

MEET CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

James T. de Kay
Illustrated by John Edens



The sailors had not seen land for three weeks.

They started to worry. Would they ever see land again? They became frightened and angry.

Late one night the moon came up. A sailor stood in the crow's nest high on the *Pinta's* mast. He looked hard into the night.

“Land!” he shouted. “Land!”

Meet
**CHRISTOPHER
COLUMBUS**



by James T. de Kay
illustrated by John Edens

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Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

1. Meet Christopher Columbus
2. The Young Sailor
3. Attacked at Sea
4. Lands of Gold and Spices
5. Troubles Begin
6. Columbus and the Queen
7. The *Niña*, the *Pinta*, the *Santa María*
8. The Canary Islands
9. On the Western Ocean
10. "Land! Land!"
11. San Salvador
12. The Search for Gold
13. Shipwreck!
14. Heading for Home
15. Prisoners of Portugal
16. An Angry King
17. The Hero of Spain
18. Admiral of the Ocean Sea
19. America

Dedication

MEET CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Five hundred years ago people in Europe knew little about the world. They knew it was round. But they did not know how big it was. They knew of lands to the east. But they did not know how far away they were. They knew there was an ocean to the west. But they did not know how far it stretched. They did not think anyone had ever crossed it. And they were afraid to try.

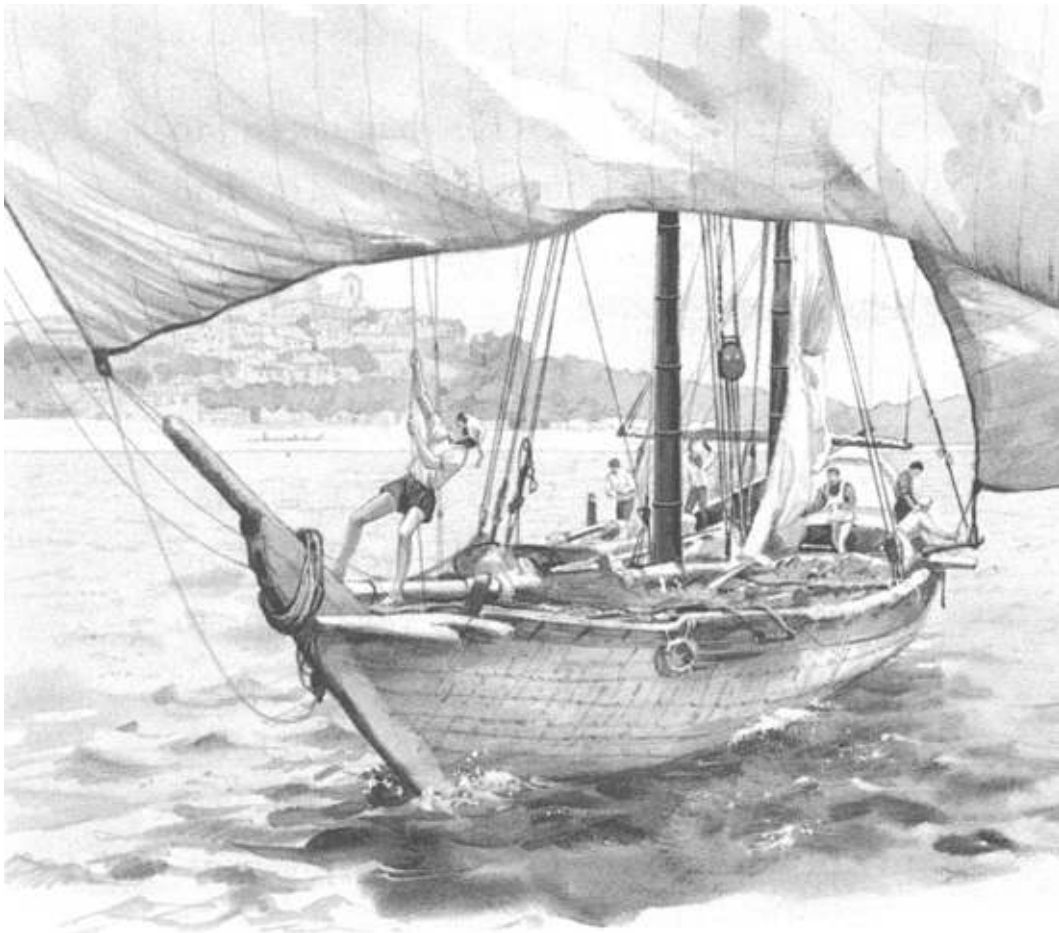
But Christopher Columbus was not afraid. His dream was to cross the Western Ocean. He became one of the greatest explorers in history.

