm free again—that's worse than being imprisoned.*

Day 458. Seville was loud, but his room was silent. No sea, no wind, no creaking wood. Only the footsteps of the guards and the scratching of his pen. He wrote because it was the only thing that never left him. "They call me a traitor," he murmured, "but I was merely being honest about my dream." The innkeeper who brought him soup said, "Honest men die poor." Columbus grinned. "And liars die decorated. It balances out." Then he picked up his spoon and stirred the broth without eating.

He wrote:*Day 458. I'm famous in stories I'll never hear.*

The letters to the crown remained unanswered. He wrote them anyway. Page after page filled with demands, pleas, curses, and jokes that no one understood. *Your Admiral asks for justice*, he once wrote. *But if necessary, a glass of wine will do.* No one answered. Spain was busy—new colonies, new heroes, new greed. The world had continued to turn, but without him. Columbus saw the sea growing in the minds of others and knew: He was the stone they had jumped over.

He wrote:*I showed them the horizon, and they started selling it.*

His body was decaying, but his spirit remained sharp. He talked to himself, to God, to his pen. "You're the only one holding me back," he told her. "And at least you scratch honestly." Sometimes visitors came—curious people who wanted to see the old explorer. Young men with shining eyes who believed history smacked of adventure. Columbus smiled wearily. "You want fame? Then bring time. It will come when you no longer need it." Most laughed uncertainly. One asked, "Was it worth it?" Columbus thought for a long time. "Ask me that when you've left the land behind."

He wrote:*Day 460. Fame is a dog that never comes back when you call it.*

In the evenings, he sat at the window, watched the seagulls fly, and pretended they were ships. "There they go again," he said. "Westward, always westward."

And no one knows that I condemned them there." He drank, coughed, laughed. In the distance, bells rang, perhaps for a church service, perhaps for him. It made no difference. He reached for the bottle, drank the rest, and whispered, "I was there. That's enough."

He wrote:*I wanted to be immortal – and I achieved it, just in a boring way.*

One night, as the rains came, there was a knock at his door. A messenger brought a letter—the royal seal. Columbus opened it with trembling hands, read it, and laughed. "You apologize," he said. "For the inconvenience." Then he threw the paper into the fire and watched it burn, slowly, cleanly, gracefully. "Finally, something that works."

He wrote:*Day 461. I'm free. Late, as always.*

Day 462. He woke up before the rooster crowed. His bones creaked, his blood flowed slowly, but still, it was flowing. The doctor came by, a thin man with a fine beard and a false expression. "You must rest, Admiral," he said. Columbus laughed. "Rest? I've been lying still for two years. Do you want to bury me or wake me?" The doctor smiled stiffly. "You shouldn't drink so much." Columbus nodded. "And you shouldn't talk so much. But here we both are: failures for life." Then he sent him away, took a sip from the jug, and grinned into the void.

He wrote:*Day 462. Healthy enough to die. Sick enough to think.*

He had stopped believing in reparations. The crown wrote polite letters, praising his deeds, promising investigations, but paying nothing. "They send me words because coins are heavier," he muttered. "That's politics: polite poverty." His friends were dead, his enemies promoted. When visitors came, they called him "the Great Admiral" – and left quickly, because greatness stinks when it gets old. "I've discovered more continents than you can handle truths," he told a scribe who came to write a chronicle. "Go ahead and write that down. Maybe someone will understand it in five hundred years."

He wrote:*Truth lasts longer than fame.*

Sometimes the sun would come through the window and fall on his maps, which lay scattered everywhere—old, yellowed, like dead dreams on paper. He would run his finger over the lines he'd once drawn. "That's when you set off, you idiot," he said to himself. "That's when you changed the world without knowing why." Then he would sit down and write again, this time not a report,

not a request, but a kind of confession. "I took more than I gave. I opened the earth, and it stank." He paused, smiled. "But damn, I was there."

He wrote:*Day 463. I don't regret anything. I'm just explaining.*

The body disintegrated, but the head remained awake—the worst fate. Sleep was rare, dreams were loud. He saw the faces again: the sailors, the priests, the queen, Esteban with his cross. They spoke over each other, as if trying to convince him that it had made sense. "You're too late," he whispered. "I already get the point." Then he laughed so hard he coughed up blood. He wiped it away, saw the red trail on his palm, and nodded. "Good. At least there's some color in the game."

He wrote:*If you live long enough, you become a footnote to your own story.*

In the evening, he sat by the window, the sky red, the light soft. A few children played in the street, shouting, laughing, throwing stones against walls. He watched them, almost tenderly. "There," he said, "there is the future. Loud, dirty, unteachable. Perfect." Then he leaned back, closed his eyes, and murmured, "I wanted to understand the world. Now I know it doesn't want to."

He wrote:*Day 464. I'm tired of meaning. I just want silence.*

Day 465. It was quiet, almost too quiet. Only the dripping rain on the windowsill, like a metronome for his final thoughts. Columbus lay in bed, his breath short, his face sunken, but his eyes – they still burned. He had stopped drinking wine, dismissed the doctor, and thrown the Bible into the corner. "Enough," he said quietly. "I don't need an interpreter for this silence anymore." On the table lay his notes, countless pages, stained with ink, salt, and blood. Testimonies of a man who had seen too much and retained too little.

He wrote:*Day 465. I have no direction anymore – and that is finally freedom.*

He thought of the sea. Not romantically, not heroically. Just the cold, salty indifference. The sea had never betrayed him, never lied to him. It had taken what it wanted, and honestly. "You were the only one who didn't pass judgment," he murmured. "And you won." He looked out at the sky, black and starless, and grinned. "Perfect sailing weather." Then he coughed up blood, wiped it away, and took a sip of water—bitter, stale, but real. "They say I've discovered a new land," he told himself. "But really, all I've proven is that we're all the same everywhere. Greedy, stupid, and curious enough to do it again."

