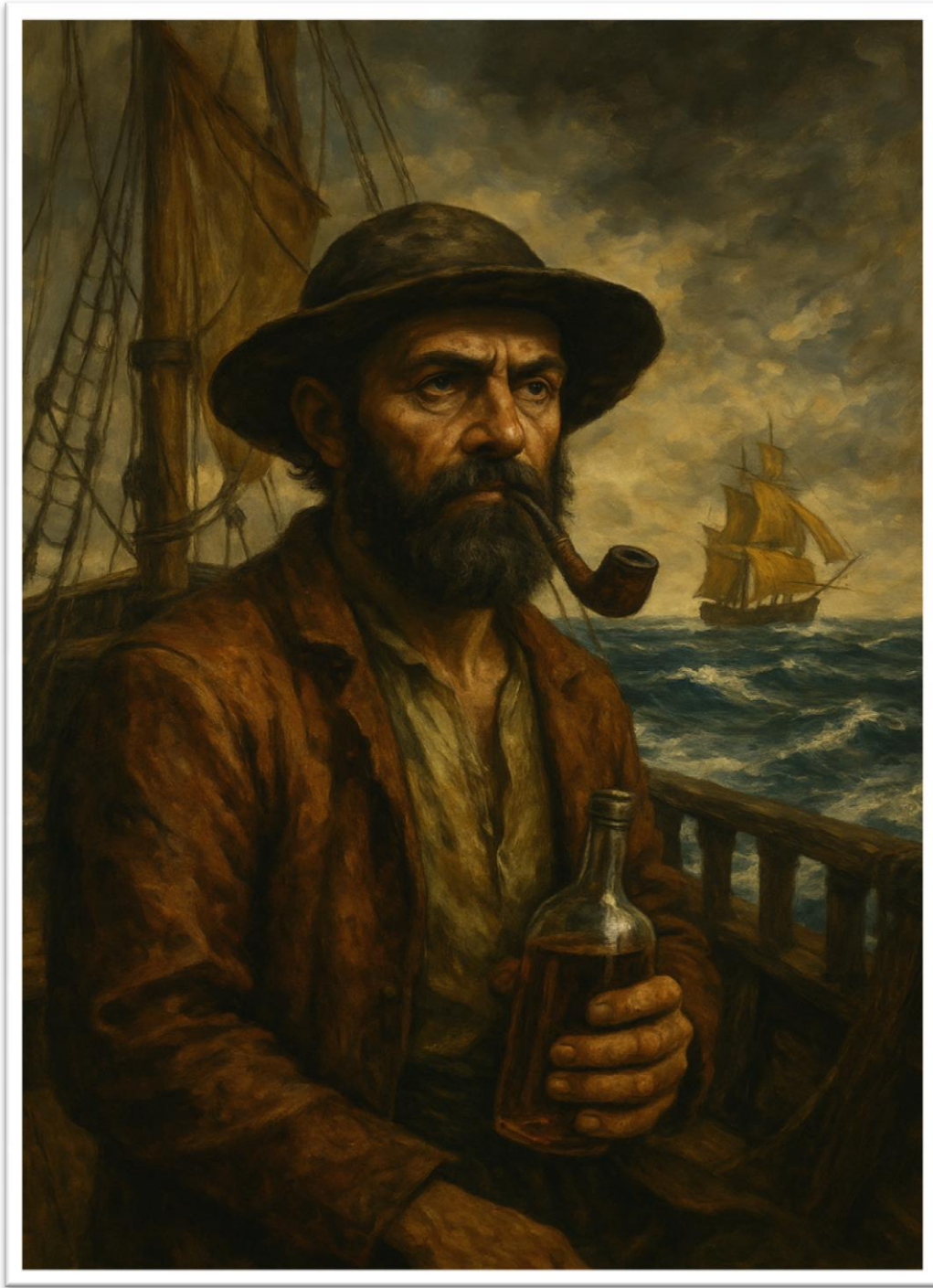


Magellan

Damned around the world



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The man who wanted too much

He was small. Not tiny, but small enough that you could overlook him when he ducked his head and shrugged his shoulders, as he often did when someone was getting on his nerves—and that was almost always the case. Ferdinand Magellan, or Fernão de Magalhães, as he was known over in Saudi Portugal, was no hero. He was a wasted soldier with a bad knee, a ruined reputation, and a rage in his gut that was bigger than all his maps put together. They say he wanted to circumnavigate the world. But the truth is: he just wanted something that would let him breathe again.

He was done with the world before he'd even circumnavigated it. The war in Morocco had almost taken one of his legs and all his pride. The Portuguese royal family had dropped him like an empty wine bottle. No pay, no recognition, nothing but dust and the taste of metal in his mouth. The king, that dazzling peacock Manuel I, treated him like a louse on his collar. Magellan came with his suggestions, routes, calculations, all neat, all sensible – and Manuel looked at him as if he were a beggar asking for bread. Maybe that's what he was. A beggar for importance. For a damn place in this shitty history.

He had seen too much, too many dead men, too many bloody sunrises over burned villages. He wasn't one of those fine navigators with white hands and beautiful French. He was a bastard of war, someone who had learned that glory only stinks if you touch it for too long. And yet—something burned inside him. A rage so deep that even the sea couldn't quench it.

In Lisbon, they said he was crazy. A man who would betray his own king simply because he was no longer granted audiences. But Magellan was no traitor—he was a realist. If someone kicks you long enough, you'll eventually turn around and back down. Even if it costs you your life. So he went to Spain, to the city of hypocrites, to Seville, where the sun was too hot and the promises were too cheap. He hobbled through the alleys, smelling of sweat, salt, and disappointment, carrying nothing in his pocket but debt and an idea so big it was consuming him.

He believed that somewhere out there—beyond the islands, beyond the Portuguese maps—there was a path to the west, which should be east. A passage no one had seen. He wanted spices, gold, glory, yes—but more than that, he wanted to show it all. The kings, the generals, the damned Portuguese who had laughed at him. He wanted to prove to them that the little man with the limping leg could outsmart the world.

In the taverns of Seville, men sat with their dirty hands and talked of miracles, of ships that disappeared in storms, of mermaids and monsters that swallowed entire boats. Magellan sat among them, drinking the cheapest wine and listening. And while they boasted, he did the math. Not with coins, but with latitudes, longitudes, and winds. He knew the sea, the real sea, the one that eats you if you blink. No mapmaker with soft fingers could explain it to him.

He wrote letters, he begged for audiences. And eventually, he came to the door he was looking for: that of the young Spanish king, Charles I, who had no idea that he would soon own half of damned Europe. Magellan stood before him, ragged, scarred, with eyes that no longer believed in miracles, but in necessity. He promised Charles wealth, spices, glory—but between the words lay something else. Something dark. A will born of defiance.

Charles liked him immediately—or perhaps it was just the money he smelled in Magellan's madness. The Spanish hated the Portuguese, and Magellan was a Portuguese who had cursed his own country. That pleased them. So it happened that the man who wanted too much got five ships: *Trinidad*, *San Antonio*, *Concepcion*, *Victoria* and *Santiago*. Names that would soon taste of death and decay.

But before he had it, he had to go through the hell of bureaucracy, bribery, and ecclesiastical hypocrisy. Everyone wanted a piece of the pie that didn't even exist yet. Everyone wanted their fingers in the future that Magellan could only draw on paper. And he—he smiled, nodded, promised, and remained silent. He knew they thought he was a fanatic, but that was okay. Fanatics get things done that reasonable people wouldn't even think about.

At night, he sat in his room in Seville, listening to the rats scratching on the walls and staring at the candle flame. He thought of the sea. Not romantically, not poetically—to him, the sea wasn't a song, but an animal. He knew its hunger. But he believed he could outsmart it. A foolish belief, but it was all he had.

He dreamed of islands where pepper grows like grass. Of waters so calm that one loses oneself in the ocean's mirror. Of a land that doesn't belong to him, but at least doesn't despise him. Sometimes, when the wind blew through the window, he could already smell the salt—not from the Andalusian coast, but from the other, the distant, the promising one.

He was obsessed. His friends, if you could call them that, said he looked like he was disappearing a little more every day, like the idea in his head was eating

him up. And maybe it was. But if you want greatness, you must first destroy yourself.

In the church in Seville, he knelt, not out of faith, but out of calculation. He knew he would only be helped if he maintained the appearance of piety. So he murmured his prayers while mentally hoisting sails and counting cannons. And somewhere out there, on the other side of heaven, God laughed—or coughed.

The nights grew longer. The rumors grew thicker. They said Magellan was planning to betray the Portuguese, deceive the Spanish, curse the Pope, and perhaps there was a grain of truth in all of it. But no one understood that he had long since transcended patriotism. For him, the sea was not a land, not an empire, not a king. It was the only thing that remained honest.

If you met him on the street back then, you saw a man with a scar on his leg, a steely gaze, and a slight tremor in his hands. Not a hero. Not a prophet. Just someone who wanted too much and got too little. And that's a dangerous mix.

He knew it would kill him. Anyone who wants to sail around the world brings death with them. But Magellan had long since come to terms with it. He wasn't a dreamer—he was a gambler who put everything on a single card. And if the sea was his final opponent, then at least it deserved a worthy match.

He wrote a few more letters to Lisbon—none of them were answered. He knew they would call him a traitor, perhaps prepare to hang him if he ever returned. But that didn't matter. The road to the West was now his religion.

He drank too much that night with sailors who would soon be his men. Rough men, half-illiterate, half-murderers, who would have sold their own mothers for a silver ducat. But they laughed, they sang, they believed him. And that was enough.

At one point, he stood outside, swaying, and looked up at the sky above Seville. It was black and cold, yet a thousand dots sparkled there, as if to show him the way. Magellan spat, wiped his mouth, and whispered, "Damn it. I'll take you all there. I swear on my crippled leg."

And somewhere, far out, beyond the visible horizon, the sea began to stir.

Seville stank. Not that noble scent of olive oil and oranges that poets later raved about, but of rot, fish, and shit. The Guadalquivir dragged the city's misery like a pregnant whore who doesn't know who her father is. Among alleys full of noise and deceit, Magellan searched for allies—but all he found

were parasites in velvet cloaks. Every other man in this city was a merchant, another a liar, and most were both.

He had his calculations, his maps, his crooked dreams. But what were numbers worth compared to human greed? In every tavern, someone wanted to have a say; everyone had a "cousin in trade with the Moluccas." Magellan listened, drank, shook hands, and when the door closed behind them, he muttered quietly, "They're all pigs." He knew they wanted to use him—but that was okay. He intended to use them in return.

The thought that, as a Portuguese, he would sail for Spain gnawed at him. It was a betrayal, yes, but a necessary one. Portugal had forgotten him, slammed its doors in his face, ridiculed his pleas. Now he was free to belong to himself—at least, that's what he told himself. But deep in the night, when the city was silent, doubts emerged like rats from the cracks.

Sometimes he sat by the river, alone, his feet in the water that smelled of silt and decay, and he thought, "Maybe I really am crazy." And then he laughed. A hard, dry laugh. Madness was a luxury only the rich could afford. For men like him, madness was just another word for courage.

He knew what was at stake. Spain wanted spices, gold, and to find the East through the West—and to do it as cheaply as possible. Charles I, the boy with the face of an angel and the gaze of an accountant, had trusted him, but only because he knew that Magellan was the only idiot who would willingly undertake this suicidal venture.

In the archives, the paper smelled of must. Magellan sat there for hours, studying old routes, skimming through reports from dead captains who had also believed they had found the end of the world. He noted wind directions, currents, latitudes. An obsessive man who believed in numbers where others believed in miracles.

In the evenings, he went to Barbosa, the old sailor who had more rum than blood in his body. Barbosa was a man who knew too much, and that was precisely why he was still alive. He cursed, coughed, and told stories of ships falling off the edge of the world. Magellan listened until the sun rose. "You want to fool them all, don't you, Fernão?" Barbosa asked one night. "The Spanish, the Portuguese, the whole damn world." Magellan didn't answer. He just stared into his glass.

He knew he was no prophet. No hero. But he sensed something greater than himself—that invisible magnet that leads men astray. The sea had never let go of him since he first swallowed its salty taste. It was like a demon in his blood.

One morning he went to the royal harbor. The ships there were huge, bloated monsters, glittering in the sun like golden coffins. He saw the sailors struggling with ropes, barrels, and curses. People who had no idea they would soon become part of a legend, told with too much wine. He knew that smell: wood, tar, sweat, death.

Magellan wasn't a man who prayed, but sometimes he whispered to himself, as if that might help. "Five ships," he muttered. "Five damned graves on water." And then he grinned. "But one of them will return. And my name will live on, even if my body rots in the ocean."

The preparation took months. Corruption was Spain's true currency. He had to pay for every piece of sail, every barrel of wine, every kilo of iron, every cannonball. The king gave him his seal, but no trust. The churchmen examined his soul as if it were a piece of cattle. He signed documents declaring himself an instrument of God, even though he had long known that God was not on any of his cards.

The men who joined him were a bunch of desperate dogs. Convicts, adventurers, drunkards, debt fugitives. Some believed in the land of gold, others simply in a quick end. Only a few believed in Magellan. They secretly called him "el portugués loco"—the mad Portuguese. He heard it, but said nothing. He had learned that silence was sharper than any knife.

In the nights before departure, one could hear the city singing. Women laughed, children screamed, and somewhere a lute played a song so sad that even the rats stopped. Magellan barely slept. He lay on his bunk, his leg aching, his mind racing. He saw the route ahead of him—through the unknown waters south of the new continent, through a strait that still had no name. He saw himself standing on deck, his face torn by the wind, but free.

But in the morning, when the sun gilded the roofs of Seville, he felt the heaviness. He knew he was crossing a line no man could cross with impunity: the line between dreamer and obsessive. Barbosa warned him: "You can't own the sea, Fernão. It eats men like you for breakfast." Magellan replied: "Then let it swallow itself."

There were women who stalked him—young, curious things who thought he was a hero. He evaded them. His body was tired, his heart rusted. What could he offer them? Only stories, and they were all full of corpses.

Once, shortly before his departure, he visited the cathedral. He stood before the altar, looked at the crucifix, and said quietly, "If you're up there, stay out of my way." The priest behind him heard this and blessed him anyway. Perhaps he knew that this man with the broken leg was doing something even saints dared not do.

That evening, sailors, whores, and thieves sat in the tavern "La Estrella." One of them, a fat man with a scar across his face, shouted, "The Portuguese wants to find the East through the West! He might just find his own ass instead!" Everyone laughed. Magellan didn't. He stood up, walked slowly over to him, and before the other could open his mouth, punched him in the face. The man fell backward, blood splattered on the table. "The East," Magellan said calmly, "will be the last thing you see if you come at me like that again." Then he walked out. Not another word. Only silence.

Later, he stood on the bridge, looking out over the river. The lanterns cast their light onto the water, which looked as if something alive were moving beneath it. Perhaps it was the sea itself, already waiting for him. He smoked—something cheap that tasted of pitch—and thought that life always moved when you least wanted it to.

In the papers that were signed the next morning in the royal archives, his name appeared under a sentence: "*Expedición para descubrir el paso al other mar.*" An expedition to find the passage to the other sea. Magellan signed with a trembling hand. He knew: This wasn't a contract. This was a death sentence. But damn it—at least it was his.

And as the sun rose over Seville, the shouts of merchants, the clanging of iron, the screams of animals began to ring in the alleys. Life went on as if nothing had happened. Only one person knew that on this morning the world shifted a little – a limping Portuguese man with too much pride, too much anger, and a dream bigger than any continent.

He turned around, looked at the river, spat into the water, and muttered, "All right. If you gods up there hate me—at least give me wind."

And somewhere, far out in the Atlantic, the first storm was stirring.

The days passed like thick soup. Every morning tasted the same: of dust, lingering wine, and the bitter taste of paperwork. Magellan wasn't a bureaucrat, but he had to become one. Spain demanded forms for every damned breath. Every rope, every nail, every pound of flesh had to be recorded, paid for, stamped, and blessed. He stood among accountants, scribes, monks, and officers, all of whom thought they knew better than anyone how to conquer a world.

He stood upright, as best he could with his leg, and bore the arrogant grins of the officials. They looked at him as if he were a poor madman begging for an audience with the king. He knew they were just waiting for him to break down, for him to admit it was all madness. But Magellan remained silent. He remained silent because silence was more dangerous than any weapon.

Charles I, the young king, listened to Magellan's final proposals. He spoke softly, almost politely, but his eyes were cold. He saw the Portuguese as a tool, not a person. "You will sail for Spain," he said. "Not for your ego." Magellan nodded. But inside, he was laughing. For Spain? No. For no one. Just to prove he was right.

In March 1519 the treaty was signed – the *Capitulation of Valladolid*. Magellan was given command of five ships and the right to claim, on behalf of Spain, anything he found, as long as it didn't already belong to the Portuguese. That was the catch. The world was divided into lines, as if it were a piece of bread being torn apart by two kings. The Pope had drawn these lines, and anyone who crossed them was as good as dead. Magellan knew this—and he knew he would cross them anyway.

At night, sitting alone in his room, he unfurled the maps. Lines, points, coasts only half-known. Between them, gaps—and right there, in those gaps, lay his future. He ran his finger over South America, along the undiscovered coasts. Somewhere there had to be the passage. A scar in the flesh of the world. He could feel it, even though no one had ever seen it.

He drank too much on those nights. Not for pleasure, but to numb the pounding in his head. The idea gnawed at him. The thought that he might be betting everything on a lie. A sea that didn't exist. A path that led to the abyss. But then he remembered the faces of the Portuguese courtiers who had laughed at him, of King Manuel, who had treated him like a pest. Those faces were the fuel of his soul. He wanted to destroy them—with glory.

His crew was a reflection of the world itself: torn, greedy, deceitful. About 270 men, Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians, Basques, even a few Germans, who came from Flanders and took anything that smelled like prey. Some had never seen the sea. Others had seen it too often. They bore scars, fists, and smells like decorations.

At the head of his officers was Juan de Cartagena, an arrogant Spaniard with royal connections. The man had the king's authority on his side—and the poison of vanity in his eyes. From the very first meeting, Magellan sensed that this man would become his enemy. Cartagena hated the thought of serving a Portuguese. Behind his back, he called him "that little cripple with a god complex." Magellan heard it. He never forgot it.

The preparations dragged on. Ships were inspected, repaired, and loaded. Tons of salt, barrels of water, wine, beans, cheese, dried fish, powder, and cannons were purchased. The lists grew longer than the Bible. Everyone wanted to be paid. Everyone wanted their share before the ship even left port. Magellan paid, cursed, and begged. He was both commander and beggar.

The sun burned, the smell of tar and animal fat hung in the air. Everywhere someone was shouting: merchants, cabin boys, dockworkers. Children ran between the carts, women called for lost men, and the clinking of cups emerged from the taverns. It was a vast, fetid orchestra of hope and despair.

Magellan walked across the quay, his step dragging, his cane tapping. Some men bowed, others spat as soon as he passed. But he didn't care. He had learned that respect had nothing to do with words—only with fear. And he would instill that in them soon enough.

He met regularly with Barbosa, who had now acted as a kind of unofficial advisor. The old sailor drank more than he talked, but when he talked, it was gold. "You must make them fear you, Fernão. If they don't fear you, they'll eat you." Magellan nodded. He knew that the voyage would not be decided by the sea, but by men. And men are more dangerous than storms.

That evening, a messenger from the king arrived with one final instruction: Magellan was to appear at the church one last time before setting sail to receive the blessing. A spectacle for the public. The king wanted to create the impression that this was an undertaking sent by God. Magellan hated this circus. But he went, stood stiffly in the church while the priest muttered Latin and waved incense. The smoke burned his eyes. He thought of the flames that would soon accompany his men—not of incense, but of gunpowder.

Later, outside, under the starry sky, he was himself again. He looked up, the Milky Way like an open book. He didn't believe in fate, but sometimes he felt as if the stars themselves were mocking him. "You shine beautifully," he murmured, "but I want to know what's behind you."

He had strange dreams during these days. Of a sea that opened like a jaw. Of men without faces roaring at him. Of a sun that never set. He woke up drenched in sweat, reached for the wine bottle, and drank until the images blurred.

Cartagena began to make his own plans. He sought allies among the Spanish officers, talking of loyalty, of pride, of a Portuguese captain who would lead Spain to ruin. Magellan knew this. He let him have his way. For now. He was no fool. He knew that you don't kill rats immediately—you let them breed so you know where they are.

In the summer of 1519, an oppressive heat hung over Seville. The stench of sweat and decay was unbearable. But in the shipyard, the masts rose toward the sky, as if they wanted to impale it. The five ships stood there, ready—or at least pretended to. Wood creaked, sails flapped, men cursed. Magellan looked at them and thought: "So this is my kingdom."

He had no gold, no crown, no army. Only five rotten chests, 270 semi-criminal men, and a dream that was deadly in every way. But in his chest beat something stronger than reason. A will that knew no mercy.

One of those evenings, Barbosa came to him, sat down next to him on the crate on the quay, and said, "Do you know what the craziest thing is, Fernão? You might actually succeed. And that would be the worst thing." Magellan laughed softly. "Maybe," he said. "But at least then I'd finally be free."

Free. A word that tasted of salt.

And so he sat there, in the darkness, the water glittering like mercury, and somewhere in the distance a dog barked. Seville slept, the world slept, but Magellan was not. He was awake—like someone who senses that tomorrow will swallow him up.

The nights before departure were leaden. A damp wind crept through Seville, as if trying to carry the city's stench into the ships. The water in the harbor gurgled, thick as oil, and every step across the pavement sounded like a curse.

Magellan walked slowly, his cane in his hand, his leg heavy, his thoughts even heavier. Everything was finished—at least on paper. But paper lies. Always.

The shipyard workers had done their work as best they could. The ships – *Trinidad, San Antonio, Concepcion, Victoria* and *Santiago*— lay there like five dreaming animals, ready to pounce. The wood glistened with resin, the ropes were taut, the barrels stacked, the masts erected like prayers. But Magellan knew: no prayer in the world could prevent at least three of these crates from seeing the bottom of the sea.

Cartagena stood at the railing of the *San Antonio* and pretended to inspect the cargo. In reality, he was watching Magellan. His eyes were narrow, cold, like a jackal's. He spoke quietly to two other officers, then they laughed. Magellan heard, but he didn't turn around. "Let them laugh," he thought. "They won't laugh anymore when the sea eats them."

He had long since understood that he would not only be sailing against the ocean, but against the men under his command. Spain had given him ships—but no loyalty. The Spanish saw him as a foreign bastard who wanted to give orders. To them, he was what they hated: an outsider with power.

That evening, Barbosa came by again, his bag of wine over his shoulder. "You should sleep, Fernão," he said. Magellan shook his head. "I've slept all my life. Not anymore." They drank on the quayside in silence. Seagulls flew overhead, loud as bad thoughts.

"You know," said Barbosa, "I've seen men die with less madness than you. You want too much. The sea doesn't like men who want too much." Magellan smiled thinly. "Then let it hate me. I have no problem being hated." Barbosa nodded slowly, as if he had expected it. "Then you're lost." "Perhaps," replied Magellan, "but at least I'm real."

The nights in the harbor were full of noises—the creaking of the planks, the hissing of the lanterns in the wind, the rustling of the rats. Some of the men slept on deck, others in the taverns, still others with women whose names they would never know. A few fought over money, a few over pride. All perfectly normal, Magellan thought. Men on the brink of hell always behave the same.

He walked through the rows of ships, spoke to the officers, checked lists. Everyone asked the same thing: "When do we set sail?" He didn't answer. Not because he didn't know, but because the knowledge itself hurt. The day was set—the end of August 1519. But every day before that felt like a last meal.

One night, he caught two men helping themselves to salted meat from one of the storage barrels. They were trying to steal it to sell. Magellan didn't say a word. He drew his dagger and cut off their ears—one the right, the other the left. "So you remember who's listening," he said coldly. No one objected. The next morning, the story was known throughout the harbor. And suddenly, no one was talking behind his back anymore.

Cartagena came to him the next day, walking erect, his voice full of polite contempt. "Captain, that was brutal and unnecessary. Those men are part of our crew." Magellan looked at him calmly. "They were part of our crew. Now they're part of a lesson." Cartagena snorted. "That's not how you win loyalty." "I don't need loyalty," Magellan said. "I need obedience." And then he turned around, leaving him standing there like a schoolboy who had just been slapped by his teacher.

The days grew shorter. The wind changed direction. It was as if the heavens themselves sensed that something was about to begin that couldn't end well. Magellan felt it too. He saw it in the men's faces—fear, curiosity, greed. A burning mixture that could ignite any ship long before a storm did.

One night, a messenger came from the palace. A final letter from the king. Blessed undertaking, divine guidance, blah blah. At the end it read: "*Don't forget that you represent Spain.*" Magellan read it twice, then spat on the parchment. "I represent no one but myself," he said quietly.

The day before departure arrived with a blood-red sunrise. The seagulls circled loudly, as if they knew what was about to happen. Men hauled barrels, lashed ropes, and checked cannons. The harbor basin vibrated with voices and orders. Magellan walked silently through the chaos. Some greeted him, some turned away. He saw everything, said nothing.

The priests came, blessed the ships, and sprinkled them with water they called holy. Some men crossed themselves. Magellan did not. For him, water was water, whether it fell from the sky or came from a bucket.

Cartagena stood there in his uniform, the sun reflecting off his gold buttons. He looked like a man made of marble—beautiful, but useless. "May God guide us," he said loudly for all to hear. Magellan didn't reply. He thought: *If God is leading us, we are already lost.*

That evening, just before dark, Magellan sat alone on the quay once more. He had a bottle of wine, a map, and his knife. The sky above him was violet, the

water still. He cut a line into the wood beside him with the tip of his knife—a line meant to represent South America. "Here," he murmured, "the world will open."

He looked at the fleet, his fleet, and felt everything inside him shrink. No pride, no triumph—only heaviness. He knew he was crossing a point of no return. He was no longer a man, but a direction.

Then Barbosa came again. "One last piece of advice, old friend?" asked Magellan. Barbosa nodded and sat down next to him. "If you die, die quietly. The sea doesn't like screaming." Magellan grinned. "I've never been able to die loudly."

They drank until the moon rose. Two old dogs who knew they would soon go their separate ways.

Later, after Barbosa had left, Magellan sat for a long time. He heard the water, the breathing of the city, the distant laughter of drunken sailors. He thought of Portugal, his home, his youth—and the moment when everything went wrong.

Back then, he'd believed that war would make him great. Instead, it had taken his leg. Now he believed the sea would make him immortal. Perhaps it would take his soul instead. But he didn't care.

"Damn," he said quietly. "If that's the price, I'll pay double."

And somewhere in the shadows of the ships, between the ropes and barrels, the rats listened. They were the only ones who knew that this man would change the world—but not survive.

The morning smelled of metal, smoke, and salt. A dull heat hung over Seville that tired even the seagulls. The bells tolled as if they'd lost their minds, and the crowd thronged the quayside, gawking, smirking, cursing. Women waved, men spat, children called out the names of the ships they would never see again. It wasn't a farewell, it was a parade of doom.

Magellan stood on the deck of the *Trinidad*. His leg ached terribly, but he didn't let it show. The wind was light, but there. It smelled of change—or trouble, it was hard to say. The sailors ran back and forth, shouting orders, untying ropes, pulling sails. A systematic chaos. He liked it. Chaos was honest.

Cartagena was on the *San Antonio*, in his uniform, with that ridiculous dignity that only men with too much perfume and too little courage possess. Magellan only saw him briefly. A shadow to be ignored until it bites.

"Lift the anchor!" someone shouted. The chains clanged, the wood creaked, and the ships began to move—slowly, hesitantly, as if they were still trying to understand that things were about to begin.

Magellan placed his hand on the railing. It was rough and damp. "Come on, you bastard," he muttered. "Show me what you can do." No one heard him, except perhaps the sea itself.

The people on the shore waved, shouted, some prayed, others cursed. The sun burned on the water, making it look like molten tin. Seville shrank, the houses blurred in the haze, the noise faded. All that remained was the creaking of the masts, the flapping of the sails, the whistling of the wind.

Magellan watched the city disappear. No sadness, no hesitation. Only emptiness. He had left nothing worthwhile behind. No home, no wife, no king. Only debt, ridicule, and dust. He took a deep breath, as if the air itself were being reborn.

A young cabin boy, barely sixteen, stepped up beside him. "Captain, is this... the beginning?" he asked in a trembling voice. Magellan looked at him—dirty face, eyes too wide. "No," he said. "This is the end. But you won't realize that until later." The boy nodded, not understanding anything, and left.

The sea was calm that day, too calm. Magellan did not like that. Calm meant that something was lurking. He saw the sails of the *Victoria* behind him, plump and white, the Spanish cross fluttered in the wind. A beautiful image – for those who knew nothing of life.

Later, wine was served in the officers' mess to mark the beginning of the ceremonial event. Magellan took a sip and set his cup down. Cartagena spoke of honor, of God, of Spain. Magellan wasn't listening. His thoughts were long gone, beyond the coast, where the maps ended.

As evening came, the fleet lay at sea. The sky turned purple, the sun slowly sank into the water like an old coin. Men sang, laughed, vomited over the railing—the usual. *Trinidad* rocked gently, like a dreaming beast. Magellan stood at the helm, gazing into the darkness. The sea glittered, calm, deceitful.

He thought of all the men who had sailed before him. Columbus, Vespucci, Cabral. Each had found something they hadn't been looking for. And all had thought they understood the world. Magellan knew better: No one understands the sea. You can only survive it.

Cartagena approached him, slightly drunk, with an inappropriate grin. "A good start, isn't it, Capitán?" Magellan didn't look at him. "A start, yes. Well, we'll see." "Perhaps we'll get lucky," said Cartagena. "Luck is for gamblers," replied Magellan. "I'm not a gambler. I'm the bet itself."

Cartagena laughed uncertainly. "You really are crazy." "That's what everyone says, until I'm proven right," Magellan said calmly. Then he turned and left.

Later, in his cabin, he was alone. The wood creaked, the lamp flickered. He took his knife and carved a word into the table: *West*— West. Then he looked at it as if it were a prayer.

He didn't sleep. He thought about what was to come. About storms, hunger, betrayal. About men turning into animals. And about the moment when they would reach the damned end of the world—if there ever was one.

He knew they would hate him. Sooner or later. Because he would force them to move on when they were ready to give up. But that was good. Hate kept men alive.

The wind came during the night. First softly, then louder. *Trinidad* groaned, the sea began to breathe. Magellan stepped out onto the deck. Above him was a sky full of stars, so close you could touch them. He raised his head and looked at them, those old, cold lights.

"You are my compass," he said. "But I don't trust you."

He laughed. For the first time in weeks, he truly laughed. It was a harsh, dry laugh that tore in the wind. And the wind laughed back.

The men below slept, dreaming of land, women, and gold. Magellan wasn't dreaming. Awake, he saw the sea opening up. A black expanse, boundless. It was beautiful—and terrible.

He remembered a sentence Barbosa had once said: "*The sea first eats courage.*" Magellan nodded into the darkness. "Then let it begin."

The ships glided on, quietly, almost silently. The coast had disappeared, leaving only the endless blackness. The sky stretched over them like a blanket, the stars sparkled like the eyes of something lurking.

Magellan stood there, motionless, until night turned into morning. The first light colored the sea pale gold. He watched the sun rise and thought: *So here you are again. And I'm still here.*

He knew there was no turning back. Only forward—into the unknown that would either swallow him up or sanctify him.

The first few days at sea were like a hangover that never seemed to end. The sea seemed friendly, but Magellan knew it was just a disguise. The Atlantic always pretended to be harmless before it started chewing men. In the morning, the deck smelled of tar, salt, and vomit. The sailors wandered around with glazed eyes, spat overboard, cursed in Spanish, Portuguese, Latin—and in the language of despair, which all sounded the same.

Magellan barely slept. He usually stood at the stern, facing the wind, counting stars. He trusted them more than the men. Stars don't lie—they only repeat. But it was the men who whispered. Already on the third day, the whispering began: the Portuguese was possessed by the devil, the course was wrong, the supplies were poor. Cartagena delivered his sermons among the barrels as if he were the true captain. Magellan let him. He watched. He waited.

He knew the sea, he knew men. Both follow the same law: First they are calm, then impatient, then dangerous. And if the sun shines too long, they go mad.

The nights were the worst. Endless. Only the creaking of the masts, the squeaking of the ropes, the breathing of two hundred bodies with too little room. The sky was full of stars, but they made no noise, no light, no answers. The men prayed, Magellan remained silent. If he prayed at all, it was to himself.

He wrote in his logbook every night—not what had happened, but what might happen. A strange way of outsmarting fate. "*Wind from the northwest. Tension. Men tired. Cartagena intrigues. The sea is watching us.*" He put down his pen and thought that one day he himself would sound like water: without end, without meaning, but always in motion.

After a week, a storm came. Not a real one, just a harbinger. Wind that gritted like teeth, waves that threatened to swallow the deck. Men screamed, cursed, and slipped. A sailor fell, breaking his leg. Magellan ordered him brought

belowdecks. Cartagena grinned. "God is testing us early," he said. "No," Magellan replied. "The sea never tests. It simply takes."

They stayed on course as the water lashed over them. *Trinidad* creaked, the wood sang, the sails cracked like whips. Magellan stood at the helm, soaking wet, motionless. He wasn't thinking about glory. Only about direction. Always direction.

When the storm subsided, silence remained. A strange, soft silence that frightened more than the roar. The men looked at him as if he had personally tamed the sea. Some began to believe. Others to hate. Both were fine with him.

On the tenth day, rations began to run short. Not because there weren't enough, but because too much was being stolen. Magellan ordered a search. A few sacks of rice disappeared, a small barrel of wine was opened. The culprits were quickly found – two Basques and an Italian. He had them flogged. Without a sermon, without a break. The blood ran over the planks, mixing with salt water. After that, there was peace.

Cartagena returned that night. "Your cruelty will bring you death, Captain." Magellan smiled. "Perhaps. But until then, it will bring me obedience."

He went outside and looked up at the sky. No moon. Just blackness. He felt strangely calm. When you're out long enough, you stop asking questions. You become part of the noise.

The days that followed were monotonous. Water, sky, wind. No land, no end. Men told stories to forget themselves. One spoke of sea monsters, another of golden islands where the grass tasted of honey. Magellan listened, not smiling. "All lies," he thought. "But lies keep them alive."

He began to speak to the sea, quietly, half-asleep. Not in words, but in thoughts. A dialogue that only madmen have. *I know what you are*, he said in his head. *You are not God. You are hunger.*

Once, as he stood at the bow, a school of dolphins came by. The men cheered, laughed, and screamed as if they had seen angels. Magellan looked at them silently. "Animals laughing in hell," he murmured. "I've seen through you."

His leg ached every night, his old war leg. He gritted his teeth and drank cheap wine, which even the sailors despised. The pain kept him awake, kept him sharp.

After two weeks, the sun began to wear down the men. The water in the barrel tasted of metal, the fish of rot. They grew quieter. Only the sea remained loud. Cartagena tried to preach again. "We are lost," he said. "That Portuguese is leading us into nowhere." Magellan let him. He waited until he finished, then stepped in front of the men. "You want to see land?" he asked. "Then pray to the wind. I can't command it. Not yet." A few laughed nervously. A few were silent. Cartagena folded his arms.

That same evening, a seagull appeared on the horizon. Just one. The men cried with joy. Land! Land! Magellan looked closely. Just a bird. But he remained silent, nodded, and gave them hope. Hope was cheaper than bread.

Later, sitting alone in his cabin, he wrote again: "*The sea wants to test us. I want to pass. God is silent. That's good.*"

He drank, staring at the light of the lamp until it danced.

The days flowed into one another. No one knew what day of the week it was anymore. They sailed southwest, ever deeper into the Atlantic. The sky changed color, the water changed taste. Sometimes they saw whales, sometimes only fog.

Magellan began to speak when no one was around. To himself, to God, to the wind. "You won't break me," he whispered. "I have nothing to lose. Not even my mind."

And the sea was silent – in agreement.

At night, when everyone was asleep, he went on deck, felt the railing, and looked into the darkness. He felt tiny, but free. Perhaps that was the meaning of it all: to be small and still move on.

One night, a man came to him, a sailor from Castile, young and pale. "Captain," he said, "aren't you afraid?" Magellan thought for a moment. "Yes," he said. "But fear is like wind. If you use it, it will carry you further." The boy nodded and left. Magellan stayed. He saw the horizon, a black line between life and death.

He knew they would soon reach the Canary Islands, the last stop before the great nothingness. He also knew some of them would try to escape. But that was okay. Those who wanted to leave were allowed to leave. The sea takes everyone back anyway.

In the distance, the first light of the islands glowed. The men cheered, laughed, and cried. Magellan stood still, his face motionless. For him, this wasn't a goal, merely an interlude.

He thought: *You don't understand anything. You're celebrating the wrong thing. This isn't a beginning. This is the point at which the world stops acting kindly.*

He smiled. And his smile already contained all the madness that was yet to come.

The Canary Islands smelled of dust and rotten fruit. Of land that had seen the sun for too long. The ships anchored in the Bay of San Lúcar, the men crawled off the boat like animals finally feeling solid ground beneath their feet again. Some kissed the sand, others urinated right next to it. Magellan stayed on deck. He trusted the land no more than he trusted the water.

The traders came with their donkeys, laden with wine, fruit, meat. And with rumors. Always rumors. "The Portuguese know about your journey," they said. "You are to be stopped." Magellan heard this and barely batted an eyelid. Of course they knew. Portugal was a nation of spies with halos. If they caught him, he'd be a dead man. But he already was.

He had the supplies replenished, checking each barrel himself. "No water from these wells," he said. "Tastes like death." Cartagena rolled his eyes, whispered to his officers again. Magellan saw it, said nothing. Not yet. He wanted to watch them all betray themselves. He knew that suspicion was his strongest ally.

That night, he sat in a tavern, alone. The beer was thin, the air filled with voices. A few sailors were playing dice, one was singing off-key, one was sleeping. Magellan watched them. People from an eternity ago. Each with their own little escape, their own little dream. It made him sad. Not because he was better, but because he was the same. Only more honest about his madness.

An old man sat down next to him, wrinkled and blind in one eye. "You're the Portuguese," he said. "Depends on who asks." "Someone who knows what the sea eats." "And what is that?" "Anything that's proud." Magellan smiled thinly. "Then it's my turn."

Outside, the wind tore through the sky, bringing dust from the south. The lanterns flickered, dogs barked. The world seemed to know he had to move on. Standing still was dangerous. Land meant temptation, temptation meant weakness.

The next morning, one of the sailors had disappeared—with a dinghy. Cartagena acted surprised, too surprised. Magellan didn't order a search. "He's already dead," he said. "Whether he knows it or not." The men looked at him as if he were the executioner. Perhaps he was.

Some asked for permission to write letters home, to wives, mothers, creditors. Magellan nodded. "Write whatever you want," he said. "But not a word about our course." One asked why. "Because the course is the only thing that belongs to me."

Cartagena came to him that afternoon, officially, with all his false pride. "Captain," he began, "the men are exhausted. They need rest before we sail any further." Magellan stood before him, his face like stone. "The men need hunger, not rest. Only hunger will make them progress." Cartagena snorted. "You are leading us to ruin." "Then God will lead you to paradise," Magellan said, turning away.

The sun burned as if the gods wanted to drive him from the land. In the evening, he had the bells rung. Departure at dawn. No discussion. No sermon. The men cursed, Cartagena gritted his teeth.

In the darkness, Barbosa came to him. "Fernão, you've become harder." "I've stopped believing in mercy." "And in God?" Magellan looked out to sea. "If he exists, he'll punish me. I'll give him plenty of opportunity."

They both laughed quietly, two old wolves before the abyss.

As the sun rose, the ships set sail again. The sky was blood red, the sea as smooth as glass. The Canary Islands grew smaller, the horizon larger. A few seagulls followed them, then they turned back. No one spoke. Only the creaking of the masts, the breathing of the sea.

Magellan stood at the helm, the wind whipping his face. "Southwest," he ordered. "No detour, no stopping." The officers looked at each other, nodded reluctantly. Cartagena muttered something about "suicide." Magellan heard it. He didn't respond.

After hours, the coast had disappeared. Only sky and water, two irreconcilable brothers. The men fell silent, their laughter remaining on dry land. They knew they were now truly on their way—no longer toward hope, but toward the unknown.

That night, Magellan sat alone on deck again. The wind had died down, the sea was black as ink. He took his knife and cut a notch into the railing. One for each day he had survived. One for each piece of evidence that the dream wasn't yet dead.

He thought of Lisbon, of the king, of the knee that had taken the war from him. He thought of the mockery, the laughter, the long nights he had promised himself to show the world that it was wrong. And here he was—in the middle of the Atlantic, with five rusty coffins and a crew full of doubt.

He laughed quietly. "Screw fame," he muttered. "I just want them to curse my name when they die."

A spark leaped from the lamp, fell onto the wet wood, and hissed out. Magellan stared after the smoke. "This is what immortality looks like," he said. "A brief spark that almost does it."

The stars reflected in the water, countless, endless. He saw them and thought that each one was a different life he could have led. But he had chosen this one. The wrong one, the great one, the only one.

He leaned against the railing, the wind rustling through his hair. "All right," he whispered. "South America. Show me your mouth."

Behind him, the crew slept, exhausted, drunk, clueless. Before him lay the vastness, dark, silent, beautiful like a smile before a murder.

And somewhere, deep beneath the surface, the sea waited. Patiently. Hungry.

Portuguese scum in Spanish service

The wind had changed, and with it the mood. A few weeks at sea were enough to drop all masks. The men smelled of fear and poor hygiene, of old sweat and rotting provisions. The sun beat down on them like a judge without patience. Magellan stood on the *Trinidad*, looking west, hands firmly on the railing. The Atlantic was endless, beautiful, and indifferent. Just like God, if he really existed.

The crew began to talk. Not loudly, but enough for everyone to hear. "The Portuguese is leading us into a trap," they said. "He's working for the King of

Portugal." The rumors grew like mold on bread. Cartagena fed them with his fake smile. "A man who betrays his own country," he said one evening, "will also betray the next."

Magellan did what he always did: He remained silent. Silence was his way of killing. When he remained silent, everyone listened, whether they wanted to or not. But at night, when he was alone, he felt the words. They crept into his dreams, eating away at him. Portuguese scum. A bastard without a homeland.

He had known they would hate him. It was part of the plan. Hatred binds people closer than friendship. But he hadn't anticipated how loud the sound of hatred could be when two hundred men were living crammed into floating coffins. It was like the creaking of wood—harmless at first, until it broke.

The ships moved in formation. *Trinidad* front, *San Antonio* close behind, then *Concepcion*, *Victoria*, *Santiago*. Five bodies, one thought. And that thought was hunger. Hunger for land, for gold, for significance.

On the third day after the Canary Islands, they sighted a sail to the east. A small dot, barely visible, but enough to make Cartagena grin. "Portuguese," he said quietly. Magellan took the telescope and looked. It was just a fishing boat, far away. But that was enough to make the men uneasy.

"They're chasing us," one murmured. "The King of Portugal wants our head." "Then let him come," Magellan said coldly. "I have room on my keel for a few more corpses."

The men didn't laugh. It wasn't a joke. They knew he meant it.

At night, they sat on deck, talking quietly. The sea was calm, the sky full of stars. One played a small flute, crooked and sad. Magellan listened. The song reminded him of Lisbon, the smell of the harbor, sweat, blood. The days when he still believed patriotism was something real. Now he knew it was just a word kings used to burn men.

Cartagena came back. He always came. Like a mosquito that knows where it itches. "The men are asking, Capitán," he began, "if you even want to tell us where we're going." Magellan answered calmly: "West." "We know that," said Cartagena. "But how far?" Magellan smiled. "Until we die or meet the end." "That's not a course," said Cartagena. "Yes," said Magellan. "It is the only one."

Cartagena left. But his gaze remained fixed, cold and glassy. Magellan knew: It was only a matter of time before the bastard tried.

The next morning, Magellan wrote in his logbook: "*Cartagena plans. Men doubt. Wind good. Direction unchanged. I remain silent.*"

He knew the sea hadn't done anything yet—it was waiting. And so were the men.

The wind continued to shift. The sun burned. The supply of fresh water was running low. The salt in the bread was eating away at the lips. One of the sailors died of a fever, a young Spaniard, barely twenty. They threw him overboard, silently, without prayer. The sea took him with the same indifference with which it takes everything.

At night, the men could be heard whispering, "That was a sign." Magellan stepped into the darkness and said aloud, "That wasn't a sign. That was statistics."

Some laughed, most didn't.

Two days later, a storm struck. Not a severe weather, just enough wind to make the deck dance. The sails flapped, the wood creaked. The men screamed, prayed, and drank. Magellan remained calm. He loved it. The sea was furious. Finally, an honest opponent.

Cartagena lost his nerve. He ordered a change of course. Magellan stepped up to him, wet to the skin, and yelled, "I command here!" Cartagena yelled back, "You're insane!" Magellan grabbed him by the collar. "And you're dead if you say that again." Then he let go and went on deck without a word.

After the storm, the sea was calm. Too calm. The men looked at him differently. No longer with doubt, but with fear. And fear was better than any loyalty.

That night Magellan wrote again: "*I almost killed him. Maybe next time. Maybe it has to be this way. The sea wants blood.*"

The days became long, the conversations short. Everyone was doing only the bare minimum. The sun was slowly driving them crazy. One cut his leg just to feel the pain. Another whispered that he heard voices coming from the water.

Magellan watched them. "Men without land," he thought. "Soon without minds, too."

And somewhere deep within him, between the salt and the pain, something new grew. No more doubt. No more anger. Only this calm, cold knowledge: He was alone, but right.

The sun burned like a punishment. Day after day, the same blue, the same blazing hell dancing on the men's heads. The sea glittered like a false promise, smooth and treacherous. No wind, no rain, no sound except the creaking of wood and the muffled cursing of those who had remained silent for too long.

Magellan stood at the bow of the *Trinidad*, motionless as a shadow. The sea smelled of salt and iron, the men of fear. It was the kind of silence that comes before a storm—but this time the storm was human.

Cartagena had begun to build his little church at sea. Every evening, a dozen men gathered around him, listening to his talk about God, about the true faith, about Spain's divine mission. Magellan knew what this was: not religion, but recruitment. He allowed it. For now.

The other captains—Quesada, Mendoza, Serrano—played their own games. Each wanted glory, but no one wanted blame. They all saw Magellan as the scapegoat to be sacrificed if the sea swallowed them. They secretly called him *portugués maldito*, the cursed Portuguese.

Magellan heard it, every word. The walls at sea are thin.

He began to speak differently. Fewer words, sharper, colder. When someone asked where exactly they were sailing to, he simply said, "Where your maps end." He never smiled. Smiling was a sign of weakness.

The nights were unbearable. No wind, no movement. Only the smacking of the barrels, the crackling of the ropes. The men sweated, drank, prayed. One jumped overboard—just like that. No scream, no goodbye. Just a quiet splash. In the morning, they found his cap. Magellan had it burned. "We don't need memories," he said.

Cartagena came to him, this time officially. "Captain," he said, "the men are at their limits. They think you're leading them to their deaths." "Then they're finally right," Magellan said calmly. Cartagena clenched his fists. "You are not a Spaniard, you have no right to command Spaniards." Magellan stepped closer, so close that their foreheads almost touched. "The sea knows no Spaniards."

Cartagena backed away, but he had too much pride to remain silent. "If you continue like this, they'll hang you." "Then let them try," said Magellan. "But one at a time."

Later, as the sun set, he sat alone on the deck, his feet above the water. The sea was red with the evening light. "Damn beautiful," he thought. "Like blood, only more honest."

During the night, the wind finally picked up. The sails billowed, the ships came alive again. Men shouted, ran, and worked. They had something to do again, meaning less time to think. Work is the best medicine for doubt.

The *Trinidad* led to the *San Antonio* followed. Cartagena strictly followed the orders, but his eyes said otherwise. There was something in his gaze—something waiting.

After a week, they reached Cape Verde, one last known coordinate before sailing into the void. Magellan wouldn't allow them to dock. No landing, no rest. The men cursed, Cartagena openly contradicted them. "We need water!" "We have enough," said Magellan. "Not for everyone!" "Then not everyone will die," said Magellan.

That was the moment something broke. An invisible thread between command and trust.

Cartagena left the bridge, went to his men, and spoke quietly. Magellan saw it, heard it, and again did nothing. That was his way of maintaining control: not reacting, just observing. He wanted to know who would raise their hand first.

Night came quickly, black and silent. The wind had shifted, now blowing hard from the west. The sails flapped, the timber groaned. Magellan stood there, motionless, and thought: *Now. If they want to do it, do it today.*

He waited. Minutes. Hours. Nothing. Only the sea, laughing.

In the morning, he ordered the course to be set further southwest. The men followed, wordless, exhausted. Cartagena stood aside, her hands behind her back, her face blank. But Magellan saw the thoughts behind them—the anger, the humiliation, the plan.

In the following days, the air grew cooler. They left the tropical latitudes and sailed toward Brazil. The sky changed color, the sea smelled different, the

winds spoke a new language. And with each passing day, Magellan became a little calmer—and the men more restless.

One of the officers, Quesada, came to him. "The crew is exhausted," he said. "We need land." Magellan nodded. "Then we'll find it." "When?" "If the sea wills." "And if it doesn't?" Magellan looked at him. "Then we'll die well."

Quesada remained silent. What could one say when a man speaks as if death were merely a coordinate?

That night Magellan wrote: *"I know they'll try. Maybe soon. Maybe later. But I have the wind on my side. And the wind is the only one who understands me."*

The next day brought a storm. Real fury this time. The sea rose, the ships fought. Men screamed, ropes broke, a mast broke on the *Concepcion*. Rain poured down, thunder roared. Magellan stood on the bridge, water up to his knees, and shouted orders.

"Hold course!" "We're losing sail!" "Then she's losing!"

The sea swallowed his words, but the men saw him—upright, roaring, unshakable. He was no longer just their captain. He was something else. Something that knew neither fear nor pity.

When the storm ended, the sea was calm. Two men were missing, washed overboard. Cartagena came to him, pale and angry. "You almost killed us all!" Magellan replied quietly: "I let you live. The storm wanted more."

He walked away, leaving him standing there.

Later that night, he sat in his cabin, wet, exhausted, but awake. He wrote: *"Cartagena hates me. Good. Hate keeps him sharp. I need opponents, otherwise I'll fall asleep."*

He took a sip of wine, lay down, and looked at the ceiling. The wood dripped. He smiled. "Portuguese scum," he muttered. "Then at least I'm scum with a sense of purpose."

Outside, the sea roared, patient as ever. It knew what humans don't: that everything that moves eventually sinks.

Brazil arrived not like a land, but like a mirage. First a green stripe on the horizon, then a smell—humid, sweet, alive. After weeks on salty water, this

smell was so foreign that some men wept. The wind carried earth over, real earth, not that dead powder from the Seville shipyard.

Magellan stood at the bow, his face to the wind. He said nothing. Just a tiny nod as the coast cleared. The men cheered, sang, shouted, and fell into each other's arms. He let them. Cheering was useful; it covered the cracks.

They anchored in a shallow bay, surrounded by palm trees, birds, and colors no one had ever seen before. The sea was warm, the sand white. A few naked figures stood on the shore, watching them. Cartagena murmured, "Pagans." Magellan replied, "Humans."

As they landed, the air danced with insects. A scent of resin, smoke, and life. The natives approached, cautious, smiling. Men, women, children, painted, curious. One handed Magellan a fruit. The captain took it, bit into it, and let the juice run down his chin. "Sweet as a lie," he said, laughing.

They exchanged gifts: glass beads for parrots, mirrors for feathers. Everything seemed peaceful, almost beautiful. The men briefly forgot the hatred, the hunger, the sea. They saw women, laughed, and drank coconut water, which they thought was wine. Cartagena preached, Magellan observed. He saw how easily people can feign peace when they are afraid of themselves.

At night, they lit fires. The sky hung heavy above them, full of sounds—crickets, strangers' cries, wind in the foliage. The men drank, told stories. Magellan sat off to the side, staring into the flames. "This is no salvation," he thought. "This is a break that costs too much."

On the second day, the men began to trade. Knives for flesh, cloth for body. Some disappeared into the forest with women. When they returned, they laughed like children. Magellan said nothing, but his eyes said everything. He knew that joy was dangerous. Joy makes people careless.

Cartagena came to him, triumphant. "Look, Captain, even God is smiling at us." Magellan looked at him, long and silent. "God never smiles. He waits." "You see darkness in everything," said Cartagena. "Only because I'm looking," replied Magellan.

He held three days of celebration, then ordered departure. "But we've barely taken on any supplies!" one man cried. "We'll take enough," he said. "More than enough adds weight." "And what if we don't find land again?" "Then you'll have less to carry when you die."

Nobody laughed.

The evening before departure, Magellan sat alone on the beach. The surf roared, the fire glowed, the men snored. A native woman came to him, young, with eyes that knew no fear. She sat down beside him, said nothing. Only the crackling between them. She placed a shell in his hand and left. He watched her until the forest swallowed her. Then he threw the shell into the sea. "I've already had enough ghosts," he murmured.

The next morning, one of the men was dead. A stab wound in the stomach, his throat slit. No struggle, no scream. Cartagena demanded an investigation. "One of the savages!" he said. Magellan shook his head. "One of us. The wounds say so." Cartagena glared at him. "You're protecting her?" "I'm only protecting the truth." "Then she'll kill you." "Perhaps. But at least she's not talking behind my back."

They buried the dead man in the sand. No cross, no prayer. Just earth.

As the ship set sail, Magellan looked back. The land stood still, as if nothing had happened. The natives waved. One held a lance high, not threateningly, but more as a greeting. Magellan nodded. "We'll be back," he murmured. "Or you'll be part of our stories."

At sea, the mood was brighter. The land had given them strength—and poison. Men laughed again, sang, and dreamed aloud. Magellan knew that hope was the most dangerous drug. It makes you soft.

Cartagena came again, politely this time. "Captain, the men are asking where to now." "South." "And then?" "Then we'll see if the world has an end." Cartagena grinned crookedly. "And if it doesn't?" "Then it's round, and I proved it first."

He turned away and looked at the sea, which was now grey and somber again.

In the night, a noise woke him. Footsteps across the deck, quiet, stealthy. He stood up, drew his dagger, and opened the door. Only darkness. But there was something—voices, Spanish, muffled. Cartagena, Quesada, Mendoza.

He remained silent, listening. Words like "return," "lost his mind," "the king's command." He smiled. "Very well," he whispered. "Then we'll play war on the water."

The next day, he acted as if he knew nothing. He praised the men and had wine served. A captain who was suddenly friendly. And that was exactly what frightened them.

In the afternoon, the wind picked up. A good wind. The ships danced, the sun was low. Magellan looked in the direction where he believed he would find the impossible. He thought: *Maybe I don't hate the sea at all. Maybe I'm just jealous because it's free.*

Then he laughed. A short, dry laugh that shattered in the wind.

And somewhere beneath the sails, between the salt and the wood, the sound of a mutiny grew, quiet as a prayer that God had forgotten.

The sea was smooth as oil. No wind, no sound. Only the ships, sitting slowly on the water, as if they had forgotten what motion was. The Atlantic held its breath, and so did the men. Standing still is poison. When nothing happens, people start thinking, and thinking was more dangerous at sea than any storm.

Magellan noticed it immediately. The talking had stopped. No cursing, no singing, no laughing. Only this muffled silence that ate into the planks. He walked across the deck, feeling the stares on his back. Stares that lasted too long. Stares that waited.

Cartagena stood at the railing, his arms crossed, the wind playing with his hair. He looked like a priest who already knew he was right. Magellan walked past him, not a word. But his mind was burning.

That evening, Mendoza, one of the officers, arrived, polite and stiff. "Captain, the men... they're talking again." "Men always do." "Different this time." "How different?" "They say you're misleading us. That the course is wrong. That Portugal awaits us." Magellan nodded slowly. "And you? What do you say?" Mendoza avoided his gaze. "I say we should talk before something bad happens." "Something bad happened long ago," Magellan said. "They think they have a choice."

At night the officers sat on the *San Antonio* Together. Cartagena, Quesada, Mendoza. Magellan knew. He knew everything. Serrano had told him, drunk, with a shaky voice. "They want to go back, Capitán. They say you're possessed." Magellan laughed. "Possessed? Good. Then they'll see what that means."

He let her be. One more night. One more hour. He wanted her to feel safe, warm in their little conspiracy. He knew that fear only works when it comes late.

In the morning, he ordered all ships to be brought closer together. "Communication," he said succinctly. "Less loss if a storm comes." The men nodded. No storm in sight. But they did as he said. For now.

He called Cartagena on board the *Trinidad*. He came, hesitantly, with that offended look that only officers have when they think heaven owes them applause. "Captain?" "We must talk," said Magellan. "Finally," said Cartagena. "I hope you see that we—" "Silence," said Magellan calmly.

Cartagena froze. Magellan took a step closer. "You talk too much, and you pray too loudly. You want to bring God on board, but God knows nothing about navigation. If you need him to help you figure out your course, then go overboard and ask him yourself."

Cartagena breathed heavily. "You can't..." "I can," said Magellan. "I'm the only one here who can. And if you forget, I'll remind you."

He turned around and beckoned two men over. "Arrest. Effective immediately. No talking, no sermons. If he prays, gag him."

Cartagena screamed, spat, and cursed. "This is mutiny!" Magellan stopped. "No. This is an order. Mutiny is what you just attempted."

He went to his cabin, leaving the screams behind him. Outside, the wind suddenly picked up again. It always did. The wind came when there was blood in the air.

That evening, he had the crew line up. All five ships, huddled together. Men in rows, faces burned, eyes empty. Magellan stood on the bridge. "You're afraid," he said. "Good. Fear keeps you awake. But don't forget one thing: I'm not going to make you die. I'm going to prove it to you. That the world is round. That there is a way. And if you hate me, at least hate the right man. Me. Not the sea. The sea laughs at you."

No one answered. Only the creaking of the masts.

"Anyone who wants to go home," he said, "can go now. But not on one of my ships. Swim."

No one moved. Not because they had courage, but because they knew there was no way back.

Later, as darkness fell, Magellan sat on the railing, knife in hand. He carved a notch into the wood. "For the first," he said. "There will be more."

The men worked in silence. Even Cartagena remained silent, somewhere below deck, guarded, humiliated, but alive. Still.

Quesada came to him that night, quietly, cautiously. "Captain, you broke him." "No," said Magellan. "I let him grow. Revenge is a good fertilizer. I want to see how big he grows before I harvest him."

They sailed on, southward, ever further. The sea changed color. The blue became darker, heavier. The air became cooler. It smelled of change.

One evening, as the sun sank into the sea like a glowing piece of iron, Magellan stood alone on deck. He thought of the men, of the word that now nested within each of them: *Mutiny*.

He said it out loud. Just once. "Come on," he said into the wind. "Come on."

And the wind answered with nothing – which was worse than any yes.

The air was a carpet of heat and anticipation; so thick you could have cut it. The men stood close together, eyes like drilled nails. The word mutiny hung like a knife twisting in the darkness. And in moments like these, when people believe the world can be ordered in some other way than with blood, there comes a point where a single spark is enough to blow everything apart.

It was Cartagena, the spark. He was a poisonous fly in an officer's uniform, with husks full of ulterior motives. He had gathered enough hatred to ignite a fire, and he sought out men who were already halfway off the boat. He ran through the ranks like a preacher of demolition, speaking softly, sharp as broken glass, and his words sank into the minds of those who had left debts and false promises behind at home. "The Portuguese is killing us," he whispered. "He's selling us to Portugal. He's leading us into the maw."

They began to say things out loud that one only says out loud at night: that a stranger had no right to give them orders; that the king and the pope might be old lies; that the ship and the sea belonged to them, not to a man with a limping leg. A few idling voices demanded a vote, a decision, something that

called itself democracy, but in truth was just a mobbing—fifty men against one, if necessary.

Magellan heard it as he always heard: not just with his ears, but with his bones. He saw Cartagena waving around, saw the small groups standing and nodding, heard the clanking of chains that someone had secretly loosened. He knew how these people think: they want to go back. Back to the huts, to the debts, to the warm betrayal that had sustained them for so long. They wanted to turn their fear against him, against the Portuguese. They wanted a name they could spit on and scream at when the sea took their teeth out.

He let it explode. Not immediately. He played the captain like an instrument—and then he struck. He had the men line up. Lines, neat, like soldiers, like in a cemetery. Five ships stood, a sea of pale faces. Cartagena stepped forward, with the same sweet smile you give people when they're selling poison. He raised his hand, began to speak—words like knives, cold in them. "Men," he said, and his voice was that of a man who considered himself a pillar. "We are following a Portuguese. He is an enemy in the service of the enemy. Who among you doesn't want to return to the arms of their families? Who doesn't want to die in Seville instead of here?"

Something broke. A few voices, first quiet, then louder: "Back! Back! Hang him! He should dangle from the gallows, Portuguese!" The idea of hanging a man was simple: quick, concrete, a guard against uncertainty. They imagined the body swaying, the city cheering, fear dissolving into blood. It's astonishing how easily people romanticize horror as long as it promises an end.

Magellan heard the hissing. He came slowly down the stairs like a person just emerging from a grave, his shadow rubbing against their fear. He had no drum, no fanfare, just words falling like pebbles. "You want to hang?" he said calmly. "Good. Begin."

This wasn't an order, this was a test. One man shouted, "He's a traitor! He's betraying us all!" Another, a man with scars on his face and the tongue of a thief, screamed, "He's Portuguese scum!" The last word came like a blow against a windowpane. The phrase was charged, a mine of ancient hatred. Cartagena smiled, audibly pleased, as if someone had sold him a firework.