THE YOUNG SAILOR

About 500 years ago in the city of Genoa, Italy, lived a red-haired boy. His name was Christopher Columbus. He worked for his father making cloth. But he did not want to be a cloth maker all his life. He wanted to see new lands and have adventures. He wanted to be a sailor.

Genoa was a good place to learn about sailing. It was a busy port on the Mediterranean Sea. Sailing ships from many lands came there. The streets were filled with sailors and traders.

Christopher soon learned to sail. First he sailed in little boats just for the fun of it. Then he sailed on big ships. He learned all the things a sailor has to know. He learned to tell the forecandle from a poop deck. He learned about masts and sails and yards. He learned about cleats and rigging and all kinds of seagoing things.



By the time Christopher was 25 years old, he had sailed all over the Mediterranean Sea. He had been to France, Africa, and Greece. He had seen strange cities. He had had many adventures.

Christopher's wish had come true. He was a sailor.

In the spring of 1476 there was some exciting news. Five ships were getting ready to leave Genoa. They were going to sail to England. England is far away from Genoa. It is far away

from the Mediterranean Sea. The ships would have to sail out into the great Western Ocean. Then they would sail north, past the lands of Spain, Portugal, and France.

Christopher got a job on one of the ships. And in the spring of 1476 he sailed out of the Mediterranean.

For the first time Christopher saw the great, green Western Ocean.

ATTACKED AT SEA

One day Columbus heard a shout from a sailor high on a mast. The sailor was pointing to some ships. They were warships! They were coming closer and closer.

The guns on the warships boomed. Cannon balls smashed into the side of Columbus's ship. They tore into the ropes and sails. They knocked down the masts.

Columbus's ship had guns too. The sailors shot back at the warships. There was noise and smoke everywhere. And Columbus heard the screams of sailors hit by the cannon balls.

The fight lasted all day. Many men were killed. Columbus was hurt. But he kept on fighting.

Then a terrible thing happened. His ship began to sink.

Columbus jumped into the sea. He grabbed an oar floating in the water. He started to swim. He swam for hours. When he got too tired, he rested on the oar. Then he swam some more.



At last, late at night, he reached land. He pulled himself up on the beach and rested. Some men came down to help him. They told him he was in the country of Portugal.