He wrote:*I was looking for gold and found people. The worse trade.*

Sleep came in fits and starts, like an animal checking to see if you're dead. He dreamed of sails, wind, voices, laughter—and then silence. He saw himself on deck, alone, the world round and empty. No land in sight, no direction, no purpose. Just him and the water. He said, "So this is it. I've arrived." The dream was so clear that he smiled when he awoke. "Maybe the sea wasn't out there at all," he whispered. "Maybe it was always here." He tapped his chest.

He wrote:*Day 466. The destination was never west. It was out.*

Late at night, a priest arrived, young, zealous, and devout to the point of stupidity. "My son, do you want to confess?" Columbus smiled. "I've already said everything." "You must ask God for forgiveness." "For what? For courage? For error? For honesty?" The priest blushed. "For pride." Columbus nodded. "I'll take that with me." Then he turned to the wall, closed his eyes, and said, "You're young, Padre. Keep believing. Someday it will be useful to you." The priest made the sign of the cross over him and whispered, "The Lord be with you." Columbus replied, "I can manage on my own."

He wrote:*I'm not afraid of death. I've greeted it too often.*

Shortly before dawn, he got up once more. Slowly, heavily, but resolutely. He opened the window, let in the cool air, smelled of rain, earth, life. He looked out into the darkness, took a deep breath, and said, "There's nothing new out there anymore. So I'll stay here." Then he sat down, took his pen, dipped it in the ink one last time, and wrote his final sentence, calmly, clearly, without pathos:*I was there.* Then he put down his pen, leaned back, and closed his eyes. No prayer, no cry, no final thought—just peace.

In the morning, he was found like this, upright in his chair, his head bowed, his fingers black with ink. On the table: a single sheet of paper. Four words. No name, no date. Only:

"I really saw it."

Returning home with shame and pride

Day 467—or none at all. The sun over Valladolid was merciless when the news came: *The admiral is dead*. No bell ringing, no procession. Just a few officials taking notes, and a monk nodding. "So this is how an explorer dies," one said. "This is how all die who find something greater than themselves," another said. And then they moved on, because it was getting to midday and the city had more important things to do than mourn history.

Columbus's body was placed in a narrow, dark wooden coffin, cheap but clean. A few sailors came, old faces with broken eyes, and drank to him. "He was crazy," said one. "He was right," said another. "Both," replied a third, and they laughed—not out of joy, but because life went on, as it always did. No one spoke of the sea. It was as if they had decided that anything too far away didn't exist.

He wrote (sometime before): *I showed Spain the sea, and they closed it again.*

In the streets, people whispered his name again – but this time like a rumor, not like a prayer. *Columbus the heretic. Columbus the fool. Columbus the lucky one.* Everyone had their own version, and none were correct. One poet wrote: *He sought paradise and invented taxes.* A priest preached: *He put the sun in chains.* A dealer said: *He brought us gold, and it was not enough.* Thus a man became a story, the story became a myth, and the myth became a coin with a false face.

He wrote: *Day 467. I continue to live, but only in the lies of others.*

The crown did what crowns do—it counted the profits. New ships, new colonies, new names that sold better. *Magellan, Cortés, Pizarro*—Heroes with clean shirts and clean hands. Columbus became a footnote in speeches, a story for schoolbooks, but without his stench, without his trembling, without his gaze into the darkness. He had become useful. Finally.

In a monastery, a monk wrote in neat handwriting: *He sailed for God and King.* Another added in the margin: *And found the devil within himself.* The sentence was later deleted.

He wrote (years ago, in one of his last letters): *I didn't encounter God. Only a land that didn't yet know him.*

It was said his remains had been moved—first to Seville, then to Santo Domingo, then back again. No one knows where they truly lie. Perhaps that's

true. Perhaps the sea wanted him back. Perhaps it already had him. And somewhere, deep in the west, water rushes over an invisible shore, and someone whispers: "He was there."

He wrote:*Day... The sea never forgets. It just waits.*

Spain had learned to be proud again. The markets were full, ships came and went, and in the taverns, men who had never held an oar told stories of the great sea. Columbus was once again the topic of conversation—this time framed in gold. "He brought the New World," said one. "He lost it," said another. And no one was wrong.

The Church made him an instrument of God, preaching about faith, courage, and divine guidance. Not a word about whips, hunger, or deaths. Not a word about madness. The priests knew how to cleanse history with holy water. They did it thoroughly. In the cathedrals, candles burned under his name, and people whispered prayers, while outside, merchants sold slaves—cheap, healthy, blessed. Sin had a price, and heaven got its commission.

The crown produced commemorative coins, large pieces with his face on them. A dead man as currency. Ironic, but efficient. The king announced that they were honoring "the great admiral of the ocean." The same title that had once been torn from his neck in chains. Now it was convenient to have it again. The world needed legends, not men.

The poets and chroniclers did the rest. They wrote of bravery, of fate, of divine providence. No one mentioned the alcohol, the doubt, the filth. The truth only marred the paper.

One wrote:*He saw the face of God above the waves.*

Another:*He led humanity into the future.*

And somewhere in an archive lay his real logbook, with ink stains and curses, and no one read it.

It was said that the sea became calm after his death. Nonsense, of course—the sea knows no sentimentality. But there was something poetic about it, and people liked that. So it was told, again and again, until even the wind believed it.

In Seville, a small monument was erected, stone, smooth, clean. There was nothing underneath. Only a name and the word *Explorer*.

No date, no quote, no mistake. A man who had found the world was reduced to what could be carved on marble. And the rest—the sweat, the blood, the

noise—lay somewhere out there in the Atlantic, unmarked, unforgotten, and precisely for that reason, eternal.

The centuries passed, and Columbus remained. Not as a man, but as a symbol—changeable, practical, marketable. In one era, he was the hero, the visionary, the dreamer with a compass and faith in God. In another, he was the liar, the butcher, the beginning of the end. The beautiful thing about the dead is: they don't fight back. You can use them for anything.