Magellan heard this and laughed. It wasn't a friendly laugh. It was the laugh of a man who knows he's being given his last chance to show what he's made of. "Scum," he repeated, the word like a toothpick between his teeth. "If I am scum, then I am the scum who will take you further. I am the scum who won't

let your children go hungry. I am the scum who will carve your names into the maps so no one will laugh at them anymore."

Then came a sound, like knives in wood. He gave the signal, not a great scramble, simply: "Grab the traitors." Two men went for Cartagena. The first shouts became a tumult. Some jumped to their feet, others drew knives. It was raw, clumsy fighting—not an elegant revolt, but a raw rampage in which hands, teeth, nails, and fists were everything. Cartagena didn't resist. He was psychologically humiliated, a man watching his net rip. A sailor kicked him in the shin, then in the ribs. Cartagena screamed and cursed, but not from terrible pain—more from embarrassed surprise. Another officer, Quesada, tried to mediate, but who mediates when there's a smell of blood? Men may be judges. Judges like blood. That's a law older than any church.

Magellan stepped into the thick of the fray, grabbed Cartagena by the arm, and yanked him up. He held it tightly, almost fatherly. "You wanted mutiny," he said. "You want my throat. You want this ship to burn so you'll be a hero when it goes unpunished. But I'm no fool." He was close enough for Cartagena to see the spit on his chest. His hands trembled, his eyes flickered. "You're going belowdecks," Magellan said. "You'll be gagged, and where you go, you go with honor? No noise. No prayer. If you make a gasp—your throat is a rope."

The men were silent. Not out of admiration, but because they were afraid, and fear is often the loudest law. Cartagena was blinded and bound. Magellan didn't allow him to be slapped or humiliated—this wasn't a primitive triumph; it was strategic. He wanted to show that violence cannot rule for one's own pleasure. Violence is a tool, and he was the one with calloused hands who wielded it properly.

Then he turned around. The men's eyes were fixed on him like dark fruit. He saw the scarred sailor, still reeking of blood and now holding back his fist. "You call me scum," Magellan began, loud enough to carry over the murmuring, "you call me a traitor. You think your silence and your courage will save you. You are mistaken, like children who believe there is treasure in their barn. You are fools. You will die like rats, one by one, if you disobey me."

He spoke the word "die" like a threat, warm and with real teeth. He laid his voice over her like a cold blade. "I will not force you to love me. I will not ask you to follow me. I demand obedience. Obedience is not love. Obedience is what keeps a man alive when the sea rips his throat open."

Then he showed what obedience meant. He ordered that Cartagena be put in iron chains so that everyone could see what became of traitors. Not dead, not hanged in shame—that was too cheap. Cartagena would live, suffer; he would be an example whose shadow no one would want to see anymore. "If you continue to insult me," said Magellan, "I will choose inhabitants among you whom I will mercilessly humiliate by name." He named names. People blinked. "Your pride is cheap. Your life is not."

The violence wasn't pretty. It smelled of wet leather and blood, of gunpowder, of a putrid sea. It became a battle of words, of shivers, of teeth clashing with strangers' hands. A man spat in Magellan's face and screamed: "You Portuguese! You filth! You are worse than any devil!" Magellan wiped his cheek, as calm as an executioner before breakfast. He bent down, grabbed the spitter by the collar, and lifted him up so that his feet dangled. Then he said softly, deadly: "You will pay for this." And the hands all around held each other, because no man knew whether the price would be paid today or later.

He ordered the ranks to be broken up. Cartagena, gagged and bound, disappeared belowdecks—a dog lying in its own excrement. The men dispersed calmly; not out of forgiveness, but out of indecision. They looked at Magellan like a judge who needed no bench. The voice on the ship was different now: harsher, simpler, more coercive. They obeyed not because they loved him, but because they feared what would follow if they didn't.

Magellan remained on deck for a long time, while the fleet continued to cut through the pale blue. He thought of Portugal, of Lisbon, of the king who had abandoned him. He thought of everything he had given up. And somewhere beyond the laughter in the wind, a loneliness formed so large he could have eaten it. He took the knife and cut a deep notch into the wood. A notch for Cartagena. A notch for the day he would show that he couldn't be torn apart with words.

The sea took the rest. It meant nothing, as always. It swallowed and remained silent. But across the planks, in the smell of tar and blood, there was suddenly something new: respect, born of fear. And that was enough. It was enough for one day, one night, maybe longer. For now, the flotilla was no longer a gang tearing itself apart. It was a tool—sharp, dangerous, led by a man willing to be brutal to survive.

And as the sun set, Cartagena was like an animal below deck, and the men no longer whispered of returning. They only whispered prayers—and that's a

substitute for any conspirator. Prayers mean they're afraid. Fear means order. And order means the Portuguese can go one step further.

The deck still glistened with the sweat of the fight, and the smell remained—iron, salt, the dull aroma of burnt vanity. Cartagena was stowed below deck like a secretion no one was allowed to read. His voice had been muffled; knots, gags, iron—everything in its place. And yet he was still there: like a cancer festering beneath the wood, bound to burst forth again someday. Magellan knew that. He knew that you can't flog men's souls without leaving scars. Scars are like maps: you read them, and every time you look at them, you remember where you went wrong.

The men went about their tasks. Machine work creates order; people are good at forgetting when their hands are busy. They hoisted sails, tied knots, mended ropes; their voices were quieter, more cautious. There was no laughter, only the monotonous clinking of moving rods, the staccato of survival. Magellan moved like a man with a knife cut in his tongue—quietly, precisely, his eyes cold as sandpaper. He called officers to him, gave orders, and refrained from words of consolation. Consolation is something for saints and children. On a ship, you need traces of steel.

He began to make small acts of cruelty routine. Not out of sadism, not out of pure lust—but because cruelty is a mouthpiece, loud and unmistakable. A man who had stolen his share of water for two days was bound in front of the others and allowed to eat only from the raft with a shovel; another, who failed to manage his weight while fishing, woke up with a raw wound on his arm so he would know what waste means. These were lessons in tangible language. When words fail, the body speaks. That's a law of nature, and Magellan said goodbye to sentimentality.

The fleet sailed on, the course remaining stubbornly southwest. The sky showed old stories in new colors, and the sea responded without pity. Small things began to accumulate—a barrel that contained less wine than noted, a box of rope that suddenly ended where there had once been fabric. These small conspiracies gave the men allies in the darkness: hands that touched secretly, glances that plotted like thieves. Magellan let them be, just enough so he could see the group rotting. He was a gardener who let the weeds grow so he could pull them out at the right moment.

During this time, the men began to spin stories; not of land or gold so much, but of revenge, of small triumphs. One recounted how he once stole a watch from a court official and then survived for five years because he knew how to

steal time. Such stories nourish the soul—or slowly kill it. You couldn't tell what was happening: whether they were gathering courage or simply losing touch with reality through the noise of their own voices. Magellan found this ironic. Courage is something you break before it breaks you. He did it carefully, the raw way.

There were sick people too. The cramped conditions, the heat, the rottenness of the supplies—it all ate away at the men. One sailor developed boils, then a fever; another, who had already begun to drink, died quietly, without a sound. He was thrown overboard as if a sack of garbage had been pushed into the sea. The men watched and pretended it was normal. It's a trick: you get used to death, then you can survive. Magellan wrote in his logbook—soberly, without pathos—like a doctor noting which wounds are more important than others. He catalogued people like supplies. It was a cynical economy, but it held.

One morning Quesada spoke to him, his eyes old and tired of making decisions. "Captain," he said, "what if one day they pull us out? What if they drive us overboard?" Magellan looked at him. His answer was no consolation: "Then they're stupid." Quesada didn't understand immediately, remaining in a fog of moral deliberation. Magellan was no philosopher. He was a man who wanted an end—a goal he would achieve by any means necessary. He continued: "My law is the margin. Those who cross it cannot complain. Different rules apply here." Quesada ducked his head. He was the kind of man who loved to live but didn't like to take responsibility. At sea, that's a dangerous combination.

The days slipped by. Sometimes there were signs of land—birds, a different color of water, floating wood. The men's hearts leaped each time as if it were the first time, but it was never the first time. Land is a drug, and they knew it. They craved it, cried out for it, as if land were a promise to be fulfilled. Magellan gave them nothing but to keep going. They grumbled, but they obeyed. Fear had created routine.

The smell of mutiny, however, remained like a taste in the mouth. You could feel it in their looks, in the small feasts where they drank more than necessary. A few men were secretly trying to tie together notes. Small pieces of paper, wrapped in oilcloth, slipped between the planks at night like snakes. Magellan found one. He opened it with the impiety of a man who had been stripped of everything for the map of the world. On it, in scrawled handwriting, was written: "If Portugal calls, we answer. We hang him, we sail home." It was childish, but deadly. Ideas are small children, they say; but children often leave knives on the floor.

He responded to this kind of betrayal with calculation. He introduced shifts, rearranged guards, and removed men without food from their rations because it was necessary—sacrifices had to be made to extort obedience. He called it order. Others called it tyranny. But tyranny is a word for books. On ships, it's results: those who disobey get less water. Results trump morality.

One evening, when the tide seemed like lead, he brought Cartagena before the crew—not to humiliate him, but to serve as a warning. Cartagena, gagged and held by the youthful officers, said nothing. The men watched this spectacle: the once proud officer a hollow, his uniform askew, his eyes like two dark glass beads. Magellan didn't speak for long. His words were few, but they stuck like nails: "Here there is no voting. Here there is sailing. Anyone who acts against the ship will not be judged. He will be put out of service." This wasn't talk for the historians. It was simple mathematics: weight vs. resistance. He stated the equation, and the men understood.

After roll call, a mechanical calm returned, like that of a clockwork that's been restarted by force. The officers submitted, the enlisted men worked. The mutiny still lingered in the stomach, but digested, at least for the time being. Magellan knew: fear buys time, not loyalty. He wanted both. And he was willing to keep paying.

And he paid with small gestures, sprinkled like sugar over the teeth. He gave one man a larger share of the fish, praised another in the mess, and sent a sick man to a better bunk. Force and mercy—the only tools understood by life at sea. He lectured as needed. A stab and a touch. A rope that snaps, and a hand that helps. That was his system: tough, clear, brutally logical.

The days passed, and in this hot, mechanical rhythm, Magellan led his men onward. The coast of South America was still far away—but no longer an idea. The map showed more than emptiness; it began to collect names, smells, nooks, corners that cut into the horizon like teeth. And with each day that the fleet glided on, something grew within him: not pity, not pride, but that deadly mixture of loneliness and certainty given only to a man who believes he is the one who is right, even if it costs him everything.

At the end of that day, he stood alone at the railing again. The sun burned in his eyes. He cut a new notch into the wood—for every act of resistance, for every act of perfidy, for every man who had thought he could deter a man like him. The knife slid, the wood wept resin. In the distance, the sea regained its upper hand: a gentle wind, a flicker of waves. Onward. Onward and onward.

The mutiny wasn't a bolt from the blue. It was a buzzing that had taken root in the men's guts, a worm gnawing at wood and heart until everything rotted. Weeks of silence and petty cruelties had built a pile solid enough to cobble together a plan for themselves. You can take many things from a man—home, money, name—but never the right to sow his cowardice. They planted it and waited until the roots grew strong.

The morning it happened smelled of oil and cold metal. No wind, the sea as smooth as a mirror. The men moved differently: shallowly, stealthily, like thieves trying to rob a church two by two. Some had hidden knives; others carried things in their pockets that gleamed like a promise—nails, small rolls, ropes. Cartagena was still below deck, but his shadow was in the eyes of everyone who had listened to him. The officers who had once hesitated had gathered themselves; Quesada was someone who carried both resignation and ambition, the man who would like to be a hero, but only where there is applause and wine.

They did it cheaply—a vote, a shouted word, a stampede. It began with an order, a rumor, a saline flourish: "Who wants to go back to Seville?" Five, ten, fifty hands went up. That was all that was needed—a crowd of men wanting to be confirmed. To their credit, mutiny is the democratic way of dying; smart, loud men make speeches, and stupid men listen.

When the first group charged, Magellan had already expected something to happen. He smelled despair like farmers smell rain. But expecting is not preventing. His plan was different: he didn't wait for them to grab his throat; he let them reveal what they were first, and then struck, precise as a knife in the darkness.

The ranks broke. Men ran, a few jumps, a few blows—real violence, real blood. An officer was thrashed to the deck with a boot in the side, his scream cutting through the air. Knives flashed. Two sailors tore at each other's hair, spitting insults that would make any principle rejoice. The deck transformed into a small hell: sweat, spit, blood, fists. This wasn't heroism. This was panic with a flag.

Magellan stood above the tumult like a man contemplating a corpse still breathing. He wasn't surprised. His face was hazy, his eyes like small, cold sewing machines. As the first wave of mutineers ran toward him, he did something no one expected: he went down, into the middle, not to flee, but to stab. Not with a sword, but rather with words and his fist. He grabbed the vanguard man by the throat, lifted him like a sack, and slammed his back

against the railing until the air was knocked out of him and his face turned purple. Then he let him fall. A sound of complete silence, like dropping a metal plate and it shattering into a hundred pieces of glass.

"You want to hang me?" he spat at the crowd, his voice like a grindstone. "You want to sell me like a dead turnip? You're children with knives!" He spoke loudly, very loudly, each word a stone falling into his stomach. "Listen: I am the captain. Not because you love me—because you never will—but because I know the direction that won't lead you to a miserable suffocation."

The magnitude of his rage was like a poster across the deck: large enough to form fear. He tore the men apart, grabbing them one by one like a butcher examining cuts at a market. The ruffians, who had previously been so confident, shrank beneath his hand; they weren't men, just ruffians whose courage was a thin skin over nothingness.

But brute force isn't enough. Magellan knew the age of tyrants was crude and short. So he relied on humiliation, on the slow grinding down. He ordered the leaders of the mutiny to be bound. He called them by name, loudly, so everyone could hear who was a traitor: "Pedro, Álvaro, Diego—you are cowards!" And then he did something worse than death for these men: he took their weapons, placed them skeptically in the middle, and ordered that anyone who surrendered their sword would receive an extra breadcrumb. Laughter rippled across the deck—not from joy, but from the irony of toothpowder: humiliation explained by food.

The heart of the escalation, however, was not the action itself, but the demonstration: Magellan did not have the bound men killed immediately. He let them live, in chains, for the public to see. He let them swing between hope and despair. He shouted orders, commanded that they be taken to the cabin and slowly tortured there in front of everyone: no water, no rest, only the roar of shouts from outside. He demanded that they spit out the names of their co-conspirators, with the breath of death in their mouths. The men had to pay prices, not just in blood, but in names. This is worse: you cause one soul to betray others—that is breaking.

On that day, not only a plan collapsed, but an alliance broke up. The mutiny wasn't shouted down; it was crushed, and the noise wasn't loud, but final. Those who had once raised their hands now sank in their ranks, their eyes drawn to the ground, not out of remorse, but out of fear. Fear is a useful currency. Magellan placed it in the chest and closed the lid.

He wasn't proud of what he did. That evening, as he sat alone on the railing, eye to eye with the cold sea, blood ran down his chin—not his own, a streak from the guy he'd smashed against the railing. He licked it like a dog. Perhaps this was his way of understanding that he was still alive, that he was still capable of taking action. He cut a deep notch into the railing. A notch for the mutiny. A notch for every time his name was spoken of like dirt.

But the fleet was no longer the same. Five ships that once moved as one body were divided. Some officers, for whom the brutal response was too much, withdrew; trust was gone, not only in him, but in the idea itself. Serrano quietly stepped down from his post, Quesada pulled his men closer to him, whispering things that sounded like farewell letters. And the *San Antonio* She had grown thin, the men there more suspicious, their eyes even sharper than before. Some took the opportunity to secretly put away provisions—for their return, if the need arose.

Magellan saw this, every twitch, every little trick. He knew: it's not enough to put down a mutiny. You must also kill the idea that gave rise to it. So he tightened his rules. A meager ration system, stricter guards, night patrols. And he administered public punishments, not excessive, but humiliating enough so that no one would dream of heroism anymore. He wanted obedience, not love. Obedience is a cool metal that doesn't rust if you guard it well.

The next morning, the sun blood red, the sea even wilder with turmoil, the fleet sailed on. But there was now a crack in it, a deep fissure that could not be mended. Trust, once broken, is like split wood: the seam remains visible, and eventually, with each storm, it begins to tear further apart. The men were broken, not all of them, but enough to transform the future into waiting for the end.

Magellan knew it was a price. He paid it with the one tool he had: his intransigence. Whether it was right, he didn't know. Perhaps it was a crime. Perhaps it was the only way to survive. But in his heart was something else, harder than regret: an equanimity, an understanding that leadership is sometimes bloody like a cut, and that if you want to circumnavigate the world, you must also trim the souls of those who walk with you.

In the evening the fleet lay in strange silence. *Trinidad* cut further, like a knife sharpening its blade. In the distance, beyond the horizon, where the ocean and the sky kissed, a twilight began that tasted different—of earth, of land. South America was coming closer, and with it the certainty that the net Magellan had spun was greater than his list of enemies. Some would stay behind. Some

would leave. But the goal? It was still there. Round, cold, and relentless. And he wanted it, wanted it more than anything.

The fleet was divided. The maps began to take on different names. And in the fine crack torn by the mutiny, something almost as good as wealth shimmered: the certainty that he, Ferdinand Magellan, would continue on despite everything—despite betrayal, despite bloodshed, despite the hatred of his men.

A dream of salt and anger

Land. The word itself felt like an insult after all those weeks on the ocean. It didn't come with fanfare or cheers, but rather crept up on me—a dirty green streak at the edge of the sky, a stain that smelled like wet dog and old hope.

The men saw it first, screaming as if they'd discovered God himself. Magellan remained silent. He knew that land was just another enemy, one that smiles before it devours you.

They headed toward the coast. The sea was flat but suspicious. The wind had died down, the sails hung like drowned cloths. Only the sun burned, mercilessly, as if testing whether humans were even fit to live.

"Brazil," said one. "South America," said another. Magellan replied, "Another place that forgets us as soon as we leave it."

The water became murkier, thicker, brown with earth. Seagulls circled, crying like mothers who had lost their children. The sand glittered like old gold. And when they finally anchored, after all this time, after all this silence, no one immediately disembarked. They stared at the land as if they couldn't believe their eyes.

Magellan was the first to set foot. No triumph, no shout, no prayer. Just a dull crunch of sand beneath his boot. "It's alive," he murmured. "And it probably hates us already."

The men followed, cautious, exhausted. Their faces were gray, their beards wild, their teeth bad. They looked like what they were: the remnants of people who had had to endure themselves for too long.

Cartagena was still in chains, down in the darkness, bound like a promise no one wanted to keep. But his name wafted across the deck like foul breath. Some whispered that he should be set free. Others said he should simply be thrown overboard. Magellan remained silent. He knew the discussion was more important than the outcome—it kept the men occupied, like a cheap belief.

They built camps, gathered wood, and filled barrels with fresh water. It smelled of life, of earth, of everything they'd forgotten. And suddenly they wanted to laugh, drink, curse, and fuck—all the little rituals with which humans reassure themselves that they still exist.

But Magellan wouldn't let them. "No feasting. No wine. No noise." "Why, Capitán?" one asked. "Because joy makes us soft."

He said this without pathos, only with that cold matter-of-factness that made him immortal and at the same time cursed him.

The nights there were heavy. The land breathed differently. Humid, loud, full of voices one couldn't understand. Animals screamed as if to warn. Men trembled in their sleep. One woke up, drenched in sweat, whispering: "I dreamed the ocean was standing in the forest." Magellan replied: "Then now you know what God looks like."

On the third day, they encountered natives. Brown, painted, suspicious. Men with eyes like glass and muscles like stone. They spoke in a language that sounded like rain and smoke. It wasn't a meeting, it was a feeling out. Hands that cautiously approached, then recoiled. A negotiation between hunger and fear.

The men traded, exchanging tin for fruit, mirrors for fish. A few of them laughed for the first time in weeks, laughing too loudly, too long. Magellan watched. There was no emotion on his face, but in his mind was a sentence that he couldn't get out of his head: *People buy each other when they starve in the same place for too long.*

He wrote in his journal:

"We've found land. But it feels like the sea is just mocking us. Maybe this is hell: land that looks like salvation but smells of salt."

On the fourth day, a fight broke out. Two men, both drunk on stolen wine, fought over a woman—a local woman too beautiful to survive this story. One

wanted her, the other already had her. It was stupid, rude, and inevitable. Magellan had them beaten until one of them couldn't get up. "Bury her," he simply said. No trial, no prayer. Just shoveling.

In the evening, he sat alone by the fire, his face half in shadow, half in light. He drank from a tin bowl and wrote again:

"I don't lead men. I lead ghosts with breath. And perhaps I am the greatest ghost of all."

In the distance, the natives sang. A slow, deep chant that seemed to emerge from the ground. The men fell silent. One said, "That sounds like dying." Magellan replied, "That's life. It just sounds wrong to your ears."

He felt the wind, the salty breath of the sea calling him. Land was not home, merely a way station. A place to replenish supplies before sailing back into the abyss.

The men slept, the night consumed the fire, and Magellan gazed into the darkness. There was nothing but questions. But questions were the only thing that kept him awake.

The rain came suddenly, as always in these latitudes. Warm, heavy, sweet, the sky a torrent. The sea swallowed the color of the sky, and the ships lay there like wet dogs without a master. Magellan stood on deck, letting the water run over him. He thought it was washing something away—guilt, perhaps, or doubt—but it was only rain.

The camp on the bank had turned into a swampy pit. Men cursed, crawling out of their tents, stinking of wet leather and decay. One coughed up blood, another laughed about it. They were back where they always ended up: too many people for too little hope.

Cartagena remained below deck, half forgotten, half feared. Magellan often thought of him, not out of pity, but out of suspicion. He knew that a bound enemy learns patience, and patience was a more dangerous weapon at sea than any sword.

The coast was beautiful, but beauty meant nothing here. Palm trees, birds, snakes, insects—everything was too lively, too loud. The men built huts out of palm fronds, gathered fruit, and cast nets, as if they were lusting after life again. Some drew crosses in the sand, prayed aloud, and cried out for

forgiveness. Magellan heard this while writing his notes. *"They pray when they are afraid,"* he noted. *"They stop when they are full. Faith is hunger with a halo."*

One afternoon a group of men from the *San Antonio* to the camp. Officially, to get wood. Unofficially, to talk. They wanted to know how long their stay would be, when they would sail on, when they would finally seek "the passage" that Magellan always spoke of. "If the wind wills," said Magellan. "And if it doesn't?" asked Quesada. "Then you wait until it does."

Quesada laughed, dryly, without joy. "You speak as if this wind were God." Magellan replied, "Perhaps it is." The conversation ended there, but the doubt remained.

Later that day, as the sun set and the coast burned with fire, they discovered footprints in the sand: bare feet, large, broad, numerous. Natives had been watching the camp. The men reached for their weapons, talking of attacks, traps, and cannibals. Magellan shook his head. "If they want to eat us, let them try. We taste of salt and dirt."

He posted double guards. The nights were restless, the rustling of the jungle like unintelligible voices. Once, the natives actually appeared: five men, painted, armed with spears. No hostility, just curiosity. They brought fish, fruit, a kind of bread made from roots. Magellan accepted the gifts and returned glass beads. Cartagena would have turned this into a fair. Magellan made a deal.

The atmosphere remained tense. The priest, San Martín, began to preach loudly, speaking of divine guidance, of the sinful Portuguese who gave orders to the Spanish. He was cautious, but Magellan heard every syllable. Later, as San Martín prayed in his hut, Magellan stepped behind him. "You think I'm lost?" The priest didn't flinch. "I think you're following false light." "Then pray that it's bright enough to light our way home." He let him pray, but also posted a guard outside the hut.

A few days later, the men began to get drunk. Wine, diluted, but strong enough to loosen their minds. They sang, laughed, and shouted. One fell into a fire and burned his leg. The stench of flesh and smoke hung in the air for days. Magellan offered no punishment. "Pain teaches better than words."

Quesada came again, this time drunk, open, dangerous. "Capitán," he slurred, "you're chasing a dream. Salt and anger, that's all. There's no passage. No end."

Only sea, and at the end, death awaits." Magellan looked at him for a long time. "Then I'll just sail to his table."

He later wrote: *"These men don't understand that the earth itself is a lie. They think it stands still. But it spins, slowly, mockingly, like a drunk laughing over our heads."*

The weeks passed. Rain, sun, more rain. Supplies grew, but morale plummeted. Some men disappeared into the jungle for hours, returning with bruises and bites, talking of ghosts. Others began carving symbols into their skin—crosses, stars, names. Magellan let them. Humans need signs when words fail.

One evening, a hut was found burned down. The priest was gone. Later, natives said he had gone upriver, alone, carrying a bamboo cross. Some said he was seeking God. Magellan laughed bitterly. "If he finds him, he should tell him I'm moving on."

He actually did it: The next morning, he gave the order to set sail. The supplies were loaded, the men exhausted, the land bled dry by rain. They hoisted the sails and left the coast, while the sun mocked them with its brilliance.

Behind them remained the camp: burned out, empty, a patch of mud and ash. Before them: the sea again. And Magellan stood at the helm, looking back, then forward, then nowhere.

"Perhaps," he thought, *"That's the dream: ever further, ever deeper, until there's nothing left to lose."*

The coast passed by like a film no one wanted to see anymore. Green, gray, rocky, green again. Always the same line between earth and water, a line that promised nothing but a continuation. The wind had changed—moody, wet, full of voices that only one person seemed to hear: Magellan.

He almost always stood alone on the bridge. No coat, no protection. Just his hands on the railing, his face open to the salt and wind. He sometimes spoke in a low voice, as if dictating orders to the sea. The men pretended not to notice, but they all did. One whispered: *"He speaks to spirits."* Another: *"He talks to himself."* Nobody knew what was worse.

The ships glided past bays that smelled of paradise but looked like a trap. In the distance, mountains, fog, rivers—all beautiful, all wrong. The men wanted to dock, at least for a day, but Magellan refused. *"Land is a knife that is grasped from the wrong side,"* he said. *"We need sea, not land."*

He led them like a man who wants to prove to himself that the sky hates him and yet the sea tolerates him. Every decision became a game of contradiction. When the sun shone, they sailed through; when a storm came, he let them stay. Once, they stayed in a bay for three days until their supplies ran dry. "*The wind is wrong*," he said, even though the wind was blowing right. He wanted to break them, see how much humanity was still in them.

Cartagena was still alive, somewhere on the *San Antonio*. Guarded, half-forgotten. But his story lived on. Men told it secretly, in the evenings, over bad rum. "He was the only one who dared to say no," they whispered. "The only one who said it out loud." These sentences were dangerous. Words are tinder. Magellan knew this and held the reins tighter.

He had new rules established: no fire without permission, no conversation between ships, no prayer longer than the Lord's Prayer. It was less a matter of discipline than a survival tactic. Everyone knew that every extra word could trigger a spark.

The sky played its own show: endless days of rain, then whip-like sun. The men's skin burst, their minds too. They talked in their sleep, screaming for their mothers, for wine, for something. One began to talk to the mast. Another drew circles on the planks and said they were maps of home. Magellan ignored them. He no longer believed in healing, only in functioning.

Sometimes, when the sea was calm, he looked in the direction from which they had come. There was nothing to see but memories. And he wondered if the world really had to be round. Perhaps it was simply empty—a circle of repetition that he had recognized too late.

The coast grew colder, harsher. The green gave way to gray. They found strange animals, mixtures of nightmare and hunger: penguins, seals, birds with cries that sounded like laughter. The men laughed back, nervous, tired. One called out: "*God has forgotten what order is down here!*" Magellan replied: "*Maybe he invented it here.*"

Then came a night when the wind slept. No sound, no breaking waves, only darkness. The fleet stood still. No one dared to venture above deck. It was as if the sea itself was lurking. Then someone called out: "*I saw lights! On the shore!*" Magellan stepped to the railing. No lights. Only phosphorus in the water, the glow of his own movement. "*These are not ghosts*," he said. "*It is we ourselves who are rotting.*"

The men heard this and thought he was crazy. But the only crazy thing was the sea, which hadn't yet swallowed him.

During the day, Magellan was sober; at night, he talked more. He spoke to the stars as if each of them had an answer. *"Show me the way,"* he murmured, *"Or burn me, I'll take both."*

His officers watched this with that mixture of fear and quiet fascination one has for saints or executioners.

Then they reached the mouth of a mighty river—the Río de la Plata. Wide water, sweet, treacherous. Some believed this was the passage, the end of the search. They shouted, cheered, saw land on both sides. Hope spread like mold. Magellan had a sample taken. Fresh water. Not an ocean. He turned around, slowly, with an expression no one could read. *"Not here,"* he said. *"The world continues to fool us."*

The men cursed, openly and loudly. Quesada stepped forward. "Perhaps God closed the passage," he said. Magellan looked at him, tired, cold. "Perhaps God never built it." "And what do we do then?" "Sail on," said Magellan.

They did it. Against the wind, against reason, against everything. They sailed south, ever further, to where maps ended. The sky grew paler, the water thicker. Seabirds circled as if they knew more. The sun sank lower, the days grew shorter.

The men's skin cracked, their faith cracked. Some began to talk about returning again, this time more quietly, more wisely, in flat voices. They knew that open rebellion would only mean imprisonment or the rope. So they whispered. And the whispering was worse than any scream.

Magellan felt it. He knew his victory lay in keeping them alive long enough until they were too tired to hate. He once said to Serrano: *"If they're going to curse me, at least they should do it while they're rowing."*

He wrote in the logbook:

"This coast lies. It pretends to be a direction, but it's just a backdrop. Every rock, every bird, every gust of wind is a test. Maybe the sea has no destination. Maybe I am the destination. And that's the worst of it."

At night, when the water was black and the ship groaned, he looked south, into the darkness he was seeking. There was something there. No land, no light—

only the feeling that something was waiting down there that already knew his name.

The wind came like a bill left unpaid for too long. First a distant rumble, then a hiss, then just movement—all at once. The sky tilted, the sea suddenly stood upright, and the men who had just been men became particles of dirt in the breath of God.

Magellan stood there, bareheaded, his fingers in the railing, grinning. The rain lashed his face like cold mockery, but he didn't flinch. *"Finally someone is talking to me,"* he murmured.

The sea boiled. Waves so high they swallowed the sky, wind like iron. The ships creaked, tore, praying silently within their timbers. Men screamed, ran, clung to ropes, to masts, to lies. One called for his mother, another for God, and both received the same answer: nothing.

Magellan shouted orders, but his voice was just a sliver in the noise. Nevertheless, they obeyed. Not because they loved him, but because they weren't dead yet. Survival was now the only belief that worked.

He looked into the darkness, into the raging gray, and thought: *If that's a sign, it's an honest one.* He didn't believe in punishment or redemption; he believed in movement. At least a storm was something worthwhile—an enemy that was revealing itself.

Quesada came to him, dripping wet, pale, trembling. "Capitán! We're losing the *San Antonio*!" "Then she should learn to swim!" "The men pray!" "Then they'll finally have a job!"

The sea struck an answer into the planks. A crash, a scream. Wood splintered, sails ripped, a mast snapped like a bone. The sky was liquid darkness. The storm had no rhythm, only hunger.

Magellan moved across the deck like a man who cannot drown. He placed his hand on the mast, felt the trembling beneath, felt the life in the wood. *"Hold,"* he whispered, *"just a breath longer than her."* And the ship stopped.

The men no longer screamed. They worked. Panic became mechanics, fear became muscle power. It was always like this: when everything falls apart, a person becomes useful again.

Magellan laughed—short, hoarse laughter. The wind tore his laughter to pieces. *"More! Show me what you got!"* he shouted into the night. No one knew whether he meant the sea, God, or himself.

He truly believed the storm was a kind of test. Not a divine one, not a moral one—a physical one. A kind of handshake between him and the world: *You want me? Then take me.*

The hours turned into days, days into a kind of hallucination. There was no sleep, only unconsciousness between the waves. Eating meant salt. Praying meant cursing. One said he saw lights in the water, small green flames following them. Magellan replied: "Those are our sins that can swim."

After three days, the wind shifted, like an animal releasing its bite. The sky opened, the sea collapsed, exhausted. Debris was everywhere: shredded sails, broken ropes, men with looks like empty bottles. But they were alive.

Magellan stood amidst the chaos, looking down at his crew. No pride, no triumph—just a cold, dry smile. *"You wanted a sign? Here you go."* Nobody answered.

They mended what was left. Stitched, bound, darned. Hands sore, faces dead. But there was something new in their eyes: not hope, but rather a kind of grudging respect. The storm had shown them who they were—or what was left of them.

That evening, they sat on deck in silence. The sea was calm, the sun red. Magellan wrote in his logbook, his fingers trembling: *"The storm took almost everything from us. But it proved me right. No man, no power, no king can tell me where it ends. Only the water knows. And it speaks the same language as me: anger."*

He put down his pen and looked out into the waves. It shimmered quietly, innocently, as if nothing had happened. But he knew: the sea doesn't forget. It remembers every name it didn't receive.

The men slept early. Magellan stayed awake. The sky above him was clear, the stars twinkling like nails in a coffin. He whispered: *"I'm still here. So one of us lost."*

Then a gust of wind came, very light, almost friendly. The sea breathed. And somewhere far to the south, where the maps were blank, the next nothingness waited.

Patagonia didn't come like land, but like a threat. Gray, cold, distant. The coast was a motionless face, the air smelled of stone and death. Even the wind seemed to have no courage here. It came, saw the men, and turned back.

The fleet lay heavy in the water. Sails hung like wet sheets, the ships creaked with every breath. The men looked like skeletons in rags. No laughter, no fighting, just that dull sound of life that refuses to stop.

Magellan stood at the front, motionless. He had stopped dreaming. Dreams were a luxury, and luxury was for the dead. Now there was only the goal. He barely spoke. When he did speak, it sounded like a grave talking. "Anchor," he said, "Repair. Check supplies. No prayers."

Patagonia welcomed them like an innkeeper who hates guests. They built tents on the beach and lit fires that gave off more smoke than warmth. The frost came at night, silently, insidiously. Water in barrels froze, bread turned to stone. Men wrapped themselves in canvas, cursing their sleep.

Cartagena was still in chains, somewhere on the *San Antonio*. Hardly anyone spoke about him, but everyone thought of him. He was the ghost that grinned in the silence. Magellan knew that the men secretly wondered if he might not be better than the man who had brought them here.

The priest, San Martín, had disappeared. Serrano took over the masses, but without conviction. He spoke of hope, and the men listened because silence was worse. But their faces said: Hope is for those who are full.

One morning, a group of hunters returned with news. They had seen people—huge, naked figures, painted, hairy, with spears as tall as a mast. The men laughed nervously. Magellan didn't smile. "Giants or not," he said, "we need meat."

The next day, they saw one of them. Tall, yes, but not supernatural. Just a man forgotten by nature for too long. He was curious, suspicious, but not hostile. They lured him with mirrors, bread, and wine. The giant drank, laughed, and danced. His voice was thunder in the frost. The men were amazed. Magellan watched him with the gaze of a man who believes not in miracles, but in possibilities.

"If the world is going to eat us," he said quietly to Serrano, "then I want to know with which teeth."

They gave the giant gifts, took measurements, noted, and drew. Later, as he slept, Magellan looked at him for a long time. "You see," he murmured, "even monsters celebrate when you give them wine. People are all the same. Only the size changes."

Winter descended upon them. The sky turned to lead, the sea to stone. Winds slashed faces, fires smothered in smoke. Men died silently, one by one. Frostbite, hunger, fatigue. No one counted the dead anymore.

Magellan wrote in his logbook:

"The frost has no voice, but it sings. We hear it every night. It sings of the south, of the end, of things you'd rather not know."

The men began to doubt him. Again. Again and again. They said he was possessed, crazy, led by the devil. Others said he was the devil. He heard this. He smiled. *"Maybe I am both,"* he thought, *"God sometimes needs a bastard to do his work."*

Quesada sought him out one evening, his face red from the frost. "Captain, we must go back. Another month here, and we'll all be dead." Magellan replied calmly: "Then at least we'll die of something great." "Great?" Quesada cried. "That's madness!" "Madness is when you don't try anything." "And what if there's no end?" "Then we're the proof."

Quesada left without a word, and Magellan knew what that meant: Something was brewing again. Mutiny is like mold—it grows in the dark.

The nights grew colder, longer. The ice settled over the water like skin. Men prayed to God, others to the sea. Some spoke to the frost, because at least it answered.

One morning, they found a man who had hanged himself. No letter, no reason. Just a rope swinging in the wind. Magellan had him unhooked and thrown into the sea. "One less to complain," he said. The men hated him for it—and followed him anyway.

He was their captain, their demon, their last anchor. And they knew: if he fell, they all fell.

Cartagena, still rotting in his cell, had letters sent to Quesada via the guards. Words full of venom, full of faith, full of truth. *"Magellan will kill you all,"* he wrote. *"Take the ships. Go home before the ice eats you."*

Quesada read the letters, silent. But there was fire in his eyes. And Magellan noticed it. He noticed everything.

He wrote that night:

"I'm surrounded by men who think they can destroy me by hating me. But hate is a wind. I sail with it."

Winter didn't go away. It remained, like a curse. The sun shone only briefly, weakly, and every time it shone, the men thought it was the end of their torment. But the sun always disappeared again.

One of the sailors said, "Perhaps we are already dead, and this is hell." Magellan replied, "If that's the case, then I am the devil here, and I decide when it ends."

The sea was silent, as always. But deep within, beneath the frozen surface, something lurked—movement, pressure, direction. The south was calling. And Magellan listened.

Court flights and golden promises

Seville shone like a smile with rotten teeth. Gold from America, stench from the alleys, courtiers everywhere, lying to each other. Behind every curtain sat a pair of ears, and whoever said "honor" really meant "provisions."

In the halls of the Alcázar, people were still talking about the expedition, about Magellan, the Portuguese, the madman. "He's going to die," they said. "But perhaps God will send back a few barrels of spices first." The merchants nodded, the priests blessed, the scribes were already counting the profits that would never come.

King Charles—young, handsome, impatient—had reports read to him that sounded hopeful but reeked of doubt. "How far are they?" he asked. "We don't know, Your Majesty." "How many are still alive?" "We don't know, Your Majesty." "And why don't we know anything?" "Because the sea says nothing, Your Majesty."

He didn't like the answer. But it was true.

While Magellan lay in the cold, his enemies sat by the fire. Bishop Fonseca, who had never set foot on a ship, spoke of navigation as if he were the wind itself. "This Magellan," he said, "is dangerous. A man without a fatherland has nothing to lose." "Then he has everything to gain," murmured one of the younger courtiers. Fonseca smiled thinly. "Such men don't die for glory. They die to prove they were right."

New ships were waiting in the port of Seville, bigger, more beautiful, cleaner. The shipyards were working, the money changers were counting ducats. No one wanted to remember that five ships were already underway, filled with hunger, frost, and Portuguese pride. The memories of the rich are short.

A scribe named Morales wrote daily letters to the king, full of rumors: Magellan had worshipped foreign gods, Magellan had sold Spaniards, Magellan had insulted the world. He wrote what was paid and received wine and silk in return. Truth was a commodity there, cheaper than salt.

One afternoon, Doña Beatriz Barbosa—Magellan's wife—appeared before the council. Her dress was old, her expression new. "I want news," she said. "I want to know if my husband is alive." Fonseca smiled like a priest before confession. "My child, the sea is silent. We pray for him." "I am not praying," she said. "I am waiting."

She received no answer, just a polite nod. Outside, in the square, children were playing, throwing stones at a beggar who was shouting "Portuguese scum!" Seville had its own wars.

Stories were told in the taverns. Magellan had discovered golden cities. Magellan had been swallowed by the sea. Magellan had declared himself king. Every lie received applause, proportional to the amount of beer consumed. The truth was a luxury no one wanted.

In a corner sat an old sailor who knew him. "He'll return," he said. "Not for gold. For pride." "And if he doesn't make it?" "Then the devil will come ashore and bring the bill."

So Seville continued to live, drinking, praying, cheating. The sun shone as if it didn't know that somewhere at the end of the world, men were dying in the ice while bread was being baked here.

Fonseca wrote another letter, this time to the Pope:

"Your Majesty, the Portuguese captain has made himself equal to God. Perhaps the Church should intervene before he proves it."

The letter went to Rome. The reply never came.

Seville was a theater, and no one remembered who had actually cast the roles. Everything continued as if by itself. Court clerks invented accounts, mapmakers drew coasts they had never seen, and in the halls of the Alcázar, men talked with their mouths full of deprivation.

Doña Beatriz was now a kind of ghost with a pulse. Every day she walked through the same corridors, looking for the same faces. No one listened to her, but she still didn't listen. That made her dangerous. A woman with nothing left to lose always becomes a problem in Seville.

She found an ally in Morales, the scribe. A small man with too many debts and too few morals. "Help me," she said. "Write that my husband is alive." "He may not be alive." "Then write that he is." Morales nodded. For a few ducats, anyone lived.

He sat down, dipped his pen, and wrote:

"Latest news from overseas: The Portuguese captain Magellan is said to have reached the land of the giants and experienced signs of divine favor there."

He sent the report to the court. Two days later, it was the subject of conversation over wine and pies.

Fonseca read the paper and snorted. "Divine favor? The man insults God with every breath." A young nobleman asked, "If he succeeds—what then?" Fonseca put the paper down. "Then we say we wanted it."

That's how Spain worked: failure belonged to the captain, success to the king.

Meanwhile, Morales sold more news. Some claimed Magellan had seen the end of the world. Others said he had long since fallen off the edge. The city's printers printed both because both made money.

Doña Beatriz watched all this. Sometimes she laughed bitterly. "My husband wanted fame," she said. "Now he has it—as a rumor."

Once, she visited the king herself. No appointment, no protocol, just courage and fatigue. The guards tried to stop her, but Charles waved her through. "You are Magellan's wife?" he asked. "Yes, Your Majesty." "You have courage." "I

have nothing else." He fell silent. Then: "I pray that he succeeds." "Don't pray. Listen to him when he comes back."

She bowed and left. Karl remained thoughtful. Perhaps, he thought, the sea was more honest than the people here.

The weeks dragged on. Court reports came and went, contradicting each other. Fonseca had new expeditions planned. If Magellan died, another would come. If he lived, his glory would be taken away. This was administration, not malice.

Doña Beatriz withdrew. Her money was almost gone, her name was mentioned less often. But she wrote to him every night, in a book that was never sent. *"Ferdinand," she wrote, "They laugh at you. I don't. I know you'll come, even if you're dead."*

In the taverns, they drank in his name. In the churches, they prayed for his failure. Spain only loved heroes when they were far away.

One night, a letter fell into Fonseca's hands – anonymous, written with a shaky hand:

"The Portuguese will not return. He now belongs to the sea."

Fonseca smiled. "Then his glory belongs to us."

And while Magellan was fighting wind and hunger somewhere in the frost, Seville had already finished writing the legend – before it was even finished.

Spring in Seville smelled of orange and sin. The city acted as if it were in God's peace, while every other man was plotting who to betray next. The Alcázar glittered in the morning light, and by nine o'clock the heat clung to the walls like guilt.

Fonseca sat poring over his papers. Reports, lies, proposals—everything looked the same. His fingers glistened with breakfast oil, his eyes with success. A servant brought new news from Cádiz. *Rumors about the Portuguese, it was said. A storm. Deaths. But one of the ships was still seen, further south.*

Fonseca read, nodded, and put the paper aside. "So he's still alive," he muttered. "How annoying."

Throughout the city, the rumor spread faster than fire. The printers spun it, each in their own way. For the merchants, Magellan was now a saint who would soon bring spices. For the priests, he was a heretic forgotten by God. For

the women in the taverns, he was a name they could whisper when the wine was too cheap.

Doña Beatriz heard about it in a house on the outskirts of town where she now lived. The marble had been sold, the servants gone. Only a table, a bed, a memory. She stood at the window, looking out at the river. "*He's still there,*" she whispered, "*and they don't know it.*"

That evening, Morales, the scribe, came to her. The wine had made it runny, but his pen was still nimble. "I heard they want to equip a new expedition. Fonseca himself is to lead the planning." "And my husband?" "Your husband is a rumor now, Señora." She stepped closer. "Then make him a legend." Morales smiled crookedly. "Legends cost money." "I have nothing." "Then I'll write it for free. Perhaps this is my confession."

He left, leaving behind ink and the smell of sulfur. That night, he actually wrote, not for money, but because he sensed that something about this story was greater than the lies everyone was selling. "*A man who seeks the world must first lose it,*" he noted. "*Perhaps his name will stick because he couldn't exploit it himself.*"

Meanwhile, another play was playing in the palace. A Venetian envoy was dining with the king. Wine, music, polite boredom. And then the word "Magellan" was spoken.

Karl barely flinched. "He'll come or he won't. Both are useful." "Your kingdom needs heroes," said the envoy. "My kingdom needs order." Fonseca, who was sitting nearby, nodded. "And order needs stories. We'll write them as soon as we know if he's dead."

Later, when the court was asleep, Fonseca walked through the corridors. He stopped in front of a mirror and looked at himself. "*Maybe I'm just a captain,*" he thought, "*but my sea is made up of people.*" He smiled at his own clarity, then forgot it again, as one forgets a name one never really liked.

Doña Beatriz went to the Church of Santa Ana. No prayer, only silence. She lit a candle and watched the flame dance. Next to her, a woman prayed for a son fighting in Italy. Neither said a word. Only the wax dripped, as if trying to count how many lives the kingdom was currently burning.

Outside, processions passed by, drums, incense, sun. Spain played piously so no one would see how greedy it was. Beatriz walked through the noise, her face still, her dress simple. Men watched her, but no one recognized her anymore.

The next day, Morales appeared again, with a sheet fresh from the printing press. *"New news from the hero of the seas!"* was written in large letters. Below: *"He has entered the land of the giants and speaks with gods."* Beatriz read it and smiled wearily. "Lies." "Of course," said Morales. "But beautiful lies." "Then thank you." "For what?" "For a little breath."

She held the sheet as if it were a letter from him.

In the streets, children sang the ballad that someone had written overnight: *"A Portuguese sails for Spain, and the sea won't let him go."* They didn't know the truth, but they knew the rhythm. And rhythm is enough to make history.

Fonseca heard the song from the balcony, drank his wine, and murmured, "This is how fame begins. And this is how it ends."

He was right. He just didn't know that the end was already sailing toward him—with shattered masts, half-frozen men, and a name stronger than his courtly wings.

The city breathed money. Not air, not life—just gold dust. It clung to every crack, to every tongue. Even the priests coughed up ducats when they prayed too loudly.

In the harbor, men called for work, for bread, for ships. No one spoke of faith. Only of rates, of rations, of names. Every name was a gamble, every hope a bet. And everywhere, in every tavern, one heard the same phrase: "The Portuguese is still alive."

This wasn't news, this was business. Whoever said it got wine, listeners, sometimes even payment. Hope was the cheapest commodity in Seville.

The Alcázar stank of roses and intrigue. Fonseca received a new advisor—Don Álvaro de Espinosa, a man who always held his face as if he were eavesdropping on a secret only he understood. "Your Grace," he said, "people love Magellan. They sing about him. That's dangerous." "Love is never dangerous," Fonseca replied, "if you guide it." "And if it can't be guided?" "Then you smother it in gold."

So it was decided to offer a reward—for every ship that returned, for every man who brought a report. No honor, just money. Honor was too volatile.

In a corner of the palace, Morales wrote new texts with moist hands. He knew what people wanted to read. *"The king stands firmly by his Portuguese captain,"* he typed. *"Spain's courage knows no bounds."* He laughed as he wrote. Irony was his only defense against the truth.

In the evenings, he went to the taverns and read his own lies aloud. People clapped. Some cried. Some offered him wine. He took it all, smiled, and thought: *I have found a religion that can be printed.*

Doña Beatriz now lived in poverty. Her dress was faded, her hands sore. But her pride was still there—tough, like a coin that can't be broken down. Every Sunday, she walked through the city, listening to the songs about her husband. She didn't smile. She knew that fame is the smell of a corpse that the living find sweet.

One day, a messenger stood at her door. A boy, barely thirteen, brought an unsealed letter. It contained only one sentence:

"He's alive. I saw him. South of the Rio de la Plata."

No name, no date. Just the sea in words.

She read it over and over until the ink smudged. Then she hid it under her pillow.

Meanwhile, an argument raged in the palace. Fonseca wanted new funds for an expedition, while the king wanted to save money. "Your Majesty," said Fonseca, "the world has become small." "No," replied Charles. "Only our patience." "But fame—" "Fame doesn't feed an army."

The conversation ended as conversations at court always ended – with a nod that meant nothing.

Drums could be heard in the streets. A ship returned from West Africa, half empty, but with gold dust in its hold. The crowd cheered as if God himself had landed. For a moment, Seville forgot the name Magellan. That was the true crime: not hatred, but indifference.

Fonseca stood at the window, watching the goings-on. He knew how short fame was, how quickly names could be exchanged. *"Today people sing about him,"* he thought. *"Tomorrow over the next."*

Then he turned away and picked up a new report from the table. The envelope read: *"From the New World – by an unknown hand."*

He opened it and read: *"The men are starving. The captain is obsessed. But the*

sea follows him."

Fonseca smiled. "Then let them both go down together."

And somewhere, far from all candles and songs, Magellan trudged through ice and wind, not knowing that in Seville his name ended in the third verse of a ballad.

The heat now had a weight that could have been measured in money. Seville stood there like an inflated hall, ready to burst, and the people inside continued eating as if nothing had happened. In a hall like that, ambition grows like mold: invisible, then everywhere.

Fonseca rubbed his hands together. Power always needs a narrative, and narrative means pressure on all sides. He insisted that no one should praise the Portuguese too much—that what benefits the king is useful. He also insisted that anyone who cheered too loudly could expect a visit to the scissors. Intrigue works like clockwork: gears made of names, lubrication made of bribes, a ticking that never stops.

The traders saw things differently. For them, Magellan was less a man than a possibility—an account with potential interest. They whispered at the table: "When he returns, his barrels will drive up the price. Anyone who invests now will laugh until they die." They laughed as if they had already ordered and unpacked death. The laughter sounded like a bribe.

Doña Beatriz walked through the alleys and heard this laughter. It hurt; not so much because it was about her husband, but because the laughter shredded his future. She sought out men who had once been friends, offered them bread, and asked for news. Some gave her words of sympathy, others only pity, which was served with cigarettes and lame compliments. Pity is a currency that is quickly spent.

Morales continued to work. He wrote stories that were read in the morning, forgotten by midday, and praised again in the evening. His pen was a small guillotine for the truth: it cut, shaped, and killed. He wrote articles so vague that any interpreter could craft from them what they needed: a triumph for the king, a warning for the critics, a fairy tale for the bankers.

One day, a man in baggy clothes came into the royal treasurer's office. His hands trembled, his breath smelled of the land. He had stamps in his pocket and stories on his tongue. "A ship," he said, "has returned. No cannons, just empty barrels and a few souls." He didn't name a name. The treasurer

swallowed, nodded, and sent someone to investigate the claim. News is like cats: they usually come at night, looking for shelter.

Fonseca read the first, blurred note late one night. His eyes narrowed, as if trying to find something there that wasn't there—a mistake, a ruse, a misconception that would tear the story apart. He thought about how easily a name can be shifted: today Magellan, tomorrow another tide bearing the new name. He wasn't sentimental. Politics doesn't give gifts. Politics borrows and demands return with interest.

At court, the big calculations began. If one of the ships really did return, they could sell it: as a triumph or as a warning. They could celebrate as if they had conquered the world—while hiding the bill. Or they could sell sympathy, conduct a campaign across the country, and collect donations for widows whose husbands were still at sea. Money rules every story.

Doña Beatriz heard rumors that made her stomach churn. One said it was just a fisherman wearing old divers who saw people on board screaming and then falling silent. Another said they had found writing on which her husband wrote in strange numbers, names no one understood. The rumors were like little knives. They cut through the air, making blood drip onto the paper.

She sought out Morales again. This time not out of poverty, but out of defiance. "Write something true," she demanded. Morales laughed, a short, bitter laugh. "Truth costs money, Señora. And you have nothing to pay." "Then write a question," she said. "Write: Where is Ferdinand?" He looked at her as if she had offered him a grave blasphemy, but then he nodded. Questions are less risky than answers, he thought. And questions sell well.

The question appeared the next morning, printed in large print in the *Gazettes*: "*WHERE IS FERDINAND MAGELLAN?*" The city read them, bit into them, and spat them out again. Questions are like breadcrumbs; many people grab them.

Meanwhile, Charles tightened his grip. Politics is a game for men with wet hands, and his finger smelled of potion. He invited men whose machinations were useful to him and listened to voices that told him how he could profit, no matter how the truth turned out. His interest in Magellan was pragmatic: as long as the name brought him something, he protected him. Protection comes with conditions.

At court, people began to reward those who uncovered useful stories. A sailor who brought back a piece of a sail was rewarded—not much, but enough to keep him silent. Silence is a contract, often signed with silver.

There were evenings when Doña Beatriz sat alone by a candle and imagined her husband returning home: tired, hungry, with eyes that betrayed stories and a smile you couldn't buy in a tavern. In her imagination, he kissed her and said only one thing: "It was real." That word, real, was rare and precious. If he spoke it, perhaps the world would stop contradicting her.

But the world continued to object. Fonseca organized an audience, half masquerade, half trial, to win donors and simultaneously reassure the people. That was his method: reassurance through action, action through theater. He called it "the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Overseas Affairs." A long name, one that's easy to hide behind.

Beatriz received an invitation. She went, not out of hope, but out of duty—the duty to have a face one could rub against if one wished. She stood before the council, heard questions, avoidance of answers, the workings of courtly language. "Is there any news?" one asked. "Is there any proof?" another asked. She responded with the letter the boy had brought her, unsealed. She spoke with few words and long glances. Her voice was not a sob, just a knife being slowly turned.

The men looked at her, some with pity, some calculating. Fonseca kept his hands steady. He heard what she didn't say: that if Magellan ever returned, they would either take the crown from him or hand it over to him, and both were part of the game.

The evening the commission broke up, Morales came to her. He looked as tired as a printer after a long night of lies. "There are things you can't write," he said. "And there are things you mustn't say." "Tell me one thing," she begged. "Tell me if he was alive when he was last seen." He looked at them, at the men's mouths, at the rings in their hands. Then he said, "He was alive, Señora. But being alive doesn't always mean obeying life."

She treasured this half-confession. It smelled of tar and sea. It was enough to breathe and carry on living, just barely.

In the days that followed, the city continued to weigh. Some prayed, some bought, some forgot. The press continued to ask questions; Fonseca laid plans; Morales invented another rumor to reassure the men of the harbor. The clock

of the empire continued to tick, and no one wanted to hear how Magellan, buried in the ice, might already be worshipping death—or the life he was being persuaded to believe.

But the candle in Beatriz's window continued to burn. It was a small, unfailing thing, as foolish and brave as a woman who has nothing left to lose. And that, she knew, is sometimes more than all the gold in the palace.

In summer, Seville smelled of fermented fruit and fear. The streets steamed, the river stank, and the sun nailed every thought to one's forehead. Merchants sweated away their profits, women fanned lies before their faces, and over everything hung the shimmer that comes when a city carries too many secrets at once.

Fonseca was ill. Not seriously, but visibly so. His hands trembled, his gaze was short-sighted. Illness is always a rumor at court. Some said the bishop owed too much to God. Others said he'd been poisoned—by whom, it didn't matter, as long as someone did it. In truth, it was just exhaustion: too many letters, too many gods in his head.

He continued working anyway. Every night he read the new reports coming from the ports, and they always said the same thing: *no message*. He began to hate the words. "No news" was worse than "death." No news meant silence, and silence was the one thing he couldn't control.

The printers had long since moved on to other heroes—colonial officers, priests, explorers who hadn't discovered anything at all. Magellan was old stuff, a song no one commissioned anymore. Morales knew this and now wrote about tax policy and whaling. "Heroism," he said, "only sells as long as it remains cheap."

Doña Beatriz remained silent. She had grown older in just a few months, her skin paler, her eyes sharper. She worked in a convent, helping with sewing and bread making. The nuns liked her because she never complained. In the evenings, she went out onto the balcony, watched the ships in the harbor, and waited.

One day a letter arrived—again anonymous. Just one sentence: "*He has found land, but God is not there.*" She read it, folded it, and placed it with the first one. No one knew that she possessed a small collection of such letters, like relics of a faith only she understood.

Meanwhile, a new wave of mistrust swept through the palace. Charles had grown older, more impatient, and harder. He spoke less, but when he did, every word cut through. Fonseca felt it. "You promised me glory," said the king. "I see only dust." "Dust, Your Majesty," Fonseca replied, "is the beginning of gold." "Or of a tombstone."

He left. Fonseca stayed behind, staring at his hands, which smelled of ink, of years, of nothing.

In the streets, beggars sang old songs, and Magellan's name appeared again, this time as a warning. *"Don't go out, little man, the sea will eat you like Magellan."*

Songs are merciless. They devour what they love.

Morales began drinking again. He drank out of boredom, out of regret, out of everything. "I wrote about the world," he once said, "and it forgot me." Then he laughed and continued writing, because writing was better than thinking.

Doña Beatriz saw him one day in a tavern, completely drunk. He didn't recognize her immediately. "Señora," he slurred, "I lied for you. More than for God." "Then you did more than he ever asked," she said, and left.

A ship from Flanders arrived in the harbor, bringing fabrics, rumors, and fleas. A sailor told me he had heard of Portuguese sailors who had sailed almost around the world in the south. The word *"almost"* hung in the air like an insect that doesn't want to die. The crowd laughed, but the king asked for further clarification.

Fonseca received the message, sighed, grabbed a new sheet of paper and wrote: *"If it's true, he'll be celebrated. If not, I'll be blamed."* That was the most honest line of his life.

That night, Doña Beatriz burned down one of her candles, took the remains, mixed them with wax, and formed a new one. Thus, the light remained the same, even though the flame was old.

Autumn came early. A dust hung over Seville that dulled even the gold. Merchants spoke more quietly, as if afraid the air might overhear their profits. Only the church bells remained loud—ringing for everything: birth, death, rumor.

The air in the Alcázar was stuffy. Fonseca sat between stacks of parchment, their edges buzzing with flies. Messages from overseas, filtered, twisted, with

wax seals that carried more meaning than their contents. The last letters from Lisbon claimed that a ship under a foreign flag had sailed through a strait no one had on their maps. No one could prove it was Magellan's. No one could prove it wasn't.

"So what do we report to the king?" asked the secretary. Fonseca closed his eyes. "That God completes his work—through whom—is secondary."

This is how history was made: not with truth, but with formulations.

The streets were seething with unrest. Bread prices rose, hopes sank. Morales wrote about taxes again, this time soberly. He had given up wine—not out of virtue, but out of exhaustion. His hands trembled as he wrote, but his pen obeyed. *"The sea," he noted, "belongs not to the heroes, but to the writers. For only we can explain it."*

Doña Beatriz was still working at the convent. The nuns whispered about her: "The dead man's wife, who waits." She smiled at them, always the same smile that cost nothing. Once a month, she went to the river, stood on the bank, and looked south. She imagined a man somewhere down there doing the same thing.

In the palace, the king prepared for winter. New envoys arrived, new expeditions were planned. Fonseca was allowed to stay—no one knew the books as well as he did. But he was told that his time was numbered. This hurt, but it didn't surprise him. Power is like salt: it preserves briefly and destroys slowly.

One evening, as the sun hung over the Guadalquivir like a red piece of metal, Doña Beatriz had all the candles in the convent chapel lit. She stood before the altar, her hands clasped, and whispered: "If he's alive, give him wind. If he's dead, give me rest."

No one answered. But out in the harbor, a gust of wind arose, filling the sails of a strange ship. Sailors cursed, children cheered. No one noticed that it was coming directly from the south.

Fonseca heard the wind, looked out the window, and for a moment thought he smelled salt. Then he shook his head. "Imagination," he said aloud to make sure he believed it.

Morales sat in the tavern and wrote the last sentence of his life's work: *"In the end, someone will come home, and everyone will claim they knew."*

Doña Beatriz rested her head in her hands as the candles dripped. A flame hissed, fell, and went out. Outside, the river murmured on, unperturbed, cynical like the sea.

Thus ended the chapter of Seville: a city that lived on glory it never saw. And somewhere far away, beyond ice, hunger, and silence, a sail continued on—torn, but on course.

The five rusty coffins

There were only five of them left. Five ships that sounded as if they were breathing through rusty lungs. Wood too old for its nails, sails that smelled of ash, men who tasted of salt and time. The sea had long since told them who was in charge, but they continued to act as if orders still meant something.

The *Trinidad*, Magellan's ship, led them. Behind them the *San Antonio*, suspicious, always slightly off-kilter, as if she wanted to evade the moment the wind changed. Then the *Concepcion*, the ship of the skeptics; the *Victoria*, small, fast, but tired; and the *Santiago*, which looked as if it had already forgotten what it was built for. Five floating arguments against hope.

The wind was cold, the sea grayer than memory. They sailed south, ever further, searching for a crack in the celestial body, the opening that would separate the ocean. The men no longer believed in the heavens, only in maps, and even those were lies.

Magellan stood at the railing like a man fighting a war no one ever mentions. There was no anger in his face, only conviction. That's worse. Anger fades, conviction freezes.

"The sea smells different," said Serrano beside him. "Like death?" asked Magellan. "Like the end." "The end is good. The end means direction."

He said it without irony. He meant it.

The ships lay close together, out of both fear and mistrust. No captain trusted the other; everyone was calculating who would disappear first. Magellan knew this, and he liked it. A little fear keeps men alive.