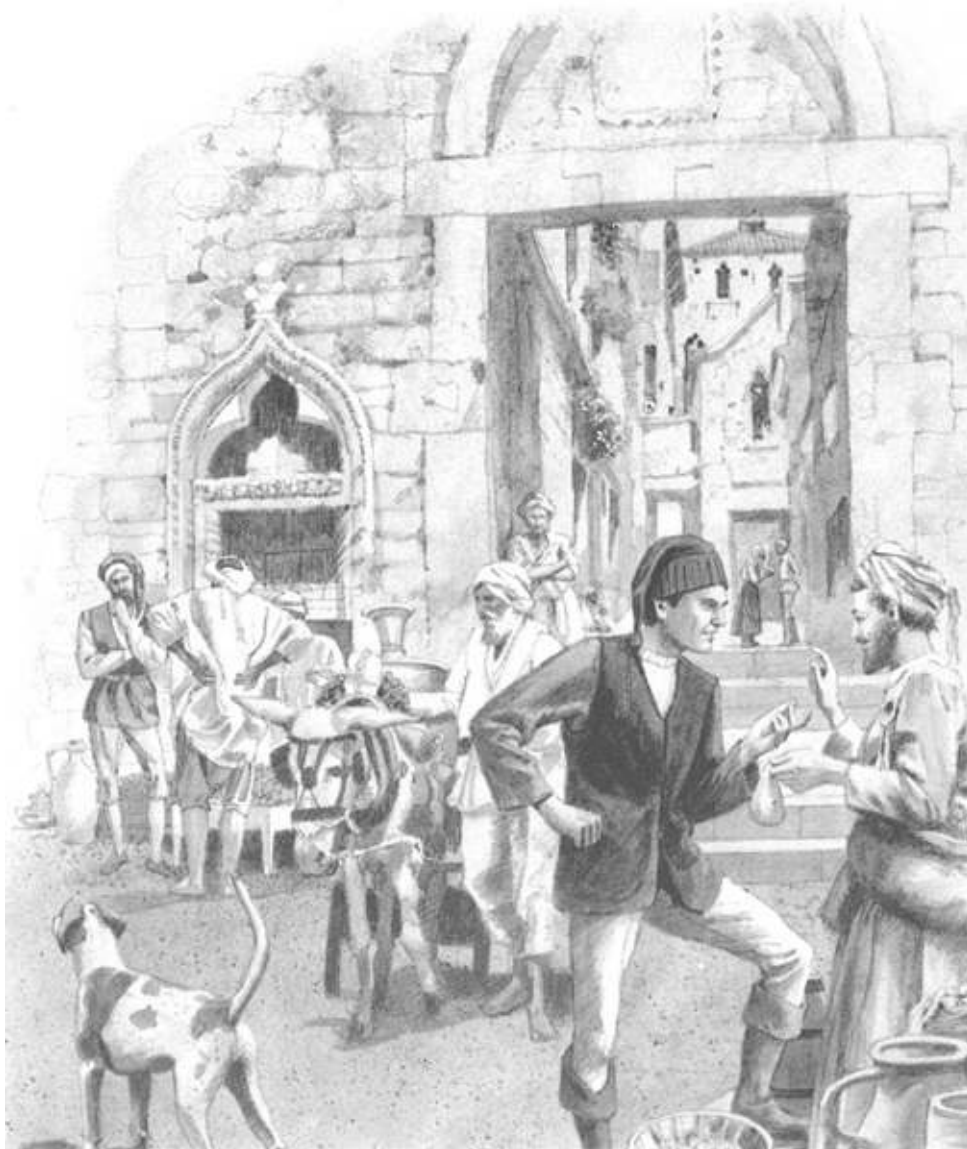
LANDS OF GOLD AND SPICES

Christopher Columbus decided to stay in Portugal. He went to live near the big, busy port of Lisbon. He married. He and his wife had a baby boy. They named him Diego.

From Lisbon he sailed to many places. He sailed to Africa, which is hot, and Thule, which is cold. He sailed to England and Ireland, Flanders and Germany. He talked to men who had been to other lands. These men sailed into Lisbon in ships filled with pepper and ginger and cinnamon and cloves.

These things were called spices. Spices made food taste much better. People would pay almost anything to get them.

The sailors bought the spices from people called Arabs. But everyone knew the Arabs did not grow the spices. They got them from faraway lands named Cathay and India and Cipango. These lands were called the Indies. The Indies lay far away to the east of the Mediterranean.



Many men did not want to buy the spices from the Arabs. They wanted to go straight to the

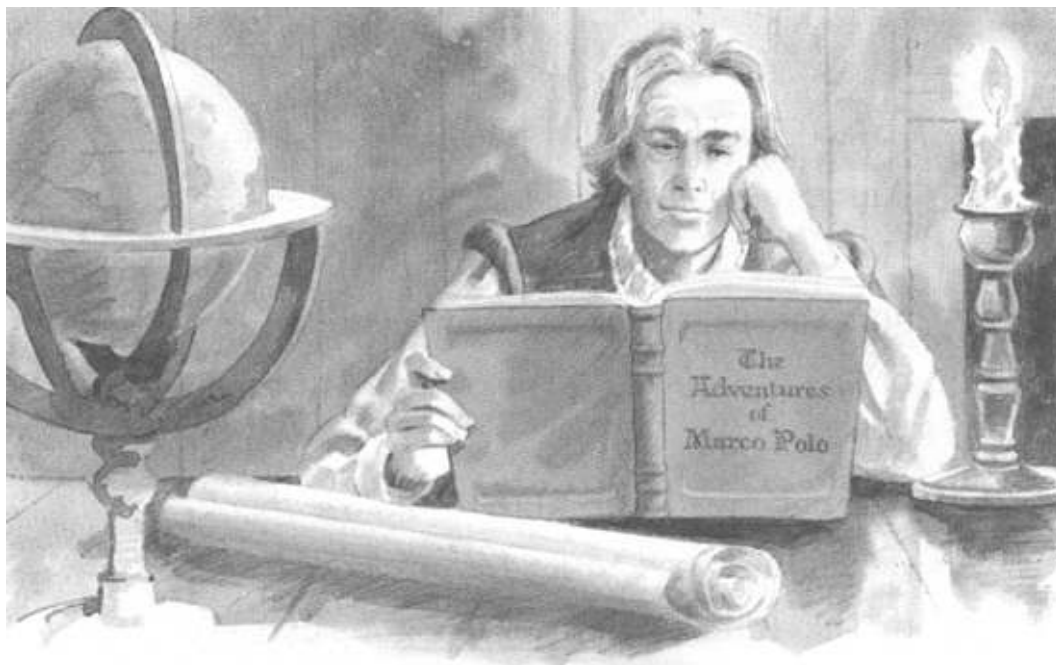
Indies. The spices were much cheaper there.