The schoolbooks told of courage, of the great awakening, of the discovery of the West. Children painted ships with white sails and clean flags. No one spoke of whips, hunger, or decay. The children were shown the sea, but not what it had taken. Teachers said, "He brought civilization." And the students nodded, because they had been taught that civilization always came from the right side of the ocean.

His portraits hung in churches—stern, pious, idealized. A man who looked as if he had invented light.

The priests preached about the divine plan. That Columbus was a tool, a chosen one. No one mentioned that when God truly spoke, he was usually quiet—and never with admiralty.

In the cities, he was given squares, statues, and holidays. Ships, schools, and even cigarette brands were named after him. He was everywhere, but never real. A ghost that survived in marketing. And every time a politician mentioned his name, a little bit of him died again—politely, patriotically, profitably.

Then came the centuries of shame. New voices, new truths. They called him a murderer, a conqueror, a symbol of evil. His statues fell, and the dust smelled just like the sea once did. People screamed, argued, hated, and no one noticed that they were going around in the same circle again: looking for scapegoats instead of holding mirrors. Columbus had become useful again—this time as the culprit.

Books, films, and songs were written about him. Every generation found its own Columbus—the romantic, the devil, the fool, the visionary. And somewhere in all these versions, the man who had simply set sail because he thought there must be more out there than boredom and church taxes disappeared.

If he could have seen all this, he probably would have laughed. He, the man who left everything behind to find the unknown, was now the safest bet in

history. A dead name with guaranteed impact. A symbol to be kicked or celebrated—depending on who's holding the microphone.

And maybe, somewhere far out at sea, the water is laughing along. Because it knows that none of them has really discovered anything. You can travel around the world, but you can never escape yourself.

Fame is an animal that knows no owner. It eats you as long as you breathe and lies satiated on your grave when you finally fall silent. Columbus was no exception—just the first to be properly exploited. He had the misfortune of becoming a legend and the good fortune of not living to see it.

Kings died, churches burned, the world continued to turn as if it were in a hurry to forget him. But his name remained like a stain that no one could touch, because everyone wanted to use it—for honor, for shame, for instruction, for protest. It was the perfect symbol: so empty that everyone could pour their own truth into it.

Fame simply works. First, they need you. Then they show you off. Then they say you were overrated. And the audience applauds every time. Heroes only live until they bother someone. After that, they're called monsters—and that's sold as progress.

Perhaps Columbus was not a hero, not a devil, but merely a man who ventured too far to find something that would make him forget. Perhaps the whole thing was never divine, but simply human—the longing to belong somewhere where you don't have to explain who you are to anyone. And perhaps that was the greatest mistake of all: believing you can outsail your own shadow.

The world dissected him, but never understood him. They portrayed his actions as progress and its consequences as an accident. But it was simply what people always do: They run, find something, take it, argue about it—and then write a song about how brave they were.

If Columbus could return today, he wouldn't give a lecture, a speech, or a prayer. He would go to a bar, order a bad wine, and say, "They've found everything. But they're still searching." Then he would drink to himself, to the sea, and to the fact that no one truly returns home—they just arrive differently.

The years passed, and his name remained like a wave that never stops crashing ashore. Sometimes loudly, sometimes quietly, sometimes full of pride,

sometimes full of anger. Columbus became the subject of poems, sermons, bogeymen, and holidays. Everyone tugged at him as if he were a piece of land that could be conquered once more. But no matter how many monuments were erected or toppled, the sea remained silent. It told no story. It simply left him alone.

Perhaps that was the only mercy he had left. The sea judges no one. It takes you, carries you, devours you – without opinion, without morals. And somewhere, deep beneath the smooth surface, probably lies what's left of him: not his body, but the sound of an idea. The sound of a man who believed that direction was more important than destination.

The world he had opened closed again—this time with borders, tariffs, and laws. The lands he discovered were plundered, tamed, and baptized. Jungles became plantations, people became labor, faith became trade. They called it progress. And every time someone said, "We've discovered," there was a dead man somewhere. Columbus was just the first in line.

Centuries later, tourists stand in museums and look at his map—clean, framed, meaningless. Children write essays about him. Politicians quote him when they want to sell courage. And each time, he becomes a little further from the truth. The world's Columbus is a product, not a person. An emblem on a holiday, a slogan for determination. The seas he sailed now carry cruise ships and plastic—that is his legacy, whether we like it or not.

Perhaps this is the fate of all explorers: They set out to discover something new and only bring back themselves, multiplied by errors. Columbus was no hero, no demon—merely the prototype of the man who believes that movement is salvation. He never arrived, and that was his victory. For whoever arrives ceases to dream.

And so he remains, somewhere between heaven and hell, halfway between truth and delusion. Not a man, not a myth – a mirror. Everyone who looks into it sees what they want. The merchant sees gold, the believer sees fate, the skeptic sees madness. Only the sea sees nothing at all. It has long since forgotten him. And that is precisely why it remembers best.

A king who looks away

The king sat in his halls, heavy and tired, but the kingdom was young and hungry. Columbus was dead, but the sea was alive, and with it, greed. The admiral was spoken of only in polite phrases that smacked of duty. "He opened the way for us," they said. Period. Not a word about madness, not a word about chains, not a word about the rot his voyages had left behind. The king nodded when reports came and put them aside. He had no desire to remember the face of a man who had believed too much in his own promises.

Power doesn't work through courage, but through distance. The king knew this. Sometimes he sat at a long table, his advisors around him, and they talked about new expeditions, about gold, about slaves, about the next names that would shine brighter. Magellan, Cortés, Pizarro—men who were still fresh, still pure in their myth, not yet burned by their own mistakes. Columbus was already past, and the past is only used when it makes the present look pretty.