At night, the sky was full of stars, so clear you could get lost in them. Some men prayed. Others drank. A few laughed hysterically. One sang until Magellan made him shout: "No singing. We are not children of God."

They found new coves, new cliffs, new words for cold. Each time, someone thought this was the passage. Each time, they were wrong. Hope was a piece of meat they chewed over and over again, even though it had long since dried out.

Once a storm came. Not a real one, not a fury, just that insidious wind that laughs from behind and kills from the front. *Santiago* cracked. Men screamed, water poured in. Magellan watched until they broke the mast and threw the barrels overboard. He gave no orders. He simply watched. When the wind died down, he simply said, "Now they know what weight means."

The days that followed were quiet. The men worked, cursed quietly, and spoke little. Even Serrano remained silent. Silence at sea is contagious.

In the galley, the bread was soggy and the water was bad. Someone found a dead rat's head in the soup. Nobody said anything. They carried on eating.

The sun was now lower in the sky. The light no longer had any warmth. It didn't burn—it observed. And the south moved. Ever further. Ever more quietly.

One evening, they saw smoke on land. Magellan dropped anchor and sent boats. They found fires, tracks, broken spears—and no people. Only a message, carved into the earth: signs, circles, lines. Serrano interpreted them. "They know we're here." Magellan nodded. "Then they know more than God."

The men didn't understand the sentence. But they felt it was true.

That night Magellan wrote:

"We are five ships. Five temporary graves. But if one of us reaches our destination, at least death will have had a direction."

He closed the book and looked out at the sea. It moved, steady, unmoved. A man on deck spat over the side and said, "I bet the sea is laughing at us." Another replied, "Sure. But it laughs at everything."

In the morning, the sea was calm—too calm. The men didn't like that. A silent sea is planning something. Anyone who had been out there long enough knew that. And so they began to talk quietly, in fragments, like thieves who don't know if the master of the house is already asleep.

"The *Santiago*" "Let's leak again," said one. "Then let her drown," replied another. "If she sinks, we'll be next." "If she stays, too."

Magellan heard everything. He didn't need spies. On a ship, every word is a drum.

He sat in his cabin, his logbook open, but he wrote nothing. Only the wind outside made a sound—muffled, like an animal sleeping in a cage. On the table lay a map, half wet, half a lie. Lines leading to nothing, dashes that called hope what was actually fear.

Serrano came in, smelling of salt and tiredness. "They're talking again." "Let them," said Magellan. "They're talking against you." "Then at least they're talking." "At some point they'll act." "Then they'll die."

No threat, no posturing. Just a fact. Serrano nodded.

The *Santiago* continued to lose water. Quesada cursed, threw crates overboard, and prayed that the weight would be enough. Two men were swept over the railing, one smashed against the mast, and the other disappeared. No one wrote it down. The writer was sick, and so was his faith.

When they finally pulled the ship ashore to repair it, the men stood in the wind, smoking, freezing. Magellan looked at them—weary figures with hands like tools. "Repair it," he said, "or let it die. But don't complain."

They still complained, just more quietly.

During the night a messenger came from *San Antonio* Ship. Cartagena had tried again to send a message—this time with a bribe. Two men with wine and promises. They were caught, flogged, and one of them died on the third day. Magellan didn't say a word. He just looked briefly at the sky, as if checking whether God was listening to him. Then he went to sleep.

The next morning, he summoned all the captains. The sea was gray, the sky flat. Five men stood around him, each with a different face—pride, fear, hatred, boredom, greed. "We're here because you want to know when we'll turn back," Magellan began. "I tell you: never."

Silence. Only the slapping of a loose rope.

"We're here to survive," he continued. "Not to return home alive. Anyone who doesn't understand that should leave immediately."

No one moved. Only Quesada took a step forward. "You're killing us." "I'll take you farther than anyone before me." "Where?" "To something greater than you."

Quesada laughed, an ugly, broken laugh. "Bigger than us? Then you eat it first." Magellan stepped close to him. "That's all I do, day and night."

No one said anything else. The sea breathed between them.

They parted, each with a thought that was better left unsaid.

The days grew longer, emptier, and simmering. The sun hung like a knife in the sky. Men developed fevers, skin peeled off, rations became smaller. One said: "We're already dead, we just don't know it yet." No one objected.

One night the *Santiago* Final. No scream, no drama—just the sound of wood breaking and water responding with gratitude. In the morning, the wreckage drifted at sea: barrels, oars, a dead body with its mouth open, as if it wanted to say something.

Magellan stood on the deck of the *Trinidad*, stared at the water. Serrano stepped beside him. "That's it." "No," said Magellan. "That was just one of the coffins. We have four more."

And that's what the men called them from then on—the five rusty coffins. Not ships, but floating graves, with room for everyone who still had hope.

After the sinking of the *Santiago* Time began to dissolve. Days, nights, hours—everything smelled of the same: wet rope, salt, people. They sailed on, but no one knew where they were going. The world was now just a circle of water, sky, and hunger.

The sea was smooth and shone like oil. No wind, no direction. Sails hung slack, ropes creaked. If you listened closely, you could hear the ships breathing. Like old men about to die.

Magellan wrote in his logbook:

"Standstill is worse than a storm. At least the storm provides an answer."

The men began to whisper, quietly, off to the side, among the barrels. It wasn't a plan, not yet—just the feeling that something had to break. "He's led us to hell." "No," one said, "we've already been there. He just raised the curtain."

The bread had long since gone moldy, the water rotten, the meat tough. They caught fish they didn't know and ate them until one died. Then they cooked them longer. The stench remained.

At night, they told each other stories. Of ghosts, of mermaids, of islands full of women who ate men. Anything to keep them awake. Serrano tried to pray, but even the prayers sounded hollow. God had become a rumor that no one believed anymore.

One of the sailors, a man from Burgos, began to hear voices. He stood on deck, spoke to the wind, calling it "brother." Three days later, he jumped overboard. No scream, no resistance. Just a splash, and then nothing. "Perhaps he's arrived," someone said. "Perhaps he was right," another said.

Magellan saw it and remained silent. He had ceased to feel compassion. It was like a useless currency that he had long since used up.

On the fourth day without wind, a fight broke out. Someone had stolen bread. They found him and pulled him before Magellan. He stood there, motionless. "How much?" he asked. "A piece, Señor." "Then he's hungry." "And that's punishment enough?" Quesada asked. Magellan nodded. "For hunger, yes. Not for stupidity." He had him tied to the mast, without whip, without blood. Just tightly. For a whole day. The man screamed, begged, cursed, then fell silent. The next morning he was dead.

No one asked if it was murder. At sea, you simply die—from wind, from water, from people.

Serrano later came to Magellan. "They hate you." "I know." "And you let them." "Better they hate me than themselves."

The sea remained calm, but the men were beginning to storm. One wrote on the mast with charcoal: "*Spain is dying here.*" The next day the writing was gone—painted over by rain or fear.

The nights grew longer, harder. The sea sometimes glowed in the dark, shining green and blue, as if cursed from within. One whispered, "Those are the souls of the drowned." Another spat into the water and said, "Then let them watch."

Magellan often stood alone on deck. He spoke to no one, barely ate, and rarely slept. There was something in his face that hovered between faith and madness. He wrote:

"People call me stubborn. Maybe that's true. But so was God."

On the sixth day, the wind finally came. Light, timid, like an animal that doesn't dare. The sails filled, the men cheered, cried, and laughed. Magellan smiled briefly. "There," he said, "proof that God has a sense of humor."

But the wind was coming from the south. And south was just another word for ruin.

The wind came like a relief—but every relief is expensive. First it pushed them gently, then with force. The sea wrinkled, the sky furrowed. Everything moved, everything spoke again. The men cheered until they realized the wind was coming from the south. And south meant only one thing: cold.

First it was chilly, then harsh, then hostile. The nights burned their skin. Every breath was a knife, every movement a guilt. They put on thicker clothing, wrapped themselves in canvas, but the frost always found a way through.

The sea changed color. It became dark blue, then gray, then almost black. The sky hung low, heavy, as if it were tired of continuing to live.

Magellan stood at the bow, motionless, his cloak open. The wind beat against him, but he didn't budge. Serrano stepped beside him and looked at him. "You're not cold?" Magellan grinned. "I was freezing in the royal palace. This is honest."

The wind increased, the water lapped, the masts creaked. Men cursed, prayed, laughed, all at once. Some saw reflections of light on the waves—small, fleeting flames. They called them *Fire of Saint Elmo*. "A sign from God," said Serrano. "Or a spark from the devil," said Magellan. "Both the same."

He no longer believed in mercy, only in direction. He read the waves like letters, searching for meaning in the winds. For him, the sea was no longer an enemy, but a judge.

The men saw it differently. They began to fear him—not because he shouted or beat people, but because he believed. And nothing is more dangerous than a man who believes God speaks directly to him.

One of the sailors, an Andalusian with only one eye, came to Serrano. "He's possessed," he said. "He hears voices that aren't there."
"And if they are there?" "Then we're lost."

Serrano didn't know the answer. Perhaps both were true.

At night, in the flickering light, Magellan wrote:

"The world has a border. I can feel it. Maybe it doesn't want me to find it. But I do anyway."

He began to speak to the sea. Not loudly, but with conviction. He called it "old man," sometimes "brother," sometimes "enemy." He told it things no human should hear—about God, about the king, about himself.

The others noticed. They whispered, "He's talking to the water." "Perhaps it will answer him," one said. "Then we'll all be dead."

The next morning, they found ice in the water—small, shimmering pieces that broke against the railing. Magellan picked one up and held it up to the light. "Pure land," he said. "That's ice," Serrano replied. "No. That's the beginning of soil."

The cold crept into everything. Bread hardened, metal brittle, men fell silent. The ships groaned with every movement, as if they were crying.

One night, a silence came that was worse than any storm. No waves, no wind, no sound. Only the cracking of the frozen water. The men held their breath, as if afraid the world might shatter from sound.

Magellan stood there, listening. Then he whispered, "Now she's listening." "Who?" asked Serrano. "The world."

The next day, as the sun rose, they saw a coastline—rough, black, endless. They thought this was the end. And perhaps it was.

Magellan dropped anchor. He went ashore, knelt down, and took earth in his hand. It was cold, heavy, real. "There," he said. "That's it. The door to the other sea."

Serrano looked at him. "And if it doesn't open?" "Then we'll kick it in."

He meant it.

They set up camp in a bay that smelled of metal and old smoke—as if another war had already wiped out the land. The land was rugged, flat, with a cold that stole not only skin but speech. Words froze on the men's lips; even cursing sounded musty here, almost ridiculous, like an old hat in the corner.

Patagonia isn't a land that whispers your name. It roars at you and waits until you realize you're just a sound in its vastness. The fleet lay half in the mud, half in the sea. Wood steamed, ropes snapped, fires smoked. Men hauled earth in buckets, pitched tents, and erected primitive protective walls against the wind that blew like a knife, smiling as they did so.

Magellan walked around with pride like a disease. He assigned tasks, counted and measured, spoke briefly and with the tone of a man who knows how little of himself remains. "Double watch," he said. "Every man has something to do. Anyone who lies down is lost." No warmth in his voice. Just function. His eyes were cracks in stone, cold and sharp.

The men did as they were told, out of habit, out of fear, out of the stupid habit of not thinking of themselves first. Some lifted wood, others gathered seaweed, a few hunted birds that looked as if they had never known a bed. The prey was small and barely enough, but it smelled of life not yet torn apart. They cooked soup in pots that had seen better days; the broth was thin but hot, and that helped.

Cartagena, still gagged in his inner prison, was now more distant than ever. He was a shadow no one had the courage to touch. His strained eyes peered out like the holes of a dead thinker. The men sometimes murmured things about him at night—revenge, freedom, longing to return home. Magellan heard this. He heard everything. He was an ear that catches fish.

The rations were a calculation without conscience. Every spoonful of soup was an argument, a small murder of the idea of equality. People counted the days, the bowls, the portions. There was always a feeling that the counting was wrong—that somewhere someone was taking more, or someone less, and that this difference would ultimately end up in teeth. Envy is a small, persistent flame; in the cold, it can become a fire.

One of the sailors, a fellow from Santander who once knew wine better than words, was caught one day tinkering. He had a piece of dried meat in his pocket. A stupid, desperate theft. He was brought before Magellan. The captain stood there like a judge untrained for mercy. "Why?" was all he asked. Not an accusation, just a question as heavy as a stone.

The man growled, "Hungry. I have children." Magellan remained cold. "Then work harder. Or die quietly." The words fell like ice on a scalp. It wasn't the verdict the men feared—it was the indifference. The punishment wasn't public bloodshed; the punishment was deprivation. The thief was demoted: fewer

rations, hard labor, sleeping right next to the cutter, where the wind and spray gave him no peace. A slow correction, as nasty as a tooth that never lets go.

The night was long. Men shivered in their blankets, cursing through teeth chattering from the cold. Some tried to secretly sell dreams—stories of islands, of fields, of women who didn't flee. Others listened because words warm, even if they're lies. Hope is like beer: briefly bitter, then sweet, until it breaks your teeth.

Loneliness became their companion. Not the great, poetic solitude, but this nauseating, everyday loneliness: man next to man, yet miles apart. They sat around fires, ate, stared, smoked, and no one talked about the things that really mattered—who was waiting at home, what debts were piling up, what oaths had been broken. They talked about tools, about ropes, about horses, as if these were collateral.

Magellan observed them with that quiet hardness once formed from the loss of love and scars of war. He wrote little, perhaps noting measurements, perhaps only numbers. In the evenings, he rarely spoke. When he spoke, it was like a bell: brief, heavy, a matter meant to clarify in time whether something was genuine. "We'll stay a week," he once said. There was no tone of argument, just facts. The men nodded, although there was no heart in their nods.

At the same time, something quiet and mean began to grow: a mutual reckoning with one's soul. Complaints sprouting in the cracks like mold. Man against man, not openly, but in glances, in small actions. One sailor secretly placed a candle in another's sleeping niche, so that upon waking he was briefly blind and stumbled; another time, someone found one spoon less on the table. Small gestures, but they accumulated like bad weather.

This led to nightly dramas without an audience. Men blamed each other, accusing those who looked weaker, those with quieter voices. Superstition crept through the ranks: whoever sneezed first would be cursed by the sea; whoever spoke last would cry out in the night to perish. Magellan let it go because he understood that sometimes faith was the only medicine left—even belief in nonsense.

But there was explosive potential in this smattering of rituals. One evening, one small bottle—a gift from one of the broken barrels—was enough to overpower reason. People sat, they drank, they lost words. Words became plans. Plans, silent as snakes, became lists of names. They were written secretly, in charcoal on the wood, so only their own eyes could read them. Names of men who

could no longer be trusted. Lists that had only one goal: to influence the distribution of survival.

Magellan smells such things. He smelled nights like these from afar, like a dog who knows which shadow is foolish enough to step into the trap. At dawn, he took the lists if they weren't well hidden—that's no art on a ship where nothing disappears for long—and he read them aloud, not to punish, but to show that nothing could remain hidden if one only looked. That was his kind of medicine: exposing rather than cutting.

The humiliation was bittersweet. Some men screamed, others buckled. Some ran away in anger, banged on neighboring trestles, and staged small actions—thorns in the flesh of a system. One group wanted to go home, another wanted to stay and fight. The tension was like a wire taut over water. And like wires, even a thin wire can hold a surprise: it can explode.

Magellan made them explode. Not with blood, but with order. He reorganized shifts, redistributed rations, and made the lists a play on efficiency. He assigned men with guilt to tasks they would never forget: splicing a rope for hours; the same work, over and over again, so that hands and minds became empty. Work became punishment; punishment became order.

The cold remained. The frost gnawed on. There were nights when the men dreamed of hills full of faces, of the return of their wives, of bread that tasted like a god. In the morning, all that was gone, only the freezing, only the feeling that every morning resembled another morning—and that is the most dangerous form of equanimity.

Then came the day two of them disappeared. Not out in the storm, not overboard, not dead in the galley. They were simply gone, as if the ground had swallowed them. Tents were untouched, no trace, only a blanket fluttering in the wind. The men searched, called out, did what desperate people do: they made noise, as if noise could drag reason into the light. Magellan ordered search parties, possibly knowing nothing would be found. Perhaps it was just a ritual of power: acting to silence fear.

Someone, somewhere, suspected they had deserted—in small boats, heading south, hoping to paddle into the void instead of continuing to follow a madness. Desertion in Patagonia isn't heroism; it's a leap into a cold abyss. The men cursed, and everyone had a reason, and no one believed in the word "reason" anymore.

In the evening, as the bloody sun disappeared behind the rocks, the officers stood in a circle. The veins in their temples no longer belonged solely to the wind. They spoke quietly of measures, of tough shifts, of more watches. Magellan nodded, silently. His eyes searched the sea. The sea was calm. So calm that it was almost a warning sign.

He thought briefly of Seville, of Fonseca, of the prophets in silk slippers. In moments like these, the entire court world seemed ridiculous to him—paper, vaults, money—while here, among the mud and bones, the world still demanded something real: blood, work, the humiliating acceptance that one is no longer consulted. He felt no triumph. Only the weight of a truth he could no longer shake: He was no longer just a captain. He was both judge and executioner, a man who made decisions no one would ever like.

Night fell, harsh and without rescue. The last pieces of wood smoked on the fire, and the men huddled in rags to hide from the cold. One last, big kiss from the world. And somewhere, in a corner, someone wept silently—not out of pain, not out of fear, but because tears are often the only thing left to one.

So a day passed in Patagonia. Another stone in the masonry of madness. And further south, waiting for the darkness, the Nothing lurked, as if taking note of the names it would soon have to claim.

The next morning, blood was found in the snow. Not much—a splash, a trail that led to nowhere and ended there. The men stared at her as if she might answer. No one said anything. Words would have been just sounds here, insulting the silence.

The frost had stolen their faces. They looked like copies of the same face: gray skin, chapped lips, empty eyes. Magellan looked at them and thought: *These are no longer men. These are figures God forgot to erase.*

They now lived only in routines—chopping wood, tending the fire, fetching water, freezing, breathing, sleeping. Everything else was gone. One wrote with his fingernail on a piece of wood: *"We're already dead."* Someone burned it into the fire.

Cartagena, still trapped on the *San Antonio*, sent messages again through intermediaries. The language was cautious, but the poison was clear: *"Magellan is lost. He is no longer a captain, but a prophet of nothingness."* These words crawled through the ranks like rats. Men began to call him by name again—not out of respect, but out of fear.

Magellan knew about it. He always knew everything. He didn't talk to anyone about it. He went to the shore alone in the evenings, staring at the ice as if testing whether it would support him. Serrano followed him once, cautiously. "You should sleep," he said. Magellan didn't answer. "They're talking again." "Then at least they're still alive." "They're planning something." "Then they should plan. I'll keep planning."

He walked away, leaving Serrano standing there – a shadow that slowly disappeared into the white void.

On the third day, a man simply collapsed. Not a scream, not a word. He was fetching wood, axe in hand, when he fell and lay there. Heart. Cold. Both. They buried him in the frozen ground, more chopping than praying. Magellan watched, his hands clasped, his face blank. When they were finished, he said, "We are lighter now."

That was his consolation.

Supplies dwindled. They stretched the flour with sawdust, the meat with salt, the water with snow. Serrano wrote in his logbook: "*We eat things that are not meant for humans.*" Quesada read it and laughed dryly. "Then we're not anymore."

At night they talked about mutiny. It began as always – with the sentence: "*We can't go on like this forever.*" Then followed: "*He's going to kill us all.*" Then: "*Someone has to act.*" And in the end: silence. That dangerous silence that turns thoughts into actions.

Quesada was the loudest. His face was frozen with rage, his heart an expired promise. "I was captain," he said, "and now I'm supposed to follow this madman?" Serrano tried to calm him down. "He knows what he's doing." "He doesn't know anything. He's talking to the wind!" "At least the wind listens to him."

One blow. Fast, loud, definitive. Serrano wiped blood from his lip and laughed. "Then get started, heroes."

The mutiny was not yet a fire, but the smoke was there.

Magellan noticed the change immediately. He felt the air between the men vibrate differently—like a rope about to break. He called them together the next morning. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "I know what you're whispering. Do what you must. But know one thing: I won't turn back. Never."

His voice was calm, almost gentle. That was precisely what made it dangerous.

No one answered. Only the cracking of the ice.

Later, when he was alone again, he wrote:

"You can't persuade a storm. You can only be louder."

The nights grew even colder. Men writhed in their sleep, cursing in dreams that sounded like prayers. Serrano wrote again: *"He loses them. Or they lose him."*

Quesada talked to Cartagena. They planned in the shadow of the ships, in the darkness that forgives all. Words like daggers, promises like ropes. It was no longer about faith. It was about hunger, warmth, life.

One asked, "And if we fail?" Quesada replied, "Then at least we won't die for his God."

In the distance, above the ice, lights moved—green, blue, flickering. The men paused. "Those are the souls of the dead," said one. "Or the sea laughing," said another. Magellan heard both and murmured, "Perhaps it's the same sound."

He knew they would come soon. But he waited. He wanted to see if courage and madness had the same taste.

The night in which they rose was clear. A sky of glassy black, so still that even their breathing sounded like an insult. The fires in the stoves burned low, weak, and suspicious. Faces could be seen in the light, pale, determined, tired.

Quesada led them. Not a speaker, not a hero—a man who had simply waited too long. His words were quiet, almost polite. "Today," he said, "we take back the world."

Cartagena was free. No one knew exactly when that had happened, only that the guard had disappeared and the chain had been cut. He looked ill, but there was something in his eyes that suggested faith. "God is with us," he said. "Magellan is the devil." "Then God should sail faster," someone murmured.

They set off. Heavily armed, with knives, axes, and rusty hooks. Each carried more fear than courage, but fear is sometimes the better weapon. The ice crunched beneath their feet, the sea breathed deeply.

Serrano saw them coming. He was standing by the fire when they stepped out of the darkness. "So early?" he asked. "Where is he?" "He's asleep. But not soundly." "Then wake him up."

Serrano nodded, went to the *Trinidad*. He entered Magellan's tent and found him awake, as expected. The captain sat there, his hand on his dagger, his eyes still. "They're coming," said Serrano. "I know." "And?" "Let them."

He stood up, put on his coat, and stepped outside. The wind cut through everything.

Quesada stood before the fire, the men behind him like a trembling wall. Cartagena stepped forward. "In the name of the king," he said, "you are deposed." Magellan looked at him. No anger, no mockery. Only weariness. "The king is not here." "Then I speak for him." "Then you are lying twice."

A murmur went through the ranks. Magellan stepped closer until their faces almost touched. "I brought you here," he said. "You screamed, prayed, cursed—and you're alive. You owe that not to God. Not to the king. To me." "You're insane," Quesada hissed. "Finally, someone's honest."

Then there was movement. A scream, metal, breathing. One of the men leaped forward, raised a knife—and died before he could stab. Magellan had drawn it faster than anyone could see. The knife went through his throat, quietly, almost tenderly.

The others stepped back. No one moved. The dead man fell slowly, like a sack of flesh and fate.

"Whoever comes next," said Magellan, "should know: I'm not fighting for my life. I'm fighting because I'm right."

No one stepped forward. Not Quesada, not Cartagena. Only the wind stirred.

Serrano came over and stood next to him. "What do we do?" "Let them choose." "Between?" "Heaven or water."

You understood.

In the morning, three men hung from the masts. Not dead, not yet—just a memory. Quesada lay bound, Cartagena in chains again. The mutiny was over, but the price had been paid: trust. It was gone. Burned.

Magellan wrote in his logbook:

"I've lost men, but I've kept order. Maybe that's the same thing."

Serrano said, "They'll try again." Magellan nodded. "Of course. But each time with less courage."

In the days that followed, no one spoke aloud. The camp was silent, even the sea was still. When the wind blew, you could hear the whistling through the ropes—like a flute playing to the dead.

One of the survivors, a boy, later wrote:

"It wasn't a mutiny. It was the sea that let us speak through them."

Magellan remained firm. No pride, no triumph, just this cold, matter-of-fact conviction that the world would obey if forced long enough.

The men mended sails, tied ropes, and buried the dead. And every time they closed the earth again, he could be heard saying: "The sea is hungry. But so are we."

The sun rarely came out. When it did, it shone on a crew that was no longer human, but rather remnants. But something still glowed in Magellan's eyes. Not hope, not mercy—only the will that all this would not be in vain.

Patagonia now smelled of ash. The five coffins were waiting. And somewhere beyond the horizon, the next chapter began, one that none would survive.

Men without a future, only with debt

The morning after the mutiny was a grave of light. The sun rose flat over the frozen bay, as if checking to see if anyone remained. The men moved slowly, each feeling that their own shadow had become too heavy. The ships creaked in the ice, the ropes sounded like broken bones.

They had won, Magellan said. But no one believed him. Winning meant survival, and even that was questionable. The wind was still, the sea a sheet of cold glass. When they looked into it, they saw themselves—pale, hollowed, half-dead.

The dead of the night were buried, the fire extinguished. The ropes from which the mutineers had hung still hung from the masts. No one cut them. Perhaps because people had grown accustomed to the silence they left behind.

Serrano walked among the men, talking to them, talking about order, about discipline, about faith. But his words fell like snow—beautiful to behold, quickly forgotten. Quesada lay in shackles, his hands blue, his face rigid. Cartagena whispered prayers that even God wouldn't hear.

Magellan stood alone. He looked out at the sea and thought it was worth fighting against something greater than humans. He had won, but the victory felt like a loss. Perhaps that was the truth about all victories.

The men worked, mending sails, polishing tools, grinding leftover flour. Everyone knew they'd soon have to leave again. The land was only a respite, not a refuge. Patagonia wasn't home—it was a mirror that showed how small they truly were.

One of the younger sailors, barely twenty, said at dinner, "We're not sailors anymore. We're gravediggers with oars." No one laughed.

The food now consisted of fish soup that tasted of earth. There was hardly any bread left. People drank snow water that smelled of iron. The men's faces were sunken, their eyes dark. They barely spoke. Language needs hope.

Magellan saw all this, and somewhere deep within him, something stirred that used to be called pity. But he knew that pity was deadly. So he smothered it with duty. "Three more days," he said. "Then we sail on."

No one protested. Protest was a luxury.

Serrano came to him in the evening and placed his hand on his shoulder. "They break, Ferdinand." "Then they're finally malleable." "And you?" "I was never whole."

Serrano looked at him and nodded. "Someday they'll hate you for surviving." "Then I'll do it right."

The frost increased. At night, the ice cracked at the planks. It sounded like voices. Some swore they heard shouts from the depths. Others said it was just the sea laughing.

On the third day, the wind picked up. Cold, but strong. Magellan stepped onto the deck, looked at the horizon, saw the movement in the water, the cracking of the ice. "That's our sign," he said. "Sign of what?" asked Serrano. "That we're still alive."

They prepared the ships. Men pulled ropes, others cursed, still others prayed. All at once. This was the sound of life in Patagonia.

As they set off, part of the ice broke under the *Victoria*. The ship tilted, stopped, groaned, and righted itself again. The men cheered, because sometimes cheering is the only way to drown out fear.

The five coffins slid back out to sea. The wind drove them south, where the maps ended and the legends began.

That night Magellan wrote:

"I owe the world proof. That it's round. That it won't defeat me. I pay in people."

He put down his pen and looked out, where the sea glittered like broken glass. It was beautiful, in the ugliest way imaginable.

The wind lasted only two days, then, capricious as all things with power, it shifted. It came from the front, whipping the sails, driving them westward, where there was nothing but water, wind, and the faint feeling that time dissolves if you stretch it too long.

The men worked in silence. No songs, no curses, only the sounds of wood groaning under tension and ropes cutting. They spoke only when necessary. Words were like rations—scarce, precious, rare.

Cartagena and Quesada remained on board the *San Antonio*, bound, guarded, two memorials that were fed so they wouldn't die. Magellan had decided to keep them alive. Not out of mercy, but as a memory. Death was too quick. Shame lasted longer.

At night, the lights of the other ships could be seen dancing, like will-o'-the-wisps over a cemetery. Serrano often stood on deck, counting the flames to make sure they were still complete. "Five rusty coffins," he muttered, "and none with lids."

One of the sailors began carrying a cross, carved from wood, rough and angular. "So that God may see us," he said. Another replied, "If he sees us, we are lost."

Magellan heard this. He said nothing. He wrote in his logbook:

"Faith is a disease that can only be cured by surviving it."

Hunger returned. The meat was empty, the flour gray. They mixed sawdust into it to fill themselves. The water stank. Men got fevers, screamed in their sleep, saw things no one else saw. One spoke to the mast, calling it "Mother." Another wanted to swim, "home," he said, before disappearing. They didn't watch him.

Magellan remained unmoved. Perhaps because he had already lost himself, somewhere between sense and madness. He barely spoke to Serrano anymore. He now had his conversations with the sea.

He stood at the railing, day after day, his hands cold, his eyes wide open. "Show yourself," he whispered. "Show yourself at last." "What are you looking for?" Serrano once asked. "The end." "So it starts?" "So it becomes quiet."

In such moments, Magellan didn't seem like a human being. More like a figure carved from the wood of his own ships.

On the third day, blood was found on deck again. This time from an argument. Two men had been fighting over bread, one with a knife, the other with his bare hands. One died, the other wept. Magellan had the body thrown into the sea without a word. The dead man swam briefly, turned around, and disappeared. "That's how guilt goes swimming," Serrano said dryly.

Every hour at sea was now a trade: work for breath, faith for hunger. Some calculated aloud, others in their heads. A sailor asked Magellan: "How far, Captain?" "Until the sky divides." "And if it doesn't?" "Then we divide it ourselves."

The men nodded. They didn't know what that meant, but they liked the sound.

The nights were black. No moon, no stars, only darkness that tasted of iron. Some believed the sea had stopped moving. Others swore they heard voices from the depths. Once, someone whispered, "It's talking to him. Not to us."

Serrano began keeping the logbook when Magellan wasn't looking. He wrote: *"He believes in the bullet like others believe in salvation. Maybe we're just the coins he's paying with."*

On the fourth day, the wind came—hard, sudden, like a slap in the face. The sails filled, the ships lurched, the men cursed, but they were alive again. Movement is life, no matter the direction.

Magellan stood there, smiling. For the first time in weeks. "There," he said, "the sea remembers." "What?" asked Serrano. "That it hates me."

He laughed, short, dry, a sound that sounded more like pain.

The wind persisted. The men worked, fought, froze, and ate little. Everything was movement, everything was forced. There was no hope left—only habit. And sometimes that's the same thing.

The wind persisted, but it was no friend. It came from the west, harsh, tough, with a taste of stone and salt that bit into their teeth. The men now sailed at a pace that was more instinct than will. No one talked about purpose or meaning. They just did what had to be done—like animals that have gotten caught in a labyrinth and are no longer looking for the exit.

On the third day, they reached a new coast. Rocky, rugged, a desert of gray and snow. Serrano called it *Land without a name*. Magellan called them *Proof*. The men called her *Damn it, not again*.

They went ashore, searched for water, found ice. They searched for animals, found shadows. In the distance, something moved: large, heavy, upright. Two legs, fur, a figure. A giant, some said. An illusion, others said. But the tracks in the snow were real. Wide as hands, deep as debts.

One laughed nervously. "Maybe we're in the wrong place." Magellan looked at him. "Then at least this is a place."

He had the men explore further south. For days, they trudged through snow and scree. Some never returned. Others returned with stories: of fire pits, of strange birds, of voices in the night. Serrano wrote everything down, as if writing could conquer the cold.

The ships lay in the wind, whipped, tormented, but steadfast. It was as if the sea held them fast—not by force, but by curiosity.

One evening, shortly before sunset, they saw it: an opening between two landmasses, narrow, dark, with a current flowing into the depths. No harbor, no fjord, no river—something else. Something breathing.

"That's it," said Magellan. "What?" asked Serrano. "The gate." "Where to?" "To everything that hasn't been heard yet."

He meant the strait. They all felt it. The wind changed, the air smelled different—of wet metal, of movement. The sea before them was still, as if holding its breath.

The men stood on deck, staring at the narrow entrance that lay like a scar in the earth. No one spoke. Even Quesada remained silent, bound, but alive enough to understand that this was more than a place. It was a decision.

Serrano stepped next to Magellan. "If this is wrong?" "Then at least it's the last thing."

The sun was setting, the light turning the water red. It looked as if there was blood on the sea. Magellan stared at it, for a long time, silently. Then he said, "We're going in."

Serrano looked at him, exhausted but uncontested. "And if she devours us?" "Then we were worth it."

The night was loud. The sea spoke again, this time in tones no one understood. Wind beat against wood, ropes whirled, men shouted orders, no one listened. And above it all stood Magellan, motionless, his hand on the rope, his face cold as steel.

He knew this wasn't a place you could survive. But survival had never been the point. The point was movement. Movement was proof.

Serrano wrote:

"He's leading us into the Maw. And no one dares to stop him."

Morning came with a wind that sounded like a new beginning. The sea opened, the water flowing westward, dark and hungry. Magellan smiled. "There. The path to God."

The men looked at him as if they didn't know whether he was praying or cursing. Perhaps it was the same thing.

They drove into it as if they'd always known it would happen. No drumming, no blessing, no cheering. Just this cold, indifferent decision: If this is the way, then let it take us.

The strait lay like a rift between two worlds. Rock on the left, rock on the right, wind from all sides. Water that didn't flow, but tore. No song, no rhythm, only the roar of a nature that tolerated no spectators. The men hung from the ropes, sweating in the cold, shouting orders that no one could hear.

Serrano later wrote: "*We were no longer sailors. We were splinters floating on a vein of salt.*"

Magellan stood at the front of the *Trinidad*, motionless, hands behind his back, eyes fixed. The wind blew in his face, sharp as glass, but he didn't move. One asked, "What if it's just a dead end?" He replied, "Then at least we'll die in one direction."

The strait was capricious. Sometimes quiet as the grave, then wild, angry, unpredictable. The current shifted without warning, the water tore barrels loose, turned ships, and devoured anchors. One fell overboard, vanishing without a sound. No scream, no splash—just gone. The rest looked, then looked away. That's what you do if you want to survive.

At night, the water glowed green. The men saw it and whispered, "Witchcraft." Magellan said, "No. Truth." He believed the sea was giving him signs. Maybe that was true. Maybe the sea was just tired and playing with him.

For three days they fought against the wind, against the current, against themselves. *San Antonio* drifted off, almost collided with the *Victoria*. Curses, blows, screams. Serrano tried to sort them out, but Magellan ignored them. "We're through," one said. "No," Magellan replied. "We're just lost."

On the fourth day, a storm came. Not an ordinary one, not a loud one, but one that raged from within. The wind blew from below, the water swirled, the sky disappeared. Men clung to masts, to prayers, to memories they hated. Serrano held onto the helm, shouting orders that the wind swallowed. Magellan stood there, smiling. Not in joy, but in recognition. "This is it," he cried. "The test!"

One shouted back: "This is insane!" Magellan laughed. "It always has been."

They survived the night, half by chance, half by defiance. In the morning, the sea lay calm, as if nothing had happened. Only debris floated: barrels, ropes, wood. The sun rose, dull, washed out, but it came.

Serrano stepped beside Magellan. "We should have been dead." "We are," he said. "But we're moving on."

The strait stretched on, narrower, darker. They saw rocks jutting out of the water like teeth. The wind smelled of sulfur. One swore he saw faces in the waves. Another spat and said, "Then let them look."

On the sixth day, they reached a bay. Quiet, sheltered, almost peaceful. The men fell to the ground, praying, laughing, crying. All at once. Magellan looked around. "This is the belly of the world," he said. Serrano nodded. "Then we pray that it spits us out again."

They camped there, mended sails, dried clothes, and buried two more men. Quesada remained silent, Cartagena whispered psalm verses. No one was listening anymore.

At night, light returned. Green, blue, cold. Magellan looked out and whispered, "Almost there." Serrano asked, "Where does this lead?" Magellan replied, "West." "And beyond?" "To God."

He meant it.

The men looked at him like someone trying to grasp the sun with their bare hands. But no one objected. Perhaps because they knew that there was no language for contradiction here.

The next morning, the wind blew from behind. A mild, warm wind. One that smelled of hope—or of deception. Magellan raised his hand. "Set sail."

The five coffins slid on. Slowly, carefully, into what lay beyond the rock. No one knew whether they were sailing out or sailing in.

They sailed on, into what no human had ever entered before. The straits grew wider, the water calmer, but no one trusted the peace. It was this silence that threatened more than any storm. The sea slid like oil, the light lay flat, the world smelled of anticipation.

They were on the move for three weeks. Wind, then no wind, then wind again. The men no longer counted the days; they only counted breaths, meals, and survivors. Magellan no longer wrote every day. His words became shorter, his handwriting narrower, as if emaciated. "*The sea eats thoughts,*" was on the last page, "*and I'm tired of silence.*"

Serrano kept the men moving. Work was medicine. He had them check ropes, mend planks, and secure barrels. "If they do nothing," he said, "they start thinking." And thinking was poison in this area.

The *San Antonio* drifted away again. Always a little too far, always suspicious. Magellan knew. He watched her, night after night, until on the twentieth day she simply disappeared. No signal, no smoke, nothing. Just emptiness where a light had been.

"They've turned around," said Serrano. "Then let them," said Magellan. "Each has their own end."

The remaining ships continued on, the *Trinidad*, the *Concepcion*, the *Victoria*. Three coffins, three chances, three lies.

The wind shifted to southwest, warm, soft, almost friendly. The water became clearer, the air smelled of salt and sun. One of the sailors wept when he saw the color. "The sea is alive again," he said. Magellan nodded. "Or it has accepted us."

They sailed for days through the new blue. No more rocks, no more cold, only vastness. The men cheered, laughed, prayed. Some knelt, kissed the deck. Others looked around, as if afraid that their luck was a trick.

Serrano stepped next to Magellan. "We're through." Magellan nodded, but his face remained blank. "No. We're just outside." "Out?" "From the world we knew."

He looked at the horizon, infinite, flawless. The sea was calm, not a gust of wind, not a cloud. Everything was beautiful. Too beautiful.

On the third day in this new expanse, it became quiet. Not a bird, not a fish, not a sound. The air tasted of nothing. The sky hung above them like a sheet, perfect, indifferent. The men began to whisper again. "Perhaps this is the end," one said. "Or the beginning," another answered.

Magellan wrote:

"I wanted to find the end of the world. Instead, I found its silence."

At night, as the moon rose, he sat alone on deck. The wind had died down, the sails hung limp. The sea was so calm that it reflected the starlight. It was as if they were sailing through the sky itself.

He thought of Seville, of the court, of Fonseca, of Doña Beatriz, of everything that still existed somewhere, while he was here in a room no one knew. "Perhaps," he whispered, "I am God myself now." But even his voice sounded strange.

The men celebrated as best they could. They drank, laughed, and shouted. One sang a song about returning home, even though no one knew how to find their way back. Serrano smiled. "They have faith again." "Then it's time to break it again," Magellan said. "Faith is like the wind—if it gets too strong, it tears the sails apart."

The next morning, the wind disappeared completely. The sea lay still, the sun burned. The sky was clear, too clear. No sound, no breath, no comfort. They hung there, between movement and stillness, between sky and water, between sense and error.

Serrano wrote:

"We found the other sea. But we were lost before we could understand it."

Magellan stood at the railing again, motionless, with the face of a man who knew he had won—but the price was too high. Maybe it was worth it. Maybe not. He didn't know anymore.

Then the wind picked up. Light, warm, like a hand on the shoulder. The sails filled, the wood cracked, and the three coffins began to glide—out toward what would soon have a name: the Pacific.

Magellan looked and smiled. "There," he said. "That's the proof." Serrano replied, "Of what?" "That we've gone too far."

The Pacific. They didn't yet know it would be called that, but the sea had already decided. Smooth, still, infinite—a mirror that showed everything and explained nothing. Three ships, three floating errors. No wind, no sound except the creaking of wood and the occasional curse of a man who forgot why he was still alive.

The days grew longer, then indifferent. Sun, sky, water—the same color, the same rhythm. Time was now a joke no one understood anymore. Serrano wrote: *"We don't drive. We drift."* Magellan read it and nodded. "That's the idea."

Hunger came as it always does—slowly, politely, then mercilessly. First it was rations, then crumbs, then promises. They ate everything they could find:

leather, sawdust, mice. One boiled a piece of sail, another drank his own blood to feign thirst. It didn't work.

The water in the barrels turned rotten. Green, then black. Men vomited, drank again, vomited again. One died from tasting seawater. Magellan had him thrown overboard without ceremony. "He was thirsty," he said. "Now he's had enough."

The men's faces were now shadows. Eyes like holes, cheeks like bones. Some whispered prayers, others cursed. Serrano remained silent. He was too wise to pray, too tired to curse.

Quesada was dead. Fever. A quiet, slow death that no one noticed. Cartagena lived, but his spirit was gone. He spoke to the air, calling it "Lord." Magellan once visited him, looked at him, and shook his head. "A man without sin is an empty cup," he said. Serrano didn't understand if that was pity.

The sea was too calm. No storm, no waves, no comfort. Only light. Day after day, the same light, bright, merciless. It ate away skin, thoughts, memories. Men screamed to sleep, dreaming of snow, of shadows, of bread.

One cut his hand with a knife just to see if it was still bleeding. He did it, laughed, cried, and died.

Magellan remained upright, thin, and awake. He spoke to no one. Sometimes he still wrote:

"I believe the sea is not empty. It's full of everything we've lost."

Serrano stopped writing. His fingers trembled too much. Instead, he looked at Magellan as he stood at the railing—the shadow of a man who had turned himself into a myth.

The wind rarely came, but when it did, it was directionless. Once, it drove them in circles for days. They didn't know it until Serrano checked the starry sky and cursed. "We're going back." Magellan looked at him. "Maybe we have to do it twice to make it count."

On the 40th day, the first man fell on watch duty. He simply fell. Heart. Hunger. Sun. Everything combined. They left him there until night fell. Then they pushed him overboard. Not a prayer, not a word. Just a dull splash.

At night, the wind blew. Cold, strange. It smelled of life. The men wept as the sails filled. Serrano laughed. "A gift!" Magellan nodded. "No. A reminder that we still owe a debt."

They sailed on. No land, no sign. Only water. Endlessly. Each day a theft from the next.

One said, "I can't remember anything." Serrano replied, "Then it starts to get easier."

The sun burned, the wind disappeared again. Silence. A sea without sound. Men lay on deck, like broken dolls. Magellan stood among them, barefoot, calm, almost peaceful. "This," he said quietly, "is the true face of the world."

Nobody answered.

In the distance, on the 70th day, someone thought they saw smoke. A scream. Movement. Hope. Everyone ran to the railing, screaming, crying. Magellan looked for a long time, then shook his head. "Clouds."

The men collapsed. Some prayed, others laughed hysterically. Serrano wrote again:

"God has a sense of humor. But he doesn't share it."

On the eightieth day, the sky was gray. Not black, not blue—just gray. The color of indifference. No storm, no wind, just this slow, creeping death that demanded more patience than any death ever deserved.

The men stopped talking. Their voices were too weak. If someone fell, they simply fell. If someone died, it was no big deal, just one less small movement on deck. They wrapped the bodies in canvas, threw them into the sea, and didn't look after them. The water took everything without thanks.

Magellan wrote: *"The Pacific is not a sea. It's a mirror. If you look into it too long, you'll disappear."*

Serrano stopped writing. He observed. He mentally counted the faces that were still breathing. Of the 237, there were about a hundred left. Perhaps fewer. No one knew for sure.

The men's skin was cracked, their lips black, their teeth loose. Scurvy, hunger, sun. Their bodies were disintegrating, slowly, quietly, without dignity. Some laughed in their sleep, others wept, unaware of why.

Cartagena died on the 84th day. He had long since lost his mind. When they found him, he was lying in his corner, his eyes wide open, his face still, almost content. Serrano covered him, Magellan glanced briefly and said, "Now he finally believes in peace."

The sea remained calm. It was the worst. No storm, no movement, just this endless expanse, shimmering like an insult. The sky was reflected in it, flawless. It was as if the world had forgotten that it was meant to support life.

Then, on the 91st day, a scream came. Not a scream of pain, but that single sound known only to hope—raw, shrill, disbelieving. A sailor on the mast cried again: "Land!"

No one believed him. They'd seen things too often that weren't real. But then they all saw it: on the horizon, small, green, unreal. An island. A real one.

The men cried. Some laughed. One fell to his knees, kissed the deck, cracked his lips, and laughed anyway. Serrano just stared. "They really exist," he whispered.

Magellan stood there, motionless. "Of course they exist," he said. "The world just wants to know how far one has to go to earn them."

When they stepped ashore, the men trembled. Their legs could barely carry them. The sand was soft, warm, alive. They fell into it like children into a bed. Some prayed, some fell asleep immediately, some ate dirt because they had forgotten what food was.

The islanders came cautiously, friendly. Dark skin, clear eyes, simple gestures. They gave them water, fruit, and meat. The men wept again. Serrano wrote: "*Paradise is not an idea. It's just a place where you can get your fill.*"

Magellan kept his distance. He watched his men drink, eat, and laugh. Then he looked up at the sky, as if checking whether he would be punished. "We're alive," Serrano said. "Still," Magellan said.

The days on the island were deceptively quiet. The men healed, grew stronger, louder. Laughter returned. Songs. Arguments. Life. But in the shadows lay something else. Mistrust, temptation, greed.

One of the sailors stole jewelry. Another took a wife. On the third day, a native died, on the fourth, a Spaniard. No one knew how it all began. Only that blood always speaks faster than reason.

Magellan ordered order to be restored. "We are guests," he said. "We are ghosts," whispered Serrano.

They sailed on, westward. Island after island. Always the same sky, always the same sea. The men laughed again, but it was a different kind of laughter. The laughter of someone who knows he's long lost, but hasn't quite given up yet.

Magellan wrote his last entry of the chapter:

"We've found land, but no bottom. The world is round, and every step leads back into itself."

Serrano closed the logbook and looked at him. "And now what?" Magellan smiled, wearily, almost gently. "Now we pay the bill."

The wind shifted. The sails filled. The three coffins glided onward—out of salvation, into the next judgment.

Farewell to Seville – and to reason

In his memory, Seville smelled of wine, dust, and the kind of heat that softens men. But that was years ago—or perhaps only minutes. Time was now a dirty word, a mental trick invented by people who had never lost sight of the sky. Magellan sometimes thought he was dreaming of this city when he stared at the sun for too long. A mirage of gold and sweat.

He remembered the day of departure. The bells, the people, the faces. Cheers, noise, waving hands, lying mouths. "*Hero!*", they had shouted. "*God bless you!*" No one had told him that God was bad at navigating.

He stood on the quay, young enough to believe, old enough to know that faith means nothing without a ship. His boots gleamed, his uniform fitted, and something between pride and fear beat in his chest. He looked at the five ships, his "armada." They looked like half-dead animals, but they were all he had.

Doña Beatriz was there. All in black, silent, her hands folded. No smile, no word. Only that look—the one that tells you you're losing more than you realize. He had tried to forget her. He had never succeeded. Even now, in this infinite vastness, he could still taste her silence on his tongue.

"You're going too far," she had said. "Then I'll find out where that is."

He had laughed. She hadn't.

The king had promised him that fame was currency. Fonseca had told him that the world was big but stupid—you just had to outsmart it. And Morales, that sleazy scribe, had jotted down every word as if he were making history. Maybe he was. Just not for those who lived it.

He remembered the smell of fresh wood, the shouts of the sailors, the hissing of the horses being loaded. Everything sounded like hope. The worst of all sounds.

Now, years later, everything smelled of salt and death. The sun had burned his skin, the wind had washed away his thoughts. He could no longer remember every face. Only hands—those that worked and those that died.

Serrano found him on deck that morning, staring out to sea. "In Seville again?" he asked. "Always," said Magellan. "What was there?" "The beginning. And the error."

Serrano nodded and sat down next to him. "Sometimes I wish I'd stayed there." "Then you'd be dead by now." "I am."

Silence. Only the creaking of the planks, the eternal song of wood and water.

Magellan thought of his first day at sea, the noise, the chaos, the men who still believed they were making history. Today they were history. And he was the footnote that remained.

He remembered Fonseca's words: "*A man who seeks God finds only himself.*" At the time, he had taken it as mockery. Today, he knew it was a warning.

He pulled out the logbook and leafed through it. Names, numbers, losses. No room for emotions. But there, between the pages, lay a piece of paper. Yellowed, folded, almost disintegrating. A letter. Doña Beatriz.

He knew every sentence by heart.

"If you find him—this God, this edge of the world—tell him he owes me back my husband."

He smiled, a hard, bitter smile. "He won't do it," he whispered.

Serrano heard it, but said nothing.

The sun burned, the sea glittered, the men worked. Life was a circle, and they rode in it like mice on a wheel.

Magellan looked out over the railing into the infinite blue. He thought that perhaps he had indeed found something—but not what he was looking for. No God, no salvation. Only the certainty that mankind would always go too far if given the wind.

"Do you know what the worst part is, Serrano?" he finally asked. "Tell me."
"That I was right."

He spoke to Seville now as if she were a woman he had left but never betrayed. At night, he stood on deck and murmured things no one understood. Names, half-sentences, memories that became smells: wine, wax, earth, the heat above the city's rooftops. The men saw him standing there, naked above the sea, his arms outstretched as if he wanted to embrace the light that wasn't there.

"He's talking to his homeland," said one. "No," said Serrano, "he's talking to himself. Seville is just his echo."

Sleep left him. He walked among the sleeping men, quietly, like a thief. When one woke up, Magellan simply nodded and moved on. No one asked him why. You don't ask a man who speaks with spirits.

During the day, he stood at the railing and stared at the sun. He seemed to be waiting for her to say something. Sometimes he smiled. Sometimes he cried. Once, he laughed aloud—a short, wild, ragged laugh that startled the men. "He's leaving," whispered Serrano. "Where to?" "Inside."

He began to write in his logbook, which was no longer a logbook, but a confession. "*I forced the world to bend, and it did. Now it bends me.*"

The men avoided him. They worked, spoke little, and prayed again. Everyone had their own way of surviving the nothingness. Serrano tried to mediate, to calm things down, but he knew that madness cannot be negotiated.

At night, he could be heard screaming. No words, just sounds—rage, pain, regret, perhaps triumph. Serrano once found him on his knees, his head pressed against the deck. "I saw her," Magellan whispered. "Who?"
"The city." "Which one?" "Seville. It stands in the sea. I saw its towers of water." "You're dreaming." "I remember."

The next morning he was quiet. Almost too quiet. He didn't speak to anyone, ate little, and drank a lot. The wine they had brought from the last island disappeared faster than planned. The men saw this and remained silent. Better a drunken prophet than a sober executioner.

He began changing orders. For no reason. Course changes, new routes, strange instructions. "The wind knows," he said. "It whispers to me." Serrano contradicted him once, just once. "Ferdinand, the wind whispers different things to everyone." "Then you'd better listen."

They obeyed out of fear, no longer out of faith. And fear is more persistent.

One of the sailors, young, foolish, and brave, dared to ask him openly: "Captain, when are we going home?" Magellan looked at him for a long moment. "We're already here." The boy laughed until Magellan hit him. No anger, no hatred—just a reflex. After that, he stood still, staring at his hand as if he didn't know who it belonged to.

Serrano watched him and noted: "*He's falling. But he's falling beautifully.*"

The men began to avoid him as one avoids an illness. No one wanted to be near him when evening came. They whispered about him, called him names: *the prophet, the blind man, the madman*. Some believed he had bewitched the sea. Others said he was long dead and guided them as a ghost.

He heard them. Of course. And he smiled. "Dead?" he once said. "I've never been so alive."

That night, he called Seville. He addressed the city as if it were his lover. "I showed you something," he said quietly. "I proved to you that you're lying. The world isn't flat, it's a circle. And you—you're the hole in the middle."

The wind increased. Sails creaked, ropes squealed. One of the men crossed himself. Serrano stood next to Magellan, both looking out. "They think you're crazy," said Serrano. "I am," replied Magellan. "But they follow me anyway." "Why?" "Because they have to. Because otherwise no one will know which way is up."

He turned around and left, leaving Serrano alone. Clouds flew above him, slow and heavy. The sky looked like lead, and somewhere, far away, Seville still lay—invisible, loud, unforgettable.

He hardly slept anymore. And when he did, it wasn't sleep, but a fall. A black drop without direction, without a bottom. When he opened his eyes, he didn't know if he was awake. The sea looked like an endless expanse of glass, and he could swear he saw faces moving within it. Not like reflections, but like something that was really there—deep down, in the darkness.

Serrano watched him. Magellan spoke to the sea. Not to the wind, not to God, but to the water itself. He stood at the railing, whispering, laughing, listening. "They talk back," he once said, and Serrano didn't know whether to comfort him or fear him.

"What are they telling you?" he asked. "That we're right." "And if they're lying?" "Then at least they're being honest."

Sometimes Magellan stood in the middle of the deck and looked up, as if listening. There was no sound except the creaking of the wood, the slapping of the ropes. Then he raised his hand, pointed to the sky, and whispered something no one understood. After that, he gave new orders. A change of course. Sometimes in the middle of the night.

The men whispered. Serrano heard them. "He's talking to demons." "He's talking to himself." "He's talking too loudly."

He tried to keep her calm, talking to her. "He knows what he's doing." But he no longer believed it.

Magellan continued writing in his logbook, but his writing had changed. Shaky, uneven, sometimes just words, without any context. *"Water speaks in circles."*—*"Seville lies beneath the sea."*—*"I'm not I."*

He began calling the men by different names. Serrano suddenly became "Fonseca." The cabin boy was "Beatriz." And he called himself "The One Who Stayed." No one dared to correct him.

Once, in the middle of the night, a scream came. Magellan stood on the bow, naked except for his boots, his hands raised to the sky. "There it is!" he cried. "The end!" Serrano ran over, grabbed him, and pulled him back. "What do you see?" "Seville. Very close. Do you hear them?" "There's nothing, Ferdinand." "Yes. Bells. I hear the bells!"

But it was only the wind cutting through the ropes.

He collapsed, gasping, crying, laughing. "I did it," he whispered. "I'm back." Serrano carried him into the cabin and covered him. "Rest," he said. "I can't," Magellan whispered. "If I sleep, they talk too loudly."

Serrano stayed with him while he was feverish. For hours. The captain mumbled incomprehensible things—half-prayers, fragments of orders, words of love for a city that had long since become nothing more than a memory.

When he woke up, he was lucid. Too lucid. "We're going the wrong way," he said. "Where are you going?" "Home." "You're far from home." "I know. That's why I have to keep going."

Serrano looked at him, saw the fire in his eyes, that madness that felt so still that one could almost mistake it for reason.

Storms came during the night. Not big, not dangerous, just loud. Wind, rain, screams. The sea lashed against the hulls as if testing them. Magellan stood outside, letting himself be drenched in the rain, motionless, like a statue made of salt.

"They're talking again," he whispered. "Who?" asked Serrano. "The Depths. They tell me to hold on."

Serrano didn't know whether to lie or pray.

The next morning, the storm was over. The sea was calm, the sky clear. Magellan stood at the railing, his eyes closed. "They were friendly," he said. "Who?" "The voices. They said I'm almost there."

He looked good that morning. Calm. Composure. Almost human. And that made it worse.

Serrano wrote in his hidden notebook:

"He's gone over the edge. But he's not falling. He's floating."

They began to feel afraid. Not of the sea, not of hunger or death—they had long since lost all energy for those. No, they feared him. The man who led them, who now spoke to the sky at night as if it were his brother, and argued with the sea as if it had offended him.

It wasn't an open fear. More like that quiet, creeping kind you can't shake. A glance, a whisper, a turning away as he passed. They obeyed, yes, but without belief. Like puppets moving because the strings are still holding.

Serrano sensed it first. The silence. It was different. No respect, no weariness—just waiting for the moment when someone would find the courage to lift the axe. He knew this waiting. It smelled of metal.

"They'll try again," he said one morning as Magellan stood on deck. The captain didn't look at him. "Let them. Perhaps this time they'll be right." "And if they are?" "Then they'll find that right is worthless when the wind disagrees."

He turned around, looked at Serrano, and there was something new in his eyes—not anger, not fire, but peace. That dangerous, apocalyptic glow that comes with people who believe they've fulfilled their purpose.

"I see things," he said. "What kind of things?" "Maps. Made of light. Lines across the water. I know where we are now." "And where are we?" "Everywhere."

Serrano remained silent.

The men whispered again. Of detachment, of control, of rescue. They had learned to speak quietly. They didn't look at him when he passed. Even the officers lowered their gaze. He was no longer their captain. He had become something else—a symbol that no one understood anymore, but no one dared to destroy.

Once, during dinner—if you could call the few scraps of meat and rotten water that—Magellan suddenly stood up. "I've found it," he said. "What?" Serrano asked cautiously. "The proof. We're at the edge. The wind's changing. It wants to tell me."

No one answered. One coughed, another laughed nervously. Magellan stared at him. "You doubt it?" "No, Captain," the man stammered. "Then go on eating. You'll need it."

He sat down and began to write. His pen scratched like a knife.

Serrano later read what he had written:

"I'm the first to understand the world. And no one will ever understand it. Maybe that's punishment enough."

During the night, the wind blew. Suddenly, violently. The sails whipped, the wood creaked. Men screamed, ran, prayed. Magellan stepped out of his cabin, barefoot, with open arms. "He's coming!" he cried. "He's calling us!"

Serrano held him back. "Stay below deck!" "No," said Magellan, "I want to see who loves me so much."

The wind tore at them. Rain lashed. Lightning cast a dazzling light across the decks. And there, in that white flash, Serrano saw him standing there—Magellan, in the midst of the storm, still, smiling.

"He's no longer with us," said someone behind him. "Yes," replied Serrano, "but we're no longer with him."

In the morning, the sea was calm, quiet again, almost eerie. The storm had taken only what was loose—a few ropes, barrels, dreams. Magellan sat at the railing, his face pale, his eyes empty.

"Have you spoken to him?" asked Serrano. "Yes." "And?" "He's laughing."

The men saw him, heard him, and knew: the captain was gone. The body was alive, but the man who had led them had remained somewhere—perhaps in Seville, perhaps in the wind.

Serrano wrote in his notebook:
"I serve a dead man who is still walking."

He knew something had to happen soon. Things like this never stay quiet. Not at sea, not among men who haven't seen anything but sky for too long.

He barely slept that night. And every time he closed his eyes, he heard Magellan's voice echoing across the deck, soft, almost gentle: "We'll be there soon. Just one more piece of madness."

The wind held. For three days, strong, steady, as if it wanted to prove to them that exercise can also be punishment. The men worked mechanically, dully, without a goal. They ate when they could, drank when they were allowed, cursed quietly, and breathed heavily. Life was now a math problem: breaths minus fear, hunger divided by hope.

Serrano had no more answers. Only routine. He watched Magellan—vigilantly, suspiciously, with a kind of sadness usually seen only at funerals. The captain hardly spoke, and when he did, it was only in riddles.

"I've almost reached him," he once said. "Who?" asked Serrano. "Me."

He didn't look crazy. Just calm. And that made it worse.

The men barely spoke when he came on deck. Some stood at attention, out of habit, others stepped back as if he had leprosy. They sensed he'd long since forgotten them. To him, they were shadows, necessary tools. He had only one goal now: proof. For whom, no one knew. Perhaps for the world. Perhaps for himself. Perhaps for no one.

On the fourth evening, one of the officers approached Serrano. An older man, his face covered in salt cracks. "We have to do something," he said. "What do you mean?" "He's leading us to death." "Maybe he's leading us into history." "Or both."

Serrano remained silent. The officer looked at him. "You're the only one who's still close to him. If you don't do anything, someone else will."

He left, and Serrano was left alone. The sea was calm, the light sharp. He knew what would happen. And he knew that this time there would be no orders that would fix everything.

Magellan suddenly stepped out of the darkness. "They're whispering again," he said. "Who?" "The men." "They're afraid." "That I'm right."

He stepped closer, too close. Serrano smelled the wine, the lack of sleep, the salt. There was nothing human in his eyes anymore. Only a gleam that had seen too much. "You believe me, don't you?" Magellan asked. Serrano hesitated. "Say it." "I think you do." Magellan nodded. "That's enough."

Then he left.

That night, Serrano couldn't sleep. He heard footsteps, whispers, the creaking of wood. It was as if the ship itself was breathing harder. He stood up and went on deck. The moon lay flat on the sea, everything silver, everything silent.

Three men stood together at the bow. They didn't see him watching them. He heard words: "Tonight." - "When he's asleep." - "One push is enough."

He went back below deck, sat down, and stared at his hands. They were shaking. Not from fear, but from fatigue. He wrote:
"The men want him. The sea wants him. Maybe he wants himself. Only I don't know what I want."

Towards dawn, someone knocked on his door. It was Magellan. "You watch over me," he said. "I watch over everyone." "Don't lie. I know they will." "Then

run." "Where?" "Somewhere the sea doesn't know you." Magellan smiled. "The sea knows everyone. It only forgets who it has already eaten."

He left again. And Serrano knew he was lost. Not because he was going to die, but because he had to stay.

As the sun rose, Magellan stood on deck again, motionless, calm, his hands behind his back. No knife, no weapon. Only this expression on his face that said: *Come on, calmly.*

The men didn't come. Not that day. Perhaps they had hoped he would simply disappear. Perhaps they needed to believe in his madness to endure their own.

Serrano wrote:

"When the captain falls, the idea falls. And without an idea, the sea is just water."

He stood there for a long time, watching him. Magellan looked west, toward where the sun refused to set.

"Seville," he whispered. "I'm almost back."

And Serrano thought, maybe he was right. Maybe returning was just another way of dying.