The best way to get there was to cross the lands owned by the Arabs. But the Arabs would not let anyone cross their lands.

There was another way to get to the Indies. It was across deserts and over mountains. That way was too long and too dangerous.

Any man who found a new way to the Indies would become rich.

Columbus was sure he could find a way. He studied maps. He read books about the Indies. One book he read over and over was called *The Adventures of Marco Polo*.



Long before Columbus was born, Marco Polo went to the Indies. He crossed the deserts and over mountains. He saw many wonderful things. He had many adventures.

In Cathay, Marco Polo met the Grand Khan. The Khan was a great emperor. His clothes were made of gold. His noblemen's robes were covered with jewels and pearls.

Polo heard about Cipango, where a palace had a gold roof. He sailed to Annam and Java. He saw forests of ebony. He saw the diamond fields of Golconda and the pearls of Maabar. And he saw fields of spices: pepper and nutmeg, galingale and cloves.

From reading Marco Polo's book, Columbus tried to figure out how to get to the Indies. Marco Polo got there by going around the world to the east. Columbus knew the world was round. So he knew he could get there by going around the world the other way—to the west.

But the great Western Ocean lay to the west. How big was it? Could a man sail across it to reach the Indies? No one knew.

Columbus thought he could do it.

He started to make plans to sail to the Indies. When he was ready, he went to see the king of Portugal.

TROUBLES BEGIN

Columbus asked the king to give him some ships. He said he could cross the Western Ocean in a few weeks. He would find the island of Cipango with its gold-roofed palace. He would bring back the riches of the Indies for Portugal.

The king liked Columbus's plan. He asked his advisers what they thought of it.

The king's advisers studied the plan. They said they did not like it. They said that Columbus was wrong. They said that the Western Ocean was bigger than Columbus thought. It would take too long to cross it. A ship could not hold enough food for such a long voyage.

The king listened to his advisers. He told Columbus he would not give him the ships.

But Columbus did not give up. He decided to go to Spain. He hoped to find someone there to help him.

Columbus's wife had died. He and his son, Diego, went to the town of Palos, in Spain.

Columbus wanted to go on to the city of Seville. He left Diego with some holy men called monks. They promised to take care of him.

In Seville, Columbus talked to a rich man named Don Luís de la Cerda. Don Luís liked the plan. He said that he would give Columbus the ships for the voyage.

Don Luís thought he should tell Queen Isabella of Spain about the plan. He wrote to her. She was very interested. She asked Columbus to come and tell her more about it. If she liked it, she would give him the ships herself. If she did not like it, she would not let him go at all.



So Columbus packed his things again. He left to see the queen in the city of Córdoba. And so begins the longest and most unhappy part of his great adventure.

COLUMBUS AND THE QUEEN

On January 20, 1486, Columbus arrived in Córdoba. He found that the king and queen had left. He had to wait three long months before they came back.

Finally, in April, Columbus met King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

He told them about his plan. He said that he could sail across the Western Ocean to the Indies. Would they give him the ships he needed?

Isabella told him he had to wait while her advisers studied the plan.

Columbus waited. He waited for weeks. He waited for months. He waited for years! But he could never get an answer from the queen. She was always too busy.

Columbus was very angry. Why should he wait around for the queen of Spain? He went back to the king of Portugal. But the king turned him down once again. Heartbroken, Columbus returned to Spain.