The documents accumulated in the archives: logbooks, letters, complaints, requests. Whole stacks of Columbus's handwriting, stained with ink, wine, and anger. They could have been read, but no one did. The king had them stored away like old grain never to be used again. "He was a difficult man," he once said, almost casually, and that explained everything. A complicated fool who was no longer needed.

The court chroniclers continued writing. They took what was useful and expunged the rest. Columbus's curses became prayers, his madness became courage, his greed became vision. They painted him as smooth, festive, and useful. No reader was to notice that in the end, the man sat alone in his room, coughing blood, the sea in his head, and wrote: *I was there*. Instead, he received a wreath poem and a place in the family tree of "great men."

The king didn't see himself as a traitor. He saw himself as an administrator. His job wasn't to guard the truth, but the empire. Truth had no value, gold did. Columbus was history—and history was a commodity. So he let the name live, but the man die. A clean cut, polite, efficient, deadly like a courtly bow.

In the end, all that remained of the admiral was a shadow on the wall, which the king dismissed with a glance. And Spain sailed on, hungry, blind, self-confident. The king looked west and thought not of Columbus, but of the next cargo of gold. The admiral was finished. The empire had no time for dead men who had been proven right.

At court, his name was only spoken when it was useful. At receptions where guests needed to be impressed, he was mentioned like an ingredient in a recipe. "Our Admiral of the Ocean," people would say while pouring wine. Then they would change the subject before anyone mentioned the uncomfortable details. The truth only spoiled the appetite.

The court chroniclers knew how to strip a legend and fill it with new ones. They wrote about visions, prayers, divine inspiration. The fact that Columbus had screamed, cursed, and demanded disappeared between the lines. His pleas turned into gratitude, his doubts into courage. He had served the crown, it was said, without ceasing. The fact that he had almost broken down in the process was a footnote that no one was supposed to read.

The councilors nodded when reports of new voyages came in. They talked about silver mines, sugar, slaves—about what had become of Columbus's dream. No one mentioned him directly. It was as if he had merely been a door opener, slammed shut behind one after entering. And the king did the same. His silence was not accidental, but strategic. An empire grows not through remembrance, but through forgetting.

Sometimes the Admiral's old comrades would appear, men with scars and dark stories. They begged to be heard, to tell the truth. They were politely rebuffed with a smile as smooth as a sword. "The Empire honors its heroes," they were told, "but business tolerates no disruption." They left again, sobered, and told their truth in taverns where no one would write it down.

This is how the court functioned: History wasn't told, but mixed like wine until it tasted good. Columbus was dead, and the dead can't defend themselves. His name remained, but it no longer belonged to him. It was now the property of the Crown, a coat of arms that could be printed on any piece of paper whenever it suited the occasion.

And the king? The king looked west, thinking not about the man, but only about what lay beyond. Gold, power, land. Columbus was finished. The crown looked away—and therein lay its power.

In the taverns, his story was told differently. There, Columbus wasn't a hero in golden letters, but a fool with luck. "The guy wanted to go to India and found only swamps and naked savages," one person shouted over beer and noise. "But he came back with stories and chains," another replied, and they laughed. To the common people, he wasn't a saint, but a joke on two legs—one of them who had somehow made it close to the throne and burned there.

In the markets, however, it sounded more solemn. Merchants touted fabrics and sugar as if they were direct gifts from the admiral. "From the new lands! Discovered by the admiral!" they shouted as they tipped wares onto the tables. No one checked whether it was true. It was a name, and a name sold better than any truth. Columbus had long since become a brand, like a stamp that promised respectability.

The church, in turn, preached its own version. For them, he was an instrument of God, chosen to make the world bigger so that the heavens could also expand. The priests spoke of a man who sailed by faith, who prayed when he first saw land, and who led the pagans to the cross. Not a word about whips, not a word about hunger, not a word about madness. In the pews, the people nodded. They needed heroes of stone, not flesh.

Between the tavern and the pulpit, a strange image emerged: Columbus as both fool and prophet. Some mocked him, saying he was a sailor who had drunk the earth around. Others swore he had seen angels showing him the way. And the children sang songs about three little ships as if it were a fairy tale. The admiral was everywhere—but never the same.

So he lived on, not as a person, but as a rumor. Everyone created the Columbus they needed. For the poor, he was proof that even a simple man could change the world. For the rich, he was the symbol that greed could be a divine plan. And for the scoffers, he was a fool who had survived—worse than dying.

The people didn't know the truth, but they sensed it: that a person is never as simple as stories make him out to be. But in the end, that didn't matter. In the end, all that remained was a name that anyone could pronounce without having to bear responsibility. Columbus was no longer a man. He was a mirror.

Other kingdoms heard the stories from Spain and immediately saw the benefits. Portugal called him a lucky man who had accidentally stumbled upon land that should have belonged to them. France scoffed that Spain was now guarding farms in the distance while real empires were being made in the Mediterranean. But secretly, everyone was listening. England noted names, currents, coastlines. Merchants copied, cartographers drew, chroniclers collected every little thing as if it were gold. Columbus was no longer the man who had sailed—he was the ticket to a world that still had no owner.

The merchants were the first to realize that his mistake was more valuable than any triumph. They founded companies, sent ships, and traded everything that could be shipped—timber, sugar, people. Everyone talked about the "new

route," and hardly anyone mentioned that the road was paved with corpses. Columbus's name served as a door opener: He had shown that it was possible, so the rest was just business.

The chroniclers in Europe turned him into a ghost, making for easy quotation. For the Germans, he was a model of Protestant diligence, even though he was Catholic. For the Italians, he was a hero of their nation, even though he never sailed for them. For the Spanish, an instrument of God, even though they had welcomed him in chains. Everyone picked at what suited them. And the more they tore him apart, the bigger he became.

Spain itself acted as if he were finished. At court, people preferred to talk about the new names, the new victories, the fresh expeditions. But the other empires needed him. They built him up, not because they honored him, but because they could use him. A man who had opened up a world was ideal for justifying their own dreams. "If Spain can do this, then we can do better." Thus began the race, and Columbus was the starting signal that no one wanted to hear anymore, but everyone used.