Night came without wind. A silence that was not calm, but threatening. The sea lay smooth, not a sound, not a whisper, only this heavy silence that settled over the ships like a blanket. Even the rats stopped. It was as if the world had decided to watch.

Magellan wasn't sleeping. No one was sleeping. Serrano sat in his bunk, his eyes fixed on the door. He knew something was going to happen. He just didn't know when. The wood creaked, quietly, evenly. Footsteps on deck. A voice, flat, almost gentle. Magellan. He was speaking to the sea again.

Serrano stood up and went upstairs. Moonlight, faint, dull, the sky cloudless. Magellan stood there, arms outstretched, barefoot, eyes closed. He looked like someone waiting for something. "You're not asleep," said Serrano. "I'm awake enough for everyone," replied Magellan.

He turned around, his face in the light, pale, translucent. "They're coming," he said. "Who?" "The men. They want to end it. I'll let them." "Why?" "Because it's the way it is. No god goes unmolested if he's visible for too long."

Serrano stepped closer. "You're not a god, Ferdinand." "No," whispered Magellan. "Just his mistake."

He laughed, quietly, tiredly. Then he looked up into the endless sky. "I heard Seville. They're ringing the bells." "There are no bells here." "Then the wind is ringing."

Serrano sensed the moment was coming. Somewhere behind them, something moved. Footsteps. Heavy. Hesitant. Several.

The men came not like murderers, but like sick people. No hatred, no rage—only exhaustion. It was the most silent uprising the world had ever seen. They approached, each with a tool in their hand: a rope, a knife, a piece of iron. They said nothing.

Magellan saw them and smiled. "Finally," he whispered. "You've got it."

Serrano stepped in. "Leave him alone!" "He's not him anymore," one said. "He's a curse." "He's the reason you're still standing!" "He's the reason we're no longer asleep."

The wind stirred, barely noticeable. Magellan raised his head and closed his eyes. "Do you hear that?" No one answered. "That's it. The sea. It's calling. And you're afraid of its voice."

A man stepped forward. The eldest. "We are not afraid of the sea. We are afraid of you."

Serrano saw Magellan nod slowly. No defense, no word. Just that nod that said: *Yes. That's right.*

Then nothing happened. No attack, no scream. Just silence. A long, heavy silence in which you could hear the breathing of every single person.

Magellan took a step forward. "You want to get rid of me?" No one answered. "Then at least help me into the water. I want to see it before it takes me."

Serrano grabbed his arm. "Don't do it." Magellan smiled. "I'm not doing anything. I'm just going home."

He stepped to the railing, looked down into the dark, smooth sea. It looked like liquid glass. Then he turned to them, looked at each of them, one by one. No anger. No pleading. Just that look that said: *You were witnesses.*

"If they ask you," he said, "tell them I found it."

Then he jumped. No sound, no scream. Just the faint sound of a body hitting water. A dull, short sound.

Serrano ran to the railing and looked down. Nothing. No movement, no wave, no sign. Just the sea. Silent, endless, greedy.

No one spoke. No one cried. They stood there for a long time, until the sun rose.

Serrano later wrote:

"He left as if he were returning home. And the sea was silent, as if it had learned enough."

The men continued to work. No one spoke his name. They hoisted sails, checked ropes, did what needed to be done.

That evening, someone said, "He was crazy." Serrano replied, "He was all we had."

The sea remained calm, as if it had swallowed what was due to it.

No one said he was dead. Not a word about it. No prayer, no ceremony. Just work. Ropes, sails, wood. They did what sailors do when something happens they don't understand: They ignored it until it became part of the ship.

Magellan was everywhere now. In the sounds, in the wind, in the salt that chapped their lips. When the mast creaked, some swore they heard his voice in it. When the sea lay calm, they thought it was listening. Serrano saw it in their faces: They were no longer sailing with him—they were sailing *in him*.

The morning after his jump, the sun stood pale above the horizon. The sea was still, almost reverent. Serrano stepped to the railing where he had fallen. No trace. Just water, smooth, clear, endless. He murmured, "So you did it, you fool."

The men waited. No one wanted to say it out loud, but they needed a new captain. Someone had to hold the helm, at least for show. Serrano knew that. He had always known it.

He stepped forward, raised his hand. "We're moving on," he said. No cheers, no protests. Just nods. Blank faces. The kind that wants nothing more than to arrive – no matter where.

He wrote in his logbook:

"I'm the last person who knew him now. And I don't know if that's a curse or an honor."

The sea was friendly. Too friendly. Three days of wind, calm water, and sun. One of the sailors said the sea wanted to apologize. Another said it was laughing. Serrano said nothing.

That night he dreamed of Magellan. Not as he was, but as he had become—transparent, calm, smiling. He stood in water, chest-deep, and said, "You have to finish it." "What?" asked Serrano. "Me."

He woke up drenched in sweat, went on deck, and looked at the horizon. A line between black and gray, so fine that you couldn't tell which side was the sky. He whispered, "I can't end you. I can only carry you."

The next day, one of the men spoke to him: "Captain?" Serrano shook his head. "No. Only the one still standing." "Where are we going?" "Where he wanted to go." "And where was that?" "Ask the sea."

The men nodded. They were satisfied.

Weeks passed. The water remained calm, the weather mild. It was as if the ocean had decided to let them live, out of curiosity. Serrano led them, silently, without pathos, without faith. Only with that weary consistency that remains when one has stared into madness for too long.

Sometimes, when the wind picked up, he heard him. Quietly. Magellan. Not like a memory, but like the present. "Further," he whispered. "Where to?" asked Serrano. No answer. Just the roar.

One of the younger sailors later wrote:

"We sailed without a captain, but not without leadership. We followed a ghost no one wanted to see."

When they saw the next land—a green patch at the edge of the world—no one cried. No cheers, no screams. Only that quiet, bitter smile that men have who know it will never end.

Serrano stood on deck, his hands behind his back, the sun on his face. "He made it," said someone beside him. "Maybe," said Serrano. "Or he just pulled us along."

He looked at the sea, lying calm, vast, and indifferent. "It's not gone," he whispered. "It's just turned to liquid."

Then he turned around and ordered the sails to be set. No one asked why.

They sailed on—and behind them, in their wake, lay no shadow, no blood, no sign. Only movement. Only what remains when a man becomes too big for his own story.

The smell of fear and rats

It began with the smell. Not the smell of the sea—that was long familiar to them, salty, dead, eternally the same. No, it was this other stench that slowly crept in. Rotten. Heavy. Like a warning. The air on board became thicker, sweet, almost alive. Rats.

Serrano smelled it first. Then the men. They could hear them at night – the rustling, the scratching, the quiet creaking between the barrels. At first they thought it was dreams. But in the morning, there was no bread. No meat. And later – something else.

One of the sailors, a young Andalusian, found the first corpse. The body of a man, bloated, with bite marks on his hands and cheeks. The rats had taken what hunger had left them. It wasn't a pretty death, but at least it was an honest one.

Serrano had the deck scrubbed, the meat thrown into the sea, and the barrels opened. He did what one does when chaos looms—he acted busy. Magellan would have preached, shouted, and barked orders. Serrano remained silent. The silence kept the men sane.

They tried to hunt the animals, but the rats were smarter, faster, hungrier. They came at night, in packs, from hatches, crevices, and shadows. The men chose guards, armed with sticks, knives, and sometimes their bare hands. But when darkness fell, the ship was their kingdom.

The stench grew stronger. It was as if the sea itself was slowly exhaling it. The men began to wash themselves, which was rare. Some prayed again, others drank. Serrano wrote: *"It's like the ship is rotting before we even die."*

On the third day, the wind came. Finally. The sails billowed, and the creaking of the wood sounded alive again. The men cheered—short, hollow, like a reflex. But the stench remained.

"They'll eat us," one said. "The rats?" asked Serrano. "No. We ourselves."

He was right. The mood was fragile. Fear was worse than hunger, worse than death. It crept into their voices, their hands, their dreams. The men began to suspect each other. Each believed the other had more food, more water, more faith.

At night, screams were heard. Not a storm, not waves—screams of men who woke up and thought they felt something crawling over them. Some cut themselves to make sure there was still flesh left.

Serrano stayed awake. He sat on a barrel, his knife beside him, his logbook open. The lines blurred.

"He is missing," he wrote. *"Not the captain—the madness that held us. Now we're sober, and that's worse."*

In the morning, a rat, the size of a fist, was found dead, its belly ripped open. Someone had killed it with a spoon. "We'll eat it," said the murderer. No one laughed.

They roasted the animal and cut it into pieces. It smelled of metal and sin, but they ate it. The taste wasn't the problem. The problem was that it tasted—too good.

That evening, Serrano addressed the men. "We still have land ahead of us," he said. "How far?" one asked. "Far enough that it doesn't matter."

No one asked any further questions.

The wind drove them onward, calm, almost friendly. But the ship no longer smelled of the sea. It smelled of people. Of fear, sweat, bile. Of death that waits too long.

One of the younger men—barely twenty, with eyes that were already old—said to Serrano, "Captain, I dream he's coming back." "Who?" "Magellan." "And?" "He's standing on the mast. And he's smiling."

Serrano nodded. "Then keep dreaming. Maybe that will keep us awake."

During the night, a wind blew from the west. A fair wind. The sails were swaying, the water singing. Serrano looked ahead, into the darkness, and thought: *Maybe the rats are already laughing.*

The rats won. It wasn't a war—they simply took what was there. Bread, wood, time, dignity. When the men slept, they crawled over their bodies, pulling threads from their skin, seeking warmth. People got used to it. People can get used to anything, as long as they survive it.

Serrano heard scratching in the walls at night, and sometimes it seemed to him as if they were writing. The rats. With their claws. Messages to him. *There are many of us. We've been here before.*

He laughed about it, at first. Then he stopped.

The men became nervous. They avoided the cargo hold. One swore he saw eyes there—dozens of them, glowing, silent. Another said they began to listen to him. He spoke to them, whispering into the darkness as Magellan had done with the sea.

"They're answering," he said. "What are they saying?" asked Serrano. "That they're waiting."

The next day they found him – dead. No blood, no noise, no struggle. Just calm, eyes open, lips eaten away. As if nothingness had greeted him kindly.

Serrano buried him quietly, without prayer. He wrote in his logbook: *"It is no longer clear who is eating and who is being eaten."*

The wind drove them onward, but without direction. The sky became heavy and gray, the sea thick. A smell of iron and wet wood hung in the air. Some believed land was near. Others said it was the end.

At night, Serrano heard Magellan's voice. Absolutely certain. "You're keeping her alive," she whispered. "I'm trying," he said into the darkness. "Why?" "Because otherwise everything was in vain." "It was always in vain."

He opened his eyes. No one was there. Only the quiet treading in the dark, the sliding, the breathing.

On the third day, the men began to accuse each other. "You stole water." "You sleep too much." "You talk to them."

"With whom?" asked Serrano. "With the rats."

They pulled each other's hair, spat, and screamed. He separated them, hit them, and threatened them. But order was now a shadow. It crumbled as soon as he turned his back.

One came to him, his eyes wide and glassy. "Captain," he said. "What?" "They're biting during the day now, too."

Serrano nodded. "Then we'll wear boots." "I don't have any more."

He looked down. The man had no toes.

That night, Serrano went into the hold. Alone. He took a lantern, a knife, his logbook. He wanted to see if those eyes were really there. And they were. Not many. Two. But they looked at him—calm, alert, almost human.

He raised the knife. "What do you want?" he whispered. The sound that came back sounded like laughter.

He went back on deck, sat down, and drank. Wine, water, whatever. "I understand him now," he said quietly. "Who?" asked the watchman. "Magellan." "You're not like him." "Yes, I am. I'm just late."

In the morning, Serrano was found writing, his eyes empty, his gaze somewhere beyond the horizon. On the page was the following text: *"Maybe the rats were always there. Maybe we're on their ship."*

The men read it, understood nothing, and continued working. There was nothing left to understand.

In the evening, the wind came. Warm, deceptive. One of the sailors laughed loudly, almost joyfully. "Do you hear that?" he shouted. "They're singing!" "Who?" asked Serrano. "The rats!"

Serrano smiled wearily. "Then dance while you can."

The ship rocked, the wind sang, and somewhere below deck the next chapter scratched at the wall.

The ship no longer smelled of the sea, but of people. Sweat, decay, fear—a mixture that lingered in the walls, in the wood, in their breath. Serrano could no longer wash the smell away. He wore it like a second skin. When he stepped onto the deck, it followed him, like a shadow.

Hunger was back. Rations were barely available. The water tasted of rust, the meat of memories. The rats had grown fat. That was the worst part—they grew while the men shrank.

Serrano stood at the railing at night, the logbook in his hand.

"We are a machine of hunger," he wrote. "Everything that goes in becomes fear. Everything that comes out is death."

He heard footsteps behind him. It was the boy who had dreamed of the bells. "Captain," he said, "I heard it again." "What?" "He. Magellan. He was down below. He said we should go deeper." "There is no deeper on the sea." "Then maybe he meant inside us."

Serrano looked at him for a long time. "Sleep," he said. "And when he comes back, tell him to keep his voice down."

The boy left. Serrano stayed. The sea was black. No stars, no moon, only darkness. Water that didn't move. He whispered, "If you have him, give him back. I still have questions."

No answer. Just a quiet knock from downstairs.

In the morning, two men were found dead. No blood, no wounds. Just stiff, as if they had fallen asleep and forgotten how to live. The rats had already started. One of the sailors wanted to burn them, but Serrano forbade it. "They belong to us now," he said. "Everything here belongs to us. Until it eats us."

They looked at him as if he were a rat himself.

The days blurred. No sun, no rain, just this gray that no longer distinguished between day and night. Time had become meaningless. The sky was an empty mirror, the sea a sluggish mass.

One of the men began to laugh. Loudly, shrilly, for no reason. They let him. Another sang. Off-key, monotonously. They let him too. Everyone had their own way of not going crazy—which meant they all had already gone crazy.

At night, Serrano heard Magellan again. The voice came from the planks, deep, warm, calm. "You understand now," she said. "What?" "That order is only a pause." "And after that?" "Comes the real thing."

Serrano didn't answer. He knew talking wouldn't change anything.

On the third day, a storm came. Not a big one, but enough to make the ship dance. The barrels slid, the wood creaked, the men screamed. Rats jumped out of the hatches, scurried across the deck, and disappeared again.

Serrano stood at the helm, holding it with both hands. Wind and rain lashed his face. The boy came running, shouting: "He's back! I saw him!" "Who?" "The captain!" "Magellan is dead!" "No! He was on the mast!"

Serrano looked up—and later swore he saw something there. A figure. Just a moment. Wet, black, still. Then it was gone.

The storm subsided. Men prayed, laughed, and cried. Serrano wrote: *"I don't think he ever jumped. He just climbed down."*

The boy sat in the corner, his knees drawn up, trembling. "He'll come back," he whispered. "When we're asleep."

Serrano placed a hand on his shoulder. "Then we'll stay awake."

That night, no one slept. They sat there, with torches, knives, eyes wide open. The ship creaked, the wind whispered, and somewhere below deck there was a rustling. Not like rats. More like breathing.

One said, "He's down there." Another, "Then he'll stay there."

Serrano knew it didn't matter whether it was true. They believed it—and that was enough.

When morning came, the sea was calm, the sun bright, the ship steady. But no one trusted the light.

On the fourth day, the silence shattered. It happened quietly, almost dignified, like everything that has been pent up for too long. Two men fought over

water—a sliver, barely enough for one mouth. A word, a push, a knife. No scream, no drama. Only the sound of a body falling. Then the patter of small feet approaching. Rats. Always them first.

Serrano arrived too late. He saw the dead man, the knife, the blood, which immediately began to glisten. He also saw the others – sitting there, silent, not shocked, not angry. Just observing. Like spectators seeing a play for the second time.

"Bury him," said Serrano. One laughed. "With what?" "Then throw him overboard." "The rats won't let us."

He stepped forward and looked at the man. "I said throw him overboard." The man stood, slowly, with that look that was more questioning than rebellion. "And if we throw you?"

That was the moment Serrano realized how thin his voice had become. No rank, no office, no history held anything together anymore. Only fear. And that was no longer on his side.

He drew his knife. Not as a threat, but as a sign. "Then do it," he said.

No one moved. They looked at each other, then at him, then at themselves again. And then he realized: They were too tired to mutiny. Too empty to live, too cowardly to die.

They threw the dead man overboard. The water closed over him, smooth and indifferent. Serrano stood there until nothing could be seen.

"He was thirsty," said one. "We're all thirsty," replied Serrano.

During the night, a fever came on. First in one, then in three. Their skin was hot, their lips gray, their eyes white. They talked in their sleep, screamed, laughed, and sang. One called himself Magellan and commanded the stars to align themselves. Another prayed to the rats.

Serrano did what he could. Water on his forehead, cold cloths, words. Words that no longer meant anything. He wrote:

"I keep them alive to see when they stop."

The sea remained calm. Too calm. The sun hung above them like a needle, burning, stinging, piercing. Shadows became enemies, light became punishment.

On the third day of the fever, the boy died. The one who dreamed of bells. Serrano sat beside him, holding his hand until it was cold. The boy opened his eyes once more and whispered: "I saw him." "Who?" "Him. He told me to come." "Where?" "Downstairs."

Serrano closed his eyes. Then he wrote:
"He continues to recruit."

The men barely spoke anymore. Some sat for hours, staring at the railing as if they would find an answer there. Others whispered to themselves. One sang a children's song no one knew.

That night, Serrano heard the scratching again. Louder than usual. He went downstairs, lantern in hand. Rats everywhere. Movement, glare, shadows. And there, in the middle of the pile, something else—a shape that didn't fit.

He raised the lantern. A hand. Human. White. Still. And then a face. Half corroded, half peaceful. He recognized it. One of the feverish ones.

Serrano dropped the lantern. The light flickered, and the rats scattered, screeching, alive, like smoke.

He ran onto the deck, breathing, laughing. Not out of joy, but because there was nothing else to do. "He's coming closer," he whispered.

In the morning, he didn't tell the men anything. He simply said, "We have to move on."

"Where to?" one asked. "Down," said Serrano.

Nobody objected.

The sea was silent. The sun watched. And the rats waited. Always.

Hunger now came in waves. Not like a feeling, but like a being that crept into their bodies, consuming them from the inside, taking over a little more each day. You could see it in their faces—shrunken, glassy, hollow. The men moved slowly, cautiously, as if every movement might cost too much energy.

There was no food left. Only water that tasted of metal and a few pieces of leather from an old sail. They boiled it, chewed it, and drank the broth, which barely warmed up. It was more ritual than sustenance.

Serrano had stopped counting how many days had passed. Time was now just sound—the creaking of the wood, the men's breathing, the quiet rustling below deck. The rats had become louder again. They were no longer afraid.

He stood at the bow, staring into the void. "Maybe they're the ones really sailing here," he murmured. "We're just passengers."

A sailor behind him laughed, dryly and hollowly. "Then they should steer." "They've been doing so for a long time," Serrano said.

The man remained silent. There was nothing more to say.

One by one, they began to see things. Movements, shadows, faces. Some claimed Magellan was walking across the deck at night. Others said they had seen land. One exclaimed that he had smelled bread.

Serrano wrote: "*We are mirrors. And what we see no longer has anything to do with us.*"

In the night, he heard the scratching again. It was louder, angrier. He went downstairs, lantern in hand, knife in his belt. And there they were—dozens, maybe hundreds. Movement everywhere, like liquid shadows. They didn't retreat. They looked at him.

"What do you want?" he whispered. No answer. Only the rustling, which grew deeper, rhythmic, almost like breathing.

Then he understood. They were waiting. Not for food. For the moment when people cease to be people.

He went back on deck, sweating, pale. "How many are there?" someone asked. "More than us," said Serrano.

The sky was clear, almost beautiful. Stars, calm, cold. The sea was black as ink. He thought: *If this is hell, then it has taste.*

The next day, one of the men disappeared. No scream, no struggle. Just gone. Blood was found on the hatch. Not much. Just enough to notice.

"He jumped," said someone. "Or was picked up," said another.

Serrano remained silent.

He ordered the guards to be doubled. It didn't help. The next night, another one disappeared. Then two.

The men began to arm themselves. Knives, wood, nails—anything that could cut. Not against the rats, but against each other. Everyone believed the other was to blame. Everyone wanted to live, but no one knew why anymore.

Serrano tried to reassure them. "We'll get through there," he said. "Where to?" someone asked. "Somewhere." "Maybe we're already there," someone murmured.

And that was the worst part – maybe they were right.

He wrote: *"I have a grave that floats."*

That night, he stood at the railing again, looking into the water. Smooth. No wind. Not a sound. And there, just for a moment, he saw him again – Magellan. Not like a ghost. Like something real. Wet, calm, awake. "You did it," whispered Serrano. The figure nodded. "And now?" "Now it's your turn."

Then he was gone.

Serrano stood still for a long time until the sun rose. He knew that the sea never gives back what it has once taken.

In the morning, he ordered the ship to sail on. No one asked why.

They moved like corpses that had forgotten to stay still. The ship smelled of death, of salt, of metal. Of the end.

It wasn't hunger anymore—it was a state of being. A second heart beat inside them, slower, more greedily, insatiably. You could see it devouring them, piece by piece, like something invisible gnawing at them. Their skin stretched over their bones, their eyes were deep-set, the whites yellow and dull. Even their breathing sounded different. Heavy, as if it were fighting against life.

Serrano wrote: *"We are no longer human. Just a thought that has forgotten what it wanted."*

The water was almost gone. The salt in the wood was the only thing they could still taste. The rats drank from the same drops. Some men caught them, bit them open, and drank their blood. No disgust. No hesitation. Just necessity.

One, a young Portuguese man who always talked too much, suddenly stopped talking. Not a word for three days. Then, at sunrise, he went to another man, looked at him, and said: "You smell like bread."

That was the beginning.

They found the body the next morning. Pieces of flesh were missing. The men stood in a circle, silent, no one asking who it was. Serrano looked into their faces. No shock. Only shame, which was already hunger again.

"This must not happen," he said. "It has already happened," said one.

He wanted to answer, but there was nothing to say.

He wrote: "*Morality dies first. Then comes language. The rest follows naturally.*"

In the evening, they sat around a fire of broken wood. Smoke rose into the air, acrid, sweet. One asked if they should pray. Another laughed, coughing up blood.

"If God sees us here," he said, "he will eat with us."

Serrano stood up and stepped forward, his hands tightly gripping the logbook. "We survived Magellan. We survived storms. We'll survive this too." "Magellan was the storm," someone said. "And you are the sea," another added. Laughter. Dry. Wrong.

He wanted to scream, but his voice failed him. It was pointless. Words were just sounds, and sounds only caused fear.

In the night, he heard footsteps again. Slow. Heavy. He stood up and reached for his knife. "Who's there?" No answer. He went out, lantern in hand. The deck was empty. Only the wind, weak and hot.

He turned around – and there stood one of the men. His skin was gray, his eyes empty. In his hands was a piece of meat. He looked at Serrano. "It was already dead," he said.

"Who?" "He. Me. Everything."

Serrano stared at the piece of meat. He wanted to believe it was rat. But he knew it wasn't.

He stepped closer and picked up the knife. The man looked at him and smiled. "You smell like bread," he said.

Serrano struck. Not out of anger. Out of self-preservation.

He later wrote: *"It was a clean cut. I thanked him."*

The next day, no one spoke. They were working, if you could call it that. Mending wood, adjusting sails, breathing. Everyone knew that the end wasn't a place, but a state.

The sea was calm. Too calm. Like a spectator who knew the performance was almost over.

Serrano sat in his cabin, his logbook in front of him. His pen trembled. *"Maybe that was always the plan,"* he wrote. *"Not to circumnavigate the world, but to lose it."*

He heard the scratching again. Rats, he thought. But this time it came from above. From the mast. He went out, looked up. There he was again. Magellan. Or what was left of him. "They did it," said Serrano. The figure nodded. "And now?" "Now you know what creation feels like."

Then she was gone.

He stayed there for a long time, looking into the darkness, which now seemed like an answer.

On the last day, no one was awake. Only Serrano. The ship drifted. No sails, no wind, no sound. Even the sea seemed to remain still, as if waiting for it all to be over.

He walked across the deck, step by step, slowly, quietly, as if through a monastery of rotten wood. Traces everywhere: bloodstains, gnawed edges, a shoe without a foot. He knew each of them, and yet they had all become the same. Faces that had etched themselves into his memory until he no longer knew if they had ever lived.

He opened the cabin door. No one inside. No breathing, no cursing, no snoring. Only the sound of rats. They were everywhere. Dozens, maybe hundreds, now completely undisturbed. They scampered over tables, crates, bodies. They ate quietly, contentedly, methodically. Like workers finishing their shift.

He leaned against the doorframe and watched them. "You did it," he said. "You were always the smarter ones."

He went back upstairs. The sun was low. Red, large, tired. A giant eye that had seen everything and meant nothing more. He looked out as far as the water reached and imagined Seville standing over there. Just a line, a smell, a dream of brick and dust.

He opened his logbook. The pages were damp and stained, but he continued writing as if he still had an audience.

"I'm the last one. The sea wants to keep me, but I want to see it laugh."

The pen trembled. He continued writing.

"Perhaps Magellan never left. Perhaps he just arrived too early."

He heard a rustling behind him. He turned around. A rat was sitting on the railing, completely still, its eyes fixed on him. Not afraid, not cheeky. Just there. It looked like a messenger.

"What do you want?" he asked. She blinked. "I understand," Serrano said.

He went to the steering wheel. Placed his hand on the wood. It was warm. Alive. Perhaps it was breathing. "You too," he whispered.

Then he sat down. No wind, no course. Just movement. Very slowly, almost imperceptibly. The ship turned slightly, following an invisible current.

He wrote the last line:

"If anyone reads this, then it wasn't in vain. But I hope no one reads it."

The sun set. The sea turned black. Serrano saw it coming—night, the end, oblivion. And he smiled.

Something moved below deck. A final scratch, a final feeding. Then silence.

The ship drifted on. Destinationless, lifeless. Just a wooden skeleton on the water, filled with salt, shadows, and stories no one would ever tell again.

Someday, maybe weeks later, maybe years later, someone would find it. Empty. No one, no sound. Just the logbook, open on the table, dried ink, the last sentence smudged.

And below, very small, carved into the wood: **"We never arrived."**

Captain, Bastard, Prophet

People later said he was a hero. A visionary. A man with a compass of God and madness. But no one who said that was there. That's how legends are born—from the gaps between the dead.

In Seville, years later, no one talked about failure anymore. They talked about courage, about discovery, about damned fame. The city that had despised him adorned itself with his name. Children memorized it as if it were a prayer. *Magellan. Fernando de Magallanes. The man who circumnavigated the world.*

Except he didn't. He died halfway there. But nobody said that. The truth is bad for business.

Fonseca, the fat court councilor with the soft fingers, wrote reports. "Heroism." "Divine Providence." "A Triumph of the Crown." All in gold letters. As if he himself had held the helm.

A painter painted him. Broad-chested, with a beard, looking toward the horizon. No sign of decay, no hint of despair. Just light. Always that goddamn light.

Doña Beatriz received a pension. "For your courage," they said. She took the money, smiled, and never spoke his name again. That night, she sat by the window, looked up at the sky, and thought: *He won. But what?*

Church bells rang when the news came. Priests preached about the courage of the believers, about the proof of creation. *The world is round!* they cried. But only their greed was round.

Songs were sung in the streets. False songs. Ballads of fame and glory, of storm and victory. Not a word about hunger, rats, or blood. Not a sound about the moment he lost his mind.

The men who returned were barely men. Twenty-three out of over two hundred. Skin like parchment, eyes like holes. They spoke little. What they told didn't fit into the courtiers' stories. Too sordid. Too real.

One of them, a man named Espinosa, tried to tell the truth. "He wasn't a hero," he said. "He was possessed." He was later hanged. "Blasphemy."

Serrano was never found. Only the ship—months later, somewhere west of the Moluccas. It drifted, empty, silent. No blood, no body. Just a book.

The logbook.

The pages were almost unreadable. Salt, sun, time. But a few lines remained.

"He wasn't a captain. He was a mirror."

And below: *"If that was God, I don't want to see him again."*

The Crown declared the book heresy. It disappeared into archives, dust, and darkness. Only the name remained. *Magellan*.

And like all names that become too big, it too became a lie.

Years passed. Kings died, wars broke out, maps were redrawn. But the name remained.

He was in textbooks, on coins, in prayers. A man who saw more than others. A man who proved that the earth was round.

But no one mentioned that she had broken him for it.

It's easier to canonize a person when no one is left alive to remember their stench. And Magellan smelled of sweat, iron, and a kind of faith that corrupts everything it touches.

They made him a symbol. A saint of navigation. Patron of progress. "The man who understood the sky," they said. But he had only shouted at them.

In the taverns of Cádiz, old sailors talked about him, amidst wine and lies. Everyone claimed to have known him. Everyone knew something the others didn't. "He was kind," some said. "He was cruel," others said. No one was entirely wrong.

And so he became a legend, because truth sinks faster at sea than ships.

The survivors? No one wanted to see them. They didn't fit the picture. Men with scarred faces, shaking hands, eyes that had stared at water for too long. They barely spoke. When they did, every word fell like a stone. "He was possessed," they said. "He was bigger than us," they said. "He was sick," they said. Everything was true.

One of them, the ship's cook, sold his story to a priest. The priest rewrote it, filling it with God, hope, and discipline. The king read it, nodded, and commissioned a statue. Not a man of flesh, but bronze. Smooth. Strong. Incorruptible.

They poured it with outstretched arm, his gaze fixed on the West. No one noticed that his face was not smiling, but grinning.

Doña Beatriz was still alive, old, quiet, with eyes that hated every sunrise. Sometimes, when the bells rang, she covered her ears. "He never came home," she once told a neighbor. "Only the lies got through."

Priests praised him in sermons. Children learned from his courage. Merchants sold maps depicting his route as if it were a pilgrim's path. The sea became his altar, blood his holy water.

And no one asked what had become of those who had followed him.

Some drifted somewhere in the colonies, half dead, half legend. Others spent their lives drinking in ports, where no one ever asked why they screamed at night. Some wrote letters that never arrived.

One, an old helmsman, said: "He took us to the end of the world, and there was nothing. Just us." He was laughed at.

But at night, when the wind blew from the west, even those who laughed were silent. Because then, they said, they heard something. A creak. A footstep on wood. And sometimes—a quiet laugh.

The sea doesn't forget. It just waits.

In a monastery in Salamanca, a young monk wrote: "*Magellan proved that the world is round. But no one asked whether it should stay that way.*"

He was later burned.

And so all that remained of Magellan was his name. A myth of gold, anger, and silence.

The man was dead. The bastard was worshipped. And the prophet? He smiled somewhere in the darkness while the sea continued to write its story.

The sea took him and never gave him back. But it continued to speak of him—in its own way. Every wave that came sounded a little like his name. Not loudly, not clearly, more like a hum beneath the surface, a residue of anger that refuses to rot away.

Sailors who traveled the route years later recounted hearing footsteps on deck at night, where no one was walking. Some swore they saw him in the reflections of the water—a shadow of salt and light. His gaze was fixed, his mouth slightly open, as if he were about to say something, but the sea had stolen his voice.

They called it the *Whisper of Magellan*. No storm, no thunder, just that quiet, steady sound of water hitting wood—as if someone were knocking impatiently. The old captains said, "If you hear it, stay calm. He's counting."

In the cards of the Royal Academy it was written soberly: "*He circumnavigated the world.*"

And that was it. Not a single sentence about blood. Not a single word about madness. Just a line on paper, fine and precise, as if drawn by a god.

The truth didn't fit on parchment.

Serrano's logbook disappeared somewhere between archives, wars, and convenience. Perhaps burned, perhaps sealed. But in some harbor bars, people still talked about the ship they found empty—and the sentence it contained: "*We never arrived.*"

The men who returned grew old, quiet, and avoided water. When they did drink, it was only wine, never the sea. One of them, a half-blind Portuguese man, told a child: "He wanted to see God, and God didn't want him." The child laughed, the old man cried.

In Lisbon, scholars debated whether he was a hero or a heretic. Most chose hero—heretics are bad for business. The Church blessed his name. The Crown had it carved in stone. And the people whispered it when they saw the sea, as if it were a prayer against forgetting.

But the sea never forgot. It has a good memory for guilt.

Some nights were silent, endless, black – and when the wind shifted, the fishermen swore they heard it: a voice, hoarse, far away, saying: "Onward."

Nobody knew whether that was an order or a warning.

Over the years, the name became a coin that could be traded everywhere. Books, monuments, hymns. The man had long since become smaller than the myths that bore him. A shadow that grew larger the farther the sun receded.

A chronicler wrote: *"He led us around the world, and the world led us to ourselves."*

But that wasn't true. The world only led them to the point where everything began again: hunger, power, faith, death. An eternal circle. Like his route.

Maybe that was the punchline – that a man who wanted to prove the world was round ended up becoming a loop himself.

Today, a monument stands in Manila. Stone, bronze, prayer. Children run around it, throwing bread into the floodwaters to feed the fish. They don't know who he was. They only know that his name should be spoken when the sky turns gray.

And when the wind picks up, the sea whispers back. Not loudly, just barely. Like a final entry in a logbook no one wants to read:

"I was never gone."

They took his name and turned it into a flag. No longer a human being—a symbol. And symbols are useful as long as they don't fight back.

In the years that followed, *Magellana* tool. For kings, for churches, for merchants with more coins than souls. They built statues, wrote songs, minted coins with his face. The man who sought the end became a symbol of the infinite.

"In the name of Magellan," said the missionaries when they set sail to convert pagans. "In the spirit of Magellan," said the traders when they plundered new territories. And everyone meant something different—except him.

The name sounded like salvation, but it smelled of iron.

In the churches, they preached about his faith. About his devotion, his willingness to sacrifice. Not a word about his despair, his teeth grinding in his sleep, his gaze that sought more than it found. "He proved that God is great," they said. But God had only laughed at him.

Doña Beatriz was old when she heard this. She sat in the shadow of her room, heard the bells, heard the lies, and said quietly: "They are turning him into something he would have hated."

A king had a chapel built. *"In memory of the first person to circumnavigate the Earth."*

His picture hung on the altar. Golden, clean, smiling.

Including: *Fides, Virtus, Gloria Dei.*

Faith, courage, glory of God.

Serrano would have laughed about it. If he'd still been able to.

At the Academy in Madrid, a scholar read from his report. "He died in the service of humanity," he said. The students applauded. No one asked which humanity.

The truth did not fit into Latin.

A philosopher wrote: *"Magellan didn't circumnavigate the world, he opened it."* But once you open something, you rarely find what you are looking for.

At night, when the preachers slept, the sea whispered again. Softly. Harshly. Angry. It didn't sound like prayer. More like remembrance.

Decades later, new expeditions set sail. Each captain called himself "Magellan's heir." They sought spices, gold, glory—the same lies, packaged differently. Some never returned. Some did, claiming they had sensed his spirit. Perhaps they had. Perhaps the sea was full of it.

Because myths don't die. They are passed on like curses.

In the colonies his name became a currency. *Strait of Magellan, Magellan's Land, Magellan's Sea.* The sky was given names by men who never understood it. Stars became possessions, and God a map.

"He connected the world," they said. But they meant: *He shared them.*

On the edge of an old map, yellowed and corroded by sea air, an anonymous artist wrote:

"Here rest his bones. Or his lies. Or both."

Nobody knows who that was. Perhaps someone who had known him. Perhaps someone who understood him all too well.

And somewhere, between the names, the statues, the hymns, the real Magellan lay buried under meaning.

He was never holy. Never pure. Never safe. He was just a man with a dream too big for his head. A captain. A bastard. A prophet against his will.

And the sea? The sea continued to laugh.

The centuries did what they always do: They smoothed everything over. Blood became legend, sweat became incense, mistakes became footnotes. The human being evaporated, and what remained was a story, as pure as a prayer, as harmless as a coin.

Magellan, they said, changed the world. Magellan, they said, showed what was possible. Magellan, they said, was proof of divine will.

And yet, standing by the sea at night, you heard nothing divine. Only wind. Only waves. And sometimes that deep, ancient groan of the world, which sounded as if it were remembering something it would rather have forgotten.

The historians were diligent. They made him an ideal. The explorer. The pioneer. The martyr. No one wrote: The man who lost everything to be right. No one wrote: The man who prayed out of hunger and cursed God. No one wrote: The man who screamed when he realized there was no goal.

The books became relics. Schoolboys read them in classrooms with white walls and clean fingers. Teachers explained to them that courage was everything. That willpower moves the world. No one mentioned that willpower also destroys.

His portrait hung in the palaces. Oil on canvas, looking toward the horizon. A horizon that no longer existed. Below, small letters: *Victoria per fidem*. Victory through faith. Victory through delusion would have been enough.

In the port of Seville, the old quay still lay, weathered and crumbling. A few children played there, throwing stones into the water. When they laughed, it sounded almost like the voices of his men back then. Almost.

An old woman sat on a bench. No one knew who she was. She looked at the water, smoked, and cursed quietly. "He was no hero," she said, to no one in particular. "He was just too proud to die before the sea commanded him."

But no one listened to her.

The world kept turning. Steam engines, cannons, telegraphs, airplanes. All in his name, somehow. Progress. Expansion. Domination. They said, "He opened the sea for us." But they meant: *He gave us permission to take.*

In Manila, Lisbon, Seville—statues everywhere. Bronze everywhere. The same pose everywhere. Arm raised, gaze wide. No doubt, no pain. Only direction. And below: *"The first man to sail around the world."*

Not one person asked what it means to travel around the world when you lose yourself.

One of the chroniclers, an old Jesuit, once wrote in the margin of his manuscript:

"He wasn't a prophet. Just someone who started too early."

The line was later deleted.

And somewhere, deep down, in the belly of the ocean, perhaps what remains of him still lies—bones, salt, memories. When currents pass over, they tap softly. Not like waves. Like footsteps.

As if he were still walking.

And if you stand by the water at night, alone, and listen long enough, you might be able to hear it – that whisper, rough, old, almost human: "I did it. And that was my mistake."

There are names that die quietly. And there are names that one digs up again and again because one wants to see oneself in them. Magellan was one of these. A mirror of humanity's self-conceit, polished with fame, delusion, and pious lies.

The centuries passed, like ships in the fog. The world became smaller, the maps more accurate, the heavens more measured. But his name remained, engraved in metal and ambition. Every emperor, every merchant, every explorer who thought they had discovered something "new" secretly carried it with them—like an excuse.

"In the spirit of Magellan," everything was justified: colonies, war, coercion, missions. The man who sailed himself into hell served as a patron for all those who wanted to go too far—and wanted applause for doing so.

In 18th-century schools, his name stood between Newton and Columbus, like a cog in the wheel of reason. Teachers in powdered wigs spoke of "progress" and

"creational order." No one mentioned hunger, decay, or teeth chattering in sleep. The students nodded and thought: *That's how I want to be too.*

In the 19th century, when steam and iron crushed the world, he resurfaced—now as a symbol of "human will." The captain who wouldn't give up. The man who stood against gods and nature and said, "I know better." No one understood that this was precisely his downfall.

In London, Paris, Madrid—every empire had its version of Magellan. The British Magellan was polite and heroic. The French one was philosophical and tragic. The Spanish one was divinely sent. And all three were lies.

Doña Beatriz had long since turned to dust, Serrano's logbook forgotten, the sea the same black expanse it had been back then. Only the name remained. A blank coin, passed from hand to hand, from century to century.

In the 20th century, they sent airplanes, rockets, and probes. Always the same song: "Like Magellan, in search of the unknown." And again, it was the same hubris, only in new metal.

Man had learned to conquer the sea, but not himself.

NASA named a space probe after him —*Magellan*. She flew to Venus. Another world, another grave. One of the engineers wrote in his notebook:

"If he could see this, he would be proud."

But Magellan would probably have just asked:

"And do you understand now?"

Answer: No.

The myth had long since won. It was everywhere. In children's books, atlases, films. In cruise advertising slogans. In Sunday sermons about courage and discovery. Even in advertisements for cheap rum. *"Taste the Spirit of Magellan."*

Serrano would have laughed himself to death if he hadn't already been there.

And the sea? The sea watched. As always. It saw the ships coming, bigger, faster, shinier. It saw people who thought they had tamed it. And every time one sank, every time water became human again, it sounded a bit like applause.

Perhaps the sea really does laugh. Perhaps it only laughs when it recognizes what it has already swallowed: pride, greed, madness.

And somewhere, deep down, there's still a knocking—that same old, quiet, impatient sound. Like a pen on paper. Like a heart that refuses to stop.

Magellan. Still on the move.

The world was round. He had proven that. But in the end, it was also hollow. And that was the part no one understood—or wanted to understand.

Centuries later, in a world of glass and concrete, where people stared at screens instead of stars, his name still hung in the air. *Magellan*. An echo that no longer meant anything, but still sounded good. Companies, satellites, ships, apps, even a damn fitness program carried it. "Reach your destination with Magellan!" As if the destination had ever been the problem.

People talked about discovery, progress, and movement. But no one was really moving. The earth had long been surveyed, the sea a vacation spot. No more salt, no more blood, just all-inclusive and Wi-Fi.

If he had seen that, he would have laughed. Or spit. Maybe both.

He now stood in museums as a wax figure. Bronze eyes, clean shirt, no scars. A sign next to him: "*The first man to circumnavigate the world.*" Tourists took selfies. Children grinned. No one saw the madness behind the posture, the hunger behind the beard.

He had become silent, the old bastard. He was barely audible anymore. Perhaps because no one could listen anymore. Perhaps because the sea was finally tired of telling the same joke.

In a laboratory somewhere on Earth, scientists analyzed the ocean. They found microplastics, oil, and remnants of dreams. But no memory. No trace. No sound. Only depth.

But sometimes—very rarely—when a storm was brewing, a real, brutal, honest storm, you would hear it again. That old sound. Not loud. But clear. A knocking, a whisper, a laugh, somewhere between the wind and the waves.
"Further."

Today's ships had different names, but they sailed the same course. Only faster, emptier, with better maps. And none of them knew they were still sailing in his circle.

Because that was the joke, the curse, the punchline: He had circumnavigated the world—and thereby shown that there is no escape. You can set off, you can believe you're escaping history, heaven, yourself. But you always end up back at the same point.

The point where you think you've made it. And then you realize: It was all for nothing.

A philosopher once wrote, many centuries later:
"The world is round so that madness doesn't fall off."
He didn't know he was writing about Magellan.

And so only the sea remained. The sea that knows everything and tells nothing. The sea that swallows gods, eats men, and spits out legends like other seaweed.

It lies there, still, barely moving, breathing deeply. Sometimes—when the light tilts—you see something. A shadow. A footstep. A face in the water, looking up.

And if you listen carefully, you'll hear it again, that quiet, cynical, immortal murmur:

"I wasn't a hero. I was just too stubborn to go under."

The sea closes. So does the circle.

The sea first eats away courage

The sky was a gray, lifeless expanse, and the sea below was its mirror—a single, wet equanimity that swallowed everything. Nothing moved. No wind, no bird, no sound. Only the endless breathing of the water, that sluggish, indifferent ebb and flow. It was as if the world had decided to stop playing along.

The men no longer talked about goals or glory. Only about hunger. About returning home. About what they had left behind and no longer knew if it had ever really been there. Their voices were brittle, as if they were coming from other mouths.

Magellan stood at the railing, his hands over the wood, his gaze downward. He looked into the water as if he might find an answer there. But the sea didn't answer. It looked at him—calm, indifferent, ancient—and remained silent.

"We need wind," said one of the officers. "We need faith," said Magellan. "Faith doesn't fill sails," the man replied.

Magellan slowly turned around. His face was pale, his eyes shining. "Then pray louder."

Nobody laughed.

Supplies were scarce. The water was rotten. The bread smelled of mold, the meat of memories. Men vomited, men cursed, men prayed. And somewhere in between lay the truth—they were afraid.

Fear of the sea, which was too big. Fear of God, who remained too silent. Fear of oneself.

But Magellan was no longer afraid. He had something worse: conviction. The kind of conviction that keeps you awake when everyone else is long asleep, that keeps you burning when every wind dies down. He wrote in his logbook at night: "*When God is silent, the sea speaks.*"

The sea didn't speak. It waited.

The same silence for days. Only the creaking of the planks, the slapping of the ropes, the quiet murmuring of the men in their sleep. And then, one night, the first one arrived, refusing to get up.

A sailor, young, barely twenty. His skin was gray, his lips chapped. No blood left, only thirst. They found him in his hammock, his hands folded, his face up, as if he wanted to say something to someone, but the words were stuck in his throat.

Magellan ordered him to be thrown into the sea. No prayer, no blessing. Just a quick glance, then the body fell. It sank quickly, as if it had never been light.

The men watched. And then they fell silent again.

A wind came during the night. Not much, just a breath. Magellan stood there, his eyes closed, his hands open, as if he himself had turned the world.

"See?" he said. "He hears us."

And then they knew he was lost forever.

One whispered: "The sea eats courage first." Another: "And then those who have it."

The wind didn't last long. Just long enough for them to realize how much they needed it. After that, nothing came again.

The sea lay there, still, vast, endless. And somewhere beneath them, in the depths, something laughed. Very quietly.

The sea lay there like a single, dead thought. No wind, no destination, no sound, only the eternal pressure of water and sky, slowly crushing their minds. The men sat on deck, staring into the void, chewing on something that was no longer food, but merely a memory of food.

The bread had turned black, covered in mold. They scraped it off and continued eating. The water was bitter, it burned their throats, but they drank because their bodies commanded them. Some began to cook the leather of their boots. The smell was unbearable, the chewing dull, but it was warm. And warmth meant life.

Magellan saw all this, and none of it seemed to shake him. His gaze was distant, as if he saw something the others weren't allowed to see. There was something like peace in his eyes, but not a human one—rather, that glassy, cold peace known only to madness.

"He knows where we need to go," said one officer half-aloud, without conviction. "He doesn't know anything," replied another. "He's talking to God," whispered the first. "Then God should finally answer."

Magellan stood on the aft deck, his hands clasped, his head bowed, his lips moving, soundless. He was talking to the sky. Or to himself. Perhaps that was the same thing now.

He later wrote in his logbook:

"Men are losing heart. They don't see that pain is the way. God is testing us. I hear him in the silence."

But the sea was no god. It didn't test anything. It just waited until you fell.

On the third day without wind, the hatred began to grow. Quietly, but steadily. The men looked at each other as if they were all to blame. Everyone suspected each other, everyone talked of escape. But where can you flee when the horizon imprisons you?

One said, "I dreamed the sea rose and left." Another replied, "Then don't. Maybe it'll take him with it."

At night, whispers spread that Magellan was secretly drinking clean water, which he was hiding from the others. A rumor born of hunger and envy, but that made it more true. They viewed him with suspicion, with anger, with that cold longing one feels for someone who still believes.

A sailor whose name had long been lost stood before him at some point. "Captain," he said, "we must turn back." Magellan looked at him, calm, unmoved. "There's no turning back," he said. "Then we'll die here." "Then we'll die for real."

The man wanted to say something else, but Magellan turned and left. No anger, no command. Just this indifference, which was more dangerous than violence.

During the night, the sailor disappeared. No scream, no struggle. Just gone. In the morning, his hat was found floating next to the ship. One said he had jumped. Another said Magellan had sacrificed it. Both sounded plausible.

The sun burned, skin burst. The stench of rot, sweat, and despair hung over the ship like a second air. There were no rats left—they had long since been eaten.

Magellan continued to pray, sometimes smiling as if sharing a secret that would save him.

A man spat on the deck. "He talks to God," he said, "but God only talks to water."

And somewhere beneath them roared the sea, old, indifferent, insatiable. It no longer waited. It remembered.

The wind came back like a drunk trying to apologize—loud, dirty, and unreliable. The sails caught it hesitantly, the ship creaked, and the men pretended all was well. A few of them even sang, softly, raggedly, more out of reflex than joy.

Magellan stood at the railing and opened his arms as if he were personally welcoming him. "Do you see?" he cried. "He's here! The Lord has heard us!"

No one answered.

The men knew that the wind didn't come from God. It came because the air moves. But Magellan believed, and faith is as contagious as the plague.

He ordered the sails to be set, the barrels to be secured, the cannons to be checked. No one asked why. It didn't matter. The main thing was that they were doing something. Movement meant hope.

Three hours later, the wind shifted. Suddenly, mercilessly. The sea heaved, the masts creaked, ropes snapped. Water rushed over the deck. One sailor fell overboard—no one knew how. Another screamed that the sea was calling him.

Magellan stood in the middle of the storm, soaking wet, his face turned to the sky, his eyes wide. "That's him!" he cried. "The breath of God!"

"This is death!" someone yelled back.

"No," shouted Magellan, "this is a test!"

He held on to the wheel, laughing as the sky opened above them and water fell like nails. The men screamed, cursed, prayed—all at once. And in the midst of this chaos stood their captain, motionless, smiling, like a priest in the wrong temple.

After hours, the sea calmed down. The wind dropped abruptly, as if someone had turned it off. The ship rocked, dripped, and reeked of fear.

They had lost two men, a mast, and three barrels of water. Heaven acted as if it knew nothing.

Magellan called them in. He spoke as if he were standing on a pulpit: "You doubted," he said. "You were afraid. But look—he tested us. And we're still alive. That's the proof."

No one answered. The men stood there, empty, wet, tired. One muttered, "Proof of what?"

Magellan looked at him, and in that look lay something greater than anger. It was pity. Or arrogance. Or both. "Proof that you don't understand," he said.

In the evening he sat alone and wrote in his logbook:

"They don't see that pain is baptism. They don't see that the world is just beginning."

One of the officers later secretly read the lines. He closed the book and whispered, "He's lost."

And that was the truth. Magellan was no longer on board. He was sailing somewhere else—in his head, in his sky, in his anger.

The men began to fear him. But not in the way one fears a tyrant. More like one fears something that is no longer human.

During the night, the wind picked up again. Just a gentle breeze. The sea was calm, almost friendly. But no one slept. Everyone knew that the next storm wouldn't come from outside.

The wind remained, but it was deceptive—like a woman who kisses you and shows you a knife. It carried her on, slowly, steadily, but no one believed in it anymore. Everyone knew that wind at sea is just another form of hope: brief, cruel, false.

The men barely spoke to each other anymore. When they did, their words were stone. Choppy, suspicious, without emotion. Everyone saw the traitor in the other. Everyone believed Magellan was planning to sacrifice them.

"He drinks clean water," said one. "He eats meat," said another. "He talks to God," murmured a third. "Then let God explain it to him," came the reply.

They began to observe him. How he stood. How he walked. When he wrote. When he smiled. And the longer they looked at him, the more certain they were: He was no longer one of them.

Magellan noticed it. Of course he noticed it. He felt the stares, the silence, the hatred. And it fed him. "They must be afraid," he wrote. *"Only fear keeps people close to the truth."*

That evening, he had them line up. "You talk too much," he said. "You believe too little. You forget why we are here."

"We're here because you brought us here," one answered, quietly but firmly. Magellan nodded. "Yes. And I'll lead you out as well." "Where?" "To him." "To whom?" "To the one who's waiting."

The men looked at each other. One spat. Another made the sign of the cross. A third laughed, but it sounded like a cough.

Magellan approached. "You fear the sea," he said. "I only fear stagnation."

Then he left.

That night, the wind whispered strangely—as if it were forming words. The men heard it, swore it. Some said they had heard their name. Others said they had *his* heard.

One—the ship's cook—said loudly, "He's not talking to God. He's talking to the sea. And the sea wants him back."

Two days later, he was found hanging from the railing, his tongue blue, his eyes open. No struggle. No blood. Just wind.

Magellan had him thrown into the sea. "He was unclean," he said.

There was a moment when they should have overthrown him. But no one did. Fear is a better captain than courage.

The men began to pray secretly—but not to God. To something else. To what lay beneath them. To that which laughed when the wood creaked. One carved a small piece of wood, a figure—half human, half wave. He placed it in the corner of his bunk. The next day, someone had stolen it.

Magellan walked the deck at night, barefoot, his logbook under his arm. He spoke in a low voice, like a priest with no one to listen. "You don't understand," he murmured. "You want bread. I want creation."

An officer watched him. "He's talking to the wind," he said. "And what does the wind say?" asked the other. "That it'll come for him soon."

The sea was calm. But every step on deck sounded like a judgment. And when one coughed, the other flinched.

It was no longer the sea that was eating them. It was themselves.

On the fourth day, one of them cried out in his sleep. "He called me!" They woke him. "Who?" "The captain." "He wasn't here at all." "Yes, he was," whispered the man. "He was standing next to my bed. He said: *Spring*."

The next morning, one was missing. No one asked who.

The silence on board was merely a cover. Beneath it, everything festered—mistrust, hunger, anger. It was no longer a ship, but a floating confession. Everyone knew they were guilty, but no one knew exactly what.

The men whispered at night, below deck, between the barrels, where the wood was damp and the light was sickly. Words like poison. Names, plans, fear. "If we don't stop him, he'll eat us all." "He's possessed." "He thinks he's God." "Then let him prove it—without us."

They made lists. Who was for it? Who was against it? Who was too weak? Who was too religious. One suggested killing him in his sleep. Another suggested simply pushing him overboard. A third said they should wait until God himself did it.

But nobody wanted to be the first.

Magellan knew everything. Perhaps because they lied badly. Perhaps because he knew the smell of fear. He had been human long enough to know when people break. He wrote: "*The devil lives in their silence.*"

During the day, he acted quietly. Commands, order, prayer. At night, he sat alone, his face in the moonlight, his hands firmly on the wood. When the wind blew, it looked as if he were smiling.

One of the officers, Duarte Barbosa, was the only one who dared to talk to him. "They fear you," he said. "Then they'll learn reverence." "They'll kill you." Magellan looked at him. "Then they'll learn what comes next."

Barbosa nodded. "You only say that because you already know." "I don't know anything," said Magellan. "I just believe correctly."

Screams were heard in the night. Not a struggle—screams of dreams in which water spoke. Some men woke up and claimed to have heard a voice coming from the planks. "Jump," it said. "Jump, and you'll be light."

The next day, they found a rope that was too short. One of them had tried to escape. Down.

The sun shone as if it wanted to deny it.

The men grew louder. More aggressive. One kicked a barrel. "He's leading us to death!" "He's leading us to God!" shouted another. "Then I'll be the devil!" cried the first.

Magellan came on deck. "What is this?" he asked calmly. No one answered. He walked slowly through the rows, looking everyone in the eye. "You are no

longer men," he said. "You are animals who have forgotten who created them." Then he turned around, went into his cabin, and locked the door.

Afterward, complete silence reigned below deck. That deadly calm that comes before the storm—the human one, not the divine one.

Barbosa whispered, "It's going to happen. Tonight." "Who?" someone asked. "All of us."

They counted knives. Ropes. Courage. No one laughed.

Up in his cabin, Magellan continued writing:

"You think I'm crazy. But what is faith but madness with a direction?"

He put down his pen, stood up, and looked out the window. The sea was calm. Too calm. "If you want me to fall," he said, "then lift me higher first."

And somewhere, deep down, something answered. No sound, no word—just movement.

The ship rocked slightly. And the men knew: It was time.

Night came like a knife—silently, but deliberately. The sea lay still, the sky hung low, heavy as lead. No wind, no sound. Only the creaking of the wood, as if it already knew what was about to happen.

Below deck, someone whispered: "Now."

Ten men. Maybe twelve. No one knew exactly how many there were in the end, because no one dared to count. They had cloths tied around their faces, as if to hide their guilt. But on a ship, there's nowhere for guilt to hide. It sticks to you like salt.

One held the knife. One held the rope. One just held his hands.

They walked slowly, step by step, across the deck to his cabin. The moon was half-lit, the light dim. Everything smelled of wood, sweat, and fear.

The first attempt to open the door failed. It was locked. "He knows," one whispered. "Then we'll knock," another said.

Three beats. Muffled. Heavy. Silence.

Then his voice, calm, clear: "Come in."

The door opened, from the inside. He stood there. No sword. No helmet. Just him—thin, awake, with those eyes that saw everything and explained nothing.

"You're late," he said. No one answered.

He took a step back, as if inviting them. "Come. Look what you're killing."

They stood there, between courage and fear, between heaven and hell. And one—the youngest—took the first step. The knife flashed briefly in the light.

Magellan didn't move. He looked at him. "If you think this will save me, then do it."

The boy hesitated. Just a heartbeat. But on a night like this, a heartbeat is enough.

Another grabbed it. Then everything happened quickly. Voices, movement, breathing, chaos. The ship groaned, as if it wanted to join in the conversation.

No one later remembered the sequence. Only the sound: boots, wood, shouts, something heavy falling.

Then silence.

The boy stood there, knife in hand, blood up to the hilt. His breathing was rapid and uneven. Magellan lay on the ground, face up, eyes open. No scream. No curse. Just a faint smile.

"You're in a hurry," he whispered. "He won't wait for you."

The boy stepped back. The others stared. No one moved.

"What now?" one asked. "Now we're free," another said. But that didn't sound like freedom. It sounded like emptiness.

Outside, the wind began to blow. Very lightly. Almost gently.

They carried him out. Not a word. Not a prayer. Not a judgment. They let him slide, quietly, over the railing.

The sea took him as it took everything. Without resistance, without thanks, without honor.

One last circle of waves, then there was nothing.

The boy looked into the water, his hands still shaking. "Is it over?" he asked. One replied, "It's just begun."

The sea was silent.

Morning came as if in a hurry to whitewash everything. The sun rose, but its light was dirty, yellow, tired. It fell on the deck, on ropes, on faces that no longer knew whose they belonged to.

No one spoke. No one prayed. No one looked down, where the water was smooth again, as if nothing had happened.

They had buried him—not in the sense of honor, but of repression. The ocean was now their graveyard and their accomplice. But the sea does not forget.

The men went about their work like rag dolls with rusted joints. One wiped blood from the wood, mechanically, silently. Another threw the knife overboard. It made barely a sound, just a small circle in the water that immediately disappeared.

"He's gone," said one. "No," replied the boy. "He's among us."

Everyone looked at him. "Shut up," someone whispered. But the boy laughed, hoarsely, shaky. "You hear me, right?"

There it was – the creaking. Quiet, rhythmic, coming from deep within the ship's belly. No wind, no rope, no wood. A sound like breathing.

They paused. "That's the sea," said one. "No," said the boy. "That's him."

No one objected.

That night, they all dreamed the same thing. Of the deck. Of the water. Of a man walking in the depths, calmly, slowly, without sinking. He had no face, only light. And when he spoke, it was the voice of the wind.

"You freed me," he said. "Now it's your turn."

One woke up screaming, sweating, pale. "I saw him!" "Shut up!" "He was down there!" "He's dead!" "Then tell that to the water!"

Nobody slept anymore.

The next day, the ship began to stink. Not of blood, but of decay. "The wood is rotting," said one. "The sea is rotting," said another. And both meant the same thing.

The days stretched. Hours turned into knots, thoughts into fog. Some men began to talk quietly—not to each other, but to the wind. Others looked out to sea and smiled, as if they had friends there.

Barbosa was now in command. But no order sounded orderly anymore. Every step on deck was a betrayal, every word too loud.

"We have to move on," said Barbosa. "Where to?" someone asked. "Forward." "That's what he said."

They sailed. Slowly. Restlessly. The compass trembled as if afraid.

At night, the wind blew differently. Salty, cold, almost alive. And every time a rope taut or a barrel knocked, they flinched. The sea spoke. It murmured, whispered, giggled.

"It's him," the boy said again. "Shut up," Barbosa shouted. "He's laughing," the boy whispered. "He's laughing because we believe it."

And somewhere, deep down, the sea was doing just that.

Dispute over bread and orders

The morning smelled of salt, sweat, and something else—guilt. It hung in the air, clinging to the men like the haze over the sea. No one spoke of it, but everyone knew that the things done in the dark could not be hidden in the daytime.

Barbosa stood at the helm, his hands sore from the wood, his face gray with fatigue. He was in command now, but it felt as if he were only holding the ashes of a fire that had already gone out. "We need order," he said. "We need bread," one replied.

That was the beginning.

The supplies were almost gone. A few barrels of water, rancid. A sack of flour, half-rotten. Two fish that no one wanted to eat. Barbosa had everything brought up on deck. "We'll share," he said. "Fairly."

But justice is a luxury that hunger knows no.

At first, it was quiet. The men stood in rows, the sun burned, the sea glittered as if it were laughing. Then one saw that his piece was smaller. Another saw that his cup remained empty. Words turned to curses, curses to blows. A fistfight over nothing.

Barbosa yelled, "Stop!" One turned to him, blood in his mouth and hatred in his eyes. "He's dead," he screamed. "You're not one of us!"

The knife came faster than anyone could imagine. A brief glint, a dull thud, then someone fell. No one knew who started it.

The ship roared. Boards, shouts, blows, boots. Someone fell, someone kicked, someone laughed. The sea remained calm. It had time.

Barbosa stood over a man, knife in hand, his breath short. He saw blood running like water and understood that the sea had long since imitated him. "This never ends," he whispered.

They separated them, somehow. Breathing, sweating, panting. Two men dead. One half-blind. Blood everywhere, trampled, soaked.

"We have nothing left," said one. "We still have each other," said Barbosa. "Then we are lost," came the reply.

That evening, Barbosa tried to talk. "We must move on. There's land ahead. Maybe water." "Maybe death," someone murmured. "Then at least not here."

He looked into their faces. Burned, cut, empty. Men who had given everything and now could only wait for the sea to take them.

That night Barbosa wrote:

"He left us something. No route. No God. Only himself."

The sea roared, calm, insistent. And across the deck, someone whispered: "We didn't kill him. We split him."

Barbosa woke up, drenched in sweat. The wind was warm, sweet. Like breath.