Another year passed, and another and another. Columbus ran out of money. He was shabby and tired. His red hair turned white. He had waited six years for an answer from the queen. At last he decided to go ask the king of France for help.

Columbus went to Palos to pick up Diego. There he got a letter. It was from Isabella. She wanted to see him! Columbus got on a mule. He rode quickly off to see the queen.



This time Isabella had wonderful news. She said she would help him. After all these years Columbus would get his ships!

Isabella asked him what prize he wanted if he found the Indies. He told her he wanted gold and silver and pearls. He wanted to be called “Admiral of the Ocean Sea.” And he wanted to be the governor of all the lands he found.

Isabella’s advisers told her that Columbus wanted much too much. The queen said she would have to think about it.

Weeks went by. At last she made up her mind. She told him she would not help him. Columbus was angry. Of course he wanted a lot! What was wrong with that? If he found the Indies, Spain would be rich. Why shouldn’t he be rich too? He was the one who had to face the dangers of the long voyage.

Columbus climbed onto his mule and rode away.

Columbus rode for a few miles. Then he heard someone riding up behind him. It was a messenger from the queen. She had changed her mind again. She would give him the ships. She would give him everything he asked for.

At last Christopher Columbus’s great adventure could begin.

THE NIÑA, THE PINTA, THE SANTA MARÍA

Now things started to happen very quickly. Columbus hurried back to Palos to get ready for the voyage.

One of the first men he saw was a sailor named Martín Alonso Pinzón. Pinzón was a thin, hungry-looking man. He was a friend of Columbus.

Pinzón said he wanted to sail with Columbus. Columbus was glad to have him. He did not know that they would become enemies by the end of the voyage.

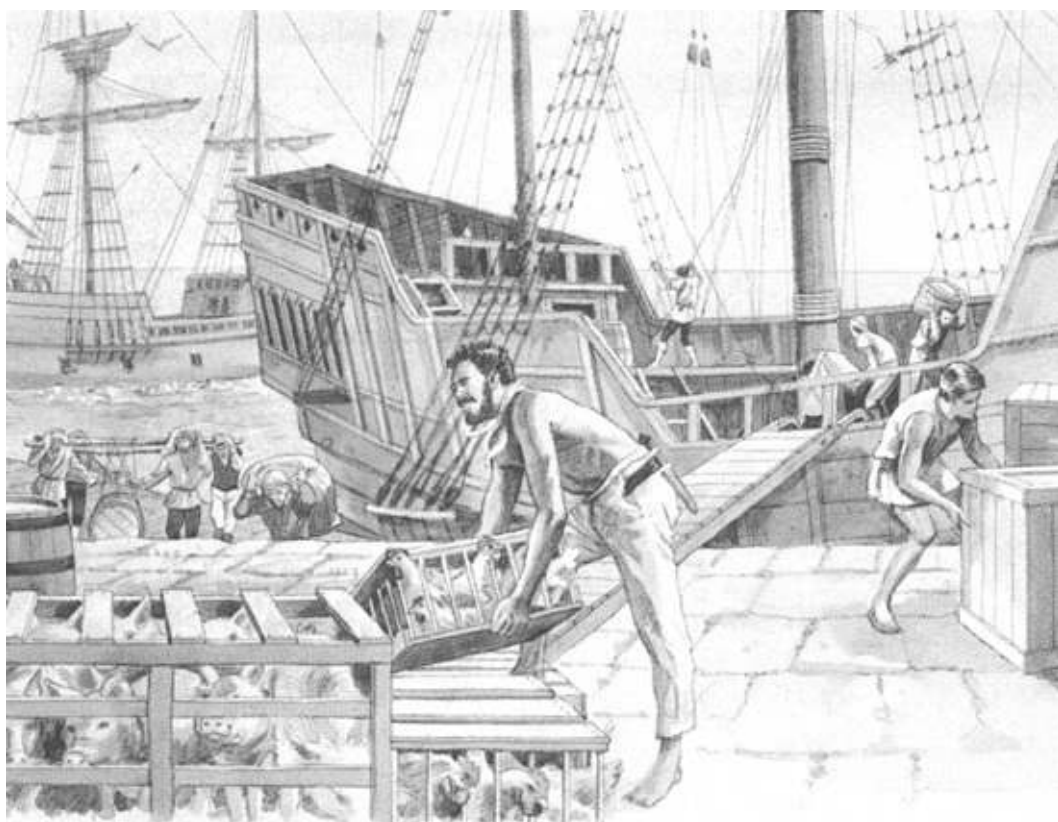
The queen told the town of Palos to give Columbus two ships. The ships were called caravels. They were fast and easy to sail. Their names were the *Niña* and the *Pinta*.