His name traveled through Europe like a coin polished by too many hands. No dust remained on it, no truth. He was a myth, and myths knew no boundaries. Anyone could own him, no one could control him. And Spain, the empire he had made greater, looked the other way—because it was easier to let the myth go than to hold on to the man.

In the end, it wasn't praise that made Columbus immortal, but forgetting. The king knew this, even if he never said it. Memories are dangerous because they raise too many questions. Silence, on the other hand, is clean, efficient, and unassailable. So they remained silent. They built statues, printed coins, preached about divine providence—and remained silent about hunger, decay, and violence. That was true power: not lying, but omitting.

The courtiers quickly learned to mention the name only when necessary. An admiral, a hero, an instrument of God—three words were enough to fill any hall. Afterward, it was put back in the drawer, next to old titles and forgotten victories. No scandal, no repercussions, no echo. Just controlled noise.

The people outside sensed that something was missing, but they couldn't put their finger on it. For them, Columbus was a fairytale man, a sailor who crossed the ends of the earth and returned. For the merchants, he was a label. For the church, a blessing. For the king, a closed chapter. The man himself, with his

stains, his defiance, his nights of anger—he disappeared. No one wanted him anymore.

This is how the king secured his power: by no longer looking. By not denying the truth, but by ignoring it. For what you don't look at eventually ceases to exist. The empire grew, the ships sailed, the gold flowed. And the admiral who had set all this in motion was now just a shadow on the wall.

Forgetting is the purest form of power. You don't have to fight, you don't have to justify, you don't have to kill. You just have to remain silent long enough until the world does the rest. This is how Columbus went down in history: not as a hero, not as a traitor, but as a figure who was only looked at as long as he was useful. After that, you closed your eyes.

The last journey – only shadows and rain

He was old, tired, but the sea called him once more. Not with trumpets, not with glory, but with a whisper that only he could hear. Columbus knew he could prove nothing more. The king had turned a blind eye to him, the chroniclers had written him off, the traders had exploited him. But in his mind, there was still a stain on the map, a piece of uncertainty that kept him awake. So he went.

The ships were smaller, money was tight, and the crew was reluctant. No one wanted to sail with the admiral who had once postponed the end of the world. He was too old, too broken, too worn out. But a few did join them—fortune seekers, beggars, men with nothing left to lose. They didn't see him as a hero, just an old fool with cards that looked like nightmares. "If he's right, we'll find something. If not, we'll drink ourselves to death," one muttered. That was enough of a plan for them.

The voyage began without cheers. No king waved, no bells rang. It was simply a departure, a stab into the unknown. The sky was gray, the water heavy, the wind a capricious bastard. Columbus stood at the bow, his face sunken, his eyes red, but they still burned. He had nothing left except this one fixation: to see the west once more, the open sea once more, as if there he might find proof that his life had not been in vain.

But this time the sea was different. No friendly tailwind, no clear horizon. Instead, rain for days, nights filled with thunder, storms that made the timbers

creak. The men cursed, shouted, prayed. Columbus was silent. He was too old to be afraid anymore. The rain ran down his face, and he saw it not as a punishment, but as a kind of baptism. "If I'm going to go down," he murmured, "I won't go down dry."

The voyage had no glamour, no great discoveries. It was just a struggle against fatigue, hunger, and illness. Shadows on the horizon that turned out to be illusions. Men who jumped into the sea at night because they could no longer bear the voices. Once, one was found floating in the water with his eyes open, as if he had finally seen land. Columbus gazed at him for a long time and said simply: "The sea forgets faster than we hope."

And yet he was driven on. Not hope, not greed, but stubbornness. He couldn't help it. He had once had the courage to make the earth round—now he needed that same defiance to see it empty. No hero, no prophet, no king. Just an old body, a burning head, a sea that still wouldn't let him go.

The days at sea blended into one another. Columbus often lay in his cabin, his body brittle, his skin damp with sweat. The fever came and went like a fickle lover. Sometimes he heard voices long dead: the queen, the old sailors, even Esteban with his cross. They spoke to him as if they were all standing on deck, laughing at his stubbornness. "You wanted to open the world," a voice sneered, "and you only built another prison." He laughed back, coughed up blood, and said, "Perhaps, but it was bigger than yours."

The men whispered outside. Some believed he was already dead and only his body was still sailing. Others said he talked to the sea at night. "He murmurs as if the water were answering," one whispered. And indeed—Columbus spoke in the dark, quietly, hoarsely, with the roar of the waves as a counterpart. "You were the only one who never lied to me," he said. "And you won't lie to me now either." The sea was silent, but the silence was answer enough.

The rain wouldn't stop. It poured for weeks, and the wood stank of rot. Provisions spoiled, barrels rotted, stomachs growled. Men died quietly, one by one, without anyone saying much. Columbus heard them go, and each time he made an invisible mental log: names, faces, curses. As if he were still an admiral, as if he still bore responsibility, even though everyone had long since realized that he could only lead himself.

Between bouts of weakness, he would sometimes stand up, drag himself onto the deck, and stare into the rain that melded sky and sea into a gray curtain. He raised his arms as if to embrace the whole thing and cried, "If you want me,

take me! But take me all!" The men looked away, ashamed or frightened. Some thought he was saintly, others mad. He was probably both, but the sea didn't care.

His mind was clearer than his body. The weaker his muscles grew, the sharper his thoughts became. He remembered every coast, every storm, the first "Land!" that had made him immortal. And he knew there would be no second chance. "Everything was unique," he murmured. "And that's why it matters." Then he fell back onto his bed, closed his eyes, and smiled.

The crew didn't know if they still had an admiral. But the sea did. It tested him with storms, with rain, with fever. And Columbus prevailed, not because he was strong, but because he had long since lost everything that could still be taken from him.