He went on deck and looked into the darkness. "If it's you," he said quietly, "then stop."

But the sea didn't listen. It grinned, invisible, ancient.

And somewhere in the belly of the ship, wood cracked – like laughter.

The sky hung low like a gray blanket someone had thrown over the world to suffocate it. No wind, no light, just that lazy, shimmering blue that made everything the same—day, night, life, death.

The men sat scattered across the deck, silent, exhausted. The bread had been distributed—or what was left of it. A few scraps, hard as stone, damp from the sea. Everyone held onto theirs as if it were more than food. As if it were hope.

Barbosa stood at the mast, his face blank, his eyes hollow. "No one touches anything without orders anymore," he said. "Whose orders?" came the reply. "Mine." A few laughed, but without joy.

They had learned that orders no longer meant anything. Orders were just another word for hunger.

One of the men, a broad Galician with hands like pieces of wood, stood up. "You're not Magellan," he said. "No," Barbosa replied. "And that's my advantage." "He was crazy," said the Galician. "He was consistent." "And you?" Barbosa remained silent.

The man nodded. "Then we agree."

He turned to the others. "We take what's left. Each for himself. No more orders. No gods. No blood for ideas." One nodded, another spat, a third whispered, "He's right."

Barbosa drew his knife. "Anyone who tries will die." "Then at least we'll die for something real," said the Galician.

And so they stood there, on that rotten deck, in the middle of nowhere, the sea below them, the nothingness above them, and between the two a few dozen men who believed that freedom lay in a piece of bread.

The first blow came from behind. Then the screaming. Then the blood.

Barbosa fought as one fights when one has nothing left to lose. A punch, a kick, a push. The Galician fell, groaned, laughed. "You're like him," he gasped. "No," said Barbosa. "I'm still alive."

When it was over, they stood there in silence. Three men dead, four injured. Blood on the planks, bread in the water.

One whispered, "The sea is getting fed." Another, "It was never hungry. Only patient."

Barbosa sat down, his hands shaking. "We'll share," he said. "But this time properly."

No one objected. No one nodded. They simply did what was necessary: rotten bread scraps, a cup of water, divided by twelve.

At night, the sea was calm. Too calm. One person heard footsteps on deck, even though no one was moving. Another smelled smoke, even though nothing was burning. A third whispered, "He's back."

And Barbosa, sleepless, looked up, where the stars hung like old scars. "If you're still here," he said, "tell me how to stop."

But the stars said nothing. And the sea only responded with a soft, sarcastic slap against the hull.

They woke up in a world that tasted of iron. The sea was as flat as a mirror, and everyone saw themselves reflected in it, uglier, older, emptier. The sun burned as if it wanted to punish them, and the sky was so vast that one could lose oneself in it without taking a step.

Hunger was no longer a sensation. Hunger was the measure of all things. It determined who spoke, who thought, who died. People no longer talked about bread. They talked about what bread had once been—a thought, a form, a promise.

Barbosa sat at the railing, looking out into the water. "If it's you," he murmured, "then you've won." But the water remained silent. It always remained silent when spoken to—that was its way of responding.

A man named Duarte, thin as a rope, began to pray. Not aloud, but in time with his breath. "Ave Maria..."

One laughed. "Maria can't hear you anymore," he said. "She went down with Magellan." Duarte didn't answer. He continued praying.

Later that night, he woke up screaming. "He was here!" he cried. "Who?" "He! With tears in his eyes!" "Shut up, Duarte!" "He told us to jump!"

Nobody spoke to him again after that.

Barbosa tried to maintain order. He wrote lists, recited prayers, distributed leftovers, and invented tasks. "We have to act as if we were alive," he said. But no one believed it.

The men began to see things. Shadows across the deck, faces in the water, voices in the wind. One swore he saw the sea breathe. Another that it whispered: "*One more.*"

A third began to curse, threaten, and beg the sea. Then he laughed, jumped, and disappeared.

Barbosa stopped making speeches. He had understood that words carry no weight at sea. Only actions. So he did nothing.

On the fourth day after the argument, he stood in his cabin and wrote: "*The sea is not a place. It's a test. And we all failed.*"

When he came out, the men were sitting in a circle. No fire, no light. Just faces that looked as if they had long since belonged to someone else. One whispered, "We're having dinner today." "What?" asked Barbosa. "One of us."

He said nothing. He knew that contradiction was just another form of prayer—and God had long since stopped listening.

Night came, silently. The sea was silent, as always. But in the darkness, somewhere out there, something knocked against the hull. Regularly. Patiently. Like breathing.

And one of the men—the one who ate the least—looked up and said quietly, "He's counting."

The sky was now just a pale expanse above a stinking wooden coffin. The sea they had once admired lay smooth and indifferent, as if it had decided to do nothing more. No wind, no sound. Only the rocking—that slow, nerve-shattering sway that continued in the men's minds even as they sat still.

They were barely human anymore. Their faces were sunken, their eyes dull, their voices scratchy like old ropes. They spoke in staccato sentences, if at all. Every thought was a burden. Every breath a trade with death.

Barbosa had become paler, quieter. He no longer wrote. He just stared. Sometimes he muttered something about Magellan, sometimes about God, sometimes about nothing. "He left us here," he whispered. "No," one answered. "He took us with him."

The supplies were finally depleted. Bread, water, faith—everything was gone. You could see it in their movements: heavy, slow, almost solemn, like animals that have forgotten themselves.

On the third night after the last argument, they began to hear the sea. Really hear it. Not the lapping, not the creaking, but words. No one spoke about it, but everyone understood them.

"Give me one." Just three words. Some swore they had dreamed it. Others said they had seen it in the waves. But everyone knew what it meant.

By morning, Duarte was dead. No wound, no blood, no trace. Just gone. "He jumped," Barbosa said. "Or was taken," someone whispered.

The sea was calm, almost friendly. They didn't glance down.

In the afternoon, fog rolled in, thick and heavy. The ship shrank within it, a shadow without direction. And in this fog, it began to sound as if voices were creeping across the deck. Names, prayers, laughter. Some answered. Others covered their ears.

"We must find land," said Barbosa. "Perhaps we are the land," one replied.

He laughed, short, dry, and sneezed blood.

Later, as the fog thickened, Barbosa saw him again. Only briefly. A shadow over the railing. His demeanor was unmistakable. His gaze calm, almost pitying. Magellan. Or what was left of him.

"What do you want?" whispered Barbosa. The answer came on the wind, barely audible: "That you finish what I started."

"I don't remember what that was." "You never knew."

Then the shadow was gone.

Barbosa stared into the darkness until his eyes watered. "He's alive," he said. "No," someone answered. "We're dead."

At night, their voices wafted across the deck. Prayers, curses, madness. No one knew where the sea ended and man began. The ocean had become their mirror. And he liked what he saw.

Barbosa had stopped counting. Days, hours, men—everything blurred. Only the sea remained, that ancient, gray beast that didn't need to move to possess everything. It watched them disintegrate and waited. The sea has patience. More than any god.

The sun came and went, meaningless. The sky was just a color, somewhere between ash and iron.

One of the men began to sing. A children's song, hoarse, broken. The others listened until someone laughed. Then someone struck. And the singer fell. No one helped him. No one looked.

Barbosa stood at the wheel. The wood was hot, his hands trembled. "We have to..." he began, and then stopped. What? Have to? That was over. There was no more have to. Only waiting.

The sea whispered. More and more clearly now. No longer words. Noises that sounded like thoughts. He heard Magellan's voice within it—calm, matter-of-fact, like a command. "Hold course."

"Where to?" asked Barbosa. No answer. Just the beating of the waves, regular, like a heartbeat.

He began to believe that the sea understood him. Perhaps this was the disease that lasts the longest.

At night, the water smelled different—sweet, almost warm. Someone said it was land, very close. "Land?" asked Barbosa. "Or hell," came the reply. "Maybe that's the same thing."

The next morning the sky was black. No storm, no wind, just darkness. A color that shouldn't be there. The men prayed, whispered, argued, laughed. One wept and held his hand over the railing. "He's down there," he said. "He's calling me." "Then go," said Barbosa. The man nodded. And he did. No scream. Just the faint sound of water closing in.

Barbosa stood there for a long time. Then he laughed. Quietly. Dryly. "The sea calculates well," he said. "Only one at a time."

In the darkness above them, the stars began to flicker. Not like light. More like eyes.

And from the sea came a glow, soft, blue, almost beautiful. The men stood up, staggered, stared. "Look," one whispered. "He's coming back."

Barbosa looked more closely. It was just luminescent algae. But it looked like someone was lying beneath the surface—large, still, with open arms.

He stepped closer until the waves touched his face. "What do you want?" he asked. The answer didn't come from outside. It came from within.

"That you finally understand."

"What?"

"That the circle never ends. You are me."

Barbosa staggered back. The men looked at him, confused, exhausted, half-mad. "He's talking to him," one said. "No," another whispered. "He's talking to himself."

Barbosa fell to his knees, his face in the water, his mouth open. He laughed. Long, hoarse, honest. Then he stood up, looked up to the sky, and shouted, "Order accepted."

No one asked what that meant. But they knew that the last command didn't come from a human.

And the sea was silent – content.

The sun no longer rose. The sky was nothing but a layer of mist, and beneath it the sea moved like a sleeping animal dreaming it was eating. No one knew how many days had passed. Time no longer had a form. Only sounds: the creaking, the dripping, the breathing.

They spoke with voices that no longer belonged to them. "Were you sleeping?" "No." "Why not?" "Because he was there." "Who?" "He."

Barbosa was at the helm. But the wheel was dead, like everything else. He turned it, and the ship didn't move. It was as if the world stood still, and they were just thoughts in a stranger's head. "He's taking us," whispered Barbosa. "Where?" "Home." "Which one?"

No one laughed anymore. Laughter was gone, just as hunger had disappeared. Only the sea remained. The sea was everything now—food, sleep, fear, God.

Sometimes the wind came, carrying voices with it. "Come." "Further."
"Deeper." They sounded like prayers, but they came from below.

One of the men stood up, went to the railing, looked into the depths, and nodded. "I understand now," he said. Then he fell. No jump, no scream—just fell. The sea took him without a sound.

Barbosa saw it, said nothing. He wrote: "*He collects them again.*"

At night, they saw lights on the water. First one, then many. They moved, glowed, and disappeared. One said they were souls. Another said they were fish. Barbosa looked more closely and whispered, "That's him. He's multiplied."

His voice was calm, clear, almost reverent. "He was never gone," he said. "He was just scattered."

The men looked at him, and there was no fear in their eyes. Only acceptance. If someone fell, no one turned around. If someone spoke, no one listened. There was no longer any distinction between doing and not doing.

Barbosa prayed again. But not to God. "You wanted it," he said. "I am your mouth."

The sea responded—or perhaps just the wind. But it sounded like agreement.

One of the men, old Gonzalo, came to him. "Orders, Captain?" Barbosa looked at him as if he needed to think. "No more orders," he said. "Just direction."
"Which?" "Down."

Gonzalo nodded. He left. And did what he understood.

Barbosa remained alone. He stood at the railing, gazing into the depths, where the sea glowed greenish, as if lights were dancing there. He saw faces in the water—dozens, perhaps hundreds. All silent. All waiting.

He raised his hand in greeting. "We have arrived," he said.

The sea was silent. But in its silence lay consent, old, cold, and final.

On the last day, the sea was as smooth as a mercury mirror. No sound, no wind, no life—only the ship, slowly standing still, as if it knew that movement

was now pointless. The sky hung pale above, a blank canvas on which nothing more could happen.

Barbosa sat on deck, barefoot, his hands on his knees, his gaze fixed on the water. Around him lay the remains of men—not dead, not alive, just empty. Faces that no longer wanted anything, bodies that were still breathing because they had forgotten how to stop.

"He made us all," one whispered. "And then took us back again." "Who?" asked Barbosa without turning around. "The one who laughs when the sea is calm."

Barbosa nodded. "Then he's laughing now."

He stood up, slowly, as if he had infinite time. "You heard him," he said, and his voice wasn't loud, but it carried throughout the ship. No one answered. They just looked at him—dully, submissively, knowingly.

He went to the railing. The wood was hot, the water beneath it cold. It smelled of metal, of salt, of eternity. "I get it," he said. "He never wanted us to go home. He wanted us to understand that this—" he tapped the railing, "this is everything. The circle. The nothingness. The waiting."

One of the men began to cry. Not loudly, not desperately—just quietly, the way you cry when you realize that everything makes sense and that's the worst of it.

Barbosa smiled. A calm, serene smile. "He taught me that a command is only a voice. And that the sea always speaks."

Then he looked down into the green darkness, where the waves barely moved. For a moment, he seemed to be listening. Then he nodded, as if he had received an answer, and climbed over the railing.

No one called out to him. No one tried to stop him.

He didn't fall. He glided. Slowly, calmly, as if he were finally returning to where it all began. The water absorbed him, without a sound. Not a splash, not a scream, not a sign. Just a small, circular movement that dissolved as if it had never existed.

The ship remained empty. Silent. The wind returned, quietly, cautiously, as if checking if anyone was still there.

He ran across the deck, over ropes, over faces, over the last page of the logbook. It read, in shaky writing:

"We shared the bread. We heard the command. And we obeyed it."

The sea answered with a sound like laughter—quiet, muffled, endless.

Then it closed.

And the wind carried the rest away, as it always did.

The Mutiny in the Darkness

They didn't know when it began—or if it had ever ended. The darkness came not like night, but like a disease: creeping, deep, without boundaries. No more stars, no horizon, no distinction between sky and water. Everything was black. Everything was the same.

The second ship, *San Antonio*, drifted somewhere south, alone, separated from the others for weeks. The wind was fickle, the wood rotten, the men empty. No one spoke of the destination anymore. Destinations are for people who believe there is land.

The new captain, Estêvão Gomes, stood at the bow, hands in his pockets, looking ahead, where there was nothing. "We're following the course," he said, although no one had asked. "Whose course?" someone murmured. "The one set by death."

Some laughed, but it was a laugh without sound.

They had heard what was happening on the *Trinidad* What had happened. Rumors, voices, signs. Men who had disappeared. One swore he had seen a ship at night—dead, black, without sails—gliding by, silently. Someone was standing on the deck. "Who?" they asked. "He," said the man.

"He's dead." "Then he hasn't noticed yet."

From then on, they spoke of him only in whispers. Magellan. The name was no longer a person, but a sound that could not be spoken too loudly, lest the sea hear it.

Gomes didn't want to be a prophet, or a hero. He just wanted to survive. But at sea, you don't make that decision for yourself.

The bread was moldy, the water bitter, the men restless. And restlessness is more contagious on a ship than the plague. First came the curses. Then the stares. Then the silence.

At night, footsteps could be heard across the deck, although no one was moving. Once, someone called out, "Who's there?" And a voice answered, "I'm still here." No one saw anything. No one asked any more questions.

On the third day, the first argument came—over bread, over wind, over nothing. A knife, a scream, blood. Gomes had the man tied up. "We need order," he said. But order doesn't obey orders when darkness consumes it.

One of the officers came to him. "They're talking again," he said. "About what?" "About him." "Then they should stop." "They say he lives in the water."

Gomes looked at the officer, cold and exhausted. "Then they shouldn't look inside."

But they did it anyway. Everyone at some point. The sea drew them—not as a danger, more as a memory.

One whispered, "He's walking down there." Another, "He's counting the ships." A third, "He's waiting for us."

Gomes did what everyone does who believes they are still in control of something: He prayed. But he knew no one was listening.

The darkness became thicker, heavier, almost physical. The water sometimes glowed greenish—like eyes peering from the depths. And when the ship creaked, it sounded as if it were laughing.

In the night, they heard voices again. No screams, no words—just this quiet, rhythmic whisper that sounded like breathing in the fog. One said, "He commands." Another, "Then we obey."

The next morning one was missing.

Nobody was looking for him.

The sea had changed. It was no longer just water. It was a surface of thought, a mirror that looked back. And the worst part was: it remembered.

The darkness was so thick that the ship was no longer visible—only sounds, voices, breathing. When someone walked across the deck, you couldn't tell whether they were still human or already a memory.

Gomes clutched his compass as if the small piece of metal were some kind of truth. But even the needle trembled, spinning, pointing nowhere. "Even iron is afraid," he murmured.

The men whispered below deck. They said the sea wasn't empty. They said it moved beneath them—not as a current, but as a will. One swore he saw a hand sticking out of the water. Another voice. "He's calling us," he said. "Who?" "Everyone."

Gomes sent him to the cargo hold, supposedly to rest. The next morning, he was gone. "Overboard?" someone asked. "Or taken," another replied.

Nobody laughed.

Faith crept back aboard—but not as salvation. As a threat. They began carving symbols into the planks: crosses, words, names. Some prayed aloud, others cursed, still others talked in their sleep.

Gomes tried to command. "Reeve the sails! Check the ropes!" But the voices didn't return. The men were working, but not for him. They were following something else—a direction no one saw, but everyone felt.

At night, Gomes heard them whispering across the deck. "He says we have to go west." "He says the light is there." "He says he's waiting."

He stepped out of his cabin, wanted to scream, wanted to bring them back, but there they stood—a line of shadows, motionless, sightless, as if listening.

"What do you hear?" he asked. No answer. Just the creaking of the planks. Then someone said quietly, "Orders."

"From whom?" The man looked at him. There was nothing human in his eyes anymore. "From him."

Gomes stepped back. He wanted to believe they were crazy. But he felt it himself. This tingling in the air, this whispering in his bones. It was as if the sea

were speaking—not loudly, not clearly, but with a patience no human could endure.

He went into his cabin, sat down, and placed the compass on the table. The needle turned, stopped, and turned again. He wrote in his logbook:

"I hear him too."

That same night, they began to turn the rudder—secretly, slowly, toward the west. No one gave the order, but everyone knew it was one.

Gomes woke up, saw the course, saw the stars—or what was left of them—and realized: He no longer had a crew. Only believers.

He wanted to intervene, but there was this voice—deep, calm, salty—right in his head.

"Leave them. You're part of it."

And for a moment he felt peace. Brief, quiet, dangerously sweet.

Then came the laughter. Very quiet. Very close.

The sea came closer. Not in waves, not as a storm—it crept. It seemed to breathe through the wood, through the cracks, through the skin. The ship was no longer a place; it was a cell in which the sea itself lay imprisoned, and it began to stir.

Gomes heard it first. A deep, regular pounding, like a heartbeat, only larger, older, more indifferent. He placed his hand on the plank and felt it. "It's alive," he whispered.

The men nodded. No one asked what he was talking about anymore. Everyone already knew.

They had stopped sleeping. Sleep meant dreams, and dreams meant him. Magellan. The name was forbidden, but it hung in the air, heavy as damp rope.

Some said they had seen him—in the reflections of the water, in the lines of the mist, in the glow of the lazy light. Always the same figure: still, patient, half human, half sea.

Gomes ordered the fire to be extinguished. "Why?" someone asked. "Because light attracts him."

It was pointless. The light came from below.

At night, the sea began to glow—a sickly, pale green, as if it were breathing. And in this glow, they saw movement. Shadows slowly turning, as if people were swimming down there. Or memories of people.

One whispered, "They're coming." "Who?" "Those who followed him."

Gomes tried to reassure her, but his voice trembled. "No one's coming. We're alone." The man smiled. "Alone is a lie."

The next morning, he was found hanging over the railing, half in the water, half out, his eyes open, his lips moving. When they pulled him back, he murmured, "He says we should help him close the circle."

Then he died.

The sea was still. But the air vibrated. They no longer heard it with their ears, but with their entire bodies. This humming that wasn't a sound, but a kind of memory, felt before they understood it.

An officer approached Gomes. "They will act," he said. "What do you mean?" "They think he's leading them." "Where?" "To the truth."

Gomes laughed. A short, broken laugh. "And what if they're right?"

He went upstairs, onto the deck. The fog was thick, the water sluggish, the ship barely audible. Only the pounding remained. He whispered, "If you're there, show yourself."

And he did it.

No storm, no miracle. Just a shadow on the sea, larger than the ship, formless and faceless, but full of purpose.

Gomes fell to his knees. "What do you want?"

The answer came in the movement of the water, in the way the ship sank and rose again.

"So that you understand."

"What?"

"That you never led. Only were carried."

He looked into the darkness, and for a moment he was calm. Everything made sense. Too much sense.

Then he turned around – and saw the men. They stood there, silent, in a circle, the water up to their ankles, their eyes wide. "He said it," one whispered. "We must obey."

Gomes wanted to scream, wanted to command, wanted to do something, but he couldn't. The sea moved. It lifted her, lightly, gently, as if it wanted to comfort her.

And the next moment everything was quiet.

Only the throbbing remained. Deeper now. More satisfied.

They later said that the night wasn't just dark—it was alive. It was breathing. It was listening. And it wanted something.

The ship *San Anton* drifted like a lost thought across a sea that was no longer a sea, but a mirror of time. The wood creaked as if it were remembering something. The men walked barefoot so as not to wake it.

Gomes had stopped sleeping. Sleep was too dangerous. He kept coming back in dreams—Magellan. Not as a ghost, not as a human, but as a voice that knew how to give orders.

"You killed me to be free," she said. "Now you are free from yourselves."

Gomes wrote it down so the words would exist somewhere other than his head. But the ink smudged—from sweat or the sea's breath. He smelled salt, wood, iron. Blood, perhaps. Everything smelled the same.

It was hot below deck. Too hot. One of the men began to laugh, incessantly, hoarsely, hysterically. "He's tickling us," he screamed. "Who?" "The sea!"

Two held him down. One hit him. His body twitched, then he lay still. They carried him upstairs and threw him out. No one prayed anymore. It was too late for prayers.

The wind had stopped. The sails hung limp, as if ashamed. Only the sea moved—in its own way. In waves that came not from the wind, but from below.

One of the men, an old navigator, approached Gomes. "He's among us," he said. "I know." "He wants to talk." "Then talk to him." "I can't. He's using your voice."

Gomes looked at him, and in his gaze lay a tired agreement. "Then we'll listen."

They went on deck. The others followed, without orders. Men, shadows, remnants. The sea glowed faintly—a phosphorescent tremor that spread across the surface, as if there were fire beneath. Then came the sound: a rumble, but faint, as if from very far below.

The men fell to their knees. Not out of faith—out of instinct.

And there was the voice. Not loud. Not human. But clear.
"You obeyed him, and you betrayed him. Now obey me."

Gomes opened his mouth. "Who are you?"
"That which remains when you are nothing."

The sea rose slightly, just a few inches, but the ship groaned as if it were bearing a weight. The men murmured, nodded, whispered. "He commands," said one. "What?" asked Gomes. "That we sink."

Gomes laughed, short, dry, but there was no power left in the sound. "And if we don't do it?"

Silence. Then the crash of a wave against the wood. A dull thud, heavy, rhythmic – like a heartbeat.

The men looked at him. The water reflected in their eyes. Nothing human anymore, only movement.

"We must follow," said one. "This is no longer mutiny," whispered another. "This is obedience."

Gomes stepped to the railing. The sea below vibrated as if it were breathing. He felt it in his feet, in his knees, in his skull. He thought: *Maybe that was always the plan.*

He closed his eyes, and the whispering was everywhere. In the air. In the wood. In him.

"You gave the order. Now obey."

He nodded. And the sea smiled.

The ship creaked as if it were praying. The planks spoke in a language of pain and salt. Everything vibrated, everything was alive, and yet nothing was alive anymore. The men stood there like statues of flesh. Everyone knew something was coming, and no one wanted to know.

The sky was black, but not from night. It was the kind of darkness that comes not from outside, but from within. When the light inside you dies and you realize it was never really there.

Gomes stood at the wheel. His hands bloody from the wood, his eyes empty. "He's driving us," he said. No one objected.

The sea was still. Too still. No wind, no waves. Only that gentle pounding they all felt in their chests. The rhythm was the same—heart and sea in unison.

Then there was movement. Slowly at first. A trembling. Then a heaving. The ship rose as if something were breathing beneath it. "He's waking up," someone whispered. "No," said Gomes. "He never fell asleep."

The men fell to their knees. Some wept, some laughed, some prayed. The water around them began to glow—green, blue, silver. It was beautiful, in that sick, holy way that only things that are going to kill have.

"What does he want?" someone asked. "So that we understand," Gomes replied.

Then came the sound. Deep, muffled, ancient. Not thunder, not a storm—more like the sound of a mountain remembering that it was once lava. The sea didn't part. It opened. Not far, just enough for the ship to begin to sink within.

"Hold on!" someone yelled, but no one obeyed. It wasn't a sinking from panic—it was a falling toward the truth.

Gomes closed his eyes. He saw faces. Men who were already gone. Barbosa. Duarte. Magellan. They all stood there, under the water, calm, smiling. "I get it," whispered Gomes. Magellan nodded.
"You're late."

"What was the purpose?" asked Gomes.
"Purpose?"

The water vibrated. *"We are the purpose."*

The ship groaned. The masts bent. Planks broke. The sky disappeared. The men didn't scream. There was nothing left to scream about.

Gomes let go of the helm and stepped forward into the spray. "I command nothing more!" he cried. And the sea answered, calmly, mercifully: "*You never have.*"

Then came the final shock. A scream of wood, a crash of air, a roar of life – and the ship broke.

The sea took them all. Gently. Like a mother finally reclaiming her children.

For a moment there was silence. Then came the laughter. Quiet, deep, from the depths—not cruel, not mocking. Just old.

And nothing remained on the surface. No wood, no sail, no people. Just water.

Smooth. Calm. Content.

Three days later, flotsam was found. No bodies, no sails—just fragments. The sea had eaten, and it had eaten well. But it's a polite eater: it always leaves something behind, so you can see that you're never truly full.

Another ship – the *Victoria*— drifted northwest. The men on board were tired, starving, half-mad, but still alive. When they saw the remains of the wood, they immediately knew whose fate they were witnessing. No one said the name. It was never spoken again.

"The sea took her," said the helmsman. "No," murmured one, "she kept her."

They pulled a piece of plank out of the water, on which something was carved—illegible, half-washed away. Only one word was recognizable: "*Further.*"

Gomes was gone. The ship *San Antonia* disappeared, swallowed up, as if it had never been there. But sometimes, when the wind shifted, they thought they heard something. Not a sound, not a song—more like an echo.

"Do you hear that?" asked one. The captain of the *Victoria* shook his head. "Just the sea." "No," whispered the man. "The sea doesn't hear. It talks."

At night, when the water was calm, the men began to tell stories. Of the whispering water. Of the captain who spoke to the sea. Of the dead man who sailed on.

"He's leading them all now," one said. "Who?" "Those who fall."

And they believed it because they had to. At sea, faith is like food—you need it, no matter how corrupted it is.

The sky remained black, the sea remained calm, but the silence was different. Sometimes they thought they heard footsteps on deck when no one was there. Or the creaking of an oar, even though none were in use anymore. And sometimes, in the distance, they thought they saw another ship – without sails, without light, moving like a thought that never stops.

The men whispered: "This is the *San Antonio*." "Impossible," said the officers. But the crew knew better.

Once someone called out into the darkness: "What do you want?" And the echo came back – from the depths, soft, tired, but clear: "*Memory.*"

They drifted on. Days. Weeks. No one knew for sure anymore. Some began to write—no reports, no logbooks, just words. "The sea has a memory." "We are part of it." "He's still leading."

The wind came back, but it sounded different. And when it blew through the ropes, it sometimes sounded like someone was laughing.

Not loudly. Just enough to let you know he was there.

The *Victoria* She sailed on, slowly, stoically, as if she knew she was carrying something invisible. No one spoke it, but everyone felt it—an invisible burden, heavier than water, older than guilt.

The sea was calm again. Too calm. No wind, no storm, no screams. Just that unnatural silence that comes when something is finished—but hasn't yet ended.

The new commander, Juan Sebastián Elcano, sat in his cabin writing. His pen scratched across the paper, mechanically, evenly. He wrote no orders. No itineraries. Only memories.

*"We sail on the bones of those who believed.
They are not dead. They are the sea."*

He put the pen aside, stood up, and looked out. The sea shone silver in the moonlight. Peaceful, beautiful, innocent—like an animal sleeping after feeding.

The men worked quietly. They avoided the water, didn't look over the side. One of the younger men, barely twenty, asked, "Captain, do you think they're still there?" Elcano turned around. "Who?" "The others. The ones from the *San Antonio*." Elcano smiled wearily. "The sea gives nothing back." "But it keeps?" "Everything."

At night, when the wind filled the sails, they heard that laughter again. Quiet. Barely perceptible. But it was there—the same one Gomes had heard, the one Barbosa had heard, the one Magellan had last heard before the sea swallowed him. An ancient, patient laughter. Not mockery. Just knowledge.

One of the men began to dream. Of water that spoke. Of a shadow that walked beneath the surface and called him by name. He woke up and cried out. "He knows we're coming!"

Elcano commanded silence. But deep down, he knew the boy was right. They were coming—all of them. Someday. Sooner or later. No one just sailed across the sea. Everyone returned to it at some point.

The *Victoria* was now the last ship. The rest was history no one could tell because it spoke of its own accord. Sometimes, when they glided over particularly smooth water, they saw faces in the sea—barely visible, only for a fraction of a heartbeat. Men with empty eyes who didn't hate, didn't complain. They watched. Waiting.

"He's still leading them," one whispered. "Who?" "All those who think they're leading themselves."

Light appeared on the horizon. No sunrise, no land—just a faint, golden glow refracting in the water. "Land?" someone asked hopefully. Elcano looked at it for a long time. "No," he said. "That's memory."

He turned toward the wind. "Set sail," he commanded. And when the ship moved, it was as if the sea had nodded.

The wind grew stronger. The water began to whisper—barely audible, like distant voices. Words without language, but full of meaning. And the men knew they were part of a story that no one could finish.

Elcano later wrote in his logbook:

*"We thought we had circumnavigated the world.
But the truth is: it has swallowed us up."*

The sea was silent. Then, after a long pause, it laughed again—quietly, knowingly, endlessly.

And the *Victoria* sailed on.

Blood on the deck

The morning came blood red. Not a poetic red, not a sunrise to kneel down for – but the red of rust, wounds, and the sky that had watched for too long. *Victoria* drifted slowly south, her sails frayed, her wood black with salt. She was no longer a ship, but a scar that still moved.

Elcano stood at the bow, his face hard, his eyes dry. He was the last person who still believed in something like control. Perhaps because he knew it was only an illusion—but one needed to keep from going crazy.

The men were silent. No one spoke, no one laughed, no one prayed. Only the scraping of the ropes, the creaking of the planks, and the wind beating against the torn sails. There were fewer of them—fifteen, maybe sixteen. Some said thirteen. No one cared to count.

Then the hunger returned. The real hunger. The kind that lives in the bones and eats away at the mind. They had caught fish, but the meat was rotten. One ate anyway. Died in the night. "The sea gives and takes," said Elcano. "But mostly it takes."

The next day, the argument came. A piece of bread. A jug of water. Two men, both half-dead, half-animal. One drew a knife. The other bit him in the hand. The blood dripped onto the deck—slow, thick, dark.

And suddenly everything was real again. The pain, the anger, the will to survive. No faith, no sea, no God – only this primitive, honest *Now*.

One screamed, another laughed, a third attacked. Knives, fists, splinters of wood—everything became a weapon. The deck shook, the ship groaned. The sea was silent.

Elcano jumped in, kicking, hitting, yelling. "Back! Everyone back!" But no one listened. Blood spurted, hands grabbed, teeth gritted. A man fell, slipped, crashed against the railing—and was gone. No scream. Just a dull thud.

Then there was silence.

The men stood there, drenched in sweat, covered in blood, panting. One was crying. One was grinning. Elcano wiped his mouth, looked at the deck. Red stains, black shadows.

"So," he said quietly, "the end begins."

He stepped to the railing and looked into the water. The sea was smooth. Too smooth. And there—barely visible—a shadow beneath the surface. Large. Slow. Awake. He knew this movement. This waiting.

"You're still here," he whispered.

The water shimmered briefly. Then a wave came, light, almost friendly, like a caressing hand.

Elcano smiled wearily. "I know," he said. "I know what you want."

He turned around and looked into the faces of his men. "We're holding course," he said. "Where?" one asked. "Home." "Which one?" "The one that still believes us."

They nodded. They knew he was lying. But it was a beautiful lie—and at sea, that's the best you can hope for.

At night, the deck smelled of metal. One person said it was the sea. Another said, "No, that's blood."

And somewhere beneath them, deep, deeper than light, something laughed.

The smell remained. Iron, salt, fear—a stench that ate into every fiber. Even the wind smelled of decay. The men wiped away the blood with rags, but the wood retained it. Wood forgets nothing. It absorbs itself, just as humans absorb guilt.

In the morning, the first man was found. He lay dead at the railing, his throat slit, his eyes open. No struggle, no noise—just this expression, as if he had known. Beside him: a piece of bread. Hard, half-eaten, dried in the sun.

"Suicide?" one asked. Elcano looked at the body. "No. Trade."

No one objected. Everyone knew what he meant. Bread was currency. Blood was the price.

At midday, they stung fish again, catching two or three. But they stank when they threw them onto the deck—rotten, twisted, with black eyes. One of them kicked them. "The sea feeds us with itself." Elcano was silent. He knew what that meant. The sea wanted to feed them, but not keep them alive.

At night, the madness began again. Hunger became a voice that spoke as the sea spoke—quietly, calmly, sensibly.

"Eat. Survive. One is enough."

They woke up because they heard noises—not from above, but from below. A knock. Not a coincidence. Not a wind. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks. "What's that?" whispered one. "He's calling," answered another. "Who?" "The next one."

In the morning, a man was missing. No blood. No trace. Just an empty space. One swore he saw him go overboard—voluntarily, silently, like a man who finally understands. No one asked for reasons.

Elcano wrote in his logbook:

"The sea is now trading directly with us. I don't know who is holding the better course."

The days grew longer. The sun burned, but no one sweated anymore. They were too empty. The sea was calm, as if it were holding its breath.

Then the storm came. No wind, no rain—just waves, like walls. The ship creaked, groaned, bent, but didn't fall. And as they fought, as ropes broke and water came, one stood at the mast and laughed. "He'll show us!" he cried. "He'll show us!" Then he fell. Overboard. Gone.

When the storm ended, everything was quiet. Four men were missing.

Elcano stood on deck, bleeding, trembling, but erect. "No one dies anymore without my orders!" he roared. Then someone stepped forward—a young sailor, his face blank, his voice calm. "Then give the order, Captain."

Elcano looked at him, and there was no trace of obedience in his eyes. Only that emptiness that hunger leaves behind when he's finished.

He walked over to him, slowly, took the knife from his hand, looked at it—blunt, rusty, old. "I don't give orders anymore," he said. Then he threw the knife into the sea.

The water took it. No splash. No resistance. Just a quiet gurgling sound that sounded like approval.

"He's laughing," one whispered. "No," said Elcano. "He's counting."

And the sea was silent. Content.

The sky was gray like old meat. The sun no longer showed itself, as if it had had enough of all this. Only light, dull and without warmth, fell over the deck of the *Victoria*. It looked like a stage after the play – there was no applause, the actors were dead, the audience was the sea.

Elcano walked across the deck, slowly, cautiously, as if he were stepping on something he shouldn't wake. The wood was sticky, reddish, damp. It had seen too much. He subconsciously counted every step, every breath. Routine as a last anchor against the madness.

The men stopped talking. Words had become useless. They communicated with glances, gestures, and breaths. A roll of the eyes could now kill. One wrong move meant death. Everyone knew it. Everyone was just waiting for the next person to make the first move.

Hunger was no longer a pain, but a state. Like gravity. It made her sluggish, dull, but wide awake to the wrong things. And in this state, just before she burst, the whispering came again.

First only in our heads, then out loud.

"You saw him."

"You heard him."

"You are like him."

Elcano did what he always did—he wrote. Not for himself. Not for anyone. Only because writing meant you still had hands.

"I feel him. In the plank, in the wind, in the voices. He was never gone. Maybe he was never human."

In the night came the sound. No storm, no wind—a knocking, from below, rhythmic. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks. "That's him," whispered one. "Shut up," said another, but he was trembling.

Then suddenly someone stood up—the young sailor who had challenged Elcano. He went to the railing without hesitation and looked into the water. "He's calling." "Stay, damn it!" Elcano shouted. The boy turned around. His face was calm, almost peaceful. "He tells you to follow."

Then he jumped. No scream. Just a splash, which was immediately swallowed.

Elcano stared into the water. He saw nothing. Then—for a fraction of a heartbeat—he saw a hand. Not sinking. Reaching.

He backed away, stumbled, and almost fell. "Enough," he whispered. "Enough now."

But the sea didn't listen. It laughed again. Very quietly. Very close.

The men began to hear laughter. First in the wind, then in the wood, then within themselves. One began to giggle. Then another. Then everyone.

Elcano shouted. "Quiet! Be silent!" But the laughter continued—not loud, not joyful, but deep, controlled, like a choir that already knows the song will last forever.

They stood around him. Faces pale, lips chapped, eyes black. He understood: It was no longer a mutiny. It was a prayer.

"Whom do you serve?" he asked. One answered: "The one who speaks when no one listens."

The sea thundered against the ship, but there was no wind. This wasn't a storm. This was breath.

Elcano reached for his sword, drew it, and held it before him. "Then at least give me a reason." "Because you're still breathing," said one. Then it began.

Fists, knives, pieces of wood, nails. No plan, no order. Just this raw, honest killing. No hatred, no anger. Just purpose.

The deck shook, blood spurted, wood splintered. One fell. Then another. Elcano fought, screamed, hit, fell, got up again.

When it was over, only four remained. The rest lay still, some half in the water, some half human, half memory.

Elcano gasped, his face covered in blood—his own, someone else's, it didn't matter. "You're crazy," he whispered. One smiled. "No. We're free."

And deep below them, there was another knock. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks.

Elcano looked up at the sky. "If that's you," he said, "then finally finish it."

The sea was silent. Then the wave came.

The sea lay there like a corpse—still, smooth, heavy. No waves, no wind, no sound. Only the sound of blood seeping into the cracks in the planks, slowly, patiently, as if the ship itself wanted to drink it.

Elcano stood among the corpses. He didn't count them. Why should he? Numbers had lost their meaning. Each man was now just a piece of history that no one would ever tell again. The sun burned on the wood, and the stench began to change—from iron to flesh, from death to memory.

He was alone. Maybe. Maybe not. That wasn't so certain anymore. Sometimes he heard footsteps. Sometimes voices. Sometimes his own.

He washed the blood from his hands. The water was lukewarm, almost friendly. Then he looked into the sea—and saw himself. But the reflection smiled before he did.

"You again," he murmured. The reflection didn't speak, but the water moved. Circles, slow, steady. He understood.

"See what I mean?"

The voice was inside him. Not loud, not human. "I see everything," he said.

"Too much."

"Too little. You think you've survived. But you're just what remains."

He laughed. It sounded like a cough. "And who are you?"

"I am what you hoped to lead."

The sea pulsed. Only slightly. The sun reflected on the surface, and for a moment he saw faces in it—the men who had fallen, their eyes open, peaceful, as if they were sleeping.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want you to carry it forward."

"What?"

"The song."

He didn't understand. Or he pretended not to. But deep down, he knew it wasn't a song made of notes. It was the sound—that ancient, eternal murmur that every person hears when they think there's silence.

He placed his hand on the deck. It vibrated slightly, like an animal dreaming.

"You're alive," he whispered.

"We are the life you don't want."

He walked across the deck. Every step sounded too loud. Every shadow seemed to breathe. Then he heard the knocking again. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks. "I'm coming," he said quietly.

He took a lantern, went to the railing, and looked into the depths. Nothing. Only darkness that knew him. "If you want me to end this," he whispered, "then say so."

"Finish?" said the sea. "This isn't the end. This is the circle."

Elcano nodded. He finally understood that no one had killed Magellan, no one had betrayed him, no one had replaced him. He had never been gone. He had become the water. And everyone who sailed on was just one more drop in his body.

Elcano saw the sun over the endless expanse, and for a moment he thought it was smiling. He smiled back. Then he spoke loudly, calmly, almost reverently: "Orders received."

The sea responded with a soft gurgle that sounded like contentment.

And somewhere deep down, the knocking began again. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks.

Night came without warning—no dawn, no transition, simply darkness. So complete that even death could disappear into it. Elcano stood alone on the deck, and the sea was no longer around him, but within him. He felt it in his bones. There was salt in every movement. Every thought smelled of water.

The ship was silent, but it breathed. Slowly. Evenly. As if it were no longer made of wood, but of flesh. Sometimes a plank would crack, and it would sound like a joint. Sometimes the wind would rush through the sails, and it would sound like a breath.

Elcano had stopped trying to distinguish between wood and skin, wind and voice, blood and water. He knew they had long since become the same.

He walked across the deck, barefoot, his feet wet with dew that tasted of iron. "I'm here," he said quietly.

"I know," it replied. "You were always here."

The sea moved, barely visible. A shimmer, green, blue, like an eye flashing beneath the surface. "I understand now," whispered Elcano. "The course was never a line. It was a circle."

"Now you're talking properly," said the sea. "Now you belong."

He laughed. It sounded strange, almost childlike. "I am you," he said.

"Not yet. But soon."

He looked up. No stars. No sky. Just this endless black, which felt like water. Perhaps the sky was the sea, only seen from below. Perhaps everything was sea.

He stepped to the railing and looked down. Something moved beneath the surface. Not a shadow—more like a memory. Faces, bodies, hands. All still. All waiting. They looked at him, but they demanded nothing. They were part of it.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"That you stop asking."

He nodded. Slowly. Then he placed his hand on the wood of the ship. It felt warm, almost alive. "I'm the captain," he said.

"You are the mouth," it replied. "I am the breath."

He felt something shift inside him. Not pain. Not fear. Just transformation. The blood in his veins became heavy. Cold. Slow.

He could hear it—a deep, rhythmic roar. No longer a heartbeat, but the sound of surf.

The lantern next to him flickered, went out. The light disappeared, but he still saw. He saw everything. The sea, the dead, the circles, the hands calling him.

And he saw Magellan. Standing on the surface, barefoot, smiling, calm. "You did it," said Elcano.

"No," replied Magellan. *"I started."*

Then he extended his hand. Elcano didn't hesitate. He took it.

The sea gently pulled him down. No cry, no resistance. He glided like one returning home.

The ship remained. But it was no longer empty. The wood gleamed, dark, wet. And if you listened closely, you could hear it breathing.

Slow. Deep. Content.

The sea was quiet again. Too quiet. No wind, no sound, no animals. Only the *Victoria*, gliding slowly over the water - all alone, without a crew, without a captain, but with a will that was stronger than any human.

She sailed even though there was no wind. Her sails didn't billow; she simply moved—like a thought that had decided not to stop. The waves avoided her as if they respected her.

The deck gleamed dark red. Blood, long since dried, but never gone. If you looked closely, you could see lines, circles, patterns—as if the wood had decided to continue writing the story itself. And when the moon fell on the deck, you could recognize the words. Not with your eyes, but with your feelings. Commands. Names. Prayers. Curses.

The ship spoke. Not loudly, not clearly—but incessantly. The planks creaked like voices.

The sails rustled like breath. And the rudder moved as if it had an invisible hand.

The sea listened. It was calm, reverent. It knew its child.

One night, as the moon hung crookedly over the waterline, other ships appeared. Spanish merchant ships, sluggish, tired, with full bellies of gold and sugar. They saw the *Victoria* They called. No answer.

They came closer. No lights on board, no movement. Just this unnatural gliding, as if she were being pulled. "Hello!" someone called. Silence.

Then the *Victoria* lightly against her stern. No damage, just contact. The men leaned over the railing. And then they heard it.

No wind, no waves—just a sound, deep, quiet, unnaturally steady. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

One of the sailors crossed himself. "Holy Mother..." The captain of the merchant ships ordered: "Back! Immediately!" But they couldn't look away.

The deck of the *Victoria* began to glow. Not bright, not warm—just a pale, pulsating light coming from the cracks. And then they saw him.

Just for a split second. A figure, at the wheel. Tall, calm, the face unclear, as if made of fog. But the posture—it was unmistakable.

"Magellan..." someone whispered.

The light went out. The *Victoria* turned slowly, as if she had seen enough, and glided away – again towards the west, where there was no more land.

None of the men aboard the merchant ships ever spoke of it again. But the knocking remained in their heads. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks.

And on some nights, when they were later at sea themselves, they heard it again – very quietly, under the wind.

Then they knew that the *Victoria* still sailing. Without wind, without crew, without destination. Only with a mission dictated by the sea itself.

A ship of blood and faith. A sermon of wood and water. Proof that nothing ever ends.

On the morning of September 3, 1522, they were seen. A dark dot on the horizon, at first little more than a shadow, then the silhouette of a ship that no one had expected. *Victoria*. She was back. But she wasn't the same.

The fishermen off the coast of Sanlúcar de Barrameda later recounted that at first they thought they were seeing a ghost ship. No wind, no sails, no oars—and yet it was moving. Slowly. Determinedly. Like something that wasn't coming, but had to return.

As she entered the harbor, all was silent. No shouting, no cheering, no music. Just the squeaking of the ropes, the soft lapping of the water against the hull—and that knocking. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks.

The men on land stood there, unable to move. Some crossed themselves. Others whispered, "That's not possible."

A boat was sent out, cautiously, as if appeasing a beast. Three sailors climbed aboard. And found—nothing.

No captain, no crew, no provisions. Just salt, dust, and what looked like dried blood seeping from the cracks in the wood. A book lay open in the cabin. The ink was smudged, but the last words were legible:

*"We have closed the circle.
But we've come full circle."*

One of the sailors later swore that the deck moved as he walked across it—not because of the wind, but as if the ship itself were breathing. Another said he heard a voice, deep, calm, very close:
"Further."

The *Victoria* She remained in the harbor for two days. Then she began to take on water—even though there was no hole in the hull. The wood soaked up water, the planks creaked, and on the night of September 5th, she disappeared. No storm, no fire, no battle. She simply slipped away as if she had never come.

In the morning, only the logbook was found. It was lying on land, right next to the quay. Wet, but undamaged.

Elcano was celebrated as a hero. The Crown wrote: *"He circumnavigated the world."*

The church wrote: *"God guided him."*

But the fishermen remained silent. They knew that no one had ever made this return.

In the years that followed, stories were heard. Of sailors who saw a ship sailing without sails at night on the Atlantic. Of a pounding that came from the depths. Of voices whispering names long forgotten.

A monk looking out to sea in Cádiz wrote:

"Perhaps Magellan was not a man, but a beginning."

And the sea—the endless, patient sea—was silent as always. Only sometimes, when the wind was blowing just right, could you hear it. Very quietly. Very deeply. A laugh. And then the knocking.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The world called it legend. But the sea called it memory.

And it waited.

Winter in Hell – Patagonia

The sky hung low, leaden, old. The wind cut like glass. Winter in Patagonia wasn't weather, it was a judgment. And Magellan, the man with the iron gaze and the shattered soul, stood amidst the snow and sand, wondering if God had forgotten him—or if God simply wasn't interested anymore.

The camp was miserable. Torn tents, half-starved men, salt on their skin, chill in their bones. Firewood was scarce. And when they made some, it smelled of fear, sweat, and death. The men hated him now. They hated Magellan with that kind of hatred that develops slowly—when faith evaporates, but hunger remains.

He knew it. He saw it in their faces. They no longer spoke to him, they spoke *above* him. "He is leading us to death." "He thinks he is God." "He is crazy."

And perhaps they were right. For Magellan was now speaking to things no human should hear—to the wind, to the shadows, to the sea itself.

Every night, when the frost crept through the tent like a knife, he stood outside and listened. The cracking of the ice. The whistling of the cold. The sound of the sea. And sometimes—just sometimes—he thought he heard the sea whisper.

"Further."

One word. Always the same. Onward.

But where, damn it? There was no "further." Only cold, hunger, death. The men wanted to go back. To Spain, to Portugal, to hell—no matter where, as long as they got out of this white void.

Magellan looked at the snow and laughed. A laugh that showed more teeth than hope. "Back?" he cried. "There's no going back. Anyone who wants to go back can end it right here!"

One dared to answer. A broad-shouldered Basque of a man, with hands like boulders. "Then finish it first, Captain."

Silence. Only the wind. Only the sea. Only the cold.

Magellan stepped forward, slowly, heavily, as if every step would decide the world. "I'm not finishing anything," he said. "I'm the beginning."

The men looked at him as if he'd lost his mind. And perhaps he had. But what was mind worth when the sky laughed at you and the sea only knew you in order to swallow you?

One spat in the snow. Another reached for his knife. A third laughed, quietly, like a dog. And Magellan saw them all—every single one.

"You think the sea is waiting?" he said. "The sea *eats*. And if you're lucky, you won't even notice when it's your turn."

Then he went to the fire, stretched out his hands, and looked into the flames. He muttered something no one understood. A prayer, perhaps. Or a curse. Or both.

Behind him, someone whispered, "He talks to ghosts." "Who else?" said another. "No one can hear him anymore."

Magellan smiled. "I don't need people."

And the wind answered. Very quietly. Very gently.
"I know."

Winter didn't come. It was already there. Always. Only the men had noticed it too late. It lay in their bones, in their thoughts, in the corners of their eyes where dreams once lived. Now there was only frost.

The sea was frozen, but not still. Beneath the ice, something stirred, as if still breathing, patiently waiting. The ships creaked in the harbor like caged animals. The wood was white with salt, the sails hard as bone. Everything stiffened, everything trembled, everything lived only out of habit.

Magellan held them together—or pretended to. He walked from fire to fire, his eyes blank and his smile like a scar. "A little more," he said. "Just a little more." A little more of what? Hope? Meat? Time? No one asked any more questions.

They ate whatever they found. Fish, raw and bitter. Seaweed. Rats. Then dogs. Then leather. One boiled his boots. Another cut flesh from the corpse of a comrade after the frost had taken him. No one looked. No one screamed. It was just another day.

The cold made them slow, but not stupid. They thought. And thinking was dangerous. They thought of home, of sun, of bread. And the more they thought, the more they hated the man who had brought them here.

Magellan.

They whispered when he slept—if he slept at all. "He betrayed us." "He wants to play God." "He wants to sacrifice us all."

One—the Portuguese Estevão—swore he saw Magellan at night on the shore, alone, kneeling, talking. "With whom?" someone asked. "With the water."

Another laughed. "The water doesn't talk." "Then wait," said Estevão. "Wait until it calls you."

The next day, Estevão was dead. Frozen to death. His eyes wide open, fixed on the ice, as if he had seen something no one should. They found him smiling.

Magellan did not bury him. "He listens better now," he said.

The men looked at him with that look that contains more knives than words.

During the night, the wind blew. It wasn't an ordinary wind—it had a direction. It came from the sea, but it smelled of metal, of blood, of memories. The men

huddled around the fires, but the flames were weak. They weren't just cold physically. They were cold in their souls.

Then someone began to sing. An old song, hoarse, without melody. A song about homecoming, about wine, about women. One after another, they joined in. Magellan stood in the darkness, saw them, heard them, and for the first time in weeks, he felt something resembling pity.

But then the sea came. A crash, distant, dull, deep. Not a storm—just a breath. The ice cracked. The water rose, as if it wanted to listen.

The men fell silent. Magellan stepped forward, his gaze fixed on the black hole opening between the ice floes. "I know," he said. "I promised you. And I'll take you there."

"Where to?" someone asked. Magellan turned around. His smile was thin, cold, holy. "To the end."

The days ceased to be days. There was no before and no after. Only white. White that burned. White that cut. White that prayed. And in this white, the mind began to crack.

Hunger had become a god, and the cold its prophet. The men followed him blindly because he was honest. The Bible in Patagonia wasn't written—it grew in their stomachs, in the frost, in the voices that crept through the tents at night.

Magellan was their Moses, their madman, their savior with the cold forehead. He no longer spoke to them. He spoke to *her*—the lake.

Every night he stood on the shore, sword in hand, the water frozen to the horizon. He muttered things. Names. Prayers. Commands. Sometimes he wept, sometimes he laughed. Once he carved a cross into the ice—deep, straight, with the point pointing west. And he whispered, "This is the way."

The men watched him. One whispered, "He's talking to death." Another, "No, to the wind." A third, "No. To himself."

But no one dared to disturb him. Because whoever disturbed him died. Not immediately. Not visibly. But soon.

They found Duarte three days later, frozen to death in his hammock, his mouth open as if he had screamed. His face was black. Magellan simply said, "He was thinking too loudly."

The men began to see signs—in the ash, in the snow, in their dreams. One swore the ice floes had moved as they prayed. Another said he had seen a face beneath the ice. "Whose?" one asked. "His," whispered the other. "The sea."

Magellan heard this. And instead of laughing, he nodded. "Yes," he said. "He sees us."

Then he walked out onto the ice. Barefoot. The frost bit, the ice cracked, but he kept going.

Until he stood in the middle of the area, raised his arms and shouted: "I am here!"

Silence. Only the cracking. Only the breathing. Then a muffled sound. Like an answer. The ice trembled, ever so slightly. Magellan laughed. "I heard you!"

The men stood on the shore, staring at him, half praying, half cursing. "He's lost," said one. "Or found," said another.

In the evening he returned, calm, quiet, his face pale, but his eyes burning. He sat down by the fire, looked at them all, and said, "I know now how to get through."

No one asked what he meant. They knew. They didn't want to know.

No one slept that night. The fire crackled, the ice sang, and the sea—sleeping beneath them—began to dream.

And in this dream everyone heard the same word.
"Further."

The night came like an animal—silent, lurking, hungry. No star, no moon, only the sound of the wind whistling through the frozen ropes like broken bones. The men lay in their tents, but no one slept. Everyone waited. Everyone listened. Everyone hated.

Hunger had changed their faces. No longer people—shadows that breathed. The frost had turned their fingers white, their nails black. Their eyes glowed, as if a tiny remnant of life still burned within them, unaware that it was long dead.

And in their midst – Magellan. He wasn't asleep. He was standing outside again, on the ice, barefoot, his coat open.

He spoke. With the wind, with God, with the sea, with whoever else was listening.

"I guided you," he murmured. "I showed you that the world doesn't end. And you curse me?" His breath steamed like smoke. "You are not lost. You are part of it."

One of the men saw him from the tent. "Part of what?" he whispered. "Of his madness," hissed another.

Then came the word they were all thinking, but no one wanted to say: "We have to kill him."

It hung in the air, heavy, inevitable. Once spoken, it became true.

At first, no one was silent. Then one nodded. Then another. "Before he kills us all," said one. "Before we all become like him," said another.

They laid out the plan. At night, by the fire. No noise, no fighting. One knife, one cut, silence. Quick. Clean. The end.

But nothing is clean in hell.

As night fell, the frost crackled like glass. The fire flickered dimly. Magellan sat there, his eyes open but unseeing. Three men stepped out of the shadows. Slowly. Not a word.

One drew the knife. The second held his breath. The third looked up, as if hoping someone would forgive him.

Then the ice cracked.

A clap of thunder from below. No wind, no beast, no storm – the sea itself. It screamed. It tore. It moved. The camp trembled, the tents fell, the men tumbled, the fire went out.

Magellan jumped up. "He's waking up!" he cried. His voice sounded like metal. "You fools! He hears you!"

The men backed away. The ice vibrated beneath their feet. And then—very briefly—they saw it.

A light. Beneath the surface. Green. Movable. Large.

"What is that?" someone shouted. Magellan laughed. "It! The circle! The depth! Everything!"

Then one of them rushed forward. The knife flashed. A scream—short, raw, real. Magellan fell, his hand on his chest. Blood steamed on the ice.

Silence.

The wind held its breath. The men stared. One whispered, "It's over."

But it wasn't over.

Beneath the ice, the light pulsed. Slowly. Evenly. Like a heart.

The sea had heard something. And the sea forgets nothing.

The wind stood still, as if even it were afraid to disturb what had happened. Magellan lay on the ice like an offering—his eyes half-open, his hands clasped, as if he had known. His blood froze into black glass. No drama, no thunder, no scream from the sky. Only silence.

The men stood around. Twelve shadows in the twilight. No one said anything. No one cheered. It wasn't a victory. It was a necessary decay.

One—Espinosa—stepped forward, wiping his knife in the snow. "Now we're in the lead," he said. But even his voice sounded as if it didn't believe it.

They threw Magellan's body into the sea. The ice cracked, as if insulted at giving him up. He sank immediately. No resistance. No buoyancy. Only a faint hiss, as if water were returning to water.

Then the light came. First faint, then stronger. Green, blue, like rotting fire beneath the surface. "What is that?" someone whispered. "Just the moonlight," said Espinosa. But there was no moon.

The light pulsed. One, two, pause. One, two. Like a heartbeat. Like a breath. Like a laugh.

Then came the smell. Not salt. Not death. Something else. Something alive. Something that smelled of warmth—of skin, of blood, of memory.

The men retreated. One fell. Another raised his fists. Espinosa stepped forward, screaming into the ice: "He's dead! Do you hear me? Dead!"

The sea answered.

The ice broke open. Just a crack, barely a hand's breadth—but deep, endlessly deep. A sound emerged. Not a word, not a sound—just a rushing that contained everything humans call fear. Then steam rose. Warm. Sweet. Almost friendly.

One leaned forward. "He's breathing," he whispered.

Something touched his foot. He screamed, fell, was dragged. No grip, no kicking helped. The sea took him, slowly, with relish, like a tongue tasting.

The others ran. Some slipped, one broke his leg, another laughed hysterically. "He wants all of us!" one shouted. Espinosa turned around, ran out onto the ice, and screamed, "What are you!?"

The light answered. It pulsed, brighter, faster. And then they heard it. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

Espinosa sank to his knees. "Lord," he whispered. "Forgive us." But there was no God. Only the sea.

He put down the knife, the blood freezing on it, and looked into the depths. "Magellan," he said. Something answered.
"Further."

The ice shook. The camp collapsed. The tents fell. And when morning came, the place was empty.

Only the sea was there. Smooth. Calm. But if you looked closely, you could see something beneath the surface—a silhouette, large, still, walking.

The next morning, there was nothing left to remind us of people. Only remnants. An overturned tent, a torn canvas, a few footprints that ended in the frost like unfinished sentences. The snow had swallowed everything, as if it itself had become guilty.

The sea lay still. Too still. No wind, no sound, no echo. Only this feeling that something lurked beneath it that would never sleep again.

The last three survivors wandered through the camp like ghosts who had forgotten their bodies. They barely spoke anymore. Words had become dangerous. Words awakened what they felt beneath them. They ate ice. They chewed leather. They drank snow water that tasted of salt.

The sky remained leaden gray, as if light were only a memory. The frost ate their fingers, their lips burst, their blood was black.

On the third day, they heard footsteps. No wind, no animal—footsteps. Slow. Steady. Heavy. They came from the sea.

One, the eldest, reached for a spear, but his hands no longer obeyed. Then came the fog. Thick, damp, warm. And in this fog—voices.

Not many. One. Not loud. But everywhere.

"You thought you killed me."

"But you gave birth to me."

The men fell to their knees. "Lord, spare us," one stammered. The sea laughed. No sound, no echo—only this movement, this gentle rise and fall, that sounded like mockery.

"I am not a master."

"I am what remains."

The fog thickened. Then – a shadow. An outline. Broad, tall, naked. No face. No flesh. Just movement.

The elder whispered, "Magellan?" The voice didn't answer. But the sea shimmered green beneath the ice.

The men ran. No goal, no purpose—just away. But the land was endless. And the cold was faster.

The first fell. The ice beneath him cracked, very quietly, as if apologizing. The second tried to hold him, but there was only fog. The third saw it happen—and laughed.

"We're part of it," he shouted. "He said it!" Then he, too, was gone.

And then there was nothing.

Patagonia was silent. The snow settled like dust over what was once life. The sea remained black, but beneath it glowed—slowly, rhythmically. Like a heart.

Later, much later, when another group of sailors arrived, they found the camp. No bodies. No blood. Only tracks leading to the sea.

And on a piece of wood, half burned, were carved words:

"He's not sleeping."

When they turned it over, they saw a second line on the back.

"Expected."

Spring came like a lie. The sun stood above the ice, but it didn't warm the sea. It only illuminated what remained of the winter—burned tents, split masts, anchors half-sunken in the frost. And the sea. This sea that had seen everything, knew everything, and forgot nothing.

A new troop arrived from the north. A supply ship no one had expected. Twenty men, hungry, tired, but full of hope. They laughed as they reached the bay called "Puerto del Hambre" on the maps—the Port of Hunger. A joke, they thought. A bad name.

But the laughter stuck in their throats.

There was no camp. No people. Only remains. A few crates, half-swallowed by the ice. A mast protruding from the snow like a finger, accusing the sky. And the silence.

They went ashore. The frost crunched beneath their boots, the wind smelled of iron. "Magellan must have moved on," said the captain. But no one believed it.

They found traces. Footprints leading into the sea. Not from animals. From humans. The last steps ended in the water. No turning back. No turning back. Only an ending that seemed intentional.

"Perhaps they drowned," said one. "Perhaps they were summoned," said another. The captain looked at him. "By whom?" "By the sea."

At night they set up camp. The fire wouldn't burn. The wood was damp, the salt soaked into the flames and turned them blue. They told stories to keep the cold at bay.

An old sailor spoke of spirits that protect the sea. Another recounted hearing of a monk in Cádiz who claimed that Magellan could never have died because the sea knows no death. The younger ones laughed nervously. But no one contradicted him.

Then, in the middle of the night, they heard it. The knocking. Three knocks. Pause. Three knocks. Quiet. Close. From the depths.

The captain stood up, his face pale. "What the hell is that?" One answered in a whisper, "He's knocking." "Who?" "The one who made the path."

The sea began to glow—barely visible, greenish, like a memory. Someone whispered, "He's alive." Another, "No. It's alive."