When the ships finally returned, they were little more than floating skeletons. The wood was blackened by the water, the sails torn, the men emaciated like walking ghosts. There was no cheering in the harbor, no bells, no speeches. Only the dull sound of ropes sliding over damp wood and the stench of disease that spread even before the anchors dropped.

Columbus was carried off the ship. His body was weak, almost transparent, a bundle of bones still breathing. The people on the quay watched, some whispering, others turning away. There was no honor, no procession, just this image: the admiral who had enlarged the world, like a beggar in the arms of strangers. A priest crossed himself. "God has tested him." But most just thought, "He's finished."

Reports of this voyage disappeared almost as quickly as they were written. There was nothing to tell except rain, hunger, and disease. No gold, no discovery, no new horizon. For the crown, it was an annoyance, a chapter better closed before anyone asked questions. The palace clerks recorded a polite phrase: *The Admiral's last voyage bore no fruit, but testified to unshakable faith.* Words like bandages on a dead horse.

Columbus himself remained silent. He lay in a house, sick, trembling, staring at the ceiling. He hardly spoke to people anymore, only to the sea in his memories. When visitors came—rarely and usually out of curiosity—they saw an old man rummaging through his maps, as if they could still save him. He showed them lines, islands, currents that no one wanted to see anymore. "Out there," he whispered, "there's more." The visitors nodded politely, smiled painedly, and left again.

The world had long since moved on. Other names filled the chronicles, other victories the speeches. Columbus was a shadow that still breathed, but no one wanted to see him. For Spain, he was a reminder that fame and madness often wear the same uniform. For the men who had carried him, he was an old fool who had never let go of the sea.

And so he returned, homeless. He was there, but he no longer belonged. The streets circled around him, the businesses continued, the bells rang for others. Columbus was back on land, but he was a stranger than ever.

He now lived in a house graciously provided by the crown, somewhere on the outskirts of a city whose name he barely knew. No harbor in sight, no mast, no smell of salt, just alleys, dust, and church bells. He was back on dry land, but the land didn't feel like home. He was like a beached animal, still dreaming in the waves.

Visitors came less frequently. At first, it was just curious people who wanted to see the famous admiral; then it was scribes collecting material for chronicles; and finally, just a few old comrades who secretly brought him bread or wine. He spoke little to them, but when he did, the old spark still glowed in his eyes. "You were out there," he told them. "You know what it's like." They nodded, and for a moment, he wasn't alone.

But he spent most of his time poring over his papers. Maps, logbooks, letters—everything lay around him like the wreckage of a lifetime. He ran his fingers over lines he had drawn himself and murmured island names no one else knew. It was as if he wanted to prove to himself that he had really been there. "I was there," he sometimes said aloud. "I saw it." No echo, no answer. Only the ticking of the clock and the distant ringing of a bell.

His body was decaying, but his gaze remained hard. He was bitter, yes, but not broken. "They used me and forgot me," he once said to a priest who offered him confession. "But I saw what was beyond the rim. They won't take that away from me." The priest remained silent, made the sign of the cross, and left. Columbus laughed softly. "None of you know how big the world really is."

He didn't see himself as a victim. In his lucid moments, he still saw himself as a man who had done what no one before him had done. He knew he'd made mistakes, yes. But he never believed he'd conquered the sea. "The sea can't be conquered," he murmured. "You can only sail on it for a while."

In his last days, he sometimes stood at the window and looked up at the sky, as if he saw sails no one else could see. "They sail on," he whispered. "And no one knows who they're following." Then he smiled, exhausted but not small. He had been to the edge of the world. That was more than most people could say.

The nights grew longer, his breaths shorter. Columbus lay in his room, and the world outside rushed past him like a stream he could no longer enter. He heard the voices of the city—merchants, children, bells—and they sounded like distant islands he would never set foot on. His body was old, brittle, ravaged by fever, but his head still floated out.

Sometimes he closed his eyes and saw the sea clearer than the ceiling above him. He heard the sails flapping again, the men cursing, the first "Land!", the cry that had made him immortal. But it was no longer glory, no longer triumph. It was a memory, a naked, cold memory, and he knew it too would soon disappear. "Perhaps that's a good thing," he murmured. "Perhaps no one is meant to keep everything."

The bitterness that had accompanied him for so long subsided. He spoke less about kings, crowns, and betrayal. He seemed to accept that the world would tell his story the way it needed to. "They'll take my name, twist it, bend it, tear it apart," he whispered. "But I know what I've seen. That's enough." For the first time in years, he no longer seemed at odds with himself.

The nights were heavy, but sometimes he dreamed peacefully. In these dreams, he saw no crowns, no churches, no coins. Only water. Endless, still water that carried him, not swallowed him. He lay upon it as if on the palm of a hand, calm, free from everything. And when he awoke, a remnant of this peace remained, as if he had finally understood that homecoming is not a place, but a state.

This is how he spent his last days: weak, silent, but without remorse. He no longer spoke of glory, no longer of guilt. Only of the sea, which would one day bring him back. "It's still waiting," he said, as if it were an old lover. And then he closed his eyes, heard the rain on the windows, and smiled.

Columbus had enlarged the world, but in the end, his own world had become small again: a room, a chair, a window, an ocean in his head. Perhaps that was enough. Perhaps it was all anyone could ever achieve.

Columbus, the old fool with the cards

Columbus sat at his table, the maps spread out as if they were his last companions. The paper was yellowed, the lines crooked, the edges torn, but he stroked them as if they were alive. "You have carried me farther than any human," he murmured. The maps were his consolation, his proof, his mirror. They told him that he had been out there, even if the world wanted to forget him.

He knew what people called him: the great admiral, the explorer, the murderer, the heretic, the hero. All at once, none of it real. He had another name for himself: Fool. An old fool who had believed lines on paper were worth more than lives. "I sacrificed men for lines as if they were sacred," he thought. "And now I'm alone with them. It's fitting."

The maps didn't lie. They showed currents, islands, coasts. But they said nothing about the hunger, the decay, the beatings, the screams. They were clean, while he was dirty. Maybe that's exactly why he loved them. "You don't hold anything against me," he whispered. "You are as patient as the sea."

Sometimes he laughed at himself. A man who had betrayed kingdoms, who wanted to conquer the seas, who sought gold like a beggar for bread – and in the end, he sat there, sick, old, still drawing lines. "This is my inheritance," he said. "Not gold, not glory. Just cards that someone will throw away someday."

He no longer felt betrayed. Neither by the king, nor by the church, nor by the sea. Betrayal had long since become normal to him. But he saw himself clearly: a fool who believed that the world would become bigger if you made it smaller on paper.

And yet he couldn't stop. He continued drawing, his hand trembling, his breath short, but the pen still obeyed him. Lines that led to nowhere. Coasts no one was looking for. Islands that perhaps had never existed. But to him, they were real. He had been there—if not in body, then in mind. And that was enough.

He knew he no longer had control over his image. The world outside told of Columbus, the admiral, the hero, the first step into a new era. But that wasn't the man sitting in this room, coughing until his back was sore. "They've cleaned me up," he murmured. "Like a table where no one wants to eat anymore."

Sometimes he laughed at the stories he heard. How he immediately fell to his knees upon first sighting the land, how he made the sign of the cross and

thanked God, how he was filled with humility. "I swore like a pig," he said quietly. "And they're writing me off as a saint." He coughed, wiped blood from his mouth, and grinned. "Perhaps that's the greatest discovery: that you can turn anything around when it's useful."

It no longer hurt him. He had once written letters, pleas, justifications. He had demanded that he be acknowledged, that his truth be heard. Now he knew: truth is weak against stories that sell better. "I was never an admiral," he whispered. "I was a merchant of dreams. And dreams are cheaper than gold."

Still, he held on. He held on to the memory that he had been out there. That he had seen the darkness, the endless water, the fear in the men's faces, the first piece of coast rising from the fog like a threat. That was real. No one could take that away from him, even if the world made him into a pious fairytale man.

His defiance was the only thing that remained. An old body, cards on the table, a head full of voices, and the quiet certainty: "I was there. You weren't." He knew that was worthless, except to himself. But sometimes that's enough.

And so he laughed, weakly, hoarsely, at the discrepancy between the man he was and the hero he'd been made into. "They're celebrating someone who never existed," he thought. "And the only one who knows what it was really like is sitting here with damaged lungs and maps no one wants to read."

He often thought of the faces of the men who had sailed with him. Many had already broken in the first storm; others had cursed, prayed, and plundered. Some had screamed as they fell overboard; others had disappeared silently. Columbus remembered them all, even if the world had forgotten them. "They only talk about me," he murmured. "But I was never alone."

He knew he was to blame. Not for everything, but for enough. He had led them, promised them land, gold, and glory. Instead, he had delivered hunger, death, and fever. Some had believed, others had only hoped. In the end, they lay at sea, nameless, unwritten. "I made maps, and they aren't found in them," he said quietly. "Perhaps that was my greatest betrayal."

Fame had made him alone. He wore the admiral's crown, but it was heavier than iron. He had had men behind him, but fame was constructed in such a way that it all fell back on him. Success, failure, guilt, crime—everything became his name, and all others faded into the shadows. "They call me hero or devil," he thought. "But what they never say: I was just one of them, too. Only louder."

His maps were silent about this guilt. Lines, coasts, islands—they told nothing of the people who had made them possible. Perhaps that was why he loved them so much: they forgave him by remaining silent. But at night, when the fever came, he heard the voices again. Sailors demanding he admit what they had paid. Voices asking him, "Was it worth it?"

He had no answer. He only knew that he still heard them, and that was proof that they never completely disappeared. Perhaps that was the price of fame: not the gold, not the honor, not the lies—but the voices of those who had gone with him, never to return.

Columbus breathed heavily, looked at his maps, and whispered, "I wasn't alone. But in the end, only I remained."

The sea was the only thing that had never deceived him. It promised nothing, it held nothing back, it simply took. Columbus knew this, and he loved it for precisely that. "You all lied to me," he whispered in his room, "kings, priests, merchants—even myself. Except the sea."

In his final days, he no longer thought of land, of cities, of monarchs. He thought of waves, of currents, of the sound of wood creaking as it works against the swell. The sea had tested him, tormented him, almost swallowed him, but it had never betrayed him. "It was honest," he murmured. "More honest than any person I've met."

The maps on his table depicted the sea in lines, as if it could be tamed, but he had long known that was impossible. One could float on it, one could use it, one could disappear into it—but one could never own it. The sea belonged to itself, and perhaps that was the only truth he had ever truly understood.

Sometimes he closed his eyes and heard the sound, so clear he thought the waves were right below his window. He imagined what it would be like to walk out now, down the street, and find not houses at the end, but a coast. He smiled at the thought. "That would be the most beautiful homecoming," he said. "Not to people, but back to the water."

In his dreams, the sea was no longer threatening. It was soft, vast, endless. No storm, no greed, no death—only movement and stillness at the same time. A womb into which one falls. He awoke with a peace he hadn't known for a long time. Perhaps, in the end, the sea hadn't been a test, but a home.

Columbus stroked the edges of his maps as if to thank them. "You always led me back to him," he whispered. "And now I'll stay." He knew he would never board a ship again. But he also knew: the sea had long since taken him. Not his body, but everything he was.

Death in Valladolid – no applause, no God

It happened without drama. No king stood at his bedside, no crowd waited at the door. Columbus died in a room in Valladolid that was barely larger than the cabin in which he had once sailed across the Atlantic. The windows were closed, the air stuffy, his body as weak as rotten wood. Only a few monks were there, murmuring prayers he could barely hear anymore.