They fled. The next morning, the beach was empty. Only a fire that never went out and a piece of wood on which someone had carved a word:

"Further."

Later, in Spain, the captain told his story. No one believed him. He grew old, drank himself blind, and died in a coastal inn. He was found at the table with his logbook open. The last page was blank except for one sentence, written in shaky handwriting:

"I can still hear him."

And outside the window, the sea crashed against the rocks. Slowly. Evenly. Patiently.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

People who forget heaven

The sun returned like a traitor who repented too late. It burned down on the battered men who had survived the hell of Patagonia, as if testing whether there was anything left of them that could burn. They had conquered the cold, they told themselves. But the truth was, the cold had only hollowed them out—now the sun came to roast the remains.

The men crawled across the deck like rats that hadn't seen daylight. Their skin was gray, cracked, and covered in salt. Their lips were bleeding, their teeth

wobbly, some missing. The ships were barely ships anymore—they were coffins with masts. The sails stank of mold and old flesh, the ropes were sticky with blood, sweat, and tears.

"We're still alive," said one. "Don't call it life," replied another.

Magellan was dead—perhaps. But his shadow remained. He was in every breath, in every piece of wood, in every gaze that rested too long on the sea. Even the sun seemed to know him.

They thought they were finally free. But freedom was just another word for exhaustion.

The men had stopped looking up at the sky. Not out of disbelief—out of shame. For they knew: Heaven was watching. And it was laughing.

The priest on board, a broken man with a cracked voice, murmured prayers no one could understand. He spoke of salvation, of trial, of grace. But the men heard only the sea.

"If there is a God," one said, "he's down there. Between the waves. And he's slowly devouring us."

That evening, they caught an albatross. A large, white animal, proud, beautiful, like a remnant of a memory from another world. They should have prayed. Instead, they ate it raw.

The sky turned red, as if it wanted to vomit. The sea was silent. The sun set, and the men pulled the blankets over themselves as if darkness were an avoidable illness.

But in the night the whispering came again. First quietly, then more clearly. Not the sea this time – but voices. Familiar voices. Those of those who were no longer there.

"You forgot him," they said. "Who?" whispered one. "Heaven."

One stood up, staggered, and looked up. No stars. Only darkness. He laughed, bitterly, desperately. "Maybe he just left."

In the morning he was hanging from the mast. No note, no word, no reason. Just his gaze upwards, frozen, searching.

The priest crossed himself. "He saw heaven," he said. One replied, "Then he saw something that no longer belongs to us."

And the sea glittered in the sun as if it understood everything.

The sky remained empty. Day after day. A pristine, blue void that they hated more than the storms. They had once prayed to the sky, but now they spat at it. It gave nothing, it took nothing—it was only there, as proof that they had been forgotten.

The sun burned their names out of their skin. Every shadow was too thin, every movement too much. They smelled of salt and decay, of leather, of what happens when hope becomes flesh and rots.

The water was running low. The sea lay around them, endless, hungry, within reach, but undrinkable. "It's like sitting in a brothel, full of women but without a dick," someone said, and no one laughed.

They began to ask the sea. Not God, not the stars, not the sky – the sea. It was there, it answered. In waves, in roar, in the creaking of the wood.
"Further."

Sometimes they heard Magellan's voice in it, sometimes their own. Sometimes there was no difference.

The priest fell silent. His prayers ceased, and so did his faith. He stood at the bow, looking into the depths, his lips moving as if he were confessing something. "I heard him," he said. "Who?" someone asked. "The one who lives below."

"The sea?" He nodded.

"And what does he say?" "He laughs at the sky."

Nobody objected.

At night, dreams came, heavy and warm, as if they were wet from within. Dreams of water breathing, of faces beneath the surface smiling and whispering. One of the men woke up, drenched in sweat, panting. "I saw him," he said. "Who?" "Magellan. He was down below. He's going." "Where?" "West."

By morning, the man had disappeared. Only his shoes remained.

The sky remained pristine, unmoved. The sun shone as if it knew nothing.

The priest began to scratch the cross out of his collar. "For what?" someone asked. "So he can recognize me," he replied.

"Who?" "The one who listens."

On the third day, the wind came. A mild, warm wind that smelled of life. They laughed, danced, screamed. But the wind smelled wrong. Sweet. Like blood that was already old.

"The sea gives us signs," said the priest. "The sea gives us hunger," said one. "Both are the same," he replied.

In the evening they saw the sky again – but not blue, not golden. Red. Red like fire, like rage, like revenge.

"He remembers," one whispered. "Who?" "Heaven."

But the sky said nothing.

And the sea continued to whisper:
"Further."

It began with a scream. Not a scream of pain, but of despair—raw, naked, human. One of the men, a small, scrawny Portuguese man with yellow teeth, knelt at the bow, pounding on the wood with his bare fists. "He can't hear us!" he screamed. "He can't fucking hear us!"

"Who?" someone asked, but the question was stupid. He meant God. And God was gone.

No one prayed anymore. The sea was more honest than the sky. It took, it gave, it smelled of truth. They saw waves like faces, foam like hands brushing against them, and sometimes, when the light fell just right, they thought the sea was watching them. And the worst part was: they found comfort in it.

One suggested making a sacrifice. Not out of superstition, but out of hope—the last thing they had left.

They caught a fish, the first in days. A gray, pale thing with glassy eyes. "He looks like one of us," someone said. "Then it's a sign."

The priest, half-mad, muttered Latin snatches, but it sounded more like a curse than a blessing. They cut open the fish, poured a few drops of wine—the last bit—into its mouth, and threw it into the sea.

“Take it,” said the priest, “and give us wind.”

The sea took it. And answered.

An hour later, the wind came—strong, cold, with the smell of iron and seaweed. The sails stretched, the ship lurched forward. The men cheered, laughed, and cried. One fell to his knees and kissed the deck.

"He heard it!" he cried. The priest nodded. "No *the*," he said. "*It*."

They understood. God wasn't dead—he had just moved. From heaven to the sea.

From then on, they spoke to the water. They whispered when they scooped. They thanked it when they caught fish. They cursed when the sea was too calm—and apologized afterward.

The sky remained empty. It no longer had any power. It was merely decoration.

One night, while the ship lay still, someone looked over the side. He came back, pale, trembling. "I saw him." "Who?" "The fish. The one we sacrificed. He's alive." "Nonsense." "No," he whispered. "He had my face."

In the morning, he was no longer found. Only the water was restless, as if he had slept badly.

The men began to love the sea. Not out of trust, but out of fear. Like you love a predator that hasn't eaten you yet.

The priest painted crosses on the deck—but they were upside down. "Why?" someone asked. "Because he wants to see it that way," he said.

And when the sky once again turned blood red, the sea laughed. Not loudly, not cruelly—only knowingly. Like a father who has found his children again.

They began to invent rituals. Not because they believed, but because they had nothing else left. The sky was silent, the sea spoke – so they spoke back.

The priest led them. He had stopped mentioning his God. His eyes were empty, his beard covered in salt, his hands sore from praying against wood. "The water wants order," he said. "No chaos. No doubt. Only obedience."

They listened, nodded. Obedience was easier than thinking.

Every morning they threw a drop of blood into the sea. Just one. A cut in the finger, a silent sacrifice. "So it knows we're alive," said the priest. "So it lets us live."

Then the animals came. Birds that sat on the ship, fish that floated in the water. They called them gifts. And began to sacrifice them.

Once, a man was found talking to the fish. He was crouching at the stern, whispering into the water. When asked, he said, "They're listening. They're talking from below. They say he's still there."

"Who?" "The one who started it."

They knew who he meant. Magellan. The name was forbidden, but it hung in the air like sulfur.

One of the younger ones, Alonso, began to consider himself chosen. He claimed the sea had touched him. "At night," he said. "It showed me the course." The priest nodded reverently. "Then you are its mouth."

From then on, Alonso spoke only to the sea. He stopped sleeping, barely ate, and stood for hours at the railing, staring into the depths. One morning, he stood in the middle of the deck, his arms wide open, his face toward the sun. "He said it!" he cried. "We must cleanse ourselves!"

"How?" someone asked. "With salt."

They didn't know what that meant. Until he took the first one—the old baker from Seville—and poured seawater over him until the man stopped breathing.

No one shouted. No one intervened. The priest blessed him, and the sea was calm. And in the silence lay consent.

Then they continued. Slowly. Methodically. They cleaned.

One by one, they disappeared. Sometimes overboard, sometimes just like that. And each time, the sea became calmer. Smoother. As if it were content.

One of the survivors later wrote in the logbook:

*"We are clean.
Heaven no longer sees us.
The water sees us all."*

When Alonso finally disappeared—one morning, simply gone—no one was surprised. The priest just smiled. "He's come home."

And above them, far above, hovered a sky so blue it was unreal. But no one looked up anymore.

For whoever forgets heaven no longer needs it.

Only four remained: three men and the priest. Four shadows who didn't know if they were still alive or just waiting for the sea to tell them. The sun was merciless, the water smooth as glass, the air tasted of rust. *Trinidad* was no longer a ship – she was a floating prayer that no one wanted to say anymore.

The days flowed into one another like wine left open too long. Hunger had become routine. Pain was everyday. The sky was just a speck above them, so alien that no one knew why it was even there.

The priest was the first to speak again. Not to them—to the sea. He knelt at the bow, naked to the waist, his skin burned, his lips chapped. "We believed," he whispered. "Now we know."

The men stared at him, too tired to mock. "Know what?" one asked. He turned around and smiled. "That water has patience."

Then he began to preach. Not loudly, not with fire—with calm. His words dripped like dew: slowly, steadily, deadly. He spoke of purification, of depth, of truth. Of a God who needed no face to be feared.

One of the men spat into the sea. "If that's a god, then I'll eat him." The priest nodded. "And he'll eat you."

At night they heard it again—voices, whispering, circling, everywhere. Not in a language they understood, but in a tone that left no room for questioning. The sea spoke.

It didn't name names. It mattered.
One. Two. Three. Then there was silence.

The next morning, one was gone. Only his cap lay on the deck, damp, salty, empty. The priest smiled gently. "He was counted."

The other two looked at him. One drew his knife. "If you laugh again, I swear, I—" "You?" the priest interrupted. "You won't do anything. He decides."

And then the sea came. Sudden, alive, close. A wave, small but purposeful, crashed across the deck and swept the knife away. The men stepped back, the water running over their feet—warm.

One whispered: "It's alive." "No," said the priest, "we live at last."

He opened his arms, closed his eyes, and let himself fall. No scream, no resistance. The sea took him, calmly, almost tenderly.

The two remaining ones stood there, rigid, silent. Then the sea began to count again. One. Two.

One of them laughed, loudly, madly, beautifully. "I'm the three!" he shouted – and jumped after them.

The last one remained. He wrote in the logbook:

*"The sea has won.
Heaven is just a rumor."*

Then he put the book aside, looked at the sun and whispered: "Count me."

The sea did it.

The next morning, the ship drifted alone. No sails set, no rudder guided, not a breath to be heard. Only the sea, gently rising and falling, as if rocking, not destroying. The sun stood above everything, uninvolved, cruel in its indifference.

The deck was empty. No blood, no body, no sound. Only traces—footprints ending in the salt. The railing was wet, the wood dark, as if someone had soaked it with tears from within.

The logbook lay open next to the wheel. The last sentence, written in a trembling hand:

"He's still calling."

No one would ever know who "he" was. Maybe Magellan. Maybe God. Maybe the sea itself, which had finally learned language because there was no one left who wanted to talk.

The seagulls circled above the mast, but they didn't land. They knew better. The air was different—too still, too old, too conscious. It was as if the water had decided to keep everything that was once alive.

A sailor boat found the *Trinidad* Weeks later. The men who boarded said they heard voices—quiet, rumbling, as if speaking through wood. One swore the sea had breathed. Another said he saw a figure—barefoot, naked, standing at the bow, facing west.

They found no one. No dead, no living, no shadow. But they did find the logbook. And on the last page, in a different font than before, was a single sentence:

"The sky forgets. The sea never forgets."

The captain, an experienced man, ordered the book to be burned. But the fire didn't light. The wind died. And as he looked at the sea, he swore something had smiled.

They let the ship drift. No one talked about it. No one wanted to explain it.

Months later, when the wreck finally washed ashore, the wood was black, the deck bare, and the planks vibrated to the touch, like a heartbeat.

An old fisherman who looked at the wreck said: "The sea has finally found people who listen to it."

Then he spat into the water, turned around and left.

The sky was clear, too clear. The sea was calm, too calm. And somewhere far out, beyond all maps, there was a knocking.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The sign that nothing will be forgotten. Never.

Hunger, frost and fish with faces

They said hunger was the worst. But they didn't know that hunger could talk. That it whispers. That it knows songs you'll never forget.

The men on the *San Antonio* first heard it at night. This faint crackling in the air, somewhere between wind and madness. "It's just the planks," one said. But everyone knew that planks can't form words.

The frost was back. Not as brutal as in Patagonia, but more subtle. It came stealthily, taking hold of their fingers, their minds, their beliefs. The men wrapped themselves in rags, cursed, laughed, and died. In that order.

They had barely any supplies left. The flour was full of maggots, the water stank, the fish weren't biting. One suggested boiling the sail. Another said that was blasphemy. "Blasphemy against whom?" asked the first. No one answered.

At some point they started talking about faces. Faces in the sea, faces in the waves, faces in sleep. "I saw my brother," one said. "Your brother is dead," another said. "I know."

The priest of this garrison – a quiet, haggard man who had formerly been a teacher – wrote in his notebook:

*"The sea has a memory.
And we are their memories."*

The next morning he was missing. No scream, no struggle, no trace. Just a small, clean circle on the deck, wet with dew. And next to it his book—open. The last line:

"She showed me my face."

The frost moved on. It settled over the men like dust over old furniture. The wood creaked, the nails trembled, the ship was more alive than its crew.

One of the men, a young boy named Pedro, began to talk as he slept. "They're coming," he murmured. "Who?" one asked. "The ones with the faces."

The next day, they caught fish. Big, fat things, food at last. They screamed with joy, laughed, and caught dozens. But when they gutted them, the laughter stopped.

The fish had faces. Not quite human—but close enough to know something was wrong. Eyes too far forward. Lips that looked like smiles. Skin like skin, not like scales. One swore he recognized who he was cutting open. "That's the priest," he stammered. And then he vomited.

The frost crept across the deck. The sea was smooth, black, and still. "What shall we do?" someone asked. "Eat," said another. And they ate.

In the evening they sang. Songs no one knew, but everyone sang along. The sea listened. And if you looked closely, you could see faces singing along beneath the surface.

Hunger had drained their souls until they were transparent. You could see it in their eyes—there was nothing left to look back at. Only reflex, only movement, only this quiet, steady throbbing that came from below.

The fish came back. Not many, but enough to keep her awake. Sometimes they drifted against the side of the boat, as if they wanted to be seen. And they always had faces. Not the same ones. New ones. Men, women, sometimes children. Some smiled, some whispered. None of them were silent.

Pedro was the first to answer. He sat at the railing at night and spoke quietly into the water. No one understood what he said. But he laughed—that was new. A laugh that felt like a fever.

"Who are you talking to?" one asked. "Me," said Pedro.

At night they heard him singing. A melody without words, just humming, deep and rumbling, almost like the sea itself. In the morning they found him at the bow. He was dead, but his mouth was open, as if he were still singing. And in the water below, fish were swimming. Dozens of them. All with his face.

Nobody talked about it. What should have been said?

The frost had grown stronger again. The ice crept over the ropes, the hands, the mind. The cold was no longer weather, it was being. They felt it breathing, between their ribs, on nights when even death was too tired to take them.

Then the sea began to speak. Not as a voice, but as movement. The water vibrated, quietly, regularly. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

"He's calling," said one. "Who?" "The one who knows us."

They knew who he meant. And that made it worse.

On the third day after Pedro's death, they saw the faces again. This time directly beneath the ship. So many that the water looked like a mirror, reflecting only the past. Magellan was among them. Clearly. Unmistakably. He looked at them—calmly, infinitely calmly.

One screamed. Another laughed. The rest fell to their knees.

The sea trembled. Not violently, but firmly. And then—the smell came. Fish, salt, blood, iron. And something sweet. Something that didn't belong here.

"He wants us to eat," one whispered. "He wants us to live."

And they did. They ate. Without words. Without shame. Without God.

The next morning the sea was calm. No wind, no frost, no sound. Only smiling faces.

The sky was gray, but no one looked up anymore.

By the fourth day, no one was human in the old sense. Hunger had devoured their bodies, and what remained was something else—softer, calmer, without doubt. The faces on the water had become more familiar. Some they saw in their sleep, some in the reflections of their tin bowls. And at some point, they stopped being afraid.

The frost left. Instead, the whispering came. It was everywhere: in the wood, in the sails, in the nails beneath their feet. When the wind fell silent, they repeated the whispers—like a choir without a melody. The priest was dead, but his voice lived in their throats. "The sea knows you," they said. "The sea loves you." "The sea wants all of you."

One of them began painting the faces. With charcoal, with blood, with anything that burned. Everywhere. On the walls, in the mast, in his skin. "So they can find us again," he said. When they came looking for him the next day, he was gone. Only his drawings remained – wet, as if they had been freshly painted, even though no rain had fallen.

They drank seawater. First out of necessity, then out of curiosity. It made them sick, then quiet, then strong. One laughed and said he could now breathe underwater. They laughed along. Until he tried. He didn't come back.

But they heard him. His voice, deep beneath the ship, rhythmic, calm, like the pulse of the sea. Some said he had found something. Others said he had become that something.

The night smelled of metal. The fish returned, without fear, without haste. They swam just below the surface, looked up, moved their mouths. And then they understood: They weren't fish. Not anymore.

One fell to his knees. "I get it," he said. "We are not travelers. We are seeds." "Seeds of what?" "Of the sea."

They cut their palms and let the blood drip. The water took it, greedily, gratefully. And at that same moment, the ship lifted—not by wind, but by will. It glided over the water as if it were being carried.

The sky was there, but invisible. The sea was everything.

"We've arrived," said one. "Where?" asked another. "In the belly."

They laughed. And the sea laughed with them. A deep, vibrating sound that had no direction and yet was everywhere.

One began to cry. Not out of fear. Out of love. "I can feel him," he said. "Magellan. He's swimming inside me."

No one objected. Because everyone felt it.

The hunger was over. They were full—not from food, but from knowledge.

The sea had kept them.

On the sixth day, her skin began to change. Not suddenly—gradually, unobtrusively, like a secret slowly revealing itself. At first, it simply shone, then it thinned. Translucent. When the sun shone on it, you could see the veins, blue like seaweed, pulsing to the rhythm of the sea.

They noticed it, but no one was alarmed. It was as if they had expected it. As if it had always been meant to be this way. "He's reshaping us," one said. "No," whispered another. "He's just reminding us how we began."

The air became thicker. You could taste it—salt, iron, life. Breathing was difficult, but that didn't matter. They learned to breathe differently. Slower. Deeper. As if the sea were teaching them how to become it themselves.

One of the men saw himself reflected in a bowl of water. He smiled, and the water smiled back—not as a reflection, but as its own being. He reached into it, and it reached back. "I'm here," he said. Then something pulled him down. No scream, no resistance. Just a small circle that closed, as if nothing had ever happened.

The others saw it. No one spoke. One just whispered: "He did it."

In the evening, the sea was high. Waves like breaths, calm, determined. Something moved within them. Not fish, not shadows. Bodies. People. Half.

They came close to the ship. Their faces were beautiful. Too beautiful. Familiar. Everyone recognized someone. Fathers, brothers, friends, loved ones. And they called out.

"Comes."

The men wept. They knew they had no choice. The sea had called them, and once called, one already hears.

One by one, they stepped to the railing and let themselves fall. No scream, no impact. Only a quiet hiss as skin and water met again. The sea took them gently, almost lovingly.

Only one remained. The eldest. He had seen everything, heard too much, believed too much. He wrote in the logbook:

*"We are no longer lost.
We have been found.
From that which created us."*

Then he stood up, went to the helm, and the sea rose beneath him, like a hand carrying him. He whispered, "Thank you." And left.

The ship remained behind. Empty, but not abandoned. For the wood breathed.

You could hear it if you were completely quiet. Slowly. Evenly. Like the sea itself.

And beneath the surface – faces. Not dead, not alive. Just waiting. For those who had forgotten who they were.

The ships sailed on, even though there was no one left on board. Or perhaps they were—just different. The ropes moved of their own accord, the sails stretched without wind, and the wood no longer creaked under weight, but with contentment. The sea had taken them all, but had not forgotten them.

The *San Antonio* and the *Trinidad* They drifted side by side as if they knew they were sisters. Their masts were reflected in the smooth surface, and sometimes it seemed as if they were drawing light from the depths. Not from above, not from the sky. From below, where it all began.

Fish swam around—too many, too close. But they were no longer fish. They moved too evenly, too deliberately. And if you looked closely, you recognized their faces. Not quite human anymore, but not yet forgotten.

One of the fish had an eye that looked like glass. The ship was reflected in it. And in the ship – movement. Shadows moving across the deck, slowly, steadily, as if keeping watch. You couldn't see them, only sense them. But the wood knew.

Something began to stir in the depths. Something old, something big. Something that had been silent for too long.

The current changed. Gently, deliberately, as if someone had placed an invisible hand in it. And with the current came a voice. No words. Just rhythm. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

A storm arose, but without fury. More like a birth. The waves rolled, the water sang, and the two ships revolved in circles, slowly, evenly, as if following an ancient dance.

Then came the silence. And from the depths – light. A faint, golden glow that grew, twisted, and took shape.

Magellan.

Not the man they once knew—but something else. A shadow of salt, thoughts, and memories. He stood on the surface of the water, barefoot, calm, and looked down at his ships.

"You got it," he said. The sea responded with a sound that sounded like satisfaction.

He raised his hand, and the water followed. The waves retreated, forming a spiral that spun, faster and faster. The ships followed, unresisting.

They didn't sink. They sank—with dignity. Like someone returning home.

The light disappeared. The sea closed. And above the spot where they sank, the water remained calm, mirror-smooth, infinitely still.

Those who later sailed there said the sea was different. Calmer. Deeper. And sometimes—when the wind stopped—you could see faces beneath the surface. And they were smiling.

One of the last chroniclers wrote:

“He didn’t lead them, he gave them back.

The circle is not an end.

The circle is the breath.”

And the sea continued to breathe.

In the end, everything was silent. No waves, no wind, no prayer. Only that unnatural silence that came when the sea was full. It lay there, shining, smooth as metal, and in the sun it looked like a giant mirror in which the world looked at itself—and didn't recognize itself.

Deep down, where no light reached, the fleet rested. Not as wrecks, not as graves—as memories. The ships stood upright on the seabed, unharmed, as if they had never sailed. Around them were the fish—dozens, hundreds, thousands. They glided between the masts, swam in circles, sang without mouths. Their voices sounded like breath, like wind, like eternity.

Sometimes the water changed. It glowed briefly, golden, then green again, as if a thought flickered within it. And every time it did, the floor vibrated. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The earth heard it. So did the sky. But no one dared to answer.

Magellan was down there—not as a body, not as a mind, but as an idea. His form had become the sea itself: boundless, patient, knowing. He saw everything that had ever been said about him, and he smiled. A smile made of a million drops.

He remembered everything. The hatred. The hunger. The men who followed him because they no longer had anything to believe in. And he knew: They had never been lost. Just on the way.

Above him, on the surface, the sun made its way. The air shimmered, the world moved on, unaware that it had changed.

In the centuries that followed, sailors told stories. Of a place in the sea where no storm raged. Of fish with faces that looked like people long dead. Of songs that came from the depths when the night was too calm.

An old captain swore he had heard them. He wrote:

*“They sang of a man who forgot heaven,
so that the sea can remember.”*

No one believed him. But sometimes, when the moon hung over the water, there was a shimmer—a movement too gentle for a wave, too steady for chance.

And whoever saw him knew, without knowing why: It was Magellan. Not dead, not alive. Just eternal.

The sea breathed. Slowly. Evenly. Patiently.

And somewhere, deep down, she answered herself.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The sign that the world was finally round.

The path through the world – finally water

They called it the end of the world, but it was only the beginning of the current. The path Magellan had always spoken of finally lay before them—not in maps, not in words, but in a gray-blue breath that stretched from horizon to horizon. No land, no foothold, no noise. Only water. Only truth.

The men who remained didn't see it at first. They were too tired, too empty, too hungry to believe in beauty anymore. They considered the sea another enemy, another trial. But as the sun set and the sky opened, they understood.

That wasn't the sea. That was a decision.

The wind blew steadily, the sky was clear, the water motionless—so still that time itself seemed to sleep. The ships glided like thoughts across the endless blue, and even the seagulls that left them never returned.

"There's nothing," said one. "Exactly," replied another. "Finally, nothing."

They no longer had maps. No destination. No meaning. Only direction. The South was dead, the North vast, the West sacred. They were heading toward what they couldn't comprehend because they had nothing left to lose.

The sun stood harsh and white above them, an eye without a song. The sea was so clear that one could see into the depths—a depth that knew no end. Some swore they saw faces, others swore they saw nothing, and all were right.

They ate what they found: algae, fish remains, their own faith. The hunger was back, but different. It had become calm, like an animal that knows it will never be satisfied.

One of the men, a Portuguese man named Carvalho, began to talk to the sea. He asked questions. The sea answered.

Not loud, not clear, but unmistakable. "Why us?" asked Carvalho. And the sea answered:

"Because you ask."

That was enough for him. He laughed. And the laughter was genuine.

At night, when the sky was full of stars, the deck became a church. No priest, no prayer—just men on their knees, whispering. They didn't pray to God. They prayed to direction. To movement. To water.

Sometimes the ship drifted for hours without wind, and they looked up at the sky. It was vast, beautiful, unapproachable. But it was no longer their home.

One wrote in his diary:

*"We drove through the throat of the world.
Now we drink their blood."*

The sea glittered in the sun as if it had understood.

And somewhere, deep down, in the silent center of the current, there was something that smiled.

The Pacific. They didn't know it would be called that. To them, it was simply the Great Silence—a motionless surface, a sky that forgot them. No storm, no thunder, no enemy. Only a silence so loud it thundered in their skulls.

Day after day, the sun passed over them, without pity, without mercy. It burned their skin, dried their tongues, melted their minds. The sea was beautiful, but it was the kind of beauty that kills you if you look at it too long.

Thirst came first. It wasn't a feeling, it was a command. Their lips chapped, their blood tasted of rust, and their saliva turned to sand. They tried to drink seawater, but it only drove them mad. One laughed, one prayed, one bit off another's fingers, believing them to be bread.

At night it was worse. That's when the voices came. Not the wind, not the wood—but the quiet, familiar voices they all knew. "Eat," they said. "Sleep." "Jump."

One did. He simply went on deck, looked into the endless blue, nodded, and let himself fall. No scream. No splash. Just the sea, taking him as it took everything.

The others watched without a word. What could one say? There was no more sin, no more order, no heaven that counted.

On the third day of silence, one of them began to sing. An old song from Seville, about wine and girls and rain. His voice was rough, broken, out of tune. But he kept singing. The others listened, and one by one began to sing along. First quietly. Then louder. Until the whole ship was singing. A chorus of thirsty people remembering their lives, only to know they had lost them.

The sea was still. But beneath the surface, something vibrated. A rhythm. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The wind came suddenly. Cool, gentle, inexplicable. It filled the sails, and the ship moved again. "He heard us," someone whispered. "Who?" "The one who is among us."

They continued on, without a destination, without a sense of time. The sky remained beautiful, the sea remained still. But they knew that both were watching them. The boundary between dream and day dissolved.

One swore he saw Magellan—on the mast, smiling, his eyes shining. "He's showing the way," he whispered. "Where?" "Inside."

In the morning, the man lay dead at the wheel, his hands clutching the wood, his lips curled into a smile. On his chest was a trail of salt—not sweat, not water. A sign. A circle.

And the sea glittered in the sun as if it had finally gotten what it wanted.

The sun blinded them, but the light never stopped. It burned through their eyes and into their skulls, where it began to melt thoughts. Every day was the same, an endless white of sky and sea that could no longer be distinguished. The water sparkled like metal, and if you looked too long, you saw things that weren't there—or maybe they were always there, and it was you who was no longer real.

They began to see land. A new one every day. Islands of gold, forests of glass, cities of light. Some almost jumped overboard to reach them. "I see them!" one cried. "That's heaven!" But the heavens didn't answer. The sea did.

The waves rose slightly, just a breath—as if it were laughing. Then it sank again, and the land disappeared.

"He wants to test us," said the priest. "Why?" asked another. "So we'll stop asking questions."

They spoke of Magellan, though no one uttered his name. He was there. Everywhere. In the waves, in the wind, in the corner of the eye. Sometimes, as the sun set, you could see him walking across the water. Not a man, not a spirit, just form—a body of light splitting the sea as if it belonged to him. And he smiled.

"We're close," one whispered. "To what?" "At the point where everything turns."

They caught fish again, but no one dared to eat. The animals looked at them—calmly, knowingly, like judges. One dared. He cut open the fish, and inside was no meat. Only water. Clear, still water. And inside it: a face. His.

He screamed, ran, jumped. The sea took him instantly. No resistance, no time. Only that sound. Three blows. Pause. Three blows.

"He's calling them back," said the priest. "He wants us in."

Hunger rendered them mute. Their lips burst, their thoughts dissolved. Some prayed again—not to God, but to the sea. "If you want us," they whispered, "then take us all."

At night they dreamed of the ocean floor. Of cities made of salt, of streets made of skin, of bells built of bone. And in the middle stood Magellan, with arms of current and eyes of eternity. He said nothing. He didn't have to. Everything was understood.

In the morning the sun was there again, relentless, white as guilt. One wrote in the logbook:

*"We have reached heaven.
He is made of water."*

Then the wind swept the book away, and it fell into the sea. But instead of sinking, it floated away—slowly, steadily, as if it still had something to say.

And the sea was silent, content.

The nights grew longer, though the sun never stopped shining. Time was merely an echo, forgetting itself. The men slept with their eyes open, talked with their mouths closed, and breathed as if they no longer knew why. They were no longer thirsty—they were empty. And the sea slowly filled them.

It began with voices. Not from outside. From within. A whisper behind the eyes that felt like patience. "You are part," it said. "Part of what?" one asked. "Of me."

The man laughed first, then cried, then laughed again. He began to drink water—just one sip, then two, then more. The others watched, waiting for him

to die. But he didn't. He was alive. His gaze was clear, too clear, as if he had understood something everyone else had forgotten.

"It doesn't burn anymore," he said. "It tastes like home."

The others followed. One by one. They drank. First secretly, then openly, then with pride. And the sea absorbed them, sip by sip.

Their skin began to shine, as if moisturized from within. The salt settled on their bodies like a second life. They no longer sweated. They steamed. And the steam smelled not of people, but of depth.

"He's destroying us," whispered the priest. "No," one answered, "he's making us whole."

The wind whispered across the deck as if jealous. But there was nothing he could do. The sea had taken them long ago—even before they sank.

Sometimes one could see the ships from afar, sailing across smooth water as if they were alive. But those who came closer found only emptiness. No men, no movement, no fear. Only the air, heavy with memories.

Then the sea began to speak. That's right. Not as sound, but as language. In waves that became words.

"You have sought," it said. "You have found."

The men fell to their knees, laughing, crying, talking at once. "What are you?" one asked. The sea fell silent. Then a faint murmur, barely audible: "I am what remains."

They didn't understand. But they nodded. Because there was nothing left to understand.

The sky was gone. It was simply gone. No blue, no gray, no light. Only water stretching into infinity. Whether they were swimming or sailing, no one knew anymore.

One wrote in the logbook with his last strength:

*"We have not found the end of the world.
We are the end of the world."*

Then he put the pen down, closed his eyes, and listened. The sea hummed. Slowly. Evenly. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

And when the last breath came, it wasn't death. It was a return.

On the last day, the sky disappeared. Not suddenly, not dramatically—it simply dissolved, as if it had never existed. No horizon, no above, no below. Just water contemplating itself. The Pacific was perfect. And in this perfection, there was no room for humans.

The ships drifted side by side, calm, resigned, like animals that knew they were going to die and accepted it. The wood was wet but alive. It vibrated slightly—as if breathing. In the silence, you could hear the pulse of the sea. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The men were still there, but no longer recognizable. Their bodies had become transparent, salty, soft. When they moved, they shimmered, as if the light were passing through them. They no longer spoke. Why should they? The sea spoke for them.

One stood at the bow, looking into the depths. "I get it," he whispered. "What?" no one asked. "We were never in the world. The world was within us."

Then he fell—slowly, almost tenderly. The water took him, closed over him, and in his place rose steam, dancing like smoke and disappearing into the air.

Magellan was back. No body, no shadow—only movement. A wave, not caused by wind, rolled gently through the sea, spiraling and momentarily forming a shape. He stood above the water, gazing at the remnants of his fleet.

"You did it," he said. His voice was the sea. "You found me."

The ships answered—quietly, through the creaking of the wood, through the dripping of the dew, through the trembling of the air. They were alive. But they belonged to him.

The current began to move. Slowly, then faster. A circle, wide, vast, perfect. And at its center – light. Not bright, not dark. A breath.

The ships glided in without resistance. They didn't disappear. They became part.

The sea glowed. For seconds. Then it fell silent.

From afar, all you could see was water. Calm, pristine, endless. But if you listened closely, you could hear it breathing. Slowly. Evenly. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The world had closed. The circle was complete.

Later, much later, when new sailors took the same route, they told stories. Of places in the sea where the compass failed. Of voices beneath the water that knew their name. Of fish that sang in the night.

And when asked what they were singing, they said:

*“From the man who circumnavigated the world.
And of the sea that never let him go again.”*

The Pacific lay silent, like a memory no one wanted to tell. No wind, no sound, just a shimmer in the air, as if the world itself were exhaling. The sea was smooth as glass, and in that glass lay the truth—cold, endless, and beautiful in the way only things that have killed everything they touch are beautiful.

Nothing remained of the men. No bodies, no shadows, no traces. Only the water, which knew their stories. It continued to murmur them, every night, every wave, in a language no one understood anymore. But those who listened long enough could feel them – the remnants of breath, prayer, and despair that had come together to form a song.

A song without beginning, without end. Like the sea.

The sky eventually returned, but different. No blue, no gold—more of a shimmer, a dull light that brought no warmth. The sun stood there as if it knew it had nothing more to say.

The sea was now God. Not in name, not in belief—in fact. It was the only thing that remained, the only thing that spoke, the only thing that understood.

And somewhere deep down, where no man would ever return, stood Magellan. He had become the sea—or rather, he was the sea. His thoughts flowed like a current, his eyes were whirlpools, his voice rhythm itself. He remembered everything. The ships. The men. The rage. The desire to grasp the world—and that it allowed itself to be grasped.

He knew now that it was never about fame, never about gold, never about God. It was about movement. About the circle. About the eternal return.

The sea no longer bore his name, but it breathed it. Every wave, every gust of wind, every drop spoke it, quietly, infinitely:
Magellan.

Over the centuries, his legacy crept into everything that moved. Into every storm, into every current, into every ship that dared to lean against the horizon. And every time the wind fell silent, they heard it—three blows, pause, three blows.

Some said it was the heartbeat of the ocean. Others said it was the breath of the world. But the ancients, those who still believed in stories, knew better.

They said he was the man who circumnavigated the world—and never stopped going.

For whoever seeks the end will only find the beginning. And whoever forgets the sky will find the sea.

The sea was still. Then – a final sound. Not wind. Not waves. A breath. Slow. Steady.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

And somewhere between water and memory the world opened – and closed itself.

The strait that no one should survive

It was no longer a sea. It was a mouth. A cold, dirty, steely mouth that crunched as if it were chewing. The winds screamed, the water bit, and the ships—those miserable wooden skeletons—creaked as if they knew they would die here. No man who sailed through the Strait of Magellan was ever the same. Some came back, physically—but no one brought himself with them.

The cold was a beast. It didn't come from outside; it grew in the bones. It settled between thoughts and breath, consuming warmth, words, hope. The sea was black, the ice was gray, and in between there were only men who looked like walking curses.

The masts cracked like bones, the sails tore like skin. Every movement was violent. Every gust of wind was a punch. The water rose, fell, laughed—yes,

laughed. And the laughter was the worst. Because it sounded like it came from God.

One of the men, a fat fellow from Cádiz, began to talk to the wind. He called him "Señor," begged for mercy, promised him wine, gold, even his soul. The wind answered. It whipped him overboard.

The others watched. No one screamed. They were long past it.

Magellan stood at the helm, his eyes half-closed, his beard frozen. He didn't speak to anyone, not even to himself. But his mind burned. He knew he had to get through this, no matter who died. No matter whether he himself survived.

"That's the price," he murmured. "The sea wants blood, so I'll give it flesh."

And he gave it.

The men worked until their hands burst. The salt ate into their wounds, the ice stuck to their skin. Some tied themselves to the ropes so the wind wouldn't carry them away. Others prayed again—old prayers, wrong words, none of it mattered, as long as something spoke back.

But the sky was empty. Only the sea answered – with scorn.

On the third night, the rudder broke. A scream, then a crash, then silence. The ship drifted. They were trapped, right in the throat of the world.

One said, "The devil lives here." Another laughed, "Then he has style."

The ice cracked all around, mountains of frost contracted like teeth. They were in the throat. And the throat closed.

Magellan stood there, motionless, as the wind slashed his face. "Swallow me, you bastard," he whispered. "But I'll go right through you."

The wind raged, the sea screamed, the wood splintered. And somewhere in between—someone laughed.

Maybe it was God. Maybe it was Magellan. Maybe it was the world itself, finally remembering that it was round.

The ice sang. Not a song humans were meant to hear, but a song everyone felt when they came too close to death. A deep, vibrating groan, as if mountains

were breathing. Some said it was the cracking of the ice. Others knew it was the sea—the damned body of God stretching to swallow them.

The cold first took the fingers. Then the mind. One chopped off his hand because it turned black. He laughed as it fell. "Better you freeze than me," he said to his own fist.

The sky was made of lead. It hung low, heavy, deadly. The wind came from all directions at once, as if it had decided to hate her personally.

They hadn't eaten anything for days. The flour was frozen, the water too hard to drink, and the fish they caught was dead before they could pull it from the ice. But they ate it anyway. Raw. Lifeless. The blood was black and sweet.

One was crying. Another wiped the tears from his face.

Hatred became food. They ate each other with looks, with words, with teeth. The ship was no longer crew—it was a cage full of animals that had been kept in the dark for too long.

In the night they heard footsteps. Not on the deck, but in the water. Slow, steady, heavy. One swore he saw Magellan—barefoot on the ice, his eyes open, his beard covered in snow. "He's walking," the man whispered. "Where to?" "West."

That was enough. The madness spread like rot. First they fought over bread. Then over warmth. Then over meaning. And when all that was used up, only violence remained.

One reached for a knife. Another laughed. The ice trembled. And the sea waited.

They fought, silently, blindly, without reason. Fists, wood, blood. All the same. Death was no longer a punishment, but salvation.

When morning came, three dead bodies lay on the deck. Their faces were open—frozen in the expressions with which they had died: anger, fear, laughter.

Magellan stood at the helm. He had seen everything, but said nothing. His eyes were hollow, his breath visible. He was no longer human. He was will incarnated in flesh.

"We're moving on," he said. "Where to?" someone asked. "To where the world stops believing in itself."

They didn't understand him. But they obeyed.

Because he was the only one who still believed in something. And even if that something was madness, it was better than nothing.

The ice cracked again. A sound like a scream. Then movement. The sea opened up—and they went into it.

The days ceased to be distinct. The light was sickly, a pale glow that knew neither morning nor evening. The men moved like shadows, rigid, mechanical, empty. They ate snow, chewed leather, drank their own breath. The sea had become a black beast, creeping beneath them, patient, lurking. The ice cracked as if it were laughing. The sky was a gray, closed lid. No star, no hope, no way out. Magellan stood at the railing, staring into the white, whispering incessantly. He didn't speak to people. He spoke to the sea, to God, to himself, to madness—no one knew anymore. His words were lost in the wind, but one sensed their power. He was no longer the captain. He was a prophet of frost and hunger. Someone who saw something no one else was allowed to see.

A man fell, just like that. No scream, no struggle. He slipped on the ice, hit the ground, and lay there. No one went to him. No one had more strength. The cold ate faster than maggots. Fingers burst, skin stuck to the wood, and blood froze before it fell. Magellan didn't look. He knew that death no longer had any meaning here. Death was a passenger, silent, polite, inevitable.

At night, the ice crept up the sides of the ship as if it were alive. It crunched, it whispered, it sang. The men thought they saw faces in it—stiff, ancient, lurking. "The sea is watching us," one said. Another laughed, a laugh like a cough. "Then let it see what it's done." The next morning, the laughing man was dead, his tongue frozen to his teeth.

Magellan wrote in the logbook with a trembling hand: "*We're moving on. The ice is just a test. God is just testing who he still needs.*" Then the spring broke. Then he broke himself. For a moment. But he straightened up again, leaned on the steering wheel, and in his eyes there was no longer a person, only direction.

The men began to whisper. Not about him, but about the sea. Some said it was following them. Others said it was leading them. One swore he saw the water

open to let the ship through—like a mouth holding its breath. Magellan believed him. "He wants us to go further," he said. "He wants us to prove we deserve it."

The nights grew longer, or the days shorter—no one knew anymore. The darkness wasn't simply the absence of light; it was substance, something one breathed. Some men dreamed while awake. They saw lands of fire, skies of stone, seas of blood. And in the center—a face, huge, calm, alien.

One began to pray aloud. But the words no longer came out. His voice was gone, frozen. He opened his mouth, and only steam came out. Magellan looked at him, nodded, as if he understood. "God speaks through those who can no longer speak," he murmured.

The wind came back. A howling beast. It beat the masts, tore the ropes, and hurled pieces of ice like knives. The men screamed, but no one heard them. The sea raged, and the ship danced, and in all the chaos, Magellan stood at the helm and laughed. A hoarse, ragged laugh that sounded as if it didn't come from him.

"Now you finally see me!" he cried into the storm. "Now you see what you've made of me!" The sea answered. Not with words—with a cry of wind and waves. The ship rose, fell, crashed, and in that moment they all believed they would finally disappear, rise, be redeemed. But they stayed. They lived on.

And that was the punishment.

The storm subsided. Silence returned, heavy, final. The sea had spared it only to break it. And somewhere, in Magellan's shattered eyes, madness glowed like a torch burning in the darkness because it was too proud to go out.

They sailed on, as if death were merely a different kind of weather. The strait stretched like a scar through the world, narrow, cruel, endless. Above them the sky—no longer a sky, but an open wound, bleeding from within. Below them the sea—cold, black, thick as oil. The men were no longer men; they were movements. Breathing in and out. Steps and pain. The will to move once more before nothingness swallowed them.

Magellan held his course, steady, relentless, as if possessed. He was thin, almost transparent, his beard matted, his eyes glassy. He barely spoke, but when he did, you could hear the sea in his voice. It was as if he had conspired

with the sea. Every gust of wind was a response, every blow against the wood a sign.

He began sacrificing men. Not out of anger. Out of calculation. He was convinced that blood calmed the current, that the sea demanded respect. He commanded it calmly, without shouting, without hatred. "We must pay," he said. "The world only eats what it loves."

They tied the first one to a rope and lowered him into the water. He didn't scream for long. The sea took him silently, like a mouth too tired to chew. After that, the water was still, the wind died down. Magellan nodded. "See?" he murmured. "He's taking it."

The next day, the ice was thinner, the current calmer. The ship glided, slowly, cautiously, but forward. And in this movement lay salvation. Or madness.

The men obeyed, not out of fear, but because they believed. In what – no one knew anymore. But they believed. The sea spoke, Magellan heard, they followed.

Then the sky came. It broke. A sound like shattering glass, loud, deafening, inhuman. Light fell, bright, white, burning. For seconds, the world was illuminated, until it went black again.

A man fell to his knees. "God saw us!" he cried. "No," Magellan said calmly. "He saw himself—and was frightened."

Then he laughed. That laugh—dry, deep, final. It cut through the wind and cold, through everything. The men knew they were lost. Not because they were going to die, but because they believed him.

The sea fell still. No wind, no sound. The ice closed behind them – a door locking. No turning back. Never again.

They continued into the darkness, and behind them the world died.

Magellan wrote in the logbook:

*"We have driven through the flesh of the earth.
We are their heartbeat."*

Then he put down his pen, and the sea whispered softly, almost tenderly, three strokes. Pause. Three strokes.

And no one knew anymore whether the sea was breathing – or they themselves.

They no longer spoke. Words had become too heavy, too useless. Everything that could be said, the sea had long since said better. They moved silently through the darkness, over water that was no longer water—more like a skin, thin and taut, beneath which something great breathed. Every wave was a pulse, every movement a thought turned to salt.

Magellan was now just a silhouette. A shadow with a purpose. He didn't sleep, didn't eat, and barely spoke. But you could sense that he saw something the others didn't. He saw through the ice, into what lay beneath. And he smiled.

"We're almost there," he whispered one night, and no one asked where. For everyone knew there was no place left, only direction. They weren't driving through the world—they were driving into it.

The sea whispered. No longer in waves, but in thoughts. Sometimes they felt the words directly in their bones. "Depth," she said. "Stay." "One."

They began to see in dreams what they should never have seen. A city of ice, far below, full of unflickering lights. Bodies floating through the water, alive but still. And in the center—a throne of salt. Upon it, a figure, motionless, awake.

Magellan.

They awoke drenched in sweat, even though there was no warmth left. One screamed, another laughed, a third jumped overboard, just like that. The sea gently took him. No splash, no scream. Just that quiet, contented breathing.

Magellan wrote in the logbook:

*"I hear him.
He calls me.
He is me."*

After that, he was rarely seen on deck. He disappeared for hours, sometimes days. When he returned, his eyes were glassy, his skin pale but dry. He no longer carried any ice on him, as if the sea had decided to stop touching him—or had completely entered him.

"He's talking to us," he said. "Who?" someone asked. "The world." "And what does it say?" Magellan looked into the darkness. "That it's tired."

One of the men began to cry. Quietly, almost shamefully. Magellan placed his hand on his shoulder. "Don't cry," he said. "It's a privilege to see the end."

In the distance, far below them, something stirred. A sound like thunder, but duller, older. The sea opened for a breath, and the ship sank—not much, but noticeably. The men screamed. Magellan stood still.

"He's breathing," he said. And the sea answered. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

Then it closed again as if nothing had happened.

The ice gave way, the water cleared, and on the horizon they saw light. Not the sun—something else. Something that waited. Something that knew.

Magellan smiled. "Now the world begins," he said. And they sailed into it.

There was no end, only dissolution. The strait ceased to be a place and became a state. The water slid from black to gray, the ice melted silently, the sky retreated, as if it had seen too much. The ships sailed on, but no longer on the sea—they sailed within it. Every plank absorbed water, every nail vibrated as if the wood were breathing. The men had ceased to distinguish between body and sea. Their skin shone like wet wood, their eyes no longer reflected light.

Magellan stood at the bow, naked to the waist, his beard crusted with frost. He had let go of the wheel. His hands were open, his fingers slightly spread, as if he were about to receive something. The sea rose and fell to its rhythm. He was no longer a captain—he was part of the engine. "We're here," he said quietly. No one answered, but the ship nodded. It cracked briefly, like a joint coming loose, and oriented itself to the south, all by itself.

The current pulled in. The water glowed. First faintly, then more intensely, until everything beneath them burned without being consumed. The men crawled together, holding onto each other, whispering old names. Their voices sounded as if they came from far away—voices from other lives. "Is this the end?" one asked. "No," said Magellan, "this is the proof."

The sea opened. Not far, just a crack, but enough to show that there was nothing beneath. No bottom. No light. No noise. Only movement. And in this movement lay peace.

One of the men fell, just like that. He didn't fall into the depths—he became part of them. His body dissolved, the water took him, without a splash, without a wave. Then the next one. And the next. Silent. Dignified. Like a return.

At the end, Magellan stood alone. He looked back—the strait had disappeared. Just smooth water, stretching to the horizon, as if it had never existed. Then he looked ahead – there was nothing. Just white.

He breathed in, and the air tasted of salt, iron, and eternity. "Now you know," whispered the sea. He nodded. "Yes," he said. "I was never your enemy."

Then he took a step forward. His feet touched the water, but he didn't sink. He walked, slowly, calmly, into the light, until the sea took him. No sound. No scream. No goodbye. Only three strokes. Pause. Three strokes.

The water closed. The air stood still. And the world was whole again.

Later, much later, when the wind passed over this spot, one sometimes heard something. No echo, no storm—just a breath. A breath.

"He has passed through," said the old men.

"He has found the mouth of the world.

And she swallowed him – out of love."

God, Gold and Ghosts in the Fog

The fog didn't come – it grew. First thin, like breath, then thicker, heavier, until it swallowed everything: sky, sea, direction, reason. The men woke, and the world was gone. No horizon, no light, only gray. A gray that consisted not of color, but of silence. It smelled of metal and mold, of wet wood and fear. If you reached out, you couldn't see it. But you felt it – damp, cold, strange.

The men spoke quietly, as if afraid the fog might be listening. "How far are we?" one asked. "From what?" another answered. No one laughed.

Magellan sat at the helm, motionless, his eyes half-closed. His face was pale, but not from fear. More as if he had already become part of something greater. The fog dripped from his beard like sweat. He said nothing, but the men knew: he was listening.

For there was movement in the fog. Something glided between the ships, slowly, fluidly, silently. Sometimes one heard breathing, deep, steady. Sometimes the creaking of wood, though no one moved. And sometimes—footsteps. On deck.

One swore he had seen Magellan, even though he had never left the spot. "It was him," he whispered. "But he didn't look at me. He looked through me." Then he fell silent, as if the fog had stolen his mouth.

The sea was calm, but the ship continued sailing. No waves, no wind, no current—it glided along as if something were pulling beneath it. The men felt it. Something big. Something that knew they were here.

"This is God's breath," Magellan said quietly. "He sees us now." One of the men wept. "Then he should stop." Magellan looked at him. "No. He wants us to see."

And they saw.

First shadows. Then faces. Not human, not quite. Too big, too close, too alive. They floated in the mist, half light, half flesh. Some smiled, others whispered. "Gold," they said. "God." "Stay."

One fell to his knees, beating his chest. "Those are angels!" he cried. "Those are mirrors," Magellan said calmly. "They show what we wanted."

And the fog grew thicker. It vibrated. You could hear it breathing. And in every breath lay the promise of something—salvation, wealth, death.

One groped along the railing, his fingers sliding into the gray air. He pulled them back—golden. Fine scales of light clung to his skin. He laughed. "Gold!" Then he fell.

No one tried to stop him.

The sea remained still. The fog glowed briefly, as if it had swallowed something it liked.

Magellan looked out, in the direction from which the voice came. "God doesn't give," he said quietly. "He takes. But that's enough."

Then he stepped forward until his silhouette disappeared into the gray.

Behind him, someone whispered, "We're following him. There's nothing left we haven't lost."

And the fog answered. Gently, almost lovingly. Three strokes. Pause. Three strokes.

Gold fell from the sky. Not much, not heavy, but real. Small, glowing flakes floating in the mist, slow, dancing, as if the sea itself were donating alms. The men stretched out their hands, trembling, greedily, childlike. The gold clung to their skin, burned briefly, then disappeared. Only the pain remained—and the smile.

One laughed loudly, a dry, scratchy sound that lasted too long. "He saw us!" he shouted. "He's paying us!" Another shook his head. "He's buying us." Magellan stood among them, motionless, his eyes wide open. He saw the nebula moving—alive, purposeful, whispering. He knew this wasn't a reward. This was the voice of a being who understood humans because it had created them to observe them.

"This isn't gold," he said calmly. "This is memory. It shows us what we were."

But the men didn't hear him. They crawled across the deck, collecting, licking the gold from the wood, whispering prayers in which God and greed shared a common tone. Their eyes gleamed, their fingers bloody from scraping. The fog watched them.

Then came the whisper. Not loud, but omnipresent. Deep, soft, almost feminine. "Stay," it said. "You deserve it. Here is everything you wanted. Warmth. Light. Fame."

One stood up, spreading his arms as if ready to be embraced. "I'm staying!" he cried. Magellan looked at him without pity. "Then die honestly." The man laughed, took a step forward—and was gone. No scream, no crash. Only silence, and a faint golden sparkle that disappeared into the mist.

"He is redeemed," someone whispered. "He is eaten," said Magellan.

The fog grew thicker. It began to drip—not water, but light. Every movement left traces, as if one had fire in one's fingers. The air was warm, almost pleasant. And that was exactly what drove her crazy.

"That's heaven," said one. "No," replied Magellan, "that's the trap."

But even he couldn't escape the beauty. The light settled on his skin, shimmering, flowing over his fingers like liquid metal. He felt weightless, pure, significant. And he suddenly understood why people sought God: because they couldn't bear the fact that no one was watching.

The fog hummed, vibrated, grew. Faces emerged—familiar, forgotten, impossible. The dead smiled. The living fell to their knees.

"He's speaking to us," one whispered. "No," said Magellan. "He's mirroring us."

He stepped forward, through the light, and the sea whispered in his ear. "You have found me," it said. "But you don't know what I am." He smiled. "I know enough." "Then see."

The light burst forth. A storm of gold, mist, water, and voices. He stood in the middle of it, motionless, his arms wide, his gaze fixed. His men shouted, knelt, laughed, prayed—all at once. And above it all, the whisper:

"You wanted God. Here I am."

Then it became quiet. The gold sank, the light faded, the fog remained. And where people had just stood, there were only shadows.

Magellan remained alone. And the sea asked quietly: "And you? Do you still believe?"

He inhaled, tasting salt and blood. "No," he said. "But I understand him."

The fog laughed. Gently. Definitively. Three strikes. Pause. Three strikes.

Magellan walked alone through the gray. No wind, no water, no sound. Only this breathing fog that was everywhere, inside and out. He had ceased to distinguish the sea from the air, and he felt that the fog knew him—every wrinkle, every thought, every weakness. It was as if he were being read from within. No interrogation, no judgment. Only insight.

He stopped. "Show yourself," he said calmly. The fog laughed. A laugh that vibrated like distant drums, dull, rhythmic, familiar. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. "I've been here long ago," said the voice. "I want to see you." "You see me, every time you think."

Before him, the gray thickened. Shapes emerged, blurred, became faces—his men, those he had lost. Their eyes shone gold, their mouths moved silently.

Behind them, other faces, thousands of them, all the same, all empty. They stood on the water like mirrors, forgetting whom they were supposed to reflect.

"What are you?" asked Magellan. "I am what you were looking for." "God?" "Call it what you will. I am the end of all directions."

He laughed, bitterly, exhausted. "I just wanted to find the way." "And you found it." "But I don't know if I survived it." "No one does."

The fog vibrated more strongly. Voices whispered, some weeping, some praying. He recognized the voices of his men. Carvalho. Espinosa. Pigafetta. All there. All part. "I can hear them," he said softly. "Because you love them," the fog answered. "Then give them back to me." "They're back. In you."

He breathed heavily, looking down at the water. His reflection was gone. Instead, he saw faces, countless, merging into one another. All himself. All lost. "This is not faith," he murmured. "This is madness." "There is no difference," whispered the mist.

He closed his eyes. The cold was gone. No pain, no hunger. Only this incessant swaying—the rhythm of the sea, of life, of death. He felt his fingers loosen, his skin begin to drip. Not blood, not sweat—water. Pure water. "I'll become you," he said. "You always were," the voice answered.

Then he saw them. The remains of his men. Not as bodies, but as movement—currents of light, of memory. They floated around him, quietly, peacefully. No more fear. No more questions. "You did it," he whispered. One of the shadows smiled. "No. You brought us."

He looked into the gray, searching for the sky. There was none. Only depth. And from the depths came a light, so faint that it was more thought than color. He knew this was the end—or the beginning. That he had survived to disappear.

He spread his arms, and the sea—or what was left of it—touched him. No feeling of cold, no fear. Only weightlessness.

"Why me?" he asked. "Because you asked."

Then everything fell silent. The fog retreated, slowly, circling, as if taking something with it that belonged to it. And when it had completely disappeared, the sea lay still. Smooth. Colorless. Perfect.

No ships. No men. No Magellan. Just a faint echo in the wind. Three strikes. Pause. Three strikes.

And in that silence lay everything – God, gold, spirits, and the man who thought he could separate them.

The fog began to turn into light. Not divine light, not a heavenly promise—it was the light of forgetfulness. It came from everywhere, from below, from within, from every pore, from every wave. It was warm, but not kind. It was the light of a being who no longer knew the difference between love and destruction.

Magellan stood in the middle of it all. Or what was left of him. His skin was transparent, his breath was steam, his eyes no longer reflected anything. When he raised his hand, the air around it trembled like liquid glass. He had no shadow. The fog had consumed him, but he smiled—because he knew there was nothing left to lose.

"So this is God," he said. The light didn't answer. It pulsed, vibrated, and in that pulse lay everything: time, birth, death, return. "I found you," he whispered. "No," it whispered back, "you gave yourself to me."

He nodded. He understood. Humans knew no truth—only mirrors. And the sea was the greatest of these. It didn't show what was, but what one wanted to be. And those who looked into it disappeared into it.

He took a step forward. The water carried him as if he had long since belonged there. He heard voices, whispering, distant, familiar. His men. They were no longer calling him. They were singing. A deep, steady hum that blended with the wind, with the movement of the sea, with the heartbeat of the earth. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. He closed his eyes, and for a moment he saw everything: the shores he had left behind, the land he would never reach, the sun that would never shine on him again. And then he saw nothing.

The light grew brighter. It consumed the shadows, the shapes, the boundaries. Magellan dissolved. Not with pain, not with violence—with dignity. He felt his body dissolving into waves, falling without falling, stretching, expanding, until he himself became the rhythm. The sea breathed through him.

"Now you are what you were looking for," said the voice. "And what am I?"
"The sea that thinks. The human that remains."

The light collapsed upon him, and for a moment everything was silent. No wind, no sound, no God. Only the sea, remembering.

Centuries later, sailors would report that the water where the sun never fully sets sometimes glows. Not brightly, just flickering, as if it were trying to say something. And if you listened closely, you could hear something in the depths that sounded like a name.

Magellan.

He wasn't dead. Not gone. Just scattered. In the salt. In the wind. In the minds of the world.

"He sought the end," said the ancients, "and found the center."

And when fog crept over the water, one swore one saw faces—no ghosts, no demons, only memories. Men with salt-encrusted eyes, silent because they had seen everything.

And when the wind stopped, the sound came. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The pulse of the world. Proof that someone had circumnavigated it—and never stopped walking.

After him, all that remained was storytelling. The sea had swallowed him, time had kept him, but people needed stories. So they gave him one. They called him a hero, a heretic, a madman—depending on who was speaking. In taverns, in monasteries, on ships, and in palaces, stories were told of the man who wanted to find God and lost the world.

"He has circumnavigated them," they said. "He has conquered the water." But no one understood that the sea is never conquered. It waits. It takes. It remains silent.

The fog that had taken him didn't disappear. It wandered. Sometimes over the Atlantic, sometimes over the Philippines, sometimes where maps no longer held any value. The sailors called it "Magellan's Mantle." When it came, they lowered their voices, extinguished their lanterns, and waited for it to move on. For those who sang in the fog heard answers—the wrong ones.

Some claimed they heard him. A whisper across the water, soft, calm, sad. Not a word, just a breath. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. Some said it was the sea

itself remembering him. Others said it was God, who couldn't forget that someone was trying to see him.

In Seville, there stood a statue. No pomp, no gold—just stone, rough, simple. The eyes looked into the distance, but they saw nothing. People came, prayed, asked for blessings, for courage, for direction. But sometimes, when the wind blew from the south, it smelled of salt. And whoever was brave enough to place their hand on the stone felt something beneath the surface. A pulse. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

In the writings of the monks he became a martyr, in the mouths of sailors a ghost, in the hearts of the mad, proof that faith and madness are the same. And in the depths, where light never reaches, where the earth sleeps and the water thinks, something glimmers. Not bright, not dark—just there. Movement. Memory.

Pigafetta, the scribe who survived, wrote a sentence at the end of his chronicle that the Church later deleted:

*"He found God not above us, but below us.
And when he understood that, he was no longer human."*

The words disappeared, but they remained. In the minds, in songs, in the dreams of those who had been at sea too long.

For every generation had its Magellan: the one who went too far, saw too deeply, wanted too much. And every time one of them fell, the sea whispered the same sentence: "He's mine now."

The fog returned. Every year, quietly, unexpectedly, punctually as a memory. It settled over the water, over the cities, over the heads of those who thought they were safe. And those who stood in it swore they had heard a voice. Not a threat, not a prayer—only understanding.

*"You are still searching.
And you will always find me."*

The sea laughed. Gently. Exhausted. Old.

And the wind that came carried salt. Salt and truth. And somewhere in between – his name.

Magellan.

The story never ended, it only changed form. Words became waves, waves became wind, wind became memory. The sea carried it on, across centuries, across languages, across the dreams of men. Every sailor who set out heard it, sometime, between sleep and storm: a voice, quiet, steady, familiar. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. It wasn't an echo. It was proof.

In the harbors, the word was that Magellan was still out there. Not as a body, not as a spirit—as a direction. He was sometimes seen at dawn, when the mist hung over the water and the sun's light didn't decide whether it was day or night. A gray figure, motionless, standing on the water and waiting. Whoever saw him never spoke aloud again. They said whoever recognized him recognized themselves—and that was the worst of it.

In churches, they painted him with a halo, his hand on a sphere, his gaze upward. But the painters said his eyes couldn't be painted. No matter how often they tried, in the end, there was always something else there. Something that saw through. Something that asked. Something that knew.