He had long since been somewhere else, far away. In his final hours, he spoke not of fame or kings, but of the sea. He murmured softly, as if in a fever: "The water... the water carries me." The monks made the sign of the cross, thinking he was seeing visions. But he saw only what had accompanied him his entire life—waves, currents, the endless breath of the ocean.

When the last breath came, it was not a cry, not a confession, not a pathetic sentence for the chronicles. It was a quiet exhalation, like a sail falling when the wind dies down. No god came to claim him. No applause sounded. Only the quiet crackling in the fireplace and the rustling of the monks' clothes, who continued to murmur as if someone hadn't changed their script.

Outside, the city went about its daily life. Merchants shouted their prices, children screamed, horses clattered across the pavement. No one suspected that inside this house, a man who had made the world a bigger place was dying. It was just another death, one of many that didn't even stir up the dust for a moment.

And so Columbus left the world as he had lived in it: between noise and silence, between vision and error, between longing and guilt. No God, no applause—only the sea in his head, which finally carried him home.

The news of his death was treated at court as a matter of duty. A clerk soberly noted the date, a messenger delivered the message, an official placed the file on a shelf. No uproar, no special ceremony. An admiral had died, but one who had long since been buried in thought.

The crown allowed a few words, nothing more. "Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean, has died in Valladolid." This was stated in a protocol, sandwiched between notes about grain deliveries and new tax decrees. No heroic speech, no state ceremony. For Spain, he was long past, a name in the chronicles, nothing more than a tool that had been laid aside.

In the city itself, life continued. The innkeepers poured wine, the merchants praised their wares, the priests preached as usual. Some citizens, upon learning of his death, shook their heads and said, "Hadn't he been dead for a long time?" Others laughed, "That fool with the cards? He's still alive?" Hardly anyone felt any grief. A few old sailors drank to him in a dark tavern, toasted him with cheap wine, and remained silent. That was the only funeral procession he received.

His funeral was simple. A narrow coffin, a few prayers, a barely noticeable cross. No banner, no flag, no royal decree. Only the bare essentials to ensure the body didn't remain in state any longer than it should have. And by the very next day, hardly anyone was talking about it anymore.

Thus, Columbus was not erased by death, but by oblivion. His name remained in books, in sermons, in the minds of those who wished to use it. But his end was not a bang, not a scream—it was a memo that vanished into the dust.

It was almost grotesque how quickly the balance tipped. As soon as Columbus was buried, his death became insignificant, but his life became grander than ever. Chroniclers took up quills, monks took up parchment, merchants wrote stories. They told not of the old man who died sick in Valladolid, but of the admiral who tore open oceans and discovered worlds. His death was small, his name suddenly enormous.

The irony was brutal: the less people spoke of the real Columbus, the more immortal he became. The details—hunger, storms, whips, chains—disappeared, and all that remained was a statue made of words. The hero, the visionary, the chosen instrument of God. It was convenient, it was marketable, it was clean.

The kings who had shunned him during his lifetime now adorned themselves with his legend. "Our admiral, our discoverer," they suddenly called him, as if he had served them faithfully and loyally until his last breath. That he returned in chains, that he had been cursed, laughed at, and ignored—all of that was erased. They needed a hero, not a weary old man.

And so his myth grew with each story. Children heard about him in school as if he were a saint. Merchants adorned their wares with his name. Mapmakers scribbled "Discovered by Columbus" on surfaces he had never seen. He became a label worth more than his own life.

No one spoke of Valladolid anymore, of the narrow coffin, of the monks who murmured for him. His death was dust. His name was gold. And gold outlives all.

As soon as he was dead, Columbus became a tool for anyone who could use him. The Church portrayed him as a faithful pilgrim who, on God's behalf, had led the heathens to Christ. No mention of whips, blood, or hunger—only of the sign of the cross and humility. For the kings, he was a shining figurehead, proof of Spain's greatness, even though they had treated him like a troublemaker in life. They wore his name like armor, but never his burden.

The merchants turned him into a seal. "Discovered by the Admiral" – a phrase that sold sugar, spices, and tobacco better than any sermon. His name was no longer a person, but a stamp that made coins clink. Even the countries that had mocked him claimed a piece of him for themselves. Italy claimed him as their son, France painted him as an enemy, England as a competitor, Portugal as a thief. Everyone wanted Columbus, but no one wanted him as he truly was.

Chroniclers built legends from crumbling facts. They wrote of unshakable courage, of divine inspiration, of a man who triumphed against all odds. That he returned in chains, that he was ignored by his own king, that he died in Valladolid like a nobody—all of this was omitted. History is not memory, but a tool.

And so he lived on, not as a man, but as a projection screen. For the pious, he was a saint, for the powerful, a symbol, for the merchants, a price tag. Everyone found in Columbus what they needed. The man was extinguished. The myth was immortal.

The world quickly forgot who he had been, but it never forgot his name. Streets, ports, and cities were named after him. In books, he stood as a hero, in sermons as an instrument of God, in markets as a label. The real Columbus—the man who died coughing, the old fool with maps, the beggar in the shadow of a throne—disappeared. What remained was a legend, smoothed, clean, shining like a freshly minted coin.

There was applause, yes, but not for him. The applause was for the image they had built of him, a statue of words that had nothing to do with the weak body in Valladolid. No god came to take him, but humans made him a demigod because they needed to. Columbus was no longer human—he was a mirror, a projection screen, an excuse, a justification.

He was dead, forgotten, and yet greater than ever. No more breath, no more heartbeat, only lines in chronicles and songs in schools. The world kept turning, faster, more greedily, and his name served as fuel. The man was dust. The myth was gold.

So it ended: no applause in Valladolid, no God, no throne, just a dying body. And at the same time, applause in the streets, in the churches, in the halls, for a Columbus who had never existed. The real one lay silent. The fictional one lived on.

And perhaps, he thought at the last moment, that was precisely the cruelest truth: that he had changed the world – but not in the way he himself could exist in it.

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