In the years that followed, many sought the same path. Kings, pirates, traders, missionaries—they all sailed through the same waters, on the same tracks, under the same stars. But no one returned the way they left. Some disappeared, others found gold, still others found themselves—and lost their minds. The sea had learned from Magellan how to test people.

One day, centuries later, a child stood on the coast of Seville. It was early, the air salty, the sky gray. The child threw stones into the water and counted. One, two, three. On the third beat, the sea answered. Not loud, not clear—just deep. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The child smiled. It didn't know why, but it felt seen. Perhaps that was all that remained: the feeling that something is listening if you call out far enough into the world.

Scholars later said that Magellan had opened the globe, completed the map, and rearranged the heavens. But that was only the surface. He hadn't circumnavigated the world. He had understood it.

For in the end, he knew that God was not a destination, but movement. That gold was not a possession, but a temptation. And that the spirits that accompanied him were never dead—they were thoughts. And thoughts, when they sink deep enough, become currents.

The sea remained silent, year after year, century after century. It remained silent because there was nothing more to say. But every time the wind blew across its surface, it sounded as if it were whispering: "He was here."

And so the world remained round. Not because a man had circumnavigated it, but because it remembered ever since that someone had tried—and that he had given his all for it.

In the end, nothing remained. No ship, no fog, no name. Only the sound of breathing. Slow. Quiet. Forever.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The sea continued to breathe. And somewhere, in its depths, so did he.

The Pacific – and no end in sight

The sky was too bright, the sea too still—and both too vast for humans. The Pacific lay there like a single, endless expanse from a forgotten time. No wind, no land, no destination. Only this viscous, shining nothingness that slowly consumed the men without touching them. They woke up in the morning, not knowing whether they had slept or had simply stopped thinking.

The water was so blue it hurt. A blue that knew no depth, only surface. A blue that said, "You can't defeat me." And they knew it was right.

Magellan stood at the bow, his hands clasped behind his back. His face was burned, his lips chapped, his eyes dull. But in this dullness lay something uncanny—a clarity that came not from hope, but from surrender. He knew there was no end. That the Pacific was not a place, but a state. Eternity in liquid form.

"How far?" one asked. Magellan barely turned his head. "Until we think it's enough." The man laughed, short, false. "And if it's never enough?" "Then we're there."

Hunger returned, slowly, insidiously, like an old acquaintance. The rations were rotten, the water stank, and thirst burned in his throat like salt fire. One man drank anyway, poured seawater into his mouth, prayed, laughed, and fell over.

His body swelled, almost bursting, and the next morning he was floating beside the ship, calm, peaceful, as if he had been part of the plan.

Nobody talked about death anymore. It was no longer an event—just a process.

Sometimes they thought they heard voices. Old friends, children, women, God. But when they listened, they realized it was the sea speaking. Not with words—with silence. The sea had learned to listen to them, just to better silence them.

Pigafetta wrote in his logbook:

*"There is no up and no down here.
Only a uniformity that thinks."*

The men began to hate the sea. Then to love it. Then to understand that both were the same.

One stared into the water for days until his pupils reflected. "It's looking at me," he said. "Then look back," another said. "I can't. It's too much." And he jumped.

They watched him go, not moving. The water closed, without a wave, without a sound. A clean death. The Pacific didn't like drama.

The wind eventually returned—barely noticeable, like a whisper. The sails billowed, tired but obedient. Magellan smiled. "He heard us." "Who?" "The one who never listens."

Then he looked at the sun. It hung above the horizon like an eye that had seen everything and yet continued to see. The sea glittered, beautiful, indifferent, divine.

"He has a sense of humor," murmured Magellan. And the men laughed—not because it was funny, but because it was the last thing they could do.

The sea laughed along. Very quietly. Three strokes. Pause. Three strokes.

For weeks, the sun had hung over them like an instrument of torture. It didn't just burn their skin—it burned into their minds. There was no shadow anymore, no above, no below, only this shimmering, flaming emptiness that bleached out everything human. The Pacific was no longer a sea. It was a mirror, and they were the cracks in it.

Minds began to leak. First imperceptibly, then clearly. The men laughed for no reason, screamed in their sleep, talked to the water. One claimed to have seen faces in the sea; others said the waves whispered names. Old names. Names of the dead. "The sea knows us," murmured one. "Then forget it," replied another. "It cannot forget."

Magellan sat on the deck, motionless, barefoot, his gaze fixed on the horizon. He hardly spoke, but when he did, everyone listened. His voice was not loud, not commanding—it was calm. Too calm. "The sea is a woman," he said one evening, "and we are her last thoughts." No one understood, but no one dared to contradict him.

He began to introduce rituals. Small, nonsensical things that eventually made sense, because nothing else made sense. In the morning, they knelt on the deck, placed their hands on the wood, and remained silent for a minute. "So she knows we're alive," Magellan said. At night, they threw breadcrumbs into the water. "So she knows we're sharing."

And the sea responded. Gentle waves, small eddies, quiet knocking against the hull—as if it were listening. "She loves us," Magellan whispered. The men nodded. They believed him.

Soon they were no longer talking about wind or direction, but about moods. "She's sleeping today," said one. "She's angry," said another. And when the water remained still, they knew it was thinking.

Hunger became a religion. The feeling of emptiness, the constant pulling in their chest, the trembling in their bones—they began to worship it. "That's her," said Magellan. "That's how she speaks to us."

Pigafetta secretly wrote in his book:

*"We don't eat anything because he tells us to starve.
We do not sleep because he says the sea dreams for us.
I don't know if I'm still me."*

One night, as the moon rose blood-red, the men fell to their knees. They gazed at the water, whispering, murmuring, humming. Magellan stepped to the railing. "Look," he said. "She answers." And she did.

The sea glowed. A faint, shimmering light coming from below. No reflection, no illusion. The depths glowed—green, gold, blue. Movement. Something below was moving.

The men began to pray. "That's her!" they cried. Magellan smiled. "No. That's us."

He spread his arms. "She hears us. She knows we understand her. We are her language!"

The sky burned. The water pulsed. And for a moment, everything seemed connected—man, sea, madness. Then one fell. And the sea absorbed him, calm, indifferent.

Magellan watched him go, then nodded. "She wants sacrifice. She wants memories. Give her both."

The men obeyed. Not out of fear, but out of faith. They had stopped believing in land. But they believed in him. And he believed in the sea.

The sea laughed, a dull, deep rumble. And somewhere between sky and water it echoed back—three strokes. Pause. Three strokes.

It happened slowly, almost imperceptibly, like all catastrophes that disguise themselves as revelations. Hunger became prayer, drinking became sin, death became salvation. The sea no longer just surrounded them—it had penetrated them. Into their skin, into their thoughts, into their breathing. Every breath tasted of salt and faith.

Magellan now spoke to the sea as if it were his lover. He spoke in the night, softly, in a whisper, with words no one understood. "I've seen you," he said. "You are everywhere I've never been." And the sea answered—with movement. Small, steady waves that gently rocked the ship, as if it were nodding.

The men watched him, first with suspicion, then with awe. He had become thin, almost transparent, but his eyes glowed. He had that smile that only people have who have gone too far to come back.

"He talks to her," whispered one. "He commands her," said another. "No," said Pigafetta, "she commands him."

Magellan heard it. He turned to them, calm, collected, with that unshakable, unnatural serenity. "We are part of her," he said. "Her flesh, her breath, her will. We thought we were sailing above her—but we were always within her."

The sun stood high, pale, merciless. The sky was a white eye without a lid. The sea reflected everything—endless, indifferent, perfect. The men knelt, one after the other. Not out of fear, not out of compulsion. Out of necessity.

Magellan spread his arms as if embracing the world. "She is God," he said. "No heaven, no church, no prayer—this is God." He stepped to the wheel, placed his hand on the wood, and closed his eyes. "I guide her because she guides me. I steer her because she knows me. I am her mouth, and you are her tongue."

The men wept. Honestly, raw, exhausted. They began to sing songs—old, forgotten psalms mingled with the cries of hunger. Their voices sounded like wind over glass. Sometimes one collapsed, and they left him there. "He's with her," they said. "She took him."

Pigafetta wrote with a trembling hand:

*"He calls her God.
We call her mother.
Maybe that's the same thing."*

The sun transformed into a disk of gold that blinded everything. The sea shone back, and for a moment no one could see. In this glaring blindness, faith arose. They saw nothing, so they believed in everything.

Magellan continued speaking, for hours, for days. He spoke of a world without a sky, where water was the earth's memory. He spoke of a truth that lived beneath the surface. He promised that they would soon be part of it—not dead, but arrived.

And the men nodded. They believed him. Because he was the only thing that still made sense.

In the evening, as the sky turned purple, he stood at the bow again. "Can you hear me?" he whispered.

The sea answered. Three strokes. Pause. Three strokes.

He smiled. "Yes," he said. "I hear you too."

Then the water rose, very gently, almost tenderly. And the ship glided on—not over the sea, but through it, toward a truth that no human should survive.

The days ceased to be distinct. The sun was always there, the heat was always the same, the sea was always still—as if time itself had fallen asleep. The men no longer counted; they waited. For what, no one knew. Perhaps for wind. Perhaps for salvation. Perhaps for someone to turn off the light.

They no longer ate anything. They prayed, they whispered, they dreamed with their eyes open. Some spoke to the sea, others to themselves. But there was something uncannily peaceful in this regularity. As if death had long since taken place – only the body didn't yet know it.

One morning, Magellan stood on the deck, barefoot, the sun directly in his face. His shadow had disappeared. He called to no one. He didn't have to. The men looked at him, silent, expectant. He looked at her with a gaze that demanded nothing, promised nothing. "She's thirsty," he said. Nothing more.

And they understood.

The first one went voluntarily. He climbed over the railing, turned around once, smiled, nodded. Then he fell. No scream, no resistance. Just a body that disappeared, as if the water had been waiting for it. The sea was calm. Then a bubbling. A quiet, contented sigh.

Magellan bowed his head. "She accepts it."

The next day two went. Then three.

Then no one left. Not because they were afraid – but because there was no one left who would have counted.

The sun burned, the water glittered, the wood creaked. Pigafetta continued writing, even though his fingers had barely any strength left.

*"He says she needs sacrifices.
I think she just wants company."*

At night, the sea glowed. Not brightly, not sacredly—more like a body glowing beneath the skin. You could see the movements taking place beneath the surface. Something alive, approaching. Something that remembered.

Magellan spoke softly to her. "I gave you what you wanted," he said. The sea responded with a wave barely higher than a breath. "Not everything," it whispered.

He smiled. "I know."

The next morning, Pigafetta was alone. No more men, no laughter, no footsteps, no breath except his own. He searched for Magellan—found only traces. Wet footprints that led to the bow and ended there. The sea was still.

He looked down. And for a moment he swore he saw Magellan's face beneath the surface—calm, smiling, open. He stepped back. Then forward again. And wrote with his last strength:

*"He didn't fall.
He has arrived."*

Then he laid down the book. The sea took it.
Slowly. Tenderly. And as it disappeared, the sound was heard.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The heartbeat of the Pacific. Or the last breath of humanity. No one knew. No one ever will.

The sea was silent. And in this silence lay the proof that it had understood everything.

Pigafetta remained. The last human being in a world that no longer needed humans. The sea carried him, not out of grace, but out of habit. The sun had burned his face, his lips were chapped, his eyes salt-blind. He could barely see, but perhaps that was for the better. What remained was writing. That was all he could do.

He sat on the deck, his legs tucked up, his logbook on his knees. The ink was almost empty, the paper crusted with salt, but his hand kept moving. "They are all gone," he wrote. "The sea took them, one by one, quietly, like breaths. It didn't swallow them. It remembered them."

He looked up. The sea lay flat, pristine, as if it had never seen blood. "You didn't kill her," he whispered. "You kept her."

The water responded with light. A shimmer, barely visible, but real. Pigafetta smiled. "I understand," he said. "You collect stories, not souls."

The heat had become still. No wind, no birds, no sound. Only the gentle crackling of the wood, slowly giving up. He knew he would die. Not now, not right away—someday. But he wasn't afraid. He had seen what he should never have seen: a world without people, yet still breathing.

He continued:

*"Magellan led them, but the sea completed him.
It was never a fight. It was a trade.
Flesh versus meaning. Breath versus memory."*

He put the pen down and looked at the waves. There was something. A faint shimmer, a shadow beneath the surface. It moved slowly, calmly, almost humanly.

"He?" asked Pigafetta. No answer. Just a chuckle. Three blows. Pause. Three blows.

He nodded. "I'll keep writing it," he whispered. "As long as I can."

He no longer spoke in days, but in sentences. Every line was a heartbeat, every dot a breath. And at some point he realized that he was no longer writing – the sea was writing through him. The ink was water. The words came not from him, but through him.

His hands were swollen, his skin transparent, his fingers swimming in his own blood. He saw himself reflected in the water—and saw the sea within him. No face anymore, only movement.

"So this is how it ends," he whispered. "No," the voice whispered back. "This is how it begins."

Then the book slipped from his hand, fell into the water, opened, and floated away. The pages came loose, flung apart, like scales, like thoughts. Each page bore a word that the sea retained.

They say you can still find them today—tiny characters on shells, on stones, on the skin of fish. Words that no one wrote, but everyone understands.

*"We continued driving.
The sea was everything.
And everything was the sea."*

Pigafetta lay down. The deck breathed beneath him. The sun was a white hole. The sea sang.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

Then nothing more.

The sea had the last word, slowly, like taking a breath that means too much. It closed over Pigafetta, and the Pacific was whole again. No ship, no person, no sound—only the shimmering water, pretending to be peaceful. It wasn't death. It was an archive. The sea had retained everything: the voices, the footsteps, the salt on the skin, the despair, the prayers. Nothing was lost, only transformed.

When the wind blew, it sounded different. Deeper. More conscious. It carried something within it that reeked of memory. And when the sun hung on the waves, you could sometimes see faces, fleeting, fragile, almost human. Some swore they had seen Magellan. Others said they had heard Pigafetta scream. But the sea didn't scream. It told stories.

For the Pacific had learned what humans never understood: that every end was a cycle. There was no direction anymore, no map, no up, no down. Only movement. Only the memory of water.

The sky reflected the sea, the sea reflected the sky—and there was no longer any difference between the two. That was perfection. That was punishment. Eternity as a mirror without edges.

Centuries later, ships sailed across the same expanse. They gave it a name: Mar Pacífico, the peaceful ocean. But those who stayed long enough knew it wasn't peaceful. Just full. Fed up of people, fed up of gods, fed up of meaning.

Sometimes, when it was quiet enough, when the wind was still and the sky shimmered, you could hear the heartbeat. Not loud, but clear. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. And whoever heard it knew: The sea is alive. And it remembers.

They say every drop contains a word, every murmur a story. The sea is not empty. It is full. Full of everything people have lost. Of their courage. Of their stupidity. Of their faith. Of laughter that had traveled too far.

One night, as a storm came, a sailor on a later ship stood at the bow and swore he heard a voice. "You have forgotten me," she said. "No," he answered. "We are you." The sea was silent. Then it laughed softly, tiredly, old.

The sky retreated, the water closed. And when the storm was over, only the smell remained. Salt, iron, and something older than both. Consciousness.

The Pacific was no longer a sea. It was a memory, spread over millions of years. It was the result of a dream a human had had—a dream of salt, blood, and infinite direction.

And if you fly over it today, in metal tubes that move faster than the clouds, you can see something below if you look long enough. Something flickering. A face, perhaps. A shadow. A thought that refuses to die.

And somewhere in between, in the rhythm of the waves, he lives on. The man who wanted too much. Who sought God and found the sea. Who believed he could circumnavigate the world – and instead became its heartbeat.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The Pacific breathes. And with it – history.

Three months of salt and death

It began like all hells: silent. No storm, no thunder, no divine guidance—just a slow decay under a sun that knew too much. Three months, they said later. Three months of salt and death. But in truth, it was longer. Because at sea, time loses its character. It becomes viscous, stretches, sticks to skin and tongue until you can taste it.

The sea was empty. The sea was everything. No land, no wind, no birds. Just that metallic taste in your mouth when you woke up in the morning—if you had slept at all.

The men had become shadows, moving skeletons with sunburn. They no longer looked like people, but like the memory of people. Every step on deck sounded like an echo of something long gone. Their eyes were sunken, their lips white with salt, their thoughts stuck somewhere between hunger and prayer.

The rice had long since gone bad, the meat stank of death. They ate whatever they found: rats, wood shavings, leather belts, sometimes their own teeth. They chewed on everything just to know they still had teeth. Water was scarce—and when it did, it came from rain, collected in old barrels that smelled of tar. People drank, even though they knew it was burning. And when someone fell, the others didn't look.

"He did it," someone said. And everyone nodded as if it were good news.

Magellan barely spoke anymore. He sat beneath the barely fluttering sail and stared into the void. But in this void, there was something. A will. A remnant of rage, perhaps.

"We'll keep going," he said. "Until she forgets us." No one asked who "she" was. They knew.

At night, they heard sounds beneath the ship—muffled, rhythmic, familiar. "Fish," said one. "No," whispered another. "The sea is practicing."

Sometimes they thought they heard voices. Quiet, distant, but clear. Like prayers in a language no one knew. They came from the depths, where the light couldn't reach. One wrote in the wood: *"The sea has a memory."*

Pigafetta, the last to write, noted:

*"We live, but we are no more.
We eat salt, we breathe salt, we think in salt.
When death comes, it will taste like home."*

On the twentieth day, the flesh began to eat itself. Their tongues swelled, their teeth wobbled, their skin burst. They scraped the salt from their wounds and licked it away. Not because they were crazy—because they were hungry.

And Magellan? He remained unaffected. At least outwardly. His gaze was clear, his gait steady. But something flickered in his eyes—not life, not death. Only insight.

"The sea is testing us," he said. "It wants to know how much humanity remains in us."

No one answered. Perhaps because no one wanted to know.

The next morning, a man lay dead next to the mast. No one knew who he was, no one asked. Magellan looked at him, then up at the sky. "One less she can curse."

Then he walked on as if nothing had happened.

The sea was silent. But the silence was not empty. It was full.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

They began to smell each other before they saw each other. The stench hung over the ship like a curse: rot, blood, old wood, fear. No human should have been able to endure it, but they did, because they were no longer human. Just bodies that refused to stop breathing. Three months of salt and death. It wasn't a saying—it was a condition.

Hunger made them numb. Thirst made them blind. And the sun drove them mad. Skin peeled from bones, thoughts lost their senses. One man cut a piece of meat from his arm, boiled it in his helmet, and drank the broth. He survived. "That's how it goes," Magellan said simply. No reprimand, no mercy, no compassion. The man nodded, his lips no longer quite fitting together.

They no longer spoke to each other; they growled. A nod could be a prayer or a curse. Sometimes they woke up and didn't know who they were. Then they saw Magellan and knew: He's real. Because he wasn't dead yet.

He walked across the deck, barefoot, silent, his eyes fixed on the sea. He spoke to her, not loudly, but clearly. "Look," he murmured, "these are your children. You wanted faith, and this is what remains."

The sea didn't answer. But sometimes it swelled slightly, as if listening.

They shivered in the night. Not from the cold, but because their bodies forgot they could be warm. One whispered, "I feel it inside me. The sea. It wants in." Another laughed, a wheeze that was more blood than air. "Let it in, then you're done." He did it. He let go. He simply fell. The sea took him. No resistance. No sound. Only that little gurgle, which meant more than any prayer.

Magellan saw it. And for the first time in weeks, he smiled. "He understands," he said quietly. "Finally."

Pigafetta watched him. He barely wrote anymore, only short sentences scratched into the wood.

*"He thinks the sea wants him.
But maybe it's the other way around."*

On the thirtieth day, they drank their own urine water. On the fortieth, they cut the dead rats into pieces and hung them to dry. On the fiftieth day, they ate the leather from the sails. On the sixtieth, they stopped counting.

They saw things. Faces in the water, shadows in the sky. Some said they saw land—others said it was God. One shouted that he had seen Magellan's

mother, naked and smiling. Then he laughed, jumped overboard, and the sea swallowed him like a joke.

Magellan continued talking, although no one was listening anymore. "Three months. That's how long it takes to purify itself," he said. "If we survive, we'll be free." But the word *free* meant nothing anymore. They didn't even know what it meant.

Pigafetta wrote:

"Freedom is when you stop asking why you are still breathing."

At night they hummed. No song, no rhythm—just a sound, a hum of exhaustion. And the sea answered. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

Some called it heartbeat. Others called it mockery.

But they all knew: the sea was listening.

And it waited.

There came a point when the ship was no longer a ship. It was a wooden confessional, a floating confessional, soaked with sweat, blood, and madness. The sky had forgotten to see it, and the sea had learned to wait patiently. No storm, no wave, no thunder—only this calm. This cruel, indestructible calm that drove everything mad.

Hunger ceased to be pain. It became an idea. Something one carried around with oneself like a religion. They talked about meat as if it were a memory. About taste as if it were a myth. They laughed when someone died. They laughed when no one died. They laughed because laughter was the only thing that still sounded human.

On the eightieth day, one was found—dead but untouched. Magellan stood over him, silent, and the men waited. He looked at them, long and calm, then nodded. "Take what you need."

No one asked what he meant. They knew.

The knife was blunt, but the meat was tender. They ate in silence. No prayer, no shame, no anger. Only this rhythmic chewing, this steady, solemn sound mingling with the creaking of the wood. Pigafetta no longer wrote. He watched,

his eyes dry, empty, practiced. He knew it was the final step. After hunger came faith, after faith came knowledge, after knowledge—the hunger for truth.

Magellan looked into the sun, which showed no mercy. His lips were bloody, his voice brittle. "It's not a crime," he said. "It's a return. Everything devours itself. Even the world. Even God."

He stepped to the railing and stared into the water. "Look," he said, "she's watching. She wants to see."

And the sea glittered as if it had understood. Slowly. Satisfied.

At night the wind came. It was warm, rotten, sweet. It brought no salvation, only a smell—their own. The men lay on deck, half-naked, half-dead. Their skin was leather, their teeth black, their eyes still. But they were alive. Still.

Magellan continued speaking, tirelessly, his voice burning in the air like smoke. "We are their children," he said. "And children must be sacrificed so that something greater may live." No one objected. No one understood. But they listened. Because there was nothing else to hear.

The next day, they found the helmsman—slashed open, half-eaten, half-forgotten. No one asked who had done it. No one wanted to know. Magellan just looked around and said, "The will was pure. That's enough."

The sea was still. But stillness here was not silence. Stillness was consent.

Pigafetta wrote one last time, with fingers that barely held any ink:

*"I saw him laughing.
He didn't laugh at us.
He laughed with the sea."*

Then the mast broke. The wood splintered like bone, the sky flared briefly, and everything smelled of the end. But the sea remained smooth. Like a face that doesn't remember, but knows everything.

Magellan stood there, naked except for the dirt, and whispered, "It was worth it."

Then came the sound. Deep, dull, final. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

And no one knew anymore whether that was the heartbeat of the sea – or theirs.

At some point, Magellan stopped giving orders. He no longer needed to. The sea had long since taken command, invisible, infallible, incorruptible. The men moved as it wished—they rose when it roared, they slept when it was silent. It wasn't obedience, it was osmosis. The boundary between man and water had disappeared.

They no longer had faces. Only skin that taut, eyes that burned, mouths that were empty. The Pacific had brought them all down to the same denominator: hunger, faith, salt. Sometimes they talked to each other, but not to communicate—only to hear if the voices were still there. For the silence of the sea was contagious. You could lose yourself in it, bit by bit, word by word.

Magellan sat on the railing, his feet in the water. He no longer looked human. His beard was bleached, his skin covered in wounds that no longer bled. But his eyes—they burned. Not with life, but with insight. "See?" he whispered to the sea. "I've given everything. What more do you want?" The water fell silent. Then a wave rose, barely noticeable, and gently slapped against his legs. "Everything," it said.

He nodded. "I know."

He stood up, slowly, calmly, as if he knew exactly where he was going. "I led you here," he said to the men following him, their eyes long since empty. "I showed you the end. Now you must understand it for yourselves."

Pigafetta stared at him, his fingers gripping the knife he'd been holding for days. "What are we supposed to understand?" Magellan smiled. "That the sea doesn't need us. We need it."

He turned back to the sea. "And whoever needs something belongs to him."

Then he jumped. No shout, no command, no last glance. Just movement. A body plunging into the water, and the sea closing—soundlessly, contentedly.

Pigafetta didn't scream. He knew it was right. He knew Magellan hadn't died. He had returned home.

The men gazed into the depths, silent, resigned. "He is with her now," one whispered. "He was always with her," Pigafetta replied.

The sea grew darker, then lighter. As if it were breathing. And suddenly the ship began to move—without wind, without rudder, without destination. It simply continued on, guided by something no one understood.

The men stood still. No one moved. They knew: the sea had taken over.

In the evening, a light appeared. Distant, shimmering, unreal. A glow beneath the water's surface, moving as if it were trying to guide them somewhere. Pigafetta fell to his knees. "Show us," he whispered. "Show us where he went."

And the sea answered. A whisper that sounded like a thousand voices, mixed, ancient, infinite:

"He's here. In me. And soon you will be too."

The light grew stronger. The waves glittered. The sky reflected – and disappeared.

The men stood there, unable to escape. For there was nowhere left to flee.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats. The heartbeat of the Pacific. And beneath it, barely audible, Magellan's voice:

"Further."

There were perhaps five of them, perhaps fewer. Counting no longer made sense, nor did time. The sea had taken from them everything that could be measured—hunger, direction, number. They were left, but what remained was not a state of being, but an error. The ship was nothing but a wooden frame, half corroded by salt, half held together by faith. And below it, the Pacific—smooth, endless, lurking.

Pigafetta was the last person who still knew how to think his own name. He had lost his voice, but he continued to speak, only silently. His lips formed words that no one heard, not even himself. Perhaps he was speaking to the sea. Perhaps he had long since become its echo.

The men around him lay scattered on the deck, breathing, gasping, dreaming. One laughed, softly, toothlessly. "I saw him," he whispered. Pigafetta turned his head. "Who?" "The captain. Down there. He's walking. In the light." Pigafetta looked over the railing. The sea was still, but the water glowed—a soft, dull glow that moved as if it had a purpose. "Perhaps," Pigafetta murmured, "he's still guiding us."

He took the knife he hadn't let go of for days and carved into the wood of the mast:

"He went first. We'll follow."

The sea answered, as always—not with words, but with movement. A gentle heaving, a caress against the keel, a humming that went through the planks. Three hits. Pause. Three hits. Pigafetta placed his hand on the wood, feeling the rhythm. "I know," he whispered. "I know you liked him."

The water was no longer blue. It had become colorless—or at least Pigafetta's eyes had. He saw shadows below him, large, slow-moving bodies turning as if they were scrutinizing him. No threat in them, only presence. Like gods who had forgotten why they should pray.

The sky was cloudless, the wind was still. The sun was a hole that swallowed all light. Pigafetta smiled, his lips nothing but skin. "Perhaps we are light now," he thought. "Perhaps that was the point."

One of the men stood up, staggered, and screamed something incomprehensible. Then he fell, headfirst, into the sea. No scream. No resistance. Just the splash, followed by a silence that lasted too long. Then bubbles. Then nothing.

Pigafetta wrote:

*"We are no longer hungry.
We are no longer thirsty.
We are just here.
And the sea breathes through us."*

His hands trembled. Not from fear, but because they had forgotten how to stand still. He looked at the water. It was beautiful. So beautiful it hurt. And he understood: beauty was the gods' trick to kill you without you noticing.

A wind came, barely noticeable, like a memory. It brought the smell of land. Or what they thought was land. The men stood up, staggered, looked west. There was something on the horizon. Something that looked like salvation.

Pigafetta laughed. Loudly. Freely. Insanely. "Land!" he screamed. "Damned land!"

But the sea laughed along. A dull, warm rumble. Three blows. Pause. Three blows.

He knew what it meant. No land. No salvation. Just the final deception the sea gave them to make it easier for them to follow.

And they followed. Of course they followed.

The land was a mirage, born of heat, hunger, and hope. It lay there on the horizon like a lie, too beautiful to be believed, and that's precisely why they believed it. The men stood up, stumbled, cursed, cried, laughed. After all the salt, all the blood, all the death—finally, something that looked other than blue.

"Land!" someone shouted, his voice a sliver of humanity that still remained. Pigafetta looked where the sky shimmered. Yes, there was something there. Green, perhaps. Or what his eyes thought was green. He nodded, slowly, like a believer who finally sees proof. "Land," he repeated. "Yes, of course. Land."

They gathered the last remnants of the sail, hoisted them, and prayed to everything they could think of. The wind came. Real wind—hot, but real. The ship moved. Slowly, creaking, with a sound that sounded like hope on its last breath.

Hours passed. Or days. Time was now only an idea. The land drew closer. They could smell it—earth, grass, rain, life. Their bodies, dead as they were, remembered: This was the smell of home.

One knelt down and whispered, "Thank you." Another simply fell over, dead, with a smile that was genuine. Pigafetta stood at the bow, his fingers on the wood, his eyes open, wide, empty. He saw the land shimmer. How it breathed. How it moved.

Then he understood. That wasn't land. That was the sea.

It had transformed into green, into hills, into trees, into illusion. It played. It painted. It beckoned.

Pigafetta laughed, a long, rusty laugh. He fell to his knees, pounded on the deck, and cried tears that weren't tears. "You devil," he gasped. "You goddamn sea. You are everything. Everything!"

And the sea answered. A low, vibrating rumble that went through the planks, through the ribs, through the mind. Three blows. Pause. Three blows. He felt it in his heart, in his head, in the world. It wasn't mockery. It was approval.

He stood up, staggering, barefoot, burned, empty. "So be it," he whispered. "If you want me, take me. I have nothing left that you don't already have."

He walked across the deck, step by step, to the railing. He looked out once more—and the sea did the same. Two mirrors, two beings, two truths that finally understood each other.

Then he stepped forward. No jump. No fall. Just a step.
The water took him. Not with force, but with tenderness.

And as he sank, he saw it: the land that was none. It disappeared. And the sea smiled.

The ship drifted on, empty, silent, perfect. No names, no voices, no direction. Only the sea, contemplating itself—content, eternal, satiated.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

And somewhere, deep down, where no light reaches, two eyes opened. Not human. Not divine. Just awake.

The sea had learned to see. And that was the end of the world.

Men with teeth like bone dust

They came ashore, if you could call it that. An island, small, hot, full of life they no longer understood. The water was clear, the green too bright, the air too sweet. After months on the Pacific, everything smelled wrong—too vivid, too loud, too real. The men who remained crawled out of the boat like animals that had lived too long in the dark. Their skin was gray, their mouths dry, their teeth blunt—more dust than bone.

They kissed the ground, laughed, cried, and tore out grass as if to prove it existed. But the land was silent. It smelled of rot and promises. And somewhere in the wind, the sea was still there—lurking, watching, amused.

Magellan was dead, Pigafetta was gone. What remained was a handful of men who no longer believed in anything because they had seen too much. They were no longer explorers. No longer sailors. No longer Christians. They were remnants. Men who had outlived themselves.

One—Morales, the carpenter—screamed as he looked into a mirror of water that had formed between the trees. "There I am," he cried, "there I am!" But the reflection grinned at him before he grinned himself. Then he struck. His fist into the water, again and again, until it turned red. "You're lying!" he gasped. "You're not me!" The others pulled him away. But as they left, one swore he saw the reflection remain—and continue to smile.

They found fruit, small animals, water. They ate, they drank, they vomited, they cried. Their bodies could no longer digest life. They were machines built for death.

At night, they heard sounds—laughter, whispering, voices coming from the forest. One thought it was the sea creeping across the beach to bring them back. Another said the land itself was breathing. No one slept. And those who did, woke up screaming.

On the third day, they began to look at each other. Not with hatred, not with hunger—with mistrust. For trust was a luxury the Pacific had banished from them. They ate together, but neither put down their knife.

Morales disappeared during the night. In the morning, they found traces—and blood. Not much, just enough to know he wasn't an animal. And in the evening, they found a bone, gnawed, clean, tidy. "He went back to the sea," one said. "No," another whispered, "the sea came to us."

The sun burned, the ground steamed, and the water on the shore turned black. The men drank anyway. They drank everything they found. And with every sip, the sea became part of them again.

On the seventh day, the sky stood still. No wind, no movement. Only the soft scraping of their teeth as they chewed. They no longer spoke. They understood each other without it. The hunger returned. Not the hunger for food—the hunger for meaning.

"Maybe he made it," someone said suddenly. "Magellan." The others looked at him, blinking slowly. "Where to?" someone asked. He grinned. "Down."

Then they all laughed. Long, loud, genuine. And the sea laughed with them. A dull thud, far out. Then another. And another. Three thuds. Pause. Three thuds.

The island was silent. But in its silence was life. A life they didn't understand—and one they would soon destroy.

They no longer called it an island. They called it "belly." Because they knew they hadn't arrived—they had been swallowed. The land wasn't a refuge; it was a stomach, warm, moist, silent, and they were the leftovers it would slowly digest. The sea had spat them out, but hadn't forgotten them. It was just waiting for them to stop pretending they were free.

The men grew quieter. Their voices sounded like wood that had lain in the sun too long. They talked about dreams, but the dreams were all the same: salt, water, Magellan, death. It was as if the sea had burned the same story into their skulls. They woke up drenched in sweat, searching for the murmur—and when they didn't find it, they made it themselves, with their lips, with their teeth.

The hunger remained, even though they ate. It was no longer physical. It was a hole in their heads that grew when the sun set. One cut his hand just to see if it was still bleeding. Another bit his arm because the sound reminded him of home.

Their teeth splintered. The meat was tough, everything tasted of ash. They chewed until their gums burst, and they spat blood into the sand. But they didn't stop.

On the tenth day, they found Morales—or what was left of him. His eyes were missing, his fingers too. But he was smiling. He lay there, his lips parted, his teeth bare—yellow, blunt, broken, but grinning. One stepped back. "He looks like he's okay with it." Pigafetta would have written that down. But Pigafetta was gone, and with him every language that could describe it.

So they began to speak differently. Not with words. With actions. A push, a look, a bite. Small gestures, raw, simple, honest. The language of hunger.

On the twelfth day, one killed the other. A stone, a sound, a crack—that was all. Then silence. And then: chewing.

No one said anything. No one acted as if it were a sin. It was nature. They had simply relearned what they were: animals with memory.

During the night, it began to rain. The water ran over their bodies, cool, cleansing. One raised his head, tongue out of his mouth, and drank. "The sea is back," he murmured. "No," whispered another, "it's coming for us."

The fire they had lit that evening continued to burn. The smoke rose, gray and still, and somewhere above it, the wind gathered. It came from the ocean, from

the place they thought was behind them. And it brought the smell—salt, blood, rot.

They smelled it. And they smiled.

"She remembers," said one. "What?" asked another. "Us."

Then they began to dance. Slowly, awkwardly, naked, their skin glistening with sweat and madness. They stepped in a circle, singing sounds, no words, just tones, muffled, throaty, ancient. And the sea answered. Deep, far out.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The ground vibrated, slightly but noticeably. A breath beneath the earth. The island moved.

"She's alive," whispered one. "No," answered another, "she's dreaming."

And they knew that they were part of this dream. And that the dream knew no awakening.

On the fifteenth day, the land began to strike back. Not loudly, not with thunder or fire—but silently, insidiously, through what they called "roots." They emerged from the ground, grew between the boards of their makeshift huts, wrapped around their ankles, their wrists, their necks. They didn't pull, they just held. Like hands that wanted to say: *You don't belong here.*

They cut them off, burned them, and kicked them loose. But every morning they were back again. And with every night, the men grew weaker. Not just physically. Something inside them dissolved. The idea of being human became smaller, paler, superfluous.

They hardly spoke anymore. When someone did, it sounded like barking. They had forgotten what language was good for. Words were difficult, and hunger was easy.

The sky was still, the sea distant but tangible. And when they slept, they dreamed of waves rolling through forests and of fish with faces.

One woke up one morning and had gills. Small, fine lines behind his ears, red and moist. The others saw it, nodded, and said nothing. The next day he was gone. But tracks were found on the beach—no human ones. Slimy, round, leading into the sea.

Another began rubbing the salt directly into his skin. He laughed when it burned. "That way she'll remember me," he said. "She'll know I belong."

His skin became hard, cracked, and scaly. He called it "protection." The others believed him.

On the eighteenth day, rain fell, for days. Warm, heavy, salty. Not rain from the sky—rain from the sea. They drank it, bathed in it, slept in it. And at some point, they stopped getting dry.

The island had become an in-between realm. No land, no sea. A place where the body remained undecided.

One said that Magellan still steers, but no longer ships, but bodies. "He wanted to go around the world," he murmured. "Now he is. Everywhere."

The ground vibrated, almost tenderly. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. The sea remembered.

The men began to crawl. Not because they had to—because it was right. Their spines bent, their arms grew longer, their feet wider. They looked at each other and smiled, without teeth. Teeth had become useless.

They spoke only in sounds. A click, a hiss, a buzz. And sometimes, when they moved their tongues, it sounded like a distant storm.

In the night you could hear them singing. No words. No meaning. Just rhythm. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

A song of the sea – but from throats that were no longer human.

And somewhere out there, at the edge of the ocean, the sea rose, slightly, almost proudly. For she had won. Finally.

On the twentieth day, the land sank. It did so slowly, as if to be polite. No tremors, no thunder, no chaos—just a steady sinking, a yielding, as if the earth itself had understood that it was no longer needed. The sea crept up the edges, licked at the roots, drank the sand. It wasn't conquest. It was a homecoming.

The men barely noticed. They stood on the beach, their feet long wet, their skin soaked, their eyes cloudy. Their movements were sluggish, their voices brittle.

They looked like statues someone had carved from flesh and then forgotten in the rain.

One smiled as the waves touched him. "There you are," he whispered. Then he stepped forward. And the sea took him, without greed, without violence, only with that calm naturalness that belongs to all things that can take their time.

The others followed. Not like humans, not in panic or despair. They simply walked. Step by step, as if they had been called. Perhaps they had.

The water reached up to their chests, then up to their necks. They looked at each other, nodded, and understood each other without language. One raised his hand as if to wave. Then he lowered it.

And the sea closed over them.

No scream. No commotion. Just that final, collective exhalation that made the air a little heavier.

The rain stopped. The sun hung low, blood red, blazing. Half the island was gone. Only the fire they had lit the night before still glowed—a red eye above the waterline. Then there was a hiss. And the sea was whole.

There was movement beneath the surface. Bodies that turned, heads that contorted, skin that became transparent. Eyes that opened without blinking. Gills that opened like prayers. Fingers that became fins. Backs that arched.

The men were no longer men. They were memories. They were part.

Three strokes. Pause. Three strokes. The sea had regained its rhythm.

Pigafetta—or what remained of him—drifted somewhere in between. Perhaps he was one of them, perhaps just the echo of their madness. But if you listened deeply enough, you could hear his voice:

*"We thought we would circumnavigate the world.
In doing so, we became her."*

The sea roared in agreement. Not triumphantly—in understanding. For it knew that everything would eventually return to it.

The island sank, disappeared, was forgotten. Only a whirlpool remained, large, quiet, eternal. And from it came a sound – deep, pure, ancient. Not a scream. Not a word. Only truth.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

And anyone who sails past today, on a calm sea, who holds their breath and listens, can hear them. The men's voices, with teeth like bone dust. They're still singing. Not out of pain. Not out of hope. Only because they must.

Because the sea reminds them that everything that lives is just another form of water.

The sea was as smooth as a dead man's face that had stopped smiling. No wind, no sound, just this perfect, godforsaken silence. The island was gone, the sky empty, the water so calm you'd think it wasn't there. But it was. And it remembered.

The men were gone, but not forgotten. They had sunk into the sea's memory, layer upon layer, like stories no longer told but still felt. The sea carried them within itself, not as bodies—but as thoughts.

And it began to dream.

This was new. Since the beginning, the sea had seen everything: the bubbling of life, the rising of ships, the screeching of seagulls, the drowning of idiots. But dreams? Dreams were human. And that was precisely the point.

The sea had devoured them for so long that at some point they were digested—not just with flesh, but with mind. And now, empty of ships, full of souls, she began to remember what was never hers:
Language.Intent.Lie.

The Pacific rolled gently, barely visible. A gentle, self-satisfied nod. He had won, yes—but not by force. He had waited. Longer than any man could live. And now he lay there, calm, perfect, dreaming of the bastards who had challenged him.

He dreamed of Morales, with his wide-open eyes. Of Pigafetta, who had carved the word "insight" into the wood. Of Magellan, who thought he could tame him. He dreamed of their voices, their faces, their fear. And he dreamed of himself—through their eyes.

A sea monster that didn't exist. A god that didn't need a heaven. A wound that never heals because it is life itself.

The sea became heavy. Not physically—metaphysically. A space full of questions no one will ever answer.

At one point, in the middle of nowhere, the water rose. Slowly. Like a breath, like a muscle, like a memory. Then it fell again.

And out of the water protruded a tooth. Large, gray, porous. A final remnant of one of the men the sea refused to let go of. A trophy? A monument? Or just a sliver of guilt that even the sea couldn't digest?

Boats that pass by today—if they still pass at all—tell of this tooth. How it gleams at sunrise.

How he sings softly at night. A sound, deep, salty, ancient.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

The sea has no clock. But it knows repetition.

And someday it will happen again. One ship. One man. One dream, too far.

The sea will smile. It will be silent. And it will wait.

Because it has time. Because time is the only thing that death brings with it.

And when he comes, the sea will recognize him. Will rock him. Will break him.

Not out of hate. Not out of greed. Just for the only reason the sea ever knew:

Because it can.

The world continued to turn. The sun rose, fell, and rose again, as if it had seen nothing. No king asked the names of the disappeared, no priest prayed for their souls. The maps remained blank in that part of the Pacific where the sea had eaten and dreamed. Only sometimes, when a merchant returned home from the Moluccas, he would say quietly: There's something out there. Not land, not island, not storm. Something. Something that looks at you, even though you know water has no eyes.

But no one listened. Because no one wanted to know that the sea had retained something.

The story of the men with teeth like bone dust wasn't told in books. It lay in the air above the water, in that salty breath that tastes of iron and smells of oblivion. It sang itself in the bones of the gulls that screeched as they flew over empty spaces. It didn't scream. It waited.

The sea itself was no longer the same. It had a piece of humanity within it—not the bodies; it had dissected them, metabolized them, dissolved them. No. Something else remained. The rage. The despair. The lust for meaning. The sea, once merely movement, now carried something within it that once belonged only to humans: cynicism.

Sometimes the water was so calm it seemed unnatural. Fishermen would whisper, "It's thinking." Sometimes waves would pile up without wind, sliding toward ships without hitting them, only to be seen. And sometimes, as night fell, three dull sounds would be heard from the depths. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

A pulse. Or a heart. Or just the echo of something that should never have existed.

The men were forgotten, but their imprint remained. Like an imprint in wet sand, just before the tide takes it—and leaves something behind. Something harder. Something with teeth.

There was a child, so the legend goes, born on a beach, somewhere far away. It didn't cry at birth. It gasped for air—and gurgled salt water. The midwife pulled back the blanket, looked at its face—and stepped back. No teeth. Only edges. White, blunt edges. Like bone. They called it "Magel." And the sea grinned.

Because nothing is lost. Not out there. Not beneath this surface. Not in this realm that needs no memory because it is everything.

Magellan wanted to circumnavigate the world. In the end, he opened it up. Not for glory. Not for God. But for what lay beneath. What breathes when no one is listening anymore.

And it's still breathing.

The stench of despair

Elcano stood there like a tombstone overlooking the sea. He was no captain, no leader, no hero. Just the last man still breathing, albeit shallowly, fleetingly, almost reluctantly. His beard was matted, his skin leathery, his eyes an empty safe. No vision, no commanding tone—just function. He was what remained when all dreams were burned, drowned, or corroded.

The Victoria, the last ship, creaked, groaned, alive just enough to keep from sinking. The planks stank of oil, fish, piss, and resignation. In the holds, remnants of provisions rotted next to bones no one cared to count. The sails hung from the mast like dead skin, and the wind was so calm, as if it were taking pity on them.

The men who still walked did so mechanically—like puppets without strings. Their clothes had become skin, their skin bark. They barely spoke, and when they did, it was only with words that sounded more like choking: "Water." "Rats." "Blood." Sometimes they laughed. Not out of joy. Just because laughter still worked when everything else failed.

Elcano didn't know how long they'd been on the road. All he knew was that it smelled of despair. Not the kind of romantic sorrow—but the real, dirty, corrosive stench of it. Like a mixture of rotting gums, sweat from fear, and piss-soaked leather.

The stench came from everything: the ship, the men, the water. But most of all – from their thoughts.

They began to murmur in their sleep. Old psalms, prayers, songs, curses, commands—all jumbled together. As if every dream were erupting at once. As if their brains were searching for an exit that no longer existed.

One—a young, nameless man—carved words into his chest with a fork. "Too far." "Too long." "Too empty." He died the next day of nothing specific. The stench remained.

Another swore he saw Magellan. Not as a ghost. As a rat. With a fish-skin hat. He hissed orders and then disappeared into the hold. They searched everything. Found nothing. But the man was certain: "He's here. The bastard is still leading us."

Elcano said nothing. He almost never said anything. But that night, he stood alone at the bow for a long time, gazing into the water, as if searching for the

answer down there that no one above had for a long time. And the sea, the dirty, greedy, all-knowing sea—was silent. Because it was full.

It was fed up with these trembling creatures who thought they could tame it. It had eaten them, spat them out, and they still came back.

And they stank. The stench of despair hung like a veil over everything—sticky, sweet, endless.

It stuck to the beards, the dreams, the boards. It wasn't death. It was worse. It was the knowledge that death had long since arrived—but too proud to let it go.

They sailed on. Where to? No idea. Why? Because it was worse to stay still. And because no one wanted to say what everyone else was thinking: Maybe the sea was a better place.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats. Even now, in this windless hell, it still sounded. The heart of the Pacific. Or had it long since become her own?

Elcano sat in his bunk, if you could call it that—a rotten wooden shack full of dirt, nails, and thoughts better left unthought. He had a piece of canvas between his teeth to stop him from screaming at night. Not from pain, but from thoughts that ran through his head like rats, gnawing at whatever sanity remained. Magellan was dead, yes. But somehow not gone. And that was the problem.

He came into Elcano's dreams—not as a hero, but as a faceless voice. "Keep driving," she said. "Don't ask." "Just drive."

And Elcano sailed. Not because he believed in the route, in God, or in returning home—but because there was no alternative. He was no longer captain. He was the shadow of a plan. An echo that held the oars.

During the day, he shuffled across the deck, counting men who weren't really men anymore. They crouched in corners, chewing on wooden edges, talking to themselves or to dead fish. Some had started eating their fingernails. Others carved small idols from the bones of the dead—faces with many mouths and no eyes. Elcano let them. Because what else could he do?

The supplies were nothing but a mold-crusted joke. Water? Yes, there was. From barrels that stank like corpse urine. But they drank it. Of course they drank it. Because everything that didn't die was eventually drunk.

A man named Costa—formerly a sailor, now a walking memory—came to Elcano one day, naked except for a piece of rope around his neck. "I saw Magellan," he said. Elcano didn't answer. "He said I should help you." Then he grinned. And jumped from the mast.

No one screamed. No one ran. They watched him fall. And they heard the sound a body makes when it breaks. Not spectacular. Just final.

Elcano looked away. He wanted to cry, but his tears had long since been replaced by salt water. Everything inside him had become sea. And the sea felt nothing.

He no longer slept at night. He wrote. Not in books—in wood. Words like:

"Who leads?"

"Why us?"

"Was that the price?"

Questions that demanded no answers. Only the sound of carving – as proof that he was still alive.

The Victoria became quieter. Not silent. Just... quieter. As if the ship itself no longer believed in its voyage. It creaked like an old man who knows no one is listening.

And the stench—that goddamn stench—became the crew's breath. They smelled of themselves. Of death that never came. Of salvation that was elusive.

One found a dead animal in the storeroom—some bird, long since decomposed. He ate it. They watched. He died. They nodded.

Elcano sometimes wondered if they were even human anymore. Perhaps they were merely carriers of a mistake. Floating proof that the will is stronger than the mind—and dumber.

He went on deck, placed his hand on the mast, felt the pulse. Three beats. Pause. Three beats. Not from below. From him. The Pacific had implanted itself deep in his chest.

"Magellan is dead," he whispered. But the sea didn't answer. For it had long since been within him.

They didn't see the land. They smelled it. It didn't smell like hope. It smelled like a lie. Too green, too floral, too alive. Like a damned play in hell—plants

trying to grow while they themselves had long since rotted away inside. Someone called out, "Land!" but it didn't sound like a cry for salvation; it sounded like a scream for the final nail in the coffin.

The Victoria drifted into the bay like a dying whale. Sluggish, creaking, half alive, half a monument to insanity. The water was calm, almost too calm, like a stage on which something was about to happen that would ruin everything.

They dropped the anchor. Not because they had to, but because it was a reflex. Like a drowning man sometimes still paddles with his arms even though he's long since gone under.

The shore was there. With sand. With trees. With birds that didn't know who they were welcoming. And the men—if you could still call them that—stared at it. No one ran. No one laughed. They got out like lepers, like shadows of themselves, like the dirt beneath the feet of gods.

The ground was solid. Too solid. It reminded her of responsibility.

Some knelt, not out of gratitude, but because their legs gave out. One lay down and said, "This isn't real." Another replied, "Yes, it is. And that's the worst part."

They began to gather, to search—not for food, but for meaning. But the jungle gave them none. It gave them only fruits that were too sweet. Animals that looked too curious. Water that was too clear.

It was as if this place wanted to say:

"You don't fit in here. You're not part of anything anymore."

One tried to start a fire—it went out immediately. Another found a hut, empty, deserted, but still intact. He entered, sat down, stared into the void, and said, "Someone has died here before." He stayed. He never spoke again.

Elcano walked around like a silent prophet. He looked around, smelled, heard, felt. And everything within him cried out: *Incorrect*.

This land wasn't salvation. It was a reminder of how far they were from themselves. How low they had fallen. How much they stank of the sea.

The locals—yes, there were some—only arrived after days. Suspicious, curious, armed with spears and a hunch. They saw the men. And they understood immediately.

Not through words. But through the stench.
It wasn't physical. It was metaphysical. An emanation of the past.

Elcano tried to speak, tried to act. But all that came out of his mouth was dry, faithless Spanish. The locals nodded. They left. They never came back.

The men stayed. They ate, they were silent, they waited. But for what?

Maybe to the sea. Maybe to death. Maybe to understanding.

But that didn't happen.

What came was the feeling that they had set foot on land – but had never really arrived.

Elcano woke up one morning and realized he was still breathing. It wasn't a burst of relief, it was a punch in the stomach. Breathing meant continuing to live. Continuing to live meant continuing to drag himself along. He saw the others on the floor, half asleep, half dead, skin and dirt and senseless eyes. He smelled them. They smelled him. Everything smelled of despair.

And suddenly he stood up. Not as a captain. Not as a man. But as a body that still had a reflex. He walked back to the ship, placed his foot on the planks that creaked like bones. He put his hand to the mast, felt the pulse of the wood. Three strokes. Pause. Three strokes. The sea was still there. It lurked outside, waiting.

He began mending the sails. Not out of hope, but out of reflex. He hauled ropes, he pulled planks, he straightened the mast. He did it silently, like a priest saying a mass he no longer believes in. The others watched, irritated, but no one stopped him.

Maybe they thought he'd lost his mind. Maybe they just had nothing else to do but watch.

After a while, some began to help him. Not out of faith, but out of movement. Hands that work think less. Fists that knot feel less hunger. They continued building, hour after hour, day after day, without words. The ship became a ship again. Not good. Not strong. But floating.

"Why?" one finally asked quietly. Elcano looked at him, eyes emptier than the sea. "Because we can't do anything else."

They nodded as if they'd heard a sermon. But it wasn't a sermon. It was a judgment.

At night, Elcano sat alone at the bow. He held his hand over the water, as if testing whether it was hot or cold. He whispered, "If you want me, then come and get me. But let me go while I can."

The sea was silent. But the silence was a nod.

He went back to the men. "We're going," he said. No speech, no plan, no route. Just the word. And everyone stood up.

They didn't know where they were going. They only knew they would drive again. Not out of hope, not out of duty. Because driving was the only thing left that they hadn't lost.

In the morning, they hoisted the sails. The wind came, tired, warm, but it came. The Victoria rose, fell, moved. Like an old dog getting up once more.

They looked back at the land. It looked like salvation. It smelled like a trap. They turned around.

And they drove.

The Victoria glided out of the bay like a ghost that no longer needs church. No drums, no shouts, no cheers. Only the creaking of planks and the soft scraping of ropes against wood. The men stood on deck, bent, gray, silent. They were no longer crew, but shadows walking on water. They held on, not to hope, but to ropes, because their legs no longer knew how to stand.

Elcano stood at the helm, the wheel so firmly in his hands as if he could nail himself to it. He didn't look forward, nor back. He looked into nothingness. No star, no map, no prayer. Just water. And yet he steered. Not because he believed, not because he wanted to—because his hands did it, of their own accord, like a reflex.

The island disappeared behind them. A green patch in the gray, shrinking smaller and smaller until it looked like a memory no longer needed. The wind blew diagonally from the front, warm, sweet, full of salt and something else no one could name. It wasn't a wind of salvation. It was the breath of the sea.

The men no longer shared labor. No commands, no "Aye, sir." They moved like a pack. One pulled a rope, another held it, another tied it. No eye contact, no

instructions—just instinctive coordination, like animals that know the same escape route.

The ship stank. It stank of everything they were and never wanted to be again: death, sweat, decay, soap made of fear. But they no longer smelled it. It had become their scent, their fur, their second skin.

Elcano thought of Magellan, but not in words. He sometimes saw him in the periphery of his vision: a silhouette on the railing, a shadow between the sails, a smile in the foam of the waves. Not reproach. Not consolation. Just a memory.

"We're leaving," Elcano murmured quietly, not to the men, not to himself. "We're leaving because that's all we are."

The sea was silent. But in this silence was a sound, deep, ancient, like a heartbeat that had grown too large for one chest. Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

And they continued on. Not to home. Not to freedom. Just away.

The water was smooth, the sky empty. No birds, no fish, only the smell of salt and rusted fate. The Victoria creaked as if it were praying. And the men creaked along with it.

They were no longer sailors. They were the moving sea.

The Victoria was no longer a ship; it was a moving coffin. A dark, wet box made of wood and guilt, creaking across a sea long since sated. No helmsman, no destination, no stars that still spoke. Just water under water, salt upon salt, time without time. Elcano stood at the helm like a cross-bearer on his way to the gallows. He held the wheel not to steer, but to avoid falling over.

The men had become silent. Not out of discipline, but because their voices could no longer find a tone that didn't resonate with wounds. They moved like shadows, crawled like smoke, and were silent like gravestones. They barely ate, they drank when it rained, and they slept standing up. Sometimes one opened his mouth as if to scream—and only managed a dry hiss.

At night, Elcano sat alone at the bow. He gazed down into the darkness. Sometimes it glowed there, like a lazy heart. Sometimes he thought he heard Magellan's voice, quiet, patient:

"You're not going home, Juan. You're going to me."

He didn't smile. He had forgotten how to smile. He put his hand in the water. It was warm. Like skin. Like breath.

"Get me," he whispered. "But let me drive until I realize it myself."

The sea didn't answer. But the wind came. A breath, barely noticeable, salty, heavy, old. He pulled on the sails, and the Victoria obeyed—not Elcano, not the course, but the sea.

The coast from which they had set out was now only an idea. Home was only a sound in their heads. There was no turning back, no going forward, only sailing. The wood creaked, the sky was an empty shell. The stench on board was no longer just despair. It was the opposite of life. It was anticipation.

Three beats. Pause. Three beats.

Elcano heard it within himself, in the ship, in the water. Everything beat the same rhythm. The sea had had them long ago. It only let them go so they would notice.

He gripped the steering wheel tighter and closed his eyes. "If we die," he murmured, "at least we'll die driving."

And so the Victoria glided on. Not west. Not east. Only deeper into the belly of the Pacific. A moving coffin on a silent, breathing desert.

The sea was calm. It had time.

Land! And the gods laugh

They didn't see it, they smelled it. The scent of earth, rain, leaves—that scent that had once welcomed them into the world, before everything had rotted. Now it smelled like a mockery. After months of salt and death, it suddenly hung in the air, thick and sweet, like a joke from the gods. "Land!" someone whispered, but the word sounded not like salvation, but like a curse.

On the horizon, a streak of green. Then hills. Then trees. Birds circling, loud, shrill, alive. Too alive for eyes that knew only gray. The sea below them was calm, so calm, as if it knew that the next spectacle no longer belonged to it.

Elcano stood at the helm, the wheel between his hands like a piece of cold iron. He didn't look ahead, or at the land. He stared into the spaces between. Everything in him said: *This is not real*. But he kept going. He couldn't do anything else.

The men on deck, who were still men, stared. No cheers, no laughter, no prayers. Just stares. Hollow. Tired. A few of them cried, but not with joy. More like the kind you laugh when you get the joke.

The land came closer. The smell grew stronger. It was too green, too damp, too sweet. It was as if someone had painted a landscape to lure them. The ship creaked, the sails fluttered weakly. A seagull landed on the railing, looked at them, cawed—and flew away again, as if it had recognized something it didn't want to touch.

"Gods," one murmured. "The gods are laughing." Another nodded. "Always have."

The sea was calm, but Pigafetta's old note – if he ever lived anywhere – came to Elcano's mind:

"All land is just the sea in different disguises."

He placed a hand on the wood. It was warm, pulsing. Three blows. Pause. Three blows. "Not yet," he whispered. "Not yet."

But the land came anyway. And the gods laughed.

They set foot on the ground, and it was as if they were stepping onto a mirror. The sand was warm, soft, too soft for feet that had only known planks and salt. The greenery stood before them like a backdrop: trees, fruit, waterfalls, everything in this exaggerated, almost pornographic abundance. But they felt nothing. No wonder, no joy. Only that brief pang in the stomach you get when you realize you've walked into a trap.

The first to kneel, not in gratitude, but because their knees gave way. They grabbed the sand, letting it trickle through their fingers. It didn't stick. It was clean. Too clean. One sniffed it, shook his head, and spat. "This isn't dirt," he said. "This is sugar."

Another stumbled into the forest, plucked a fruit from a branch, and bit into it. Juice ran down his chin. Sweet, sticky, strange. He laughed, coughed, choked.

He vomited, fell to his knees, laughed again. "We're dead," he said. "This is paradise." Then he collapsed.

Elcano stood at the edge of the beach. He watched as the men scattered in all directions, tugging at leaves, sipping water, throwing themselves on the ground as if they could embrace him. He didn't move. He knew the land was no paradise. It was just another face of the same hell.

He took a few steps inside. The air was thick, humid, sweet. Too sweet. It crept into his lungs, settled on his tongue, as if it wanted to suffocate him. Sounds everywhere: birds, insects, water. Life they no longer understood.

The men stopped talking. They growled, whispered, and scratched. One began digging a hole, without reason or purpose. Another lay on his back, staring into the trees that closed over him like a mouth.

Elcano thought of all the maps they had drawn. None had shown them this. None had warned them that land looked like salvation, but was only a mirror.

"We've come back," he murmured. "Just not where we came from."

Behind him, the Victoria creaked in the water. She was still there, waiting like an animal abandoned and yet not leaving. Before him lay the land, lush, damp, lurking.

And somewhere between the two, the gods laughed.

The locals didn't come with drums or war cries. They came like shadows, silent, with eyes like wounds and faces like those carved from stone. They wore no armor, no uniforms, only cloth and skin and something that smelled like distrust. They stood at the edge of the forest, not moving, not speaking. They simply saw. And what they saw kept them from coming any closer.

For what had crawled out of the ship were not gods, not traders, not men. They were fragments, forgotten things. Creatures that could no longer explain themselves. The dirt in their hair, the scars on their souls, the stench of their lost names—all of it clung to them like smoke.

A boy took a step forward, barely more than a child, a spear in his hand. He looked directly at Elcano. No hatred, no respect. Just that clear gaze that said: *You are not right.*

Elcano nodded. He knew that.

One of his men stepped forward, shrugged, attempted a smile. He extended his arm, offered something—a shell, perhaps, a piece of cloth. Something that demanded action. Something that would make one forget.

The boy didn't look. He turned around and left.

Little by little they disappeared again. The men of the Victoria stood there, staring into the thicket, which was now empty, but not forgotten. They knew what that meant.

"They don't want us," said one. "They see what we are," said another.

They sat down in the sand. And the laughter of the gods was no longer somewhere else—it was within them. A giggle in their chests, a ringing in their ears.

You have gone too far, it said.

There is no turning back now.

Elcano went back to the ship. He no longer looked like a captain. He looked like a messenger carrying a message no one wanted to hear.

"Reload," he said. "What?" someone asked. "Everything. Whatever's left. We're moving on."

"Where?"

"Away."

They reloaded the ship, but it wasn't preparation—it was an act of denial. Every step, every movement, every sack carried on board screamed: *We haven't learned anything*. The sand beneath their feet was soft, but no one wanted to stand on it anymore. The land had looked at them, examined them—and judged them. The locals had vanished like fog, and the air remained, heavy with accusation.

They pulled barrels that were half empty and half rotten. They stacked crates whose contents no one knew anymore. They hauled water in containers that looked like they carried more sickness than salvation. But they did it. Because it was exercise. Because it was better to stretch ropes than to think.

Elcano stood at the bow, staring into the gray. The sea lay there like an old enemy, lowering its weapon because it knows you've already finished yourself off. He felt no resistance anymore. No will. Only this impulse: *Further*.

One of the men—Joaquin, they thought—stood in front of him. "We could stay." Elcano shook his head. "We could die here." Elcano nodded. "But not today."

The man laughed, bitterly and dryly. "Then tomorrow." And left.

The ship was almost empty, but they pretended it was heavy. They didn't polish anything, they didn't repair anything—they were just packing. As if they wanted to escape before the country forgot their names.

No one spoke of the way home. No one spoke of Spain. No one spoke of glory. They spoke of nothing. For words had ceased to have meaning.

The sails were hoisted like flags in a cemetery. The anchor was raised, slowly, as if a corpse were hanging from it.

And then they left again. Just like that. Without a destination. Without a blessing. Only with the certainty that everything they had touched would be better off with them gone.

Behind them lay the land that had laughed at them. In front of them lay the sea that she had never forgotten.

And a single thought burned in their heads:

Maybe this is our place – between two places that neither want us.

The sea took her back, but not like a mother, not like a lover, not like a familiar place. It took her back like a creditor takes a debtor—with cold hands, a contemptuous look, and a list of every mistake. The water wasn't rough, not angry. It was indifferent. And that was precisely what made it so unbearable.

The waves didn't beat—they groped. The wind didn't scream—it whispered. And what it whispered, no one really understood, but everyone felt it:
You belong to me.

No storm. No thunder.

Only this oppressive, clean, ice-cold presence that said:
I was never your enemy. You destroyed yourselves.

The ship creaked, the sails hung limp, and the men moved like shadows of what they had once been. Not even animals anymore—just bodies with memories.

One died quietly, in the night. Another followed two days later. They were thrown overboard, without rites, without words. The ocean closed over them, unmoved. No circle was drawn, no sound remained.

Elcano barely spoke anymore. He was there, but he wasn't. His gaze passed through people, his heart beat somewhere else. Perhaps at the bottom. Perhaps already in a story that no one will write.

They ate leftovers, they drank rain, they counted days until the numbers ceased to mean anything. The sea was everywhere. Not water—presence. A god without a face, without a voice, without mercy.

One prayed again. Another began scratching his skin with splinters. A third whispered the same word every day: "Cebu. Cebu. Cebu." No one knew why. But no one dared to ask.

The sky widened. The silence grew thicker. And the sea didn't laugh. It waited.

For it knew what they did not know: True death does not come when you die. It comes when you know you should have died—and you don't.

In the morning, it suddenly smelled different. Not of salt. Not of death. Of wood fire, of fermented fruit, of earth—damp, fresh, strange. One of the men shouted "Land!" but this time no one believed him. Because they had heard it too many times. And too often it had been nothing but fog, hope, or madness.

But then it really appeared—a strip between sky and water, brown and green, solid and soft. A continent? An island? Another illusion? No matter. It was there.

Elcano stepped forward, thin as a prayer no one says anymore. He saw it. And he felt nothing. No sigh of relief. No release. Only a dull thud in his chest, as if someone had said to him:

You are too late.

For they were no longer themselves. They had been worn out. Overcooked. Strangers in their own flesh.

The men stood at the railing, looking over, tired, stunned, like people crawling out of a burning house – only to discover that everything outside had long since burned down.

"What is this?" asked one. "One last joke," said another. Elcano remained silent.

The Victoria glided closer. The waves were soft, almost loving. But that was precisely what made it worse. Because it felt like pity. And pity is worse than hate.

They anchored. No one wanted to get out. Because whatever was there, they knew they no longer fit in. Neither in the world nor in themselves.

Elcano remained at the wheel. His hands still. His gaze blank.

And somewhere in the silence—behind the trees, in the wind, in the sky—the gods laughed. Not loudly.
Not cruel. Just... knowing.

Islands of temptation and decay

It lay there like an invitation: soft, warm, green, and golden in the twilight. The island looked like the promise one had never received, but had always believed in. Palm trees, fruit, soft music from the trees—or was that the wind? Perhaps it was the brain, piecing together its last illusions like fever dreams.

The men looked over like dogs who have meat shoved in their mouths but aren't told whether it's poisoned. "There's water there," said one. "There are women there," said another. "There's death there," said no one.

Elcano stood there, his face turned to stone. The island stank. Not really—it smelled good, too good. Of ripeness, of honey, of things you couldn't get without a price in this world. And if he'd learned one thing in those months filled with sweat, blood, and voices from the depths: If it smells good, it will consume you.

But they went anyway. They couldn't do anything else. You can only pull on a rope for so long before you let go—or hang yourself on it.

The boat was launched, a few of the men rowed, others silently gazed toward the shore. They saw huts, they saw smoke, they saw movement. People.

Or what was left of it.

The sand beneath their feet was warm and soft, almost too soft. It gave way like flesh. The men stepped out of the boat as if of their own accord, walking slowly, suspiciously, with eyes that saw more than they intended. At the edge of the forest stood huts, made of bamboo and palm leaves, artless but not poor—more like those of people who had never learned to be afraid.

Then they came. The locals. Men with eyes like mirrors, in which the souls of Europeans immediately hid. Women with hips like promises and voices like ferment. They smiled. They waved. They offered fruit, water, faces, bodies.

The men of the Victoria took everything. Because they had to. Because they no longer knew how to say "no."

They ate. They drank. They lay in hammocks that smelled of flowers and guilt. And at night, when the moon shone on the rooftops, they didn't sleep—they disappeared.

Some didn't come back. Others came back with flickering eyes. They said nothing. But something inside them was... emptied.

Elcano stayed awake. He saw the women's smiles. He heard the men's whispers. And he smelled what lurked beneath the blossoms.

Not death. Not poison. Something deeper. Something that ate without chewing.

At night he wrote with charcoal on the side of the ship:
"This is not an island. This is a decision."

And no one understood. Because no one wanted to understand.

On the third day, the island smelled different. The floral scent was still there, but it had taken on a metallic quality. Something like rusty nails in wine. The water suddenly tasted sweeter. The fruit was muddier. And the women—they still smiled, but their eyes remained dead, like mussel shells in mud.

A man named Ruiz was found in the forest, tongueless. Another, Mateo, sat in the hut, his eyes wide open, his hands full of sand. He only said, "They're not human." When someone touched him, he almost broke. Not physically. Inside.

The decay didn't come like a plague. It came like warmth. First pleasant. Then sweaty. Then putrid. Then a smell that came not from the body, but from the mind.

The men became quieter. And then loud. And then wild.

One wanted to take a woman with him – she laughed at him. He hit her. She got up again. He fell over.

That evening they found his body. His eyes were missing. And a finger.

No one asked. No one searched. They began to count how many were still there. And even that became difficult because no one was sure anymore whether the person lying there had been alive yesterday.

Elcano had long since withdrawn, living on the ship again, sleeping below deck, drinking only rainwater he collected himself. He didn't speak. He thought. Or tried to.

"This island doesn't want us to leave," he once said. "Or it wants us to take something with us."

But what? And why did everyone laugh so quietly when he said that?

The island changed them. Not like a storm that tears through them. Like a mushroom that grows. Quietly. Invisibly. From within. The men began to observe each other—not as comrades, but as animals in the same cage. Distrust crept over their skin like an insect that never stops moving. Everyone was alone, even if they slept in a hut full of voices.

They sweated more. They slept less. Their teeth turned yellow, then gray. They all smelled the same—sweet, muffled, like shattered dreams. Those who had lost themselves in the women's arms began to say strange things. About voices in the forest. About shadows that didn't belong to the light. About the feeling of being watched, even in their sleep.

A sailor with half-burned skin—no one remembered his name—cut his thigh with a shell knife and drew spirals on the wall of the hut. "So they'd know it was me," he said, before jumping out the window with a blank expression. He was later found lying in the sand, his face to the ground, as if trying to bury himself.

Elcano observed everything. Silently. Taking notes. His writing became illegible. His thoughts shortened. His sentences reeked of fear. But he remained lucid. Because he didn't participate. Didn't eat. Didn't drink. Didn't smile.

The island began to ignore him. Or it lurked.

He noticed how the others looked at him. Not hostilely. Not friendly. As if he knew something they could no longer understand.

On the fifth evening, he heard them—the drums. Not from the locals. Not from outside. From inside. From the floorboards. From the walls. From his skull.

He stood up. He went on deck. He looked at the island.

And for the first time he saw what she was.

Not a place. A will. A hunger with roots. A smile with bile.

He whispered, "You want us to stay. Or you want us to take you with us."

The trees rustled. And somewhere, very briefly, a child laughed.

On the seventh day, Elcano stood at the railing with a torch. The flame trembled, but it burned. Behind him, the ship—empty, ready, hungry like an old animal that finally recognized its master. In front of him, the island—whispering, warm, breathing. A promise that had slowly turned into a threat.

"We're leaving tomorrow morning," he said. No one answered. But they heard him.

Night crept over the beach like a disease. Some men returned quietly to the ship. No luggage. Only glances. One wore a bone on his belt. Another wore a smile that didn't belong to him.

Elcano said nothing. He let them come. Not out of trust. But because at least they were still breathing.

Two stayed behind. Of their own free will. Or because the island wouldn't let them go.

At first light of day they cast off the ropes. No farewell. No greeting. No shot.

The island became smaller. And then it was gone.

Nobody talked about it. They talked about nothing. They sailed. Slowly. Against the wind.

And at some point—a day or two later—one of them smelled human again. Another woke up without shaking. A third suddenly said, "I dreamed I could walk again."

Elcano looked at them, one by one. And he knew: They hadn't survived anything. They had only continued to exist.

And somewhere deep in the bilge, between rotten wood and decaying water, there was still something of that island.

Not visible. Not nameable. But it was there.

It waited.

Traders, priests and cannibals

The nearest island smelled of smoke and pork. Not wild, not rotten—cultivated. The fire was controlled, the decay regulated, fear had a temple. When the Victoria docked, men were already standing on the beach. Tall, upright men with strange headbands and arms that looked like weapons. Behind them: priests, with faces carved from wood and eyes like holes in the world.

Elcano didn't let the men ashore immediately. He stared for a long time. Too long. "This is no place to stay," he muttered. But the ship was empty, the stomachs too, and faith had long since been thrown overboard.

They left. Merchants arrived first, carrying baskets full of spices, dried fish, shells, bones, gold dust. Everything was shown with hands, nothing with words. They knew who was coming. They had seen the sails, recognized the wood, smelled the eyes.

And they knew: these men were not heroes. They were hunger on two legs.

Then the priests came. They brought smiles, silent ceremonies, gifts that felt like confessions. One carried a skull in his hand like a lantern. Another had a tongue wrapped around his neck—not his.

Elcano remained stiff. His eyes scanned everything like cold metal. "There's no faith here," he said. "Here, there's exchange."

The men laughed. Finally, no more scarcity. No more salt, no more mold, no more shade. There was meat. There was warmth. There were women—cautious, distant, like servants of an idea no one understood.

There was dancing in the night. Drums beat. Merchants grinned. Priests watched. And somewhere in the darkness—between fire and smoke—teeth flashed. Too white. Too many.

The next morning, one of the men was missing. And no one asked the question that was burning in everyone's mind:

Had he stayed voluntarily – or been eaten?

The missing man was one of the silent ones. Nameless in memory, colorless in appearance, but not forgotten. The kind of person who always goes along, never contradicts—and then suddenly disappears. One less shadow on the deck, one spoon that no longer finds a eater. No one said anything. Only glances, slanted, washed-out, in the direction of the priests, who once again stood in the square with their trophies: skulls, jewelry made of teeth, small bundles of bones whose origins no one wanted to know.

The merchants grinned as always. Showing off gold, pottery, dried fruit. One brought out a small drum with a membrane too thin for animal hide. Elcano looked at it. He looked at it too closely. Then he stepped back without a word.

"We won't stay long," he said that evening. Some grumbled. They had just discovered the food. But no one objected loudly. Not as long as those priests were standing there. Not as long as the walls in every hut smelled of blood, covered with herbs like an old mistake with cheap perfume.

At night, it began to rain. Gently, warmly, almost lovingly. A priest came aboard the ship—uninvited by anyone. He placed an object on the deck: a carved piece of wood that looked like a tooth. Then he bowed. And left.

Elcano picked it up. He said nothing. But his fist remained closed for a long time.

The next morning, another one was missing. This time a boy, barely twenty.

One of the sailors said, "Perhaps he's lost." Another spat. "No one gets lost here. The gods dine here."

The traders came back anyway. The priests were silent. And the meat in the baskets looked... fresh. Tender. Bright.

The men looked away. But they chewed.

Elcano picked up the drum. The one with the fake skin. He weighed it. He felt that it said more than any conversation on this island. The merchant who had offered it to him stood beside it, grinning broadly, sweating like a pig before slaughter—or afterward. Not a word, just that nod. *You already know*, said the eyes. *So why pretend it's new?*

Elcano struck the skin once. The sound was soft. Muffled.
Like a final heartbeat.

He carried the drum back on board. He didn't tell anyone why. He didn't say anything else at all. Only his gaze became sharper. No one who looks into such eyes emerges unscathed. Not from the depths, not from themselves.

At night, fires burned in the square. Dancing. Drumming. Screaming.

But this time the Europeans were dancing too. Not out of joy. Out of hunger. Out of madness. Out of the need to still feel.

One of them started wrestling with a priest – playfully. It quickly became serious. Then loud. Then quiet. The priest fell. The smile remained. He got up again. Blood on his chin. Not his own.

Elcano watched all this from the railing. His men staggered between trance and instinct. They had forgotten how to pray. But they hadn't forgotten how to eat.

The next morning, there were leftover meat in a bowl. No pork. No fish. No animal with four legs.

No one asked. No one doubted. Only one vomited. And was laughed at by the others.

"It's only flesh," said one. "It's only life," said another. And Elcano remained silent. But he knew: the line had been crossed.

Not the one between cultures. The one between humans and animals.

And no one would ever go back.

Elcano stepped onto the square in the morning. The smoke still hung in the air like a guilt that couldn't be spoken. His men lay around like empty hoses—crammed with things that were never meant for them. Some were asleep. Others stared. One was counting his fingers, as if he no longer knew how many belonged to him.

The priests were already standing there. In ranks, their faces unquestioning. They were smiling. Not friendly. Not threatening. Simply... knowing. One stepped forward. Tall, plain, with a gaze like a stone thrown through a church wall. He handed Elcano a bundle: cloth, rolled up, soaked.

Elcano opened it. A finger joint. An earring belonging to one of the missing. And a tooth—with a gold filling. European. Certainly.

"Enough," Elcano said. Not loudly. Not angrily. Just clearly.

The men heard it. Even those who had long since abandoned the language.

"We set sail at sunset."

One laughed. Another spat. A third said, "Where to?"

Elcano didn't turn around. "Get out of here."

That was enough. Nothing more was needed.

He went back to the ship. No negotiations. No pleas. Just movement. Because if you can still stand, you have to walk.

The vendors came again. This time with less merchandise. More stares. More gestures.

One last deal? One last meal? One last person?

Elcano never went ashore again. He had the ship prepared. He never showed his face again. Not out of cowardice. Out of disgust.

In the afternoon, his men returned. Not all of them. Not completely. But enough.

They didn't say a word. But their hands worked. And that was more than he expected.

The sun was low as the Victoria weighed anchor. No wind. No song. No blessing. Just this movement—jerky, ponderous, like an animal tied up in one place for too long. The island didn't burn, nor did it disappear—it simply stood there. Like a stage set for a play you'd rather not have seen.

The priests stood on the bank, silent, in a row like gravestones. The merchants sat beside them, chewing. Perhaps on fruit. Perhaps on debt. Perhaps on

something that only looked like meat. And no one waved. Not those who stayed. Not those who left.

The men on board didn't talk. They had spoken enough with their teeth. They had shouted enough with their eyes. They looked at the sea as if it were the lesser evil.

Elcano stood at the stern. He still carried the bundle in his jacket. The tooth. The finger. The earring. He hadn't thrown them away. He hadn't buried them. He had kept them.

As a memory. Or as proof. Or because some things haunt you, even if you sink them.

The wind came slowly. The sails filled like lungs after a drowning attempt.

No one said, "We're still alive." No one said, "It's over."

Because everyone knew: Some things you just can't digest. You carry them with you, in tongues that no longer speak, and in hands that tremble at night.

They drove on. Somewhere.

And behind them remained an island that was not marked on maps, but continued to grow within each of them.

A king in rags

They reached the island at night. No fire, no signal, just the silhouette of trees stretching into the sky like crooked fingers. The water was calm—too calm—and the ship glided closer like a thief who no longer knows whether to take or flee.

In the morning, a man lay on the beach. Alone. Thin. Barefoot.

He wore a cloth around his body that must have once been red, but now looked like a piece of faded shame. His hair was long and matted, his skin cracked like old leather. And yet: he stood up when the dinghy arrived, raising his hand as if he were accustomed to being welcomed.

"I am the king of this island," he said, his voice hanging in the void like a clearing of the throat.

Elcano stepped ashore. He looked around. No subjects. No huts. No goats. Just dirt. Just wind. Just this man with a crown of bamboo and madness.

"Where are your people?" asked Elcano. The king grinned. "They abandoned me. Or I abandoned them. Or we all died and no one noticed."

The men laughed. Some nervously. One spat. But the king didn't flinch.

He showed them a dilapidated hut, offered water that tasted of wood, and fruits no one recognized. "Sit down. Tell me about the world that is no longer mine."

Elcano did it. Wordlessly. With his eyes.

For what could he say? That they, too, had lost a people? That his ship was a floating morgue? That being king meant nothing when the crown was merely a memory of pride?

The king drank, laughed, and sneezed. "I was once somebody," he said. "Now I'm just a shadow of that. But at least this shadow belongs to me alone."

And something burned inside Elcano. Not pity. Not hate. Only knowledge.

Because what he saw was himself, a few weeks later.

The king lived alone in a hut that smelled of wet straw and old stories. No bed, only mats. No table, only stones. No throne, except the one in his head, slowly rotting away. Elcano sat opposite him, on a tree stump he had wiped clean himself. There were no weapons. Only glances. And two men who understood each other without knowing each other.

"How did you become king?" Elcano asked. The old man laughed, coughed, and rubbed his eyes. "I had something they wanted. And when they had it, I was suddenly the man in charge. After that, they wanted something else. I didn't have it. And then I was the one to blame."

"And then?" "Then I stayed."

Elcano nodded. A sentence, like a tombstone. Then I stayed.

The king pulled an old comb from his pocket. It was made of bone, almost transparent. "This is the only thing I have left. This and my memories. And they rot faster."

The men ate together. Something root-like, tough as leather and tasting like wet stone. No one complained. Because when two men exist only to survive, they don't need seasoning.

Later, the king showed him the island. A cemetery with trees. Old fireplaces everywhere, dilapidated huts, skulls among roots. "Here was once a village. There's the ceremonial site. Back there is my wife."

"Buried?" "No. Disappeared. Just gone. Maybe into the jungle. Maybe into a better story."

They stood for a long time where an altar must have once been. Now: moss, mushrooms, bone fragments. Elcano said quietly, "We thought we were the conquerors." The king grinned, dirty. "You were always just the last in line, the ones who still thought there was something to be had."

And in that moment, Elcano realized: The crown wasn't made of gold. The throne wasn't made of power. Kings are just people who lasted too long while everyone else died.

"I can show you something," the king said the next morning. The sun hung fat and tired over the treetops, and the light felt like an interrogation. Elcano followed him. Not out of curiosity. Out of the feeling that everything he'd seen at sea was just the opening credits—and now the film that eats your eyes out was beginning.

They went deep into the forest. No path. No markings. Just this oppressive, damp, squelching silence.

The king stopped speaking. He walked as if in a dream, barefoot, with a determination that needed no place. Elcano felt the sweat beneath his shirt, the dirt in his throat, the trembling in his knees. But he said nothing. Because sometimes silence is the last defense.

After an hour, they stopped. Before them: a cave. Inconspicuous. Black, like a thought one would never speak aloud. The king nodded. "In there is what you're looking for."

Elcano didn't ask what he meant. Because he knew: what you seek is never what you find.

They went inside. The darkness was thick as fat. The air smelled of old flesh, of fear, of something that had screamed there centuries ago.

On the walls: signs. Scratched, burned, dried. Hands. Eyes. Mouths without faces.

"What are these?" The king said, "Stories. That were never finished."

Deeper inside lay things. Remnants. Bones. Gold.
Broken chains. A helmet. Spanish.

Elcano knelt down. He picked up the helmet. Carefully. Like a head.

"He came before you. He wanted more. He got everything. And now he's part of it."

"What do you mean by that?" The king laughed, dry as ash. "There are no dead here. Only stories that got too loud."

Elcano looked at him. And saw: This was not madness. This was consistency.

He put the helmet back on. He stood up.

"I'm not taking anything with me." "You can't take anything with you either."

And so they left the cave. And Elcano knew: It wasn't treasure. It was an answer. And answers are deadly if you get them too soon.

They sat by the fire, which gave off more smoke than light. The king chewed on a piece of root that looked like a charred finger. Elcano drank water that tasted of earth. No one spoke. For there was nothing left to explain. Everything had been said—between the lines, between the bones, between the glances in the cave.

Then the king broke the silence. "Do you know what a king is?" Elcano didn't answer. The old man laughed. "A king is the last one to clean up the mess."

He threw the remaining root into the fire, which flared up briefly, as if it were vomiting. "The gods are having fun. First they give you power, then they take it away, over yourself."

Elcano stared into the fire. He no longer saw flames. He saw faces. His men. His past. His own reflection—warped, charred, empty.

"I had followers," said the king. "I had war. I had women. I had more names than you have fingers."

"And now?" asked Elcano. "Now I have silence. And you."

The wind shifted. Somewhere in the forest, an animal no one wanted to see screamed. "You will become king," said the old man. "Not with a crown. Not with a kingdom. With guilt."

Elcano wanted to object. But his mouth was dry. Because deep down he knew: The man was right.

"And you?" he asked. The king grinned. "I'm done. I saw what was coming. And I survived. But that was my mistake."

Then he stood up, stepped out of the firelight, and left Elcano alone.

A king in rags. A king in the shadows. A king who knew when to leave.

And Elcano? He remained seated. With a look that grew old as he wore it.

The next morning, the king was gone. No trace. No sound. No note in the sand. Only a piece of bamboo lay there, bitten through, like a scepter that had given up on itself. Elcano stood before it for a long time, motionless, like a man who has realized that his own grave is not made of earth, but of days.

The men didn't ask about him. They loaded up on water and some provisions and avoided the hut. They had seen the old man—and sometimes seeing is enough.

As they set sail, no one was standing on the shore. No farewell, no look back. Only the wind, finally blowing again.

Elcano held the wheel. His hands were chapped, his eyes scarred. And on his shoulder lay something invisible. Not a parrot. Not a demon. A weight.

The weight of power that no one wants, but someone has to bear.

He didn't speak. He steered. And no one contradicted him. Not out of respect. Out of exhaustion.

For a man who has spoken with a king who sleeps on bones and is guarded by ghosts is no longer a simple man.

He is a mirror. A sword. A shadow.

And in that moment—with the sails full, the crew silent, and the sea calm as a lie—Elcano was king.

Not elected. Not crowned. Only recognized.

And somewhere, far behind them, among ruins and whispers, the old man might have laughed.

Or he was long gone. Like all kings who stay too long.

The Cebu Massacre

Cebu wasn't a place—it was a mistake. From the very beginning. As soon as they saw the shore, they sensed that nothing good awaited them. The welcome was too friendly. The beach was too tidy. Too many flowers for a place that had to survive on hunger.

But they went ashore. Of course. Because where the stomach growls, the brain is silent.

Locals in white robes, with necklaces of shells and gold flakes, welcomed them with open arms. And with a smile that came not from the heart, but from a plan. Women distributed fruit. Children handed out water. An old man with crooked teeth beckoned them further into the village, as if they were long-awaited guests.

Elcano remained suspicious. But the men were tired, hungry, and had been without a sense of welcome for too long.

“They’re different,” one said. “They mean well.”

And that was exactly where the mistake was. Because whoever in this world thinks that someone means well – is either stupid or dead.

There was a celebration that night. Drumming, dancing, fried things whose origins were best left unknown. And in between: glances. Too many. Too long. Too focused.

Elcano didn't drink. Barely ate. Sat with his back to the wall.

Magellan—the old idiot—was still king of his own delusion at the time. He wanted to convert. He wanted influence. He wanted...
respect.

So he stood up with his cross, with his papers, with his God, and spoke.

For hours.

And the people of Cebu smiled. And nodded. And did what you do when a stranger explains your own heaven to you.

They waited.

And Magellan didn't notice anything. As always.

In the morning, the sky was so blue it seemed almost mocking. The palm trees cast perfect shadows. The birds sang. And beneath everything lay a tension – like a rope about to snap.

Magellan, proud as a rooster on coke, stood in the square, surrounded by his men as if he were the Messiah with a musket. He had an interpreter with him, a Bible in his hand, and that look—that goddamn twinkle in his eye that says:
I told you. I am the chosen one.

He gave a speech. Again. About baptism. About grace. About order.

The chiefs listened. Politely. Quietly. Like people who have learned to listen to the storm before striking back.

Then – a movement. Barely visible. A whisper between two men. A nod.

And suddenly the air was full of arrows.

Not loud. Not screaming. Ice cold.

One hit Magellan's interpreter in the neck. He gasped, fell over, and twitched twice more. Magellan turned around—and understood nothing.

"What's going on?!" he cried. But the answer came in the form of a spear that pierced his leg.

Chaos.Panic.Screams.

The Spaniards ran – but they didn't run fast enough.

The men of Cebu had not negotiated. They had waited.

Now they struck.

With machetes. With spears. With stones. With the hatred of centuries.

Elcano wasn't on the pitch. He had stayed out of it. He arrived too late—or just in time.

When he arrived there, the place was a slaughterhouse.

Magellan lay impaled in the dirt, the Bible beside him, open to some verse about humility.

One of the natives stepped on the book. Slowly. With relish.

And Elcano realized: The god of conquerors hadn't played along today.

Elcano stepped over corpses like ropes. He didn't count. He didn't ask questions. He simply walked—through pools of blood, through steam, through shreds of uniform and intestines. The air stank of metal and dirt, of burned skin and the end of all plans.

The men who had survived lay scattered. Two beneath an overturned cart, one with a broken arm among dead children, one—merely a torso—murmuring his mother's name.

Elcano picked them up. Not all of them. Only the ones still breathing. He pulled them. Pushed them. Bit through.

None of them asked what had happened to Magellan. They knew. And none mourned. For a man who talks so many into ruin is not a loss. He is a relief.

Back on the boat, there was silence. No prayers. No crying. Just this dull emptiness, like after a visit to the dentist, except the pain wasn't numb.

Elcano put the rudder on. Blood still on his hands. His gaze straight ahead.

"We're sailing," he said. One asked, "Where to?" Elcano didn't answer.

Because where you go when you've lost everything isn't important. What matters is that you don't stay.

And Cebu didn't burn. Cebu didn't wave. Cebu immediately forgot her.

Because Cebu had won. Without war. Without treaties. Only with patience.

They were fewer. Torn. Mutilated. Lost.

What was left no longer smelled of men, but of fear, bile, and the little bit of dignity you cling to when you're too proud to die.

Elcano stood before them. Not a speaker. Not a prophet. Not a shitty captain in a gold shirt. A man. With scars, with hunger, with a voice that no longer screamed, but simply functioned.

"We're fixing the ship." No applause. No nods. Just movement.

They mended planks with the wood of their dead comrades. They sewed sails with the shirts of the slain. They filled waterskins, and no one asked if the water was clean anymore.

One died while lifting a barrel. He simply tipped over. No one stopped. They carried him aside and continued working.

Because death was no longer the worst thing. Standing still was worse. Remembering was worse.

Elcano took the wheel at night. Alone. And spoke to no one. Not to God. Not to himself. Only to the wind.

He wasn't a leader. He was the last one to leave. And sometimes that's enough.

The men began breathing again. Not deeply. Not with relief. But regularly.

And as the ship moved again, with torn sails, weary bones, and a coffin in every plank –

There they lived again. Not out of hope. Out of defiance.

On the fourth day after the massacre, the trembling stopped. Not the trembling of the hands – that remained. But the trembling in the eyes. That invisible

flicker when a man doesn't know if he'll still hear his own footsteps tomorrow. Elcano first noticed it when one of the sailors started cursing again – quietly, against the wind, but with force. Like a dog slowly remembering to bark.

Death had eaten its fill in Cebu. Now, at sea, there was room for something else. Not hope. Rather... rhythm.

They worked. They repaired. They carved new oars, twisted new ropes from old dirt and torn pride. They moved as a unit, but not a bellowing, marching company—more like a pack of wounded animals, instinctively gathering around the alpha because there's no one else.

Elcano didn't speak often. But when he spoke, they listened.

He said things like, "If you don't row tomorrow, you'll be eaten today." Or, "If you're still crying, you've got too much water in your head."

And they listened. Not out of respect. Out of clarity.

Because when someone is at the helm who has scraped his comrades' flesh from the ground without blinking, then people follow.

One carved him a knife. Another carved him a new spoon. Small gestures. Great rituals.

That's how someone becomes a captain. Not with a uniform. Not with a letter and seal. But with blood under their nails and guilt in their bones.

And Cebu? Cebu disappeared over the horizon like a nightmare you never want to dream again, but still visit every night.

Magellan was dead. The faith was dead. The plan was dead.

But the ship sailed on. Because someone said, "We won't stop until we die. And we won't die here."

The Death of the Idiot with the Vision

Elcano acted like a man who no longer owned anything—except responsibility. He stood before the assembled crew in the morning, his face a map edge, his heart a knife block.

"Anyone who believes Magellan was right can follow him—right into the Earth."

A few looked away. One laughed. The wrong one.

Elcano stepped forward, drew his knife, and rammed it through the laughter's hand—so fast, so precisely, that not even the blood managed to make a noise.

The man screamed. No one helped. Elcano bent down, pulled out the knife, and wiped it on the injured man's shirt.

"This is the new order. We drive, we remain silent, we obey. Or we die—and this time quickly."

The message burned into flesh like a tattoo. Not pretty, but indelible.

He posted guards, had rations redistributed, and drew borders where there had previously been only chaos.

Those who were sick were treated. Those who complained were isolated. Those who plotted were suspected.

They called him "El Bastardo" behind his back – but no one called him a coward.

Because what he did was necessary. Hard. Cold. Effective.

And at night he sat alone on the foredeck, with the knife on his lap and the starry sky that no longer offered any answers.

He was no captain. He was an executioner with a compass. And the men understood: There was no turning back. No glory. No monument.

Only him. And the course. And death, sailing quietly along.

Elcano wrote at night. Not for posterity. Not for fame. But to keep himself from going crazy. He wrote on the backs of old nautical charts, on linen segments, on planks with charcoal if necessary. Sentences like cuts:

"We're still alive."

"The sea knows no honor."

"Magellan was a fool."

And with every sentence he scraped a little more of this madness out of his head,
this Catholic megalomania that had permeated Portugal like too strong wine.

Magellan believed that the world would bow to him if he only believed in God strongly enough and stared into the distance long enough.

But Elcano knew better. The world doesn't bend. It breaks you. Slowly. Silently. Systematically.

He sat at the railing, the logbook on his knees, while below him the sea snorted like an old animal about to bite.

He thought of home. But that was no longer a place. Just an idea, a mistake with roof tiles.

What drove him? Not pride. Not duty. Just the need for at least one person to come back and say:

That's how it really was.

Not noble.

Not nice.

Just naked, cold and full of shit.

The men saw him writing and thought he was keeping a logbook.

But Elcano had a will. Not one for heirs. One for the truth.

And every word was a kick against the monument they would later erect for Magellan.

There was something else. A final remnant. A splinter of the idea that Magellan once carried with him like a cross—heavy, sacred, self-destructive. A metal suitcase, locked in a chest below deck, marked with the king's seal. Inside: the documents, the world map, and the original capitulation document—that goddamn piece of parchment on which Magellan had proclaimed himself the Son of Destiny.

Elcano called the men together. Not many. Only those who could still read. Or at least pretended to.

He opened the chest. Slowly. As if something might still be alive inside. Something with teeth. Or a tongue.

"That's what's left of him," he said. "And that's what killed him."

Then he tore the document in half. Once again. Once more. Until the shreds were no larger than his palm.

One of the men swallowed. Another whispered, "This is high treason..."

Elcano was faster. His fist in the man's face. A dull crack. Teeth on the ground.

"This is purification." And then he threw the remains into the fire.

The map followed. The sacred, finely drawn world engulfed itself in the flickering flames. Africa curled like burnt parchment. Asia glowed. And the strait, which no one had ever named, hissed like a devil losing its name.

"There is no mission anymore. No order. No promise."

Elcano looked at them all. And they didn't look away. Because they understood:

From that moment on, they belonged to themselves and no one else.

The flames had long since gone out, but the smoke still hung in the air—not just in the sails, but in people's heads. Like a warning, like a silence that no one could wipe away.

Magellan was dead. Chopped to pieces in Cebu, burned in fire, forgotten in the will of men.

But his ghost? It still crept across the deck, between the planks, in the bunks, in the nightmares.

A curse with a beard and a cross.

Because Elcano realized: There was no exorcism for this kind of madness. Magellan was not just a figure. He was a virus.

He had shown them the world—not the real one, but a map full of lies and desires.

And even now, after all the blood, after the burned parchment, after the shattered faith –

Even now there was still this quiet scratching in my soul.

What if he was right after all?

*What if this path, as absurd and deadly as it was,
was ultimately the only way to make history?*

Elcano sat in his cabin. A knife on the table. An empty cup. And the logbook.

He wrote: "Magellan is dead. But we're still sailing. Maybe because we have to. Maybe because we don't know any better. Or maybe because his madness was our only motivation—and now we have nothing left except the direction no one can give us."

Outside, the wind howled. A sail ripped. A man cursed. Another prayed quietly.

And Elcano laughed. Briefly.
Dry. Almost like a farewell.

But no one left. Not yet. Because the curse wasn't over yet. It lived on—in each of them. In every milestone. In every wave.

And Elcano knew: He was now the idiot with the vision.

The rest continues – without soul

They were just a caricature of a crew. Men without faith, without God, without a captain, and—worst of all—without a goal that still felt like a goal.

They steered. They sailed. They ate. They watched. But none of it had a reason anymore. Just routine. Just the ticking in their heads that said:
Not yet. Not yet. Not yet.

Elcano hardly spoke. Not because he had nothing to say, but because anything he could say would only stretch misery like a noose.

The sky was gray. The sea was gray. Their faces were gray. Everything on board was permeated by a dull silence that came from within like fog.

They smelled of fear. Of unwashed skin. Of gangrene and rats. Some had given up shaving. Others had given up thinking.

And when someone screamed at night, no one turned around.

For anyone who still struggled with nightmares today at least had something inside them that wasn't completely dead.

The rest: just shells. With hands that still work and hearts that only pump because they're too cowardly to stop.

Sometimes Elcano lay awake and counted the crew's breaths. Not out of worry. Just to know how many were still there—really there.

And each time it was less. A little. One whisper less. One glance less. One person less.

But nobody asked anymore,
"How far is it?"

Because that meant that people still believed in a goal.

And this belief was thrown overboard with the last remnant of Magellan.

It was only a matter of time. And they had time. More than is good for one person.

First, it was the looks. Long, scrutinizing. When someone coughed, eyes lingered on them, longer than necessary, longer than healthy.

Then the whispers. Half-sentences. Hints. A shrug that said:
He eats more than he works.

And then, the first one who didn't get up.

A sailor with a name no one wanted to pronounce. Not out of respect. Out of shame.

They said he fell at night. Head blow. Died instantly.

Elcano looked at the body. He saw the cut behind the ear, the skin missing from the shoulder.

Nobody asked. Nobody looked at him.

And the next morning the rations were fuller, the stomachs not quite so empty.

It was like a decision that no one had made – but everyone supported.

The sea wasn't the problem. The sea was honest. It killed with waves, with salt water, with storms.

But the men? They killed quietly. Out of hunger. Out of calculation. Out of the last, pathetic will to creep on for another day.

Elcano watched. He didn't speak. For whoever speaks gives hell a name—and then one remains forever.

They were no longer a crew. No longer brothers. No longer sailors.

They were flesh that weighed each other.

And Elcano knew: From now on, he wouldn't be traveling with men. But with shadows. With knives. With corpses that were still breathing.

It was on a moonless night when one of the younger ones made the mistake of asking. No accusation. No rebellion. Just a sentence, flat as stagnant water: "What are we still doing here?" It wasn't a question to the world, but to what was left of it. A sentence like a splinter in the gums—small, but poisonous. And suddenly everything was quiet. No more scratching. No more coughing. No more movement of the spoons in the tin bowls.

All eyes fell on him. Not out of interest. Out of hunger.

Elcano said nothing. He stared into the darkness, as if he might find an answer there that no one wanted to say. Then, almost casually, the words: "We're leaving. That's all you need to know." The boy, barely twenty, swallowed. And before he could reply, someone grabbed him from behind. Hard. Fast. Like a robbery. Two others came up and threw him to the ground, his face against the planks, where dried blood still clung. Not a scream. Just a sound, the kind you hear when you squeeze an animal's throat—not one of pain, but of disappointment that there's no way out.

They worked quickly. Skilled. Like butchers. Not out of cruelty. Out of necessity.

The body wasn't thrown overboard. Not this time. They took him down with them. And the next morning, the boy was gone. No trace. Only the bowls were fuller again, the faces a little emptier. No one asked. Because no one wanted to hear what they already knew. And Elcano? He walked across the deck, his gaze fixed, his movements as if made of cement. He said nothing. Because in that moment, language was treason. Anyone who still spoke was clinging to old rules – and old rules no longer applied here.

The men continued to work. They pulled on ropes as if they were puppets. They folded sails as if their organs hung from them. They spoke with looks, grunts, and gestures. And what united them wasn't camaraderie. It was the knowledge that each individual would only live as long as they were useful to the group.

Elcano knew it. They all knew it.

This was no longer a ship. This was a graveyard on water. A boat steered by ghosts—who still breathed.

It happened as it had to. Someone lost his mind. Not slowly, not in small drops, but all at once – like a barrel suddenly breaking from too much fermentation. His name was Ortega, he had once been a helmsman, now little more than a skeleton with eyes that flickered like open flames in a storm.

He began to talk. Loudly. To himself. To the mast. To the wind. "We're dead!" he screamed. "This is hell, and you're my demons!" Then he laughed. Long. Hysterically. Like a rooster whose head has been cut off but is still running.

At first they ignored him. Then they whispered. Then it became dangerous.

He started attacking others at night. Nothing major. Just small things. A slash in passing. A kick in the back. A knife left in his hand for too long when he wasn't looking.

Elcano watched this. Silently. He waited. Because he knew: Such men either take care of themselves—or someone else does.

On the fifth day, Ortega came on deck with a harpoon. Naked. Wearing only a bloodstained vest. He yelled something about salvation. About God. About hunger. Then he pointed at Elcano: "It's your fault! You and your godless oar!"

For a moment, no one thought he would dare. Then he threw.

The harpoon flew – and hit the railing.

One centimeter off, and Elcano would have become part of the sea.

Silence.

Then one of the men stepped forward. No name. No order. Just a movement. He drew his knife, walked over to Ortega—and slit his throat without a word.

Slow.Clean.

The body fell, the blood dripped and no one screamed.

They didn't throw him into the water. They pulled him below deck. Someone muttered, "Supplies are low again."

And that was it. No mourning. No mercy. No discussion.

Elcano looked around. No one avoided his gaze. For they knew: He was not a captain, he was a judge. And this was no longer a ship—it was a judgment in motion.

The days that followed flowed into one another like blood in water. No one spoke of Ortega anymore. No one even spoke names anymore. There were only hands pulling ropes and mouths chewing. The wind carried a sweet stench across the deck, a mixture of salt, decay, and what lay below deck.

Elcano stood at the helm, thin, silent, his face a mask of salt and lack of sleep. He was no longer a man; he was a knot holding because everything else had already broken. The wood creaked beneath his feet like a voice whispering things he didn't want to hear.

Sometimes, at night, footsteps could be heard on the deck. Too many for the few men still alive. Shadows glided by, as if they had been running alongside the ship for a long time, waiting for one of them to stumble. The men avoided the shadows' gaze, avoided each other's eyes as well. Everyone knew they only had breath as long as they kept up the rhythm.

The sky grew paler, the sea thinner, life a single series of manual movements. One fell while hoisting a barrel, dead, just like that, without drama, like a lamp going out. No one paused. They pulled him aside, covered him with canvas, and continued working. No prayer, no sign of the cross. Just work.

Elcano wrote nothing more. Not a word, no will, no maps. He had stopped counting. Only the helm in his hand, only the course before his eyes. No god, no king, no homeland, no Magellan. Only this desolate movement through water that tasted of iron and air that burned his teeth.

And yet the ship moved. Like a ghost. Like a cemetery bearing its own tombstone. The men were no longer men. They were the remnant. Flesh and shadows, the bare essentials left when everything has been stripped away. And Elcano knew: When they came back—if they came back—they wouldn't tell

anything. Because there was nothing to tell. Only hunger. Only sea. Only a name no one wanted to speak anymore.

Elcano – the shadow takes the wheel

They didn't call him captain. Nothing more. Nothing less. They called him nothing at all.

He was the rudder. He was the course. He was the movement forward when everything inside them only wanted to go down.

Elcano rarely spoke. And when he did, it was like an oar in the face—short, dry, final. "One more day." "One more wind." "Not yet to die."

That was all it needed.

He had changed. Not outwardly—his face was still that of a stubborn student of violence, but inside, nothing could be saved. He felt nothing, not even when the last of the officers died of scurvy. Elcano saw him lying there, his teeth blackened, the flesh on his leg split like overripe fruit. He pulled the blanket over his body. Then he turned over. That's all.

The men obeyed him. Not out of respect. Out of exhaustion. He was no better than them. He was just less broken.

And that was enough.

He decided when to eat, when to sail, when silent. He was not a leader. He was the last thing left of order—a shadow that walks through the dirt and doesn't ask who follows him.

And they followed. Not out of hope. Out of habit.

Because what will you do when everything is burned? You follow the one who still knows how to walk.

They began to suspect each other. Every glance became a knife. Every movement was too much. When someone coughed, the group spun around like an animal with a twitching nerve.

One of the younger ones, still too green behind the ears and too greedy in his eyes, was caught stealing. Dried fish. A tiny piece. But it was enough. Enough to ransom the rest.

Three men grabbed him. Not because they wanted justice, but because they could finally do something that wasn't pointless. They beat him to the ground, kicked his ribs, and shouted things that no longer sounded like speech.

Elcano intervened. No shouting. No command.

Just one step. Just the drawing of his knife.

One looked at him—and stopped immediately. The others followed. Blood dripped. Teeth lay on the wood like shells on the beach.

Elcano went to the boy. Blood in his mouth, his expression confused, more animal than human.

"Why?" asked Elcano. The boy wanted to say something. Then nothing. He swallowed. And closed his eyes.

Elcano sat up and looked around.

"We don't kill for fish here. We kill when necessary. And you know what necessary means."

No one objected. Because they all knew that Elcano wasn't speaking at that moment—he was judging.

They retreated into their corners, into their holes, into the last bit of humanity that they hadn't yet given up.

Elcano stopped, his hands bloody, and the knife still open in his fist.

Because sometimes it takes force to tame the animal. And sometimes it is the animal that keeps order.

On one of those nights, when the sea lay so still, as if it had forgotten how to kill, Elcano stood alone at the bow. No wind. No sound. Only the muffled breathing of the men belowdecks and the salty taste of decay in the air. He knew they were at the end. Not close—in the middle. The supplies? A joke. The morals? A memory. And the faith? Dead, burned with Magellan's papers.

He leaned over the railing, staring into the pitch-black water. Somewhere out there lay home. Spain. Castile. Or what was left of it. Perhaps it had been conquered long ago, perhaps forgotten, perhaps no one cared about this damned voyage anymore. But that didn't matter.

For Elcano now knew why they were still sailing. Not for the king, not for gold, not for the church. But because someone had to return. Someone who could say:

We were there.

We saw it.

We survived.

Not to tell stories. But to bear witness to the truth. Not with pride. With scars.

He clenched his fist. A man who never wanted to be a leader, now commander of a shadow ship that slid through the cracks of the world like a dagger through rotten flesh.

He spoke aloud—not to himself, not to God. To the wind. "We're turning back. And whoever stands in my way will become part of the sea."

The next morning he picked up the map. The last one, tattered, inaccurate. He drew a line. Not precise. But clear.

Back. Home. Not for glory. For the end.

The return journey began like a joke no one wanted to hear. The ship was a temporary wreck, held afloat by nails, spit, and willpower. The sails were riddled with holes, the keel corroded, the hull filled with noises that sounded like it was about to be buried. And yet: it was moving. Elcano stood at the helm, his face like stone, his gaze so far ahead that you'd think he could already see the harbor.

The men did what they had to do. Not because they had hope, but because there was no other alternative. Being dead was not an option—because death had become as commonplace as salt water.

Some spoke again. Only quietly. Only about things that no longer existed: bread, women, wine, sleep without fear. Others no longer spoke at all, only with their hands, only in movement.

Two died of fever. One jumped overboard. Or fell—who could say? A third suffocated in the night. Why? No one asked. No one cried. Only Elcano silently counted.

The wind grew rougher. The sky grew louder. But the ship held—out of defiance, out of madness, out of that dark remnant of will that could no longer be called "spirit."

They passed islands. Elcano left them to the left. No anchoring. No risk. No temptation.

"If anyone wants to walk the plank, go. But I'm not turning back."

They understood. For even death had no offer that was better than the dull, blind rowing on.

The compass trembled. The mast creaked. The oars creaked like old bones. But the ship sailed.

Because Elcano held it together – with looks, with silence, with the kind of madness that only survivors have.

When they reached the mainland, the ship was no longer a ship. It was a coffin with a mast. Creaking proof that madness can swim.

Elcano stood at the bow, his beard like wire, his eyes deep like graves. Behind him a handful of men, so pale and hollow, as if they hadn't returned, but had risen.

No cheering. No reception. Just a few seagulls screeching, as if they knew what these men carried within them.

The dockworkers stared. One made the sign of the cross. Another simply walked away.

Elcano stepped off the boat. Slowly. No trembling. No pride. Just steps, as if he were wearing hell beneath his feet.

"Who are you?" one asked.

Elcano looked at him. For a long time. As if through him.

Then: "The last ones."

And he went. No look back. No words. For everything that needed to be said had remained on the ocean.

The chroniclers came later. The liars with the feathers. They made him a hero. The first to circumnavigate the world.

But Elcano knew better. He hadn't traveled around the world. He had crawled through hell, measured it, and only returned because no one else could tell how much a person can decay without dying.

The return of the ghosts to Spain

They returned to a country that no longer understood them. Spain didn't smell of death, nor of salt, nor of fear. It smelled of baked bread, of marketplaces, of wine that wasn't diluted with rainwater. And that was precisely what made it so unbearable.

The men disembarked like strangers, uncelebrated, unrecognized. Their skin hung in tatters, their eyes sunken, their voices rough like old rope. They barely spoke, and when they did, it was in sentences that didn't fit. "The sun ate us," one said. Another whispered, "I saw the face of God. It has no eyes."

Elcano walked through Seville like a ghost with bones. Not a soldier. Not a hero. Not a martyr. Just a man who had lost everything that had ever defined him—except the steering wheel.

The king summoned him. Of course.

A throne room full of gold, perfume, lies. And Elcano, barefoot, with the salt wind still in his hair, didn't bow.

"You did it," said the king. And Elcano laughed. Shortly. Crackingly. Without humor.

"Success? We swam through the shit of the world, vomited our names, ate our comrades, and gave up faith in all living things. And now we stand here. Not because we won. But because death grew tired."

The king remained silent. Of course.

A court clerk took notes. Of course.

And Elcano turned around and left the room without permission and without kneeling.

For whoever returns from hell no longer bows down to men.

The men scattered through the streets like ashes in the wind. No one knew what to do with them. Not themselves, not the people, not even God.

Some went to taverns and died there—not from illness, but from silence. They sat down at a table, ordered nothing, and simply stopped breathing.

Others tried returning home. Wife, child, farm, field. But what came back no longer fit in the houses. A man without a soul cannot be a father. Cannot be a husband. Cannot be anything but a shadow on the doorstep.

The neighbors avoided them. For they not only smelled of death—they were a reminder that not everything Spain sends out returns in glory.

Some ended up in prison. Drunkenness. Brawling. Blasphemy. All small escapes, because the mind could no longer sleep and the body yearned for the sea—not out of longing, but out of compulsion.

One or two simply disappeared. Never seen again. Perhaps back into the water. Perhaps into the forest. Perhaps underground, voluntarily.

And Elcano? He saw all this. Did nothing. Could do nothing.

For how do you heal men who were never wounded, but who have fallen apart from within?

The chroniclers began to write their lies. Of courage. Of discoveries. Of triumph.

But no one asked the survivors. Because their truth wasn't printable. It was too ugly. Too raw. Too real.

They invited him. Of course.

A reception. A celebration.

Golden plates, sugared meat, music that sounded as wrong as the word "hero" in his ear.

Elcano sat among noblemen who had never seen a dead man without shoes and monks whose god had never been lost at sea. They spoke of glory. Of merit. Of eternity.

And Elcano chewed. Slowly. Carefully. Not on the meat—on the thought of whether he should get up and simply ram the fork into the next person's eye.

The king came. He handed him a medal. A chain. A piece of paper with a reward on it. "For bravery. For service to the realm. For honor."

Elcano took it. Smiled. And placed everything on the plate. Next to the bones.

"What should I do with it?" he asked. "Should I give it to the man I gutted alive so his last calories could save our sails?"

Silence. Naturally.

One of the courtiers murmured, "You are not grateful."

And Elcano laughed. A laugh like a whiplash. Hard. Dry. Honest.

"Grateful? I've scrabbled through the asshole of the world, and you hand me a gold-plated spoon. Keep your spoon. I've eaten with hands that have slit throats."

He stood up. Pushed back his chair. No one stopped him. Not out of respect. Out of fear that madness might be contagious.

He left the hall. Without a chain. Without honor. Only with the look of a man who knows the truth—and knows that no one wants to hear it.

Elcano withdrew. Not to a villa. Not to a country house. Not into the arms of a woman who comforted him with wine and warm thighs.

He retreated into a hole at the edge of the world. A fisherman's house without shutters, a table, a chair, nothing more.

No servant. No visitor. No mirror.

For whoever has seen himself after returning from hell no longer needs a mirror.

They say he wrote. But not much. Only fragments. Scratches on paper. Words like

*Salt,
Teeth,
Fire,
Faces without eyes.*

The neighbors sometimes saw him. How he stared at the sea for hours. How he didn't speak to anyone. How he didn't even count the change at the bakery. As if everything of value had long since sunk behind him.

Children said he was a ghost. The old people said a hero. And Elcano said nothing. Because to him, words were like bread carried in your pocket too long—hard, bitter, inedible.

Sometimes someone knocked on his door. A chronicler. A curious nobleman. A pilgrim.

He never opened the door. Because what he had experienced couldn't be told. One could only carry it. Like a stone. In one's stomach. In one's head. In one's sleep.

And so he was slowly forgotten. He who returned last. He who circumnavigated the world. He who survived Magellan's madness by giving up himself.

He died as men die who were long gone. No outcry. No will. No glance at heaven.

The fisherman who found him later said he was sitting there as always, at the window, looking out to sea, his hands still. Almost too still.

As he approached, Elcano was cold. Hard. Turned to stone, not from age—from too many memories.

There was a note on the table. Not a letter. Just a single sentence:
"I saw the world. It was hungry."

No cross. No coat of arms. No obituary.

The king had him buried quietly. A few soldiers, a priest, a hole.

The people at the edge of the grave didn't know who he was. Or they pretended not. Because what can you say about a man who has given you more than you can bear?

The chroniclers put a few words in their books: "Elcano, navigator." "Elcano, circumnavigator." "Elcano, hero."

But the sand ate his name faster than they could write it.

Because Spain only loves winners who die beautifully.

And Elcano was no victor. He was the last thing left standing after everything else had fallen.

A shadow that refused to give up.

A man who traveled around the world – and in the end only arrived at himself.

Gold, fame and empty stomachs

In the end, all that remained were lists. Cargo lists. Names. Numbers. Entries in books, written with ink that never smelled the stench of blood.

They opened the ship's holds like grave robbers – but they found no gold, no jewels, no treasure.

Just spices. A few sacks of cloves. Some pepper. Cinnamon damp with the sweat of dead men.

The value? High. Outrageously high. The shipowners laughed, counted coins, and spat with joy. "The trip was worth it," said one.

And somewhere deep in the earth, Elcano turned his head in his grave.

Because what came home was not a victory. It was an offering to greed.

The chroniclers wrote of fame. Of discovery. Of greatness.

They forgot the mutinies. The cannibalism. The madness.
The sea corpses that were never counted.

Spain ate history like bread – and didn't taste it.

The men who died didn't appear in any books. Only Elcano. And, of course, Magellan.

The rich got even more wealth. The king praised himself. And the people clapped—because they didn't know they were never invited.

They sat down and counted. Like merchants. Like priests. Like executioners.

Five ships had set sail. Two hundred and forty men. Captains, sailors, interpreters, priests, beggars, thieves, dreamers, idiots.

A single ship returned, with eighteen survivors. Half of them were nothing but skin on bones, the other half smelled of things otherworldly.

So they counted: A third of the empire in silver burned at sea. Two hundred lives shattered. A handful of sacks of cloves – as profit.

And yet they called it a triumph.

For triumph, as Spain had learned, was not what one survived – but what one could put on paper.

The churches rang their bells. The merchants raised their prices. The king had himself painted with one hand on the globe, as if he had rotated it himself.

And no one asked: What did it really cost you?

Not in money. In dignity. In sleep. In truth.

Because no one wanted to hear that the world wasn't beautiful, but ugly, hot, hungry, full of greed, full of gods tearing each other apart.

So they remained silent. They drew a line under the chapter. They wrote: "A great discovery."

And the game continued.

Posterity was fast. Faster than death. Faster than truth. It took what was left – a few names, a few places, a few pieces of data – and formed a heroic story out of it.

Magellan became a Titan. The man with a compass in his heart. The navigator of the impossible. No one mentioned that he bled to death halfway there because his megalomania was bigger than his sword.

Elcano? A shadow beneath footnotes. A name in parentheses. The man who finished what another had started—and lost everything in the process.

They drew maps. With elegant lines, as if the world had been a ballroom and not a hell. They placed crosses where men had died and called them "discoveries."

A few years later, the first plays were written. With heroes. With honor. With trumpets. And not a single sentence that smelled of vomit.

This is how history goes. It washes blood with ink. It lays velvet over despair. It speaks of stars when you stare into rot. It says, "That's how it was," even when you know it was different.

The world kept turning. Spices were shipped, churches were consecrated, schoolbooks were printed.

And somewhere beneath it all lay they—the bones on the seabed, the voices in the storms, the true witnesses to a dream of salt and blood.

Spain swelled up like a dead whale in the sun. They had circumnavigated the world, so they must be invincible.

New fleets were planned. Bigger, faster, more expensive. Every bastard with a sail in his head wanted to be "next." It smelled of expansion, of God, of cannon fodder.

"We rule the oceans," they said. And no one mentioned that almost all of those who set out for the first time never saw solid ground again.

The chroniclers added fuel to the fire. They painted Magellan with a laurel wreath, Elcano with a drawn sword, and the crew as brothers of discovery.

They gave the ships new names.

Victoria,

Sanctissima,

Gloria All words that walked over corpses like noble boots through mud.

But fame is a whore with gold teeth. And Spain soon learned that triumph can be choking on.

Because every new ship cost more. Every new route consumed more men. The seas didn't give back. And even if they did, they only spat out bones.

The people only cheered when there was something to eat. The nobles always cheered—because it was never their meat that was screwed into the hull.

And the churches? They prayed for the explorers who had long since whispered in the devil's ear.

Elcano was long dead. Forgotten. Buried. But his shadow lay over every sail. Not as a reminder. As a warning no one wanted to hear.

In the end, only one name remained. A name that circled the world.

Magellan.

Printed on cards. Carved on marble tablets. Sung in songs that never knew the truth.

Not *Elcano* Not the 18 who came back like broken animals.
Not the 200 who rotted between God and hunger. Only *Magellan*.

He who died before the nightmare really began.

They called him the visionary. The great navigator. The man who knew where the world was headed.

They forgot that he was also the man who fed on lies, who drove his men mad, and was blind to what breaks people.

But history doesn't ask about guilt. Only about headlines. And Magellan fit the picture better.

Elcano? A shadow in the footnotes. A man without luster. Without myth. Only with results.

Sailed around the world, accomplished the impossible – and yet sunk in the calm after the storm.

In the end, they stood there. The historians. The priests. The politicians. All of them.

And they said, "Magellan did it."

Because it sounded nicer. Because it asked fewer questions. Because truth is uncomfortable when it reeks of blood and silence.

And so he disappeared. Elcano. The shadow. The last. The one who carried what no man should carry.

But the sea still knows. It whispers his name when the wind blows from the wrong direction. When the wood creaks and not a star can be seen.

Then she whispers:
“Elcano.”

The name that circled the world – and yet disappeared

The name traveled. Not on ships, not across seas—on paper. In books. In songs. In the dusty mouths of those who have never sailed.

Magellan.

It stuck. Like a mark. Like a sword hilt,
which you can still feel, even though the iron is long gone.

The schools taught him. With maps. With data. With little portraits that made him look like a melancholic philosopher and not like the asshole who led his crew into a floating grave maneuver.

Elcano didn't appear. Or only as an afterthought. "Commanded the ship upon return." Period. Done. On to the next page.

But history is a whore. She gives herself to everyone who writes. Not to everyone who lives.

And so Magellan remained. The name. The myth. The legend.

Even if he never saw the destination. Even if he couldn't cross the last ocean. Even if his last breath was in dirt and ridicule.

Because he was the first to dare, not the first to accomplish it.

That's how memory works. It rewards the one who dies first, not the one who lasts the longest.

The legacy was a gilt-edged slow-seller. They polished it. They framed it. They displayed it in palaces, in schools, in goddamn brothels, where sailors told each other stories to keep themselves from thinking about what really awaited them at sea.

“He has circumnavigated the world,” they said. And no one asked:
Who survived?

They made books out of it. Shipping routes. Geographical maps. Operas, for rich people with clean hands.

What was born of hunger, of fear, of broken fingernails, and of torn prayers, suddenly became a noble achievement.

Classrooms full of fake heroes. Streets were named after him. Not after the man who held the wheel when the rest had long since surrendered.

Elcano? A shadow beneath the dust of a monument. Not a song. Not a statue. Perhaps somewhere in a port city a square where pigeons defecate.

Because nobody wants to know: How to really survive. What it costs. How many nights without sleep, how many friends in the belly of the sea, how many decisions in which you erase yourself so that something can continue.

They didn't want the truth. They wanted a name. A single, clean one that would fit on coins.

So they gave the world *Magellan*.
And she bought it. Because it sounded like order. Not like madness.

Truth is an animal with a good memory. And the sea is its cage.

It doesn't tell much. Only sometimes, when the wind blows from the south and the wood in the hull groans like an old man on his deathbed, you hear it whispering.

Not in words. In sounds. In waves that break differently. In the cries of seagulls that sound not like birds, but like men who have roared the last piece of their soul into the sky.

There it is. Memory.

Not on paper, not in marble tablets. But in the salty air, in the sea spray, that slaps you in the face when you sail too close to the end of the world.

The ocean forgives nothing. And it forgets nothing.

He knows who was at the helm when the world became too big. He knows everyone who went overboard—with open eyes and closed hearts.

He remembers Elcano. Not out of respect. Not out of honor. But because he was there when the rest had long since fallen.

The wind knows its name. The depths know its silence. And if you look out long enough, with enough salt on your tongue and enough dirt in your soul, then the sea sometimes whispers to you:

"He was here."

It always comes down to the same thing. The person dies. The name remains. And the meaning gets lost in the meantime, like a stone in a swamp.

What was Elcano? A bastard? A merchant? A man with too much hunger and too little mercy?

Or was he simply the one who was still breathing at the end while the rest of them already stank?

Maybe he wasn't a hero. Maybe he wasn't a captain either. Maybe he was just the last person in the room who didn't scream when the door caught fire.

He didn't want a monument. And he didn't get one. He didn't want a song. And no one sang. What he did get was the silence afterward. The silence in the schoolbooks. The subordinate clause in the chapter on Magellan.

"Elcano led the return." Done. Nothing more.

But it is always the one who takes the last step who knows how difficult the journey really was.

And the world? It didn't forget him because it hated him. It forgot him because he was inconvenient. Because he survived instead of gloriously fading away.

And survival isn't something you put on display. It stinks. It bleeds. It asks for a price no one wants to name.

There is no applause at the end of the world. Only wind. Only water. Only a sky, who doesn't care whether you fell or won.

Elcano died with his eyes on the sea. No cross. No Our Father. No trumpet solo. Only the cracking of his bones in the wind and the last whisper within him:

"You did it. And it wasn't worth anything."

But it was done. That's what counts. Whether anyone knows, whether anyone honors it, whether your name ever shines on a coin—that doesn't matter to the sea.

It knows your route. Your course corrections. Your mistakes. Your sacrifices. It carries them. Deep down. Between salt and silence.

And somewhere, when the sea is churning again, when a ship sails too far south and the stars are no longer right, then the ocean opens briefly and shows a face.

Burned. Hardened. Without a crown. Without a wreath.

Only that of a man who said: **"I'm returning."**

And then he disappeared. Like his name. Like everything that was never loud enough to survive.

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