Columbus rented one other ship. She was bigger than the caravels. But she was not as fast. She was named the *Santa María*.

Columbus liked the *Niña* best. But he decided to go on the *Santa María* because she was bigger. Pinzón was captain of the *Pinta*. His brother was captain of the *Niña*.

It took ten busy weeks to get the ships ready. New sails were made. The sailors loaded the ships with fresh water and tools and guns. They took along pigs and chickens to eat. They took fishhooks and boathooks and baskets and ropes. They took things to give to the people of the Indies. There were beads and bells and little red caps.

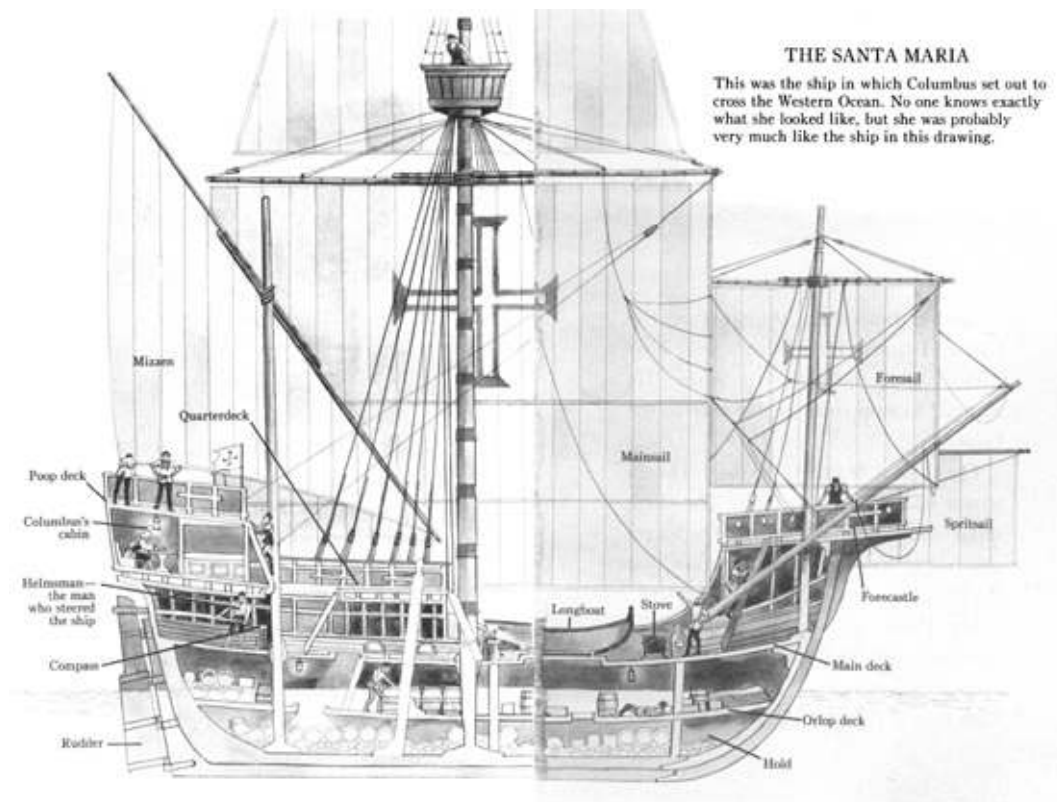
The men hammered and sawed and painted. Soon all was ready.



In the evening of August 2, 1492, all the men went to the church. Then they said good-bye to their fathers and mothers and wives and children. They climbed aboard the ships.

Very early the next morning they pulled up anchor. The wind filled the sails. With a cheer

the men set sail for the Western Ocean. The great adventure had begun.



THE SANTA MARÍA

This was the ship in which Columbus set out to cross the Western Ocean. No one knows exactly what she looked like, but she was probably very much like the ship in this drawing.

THE CANARY ISLANDS

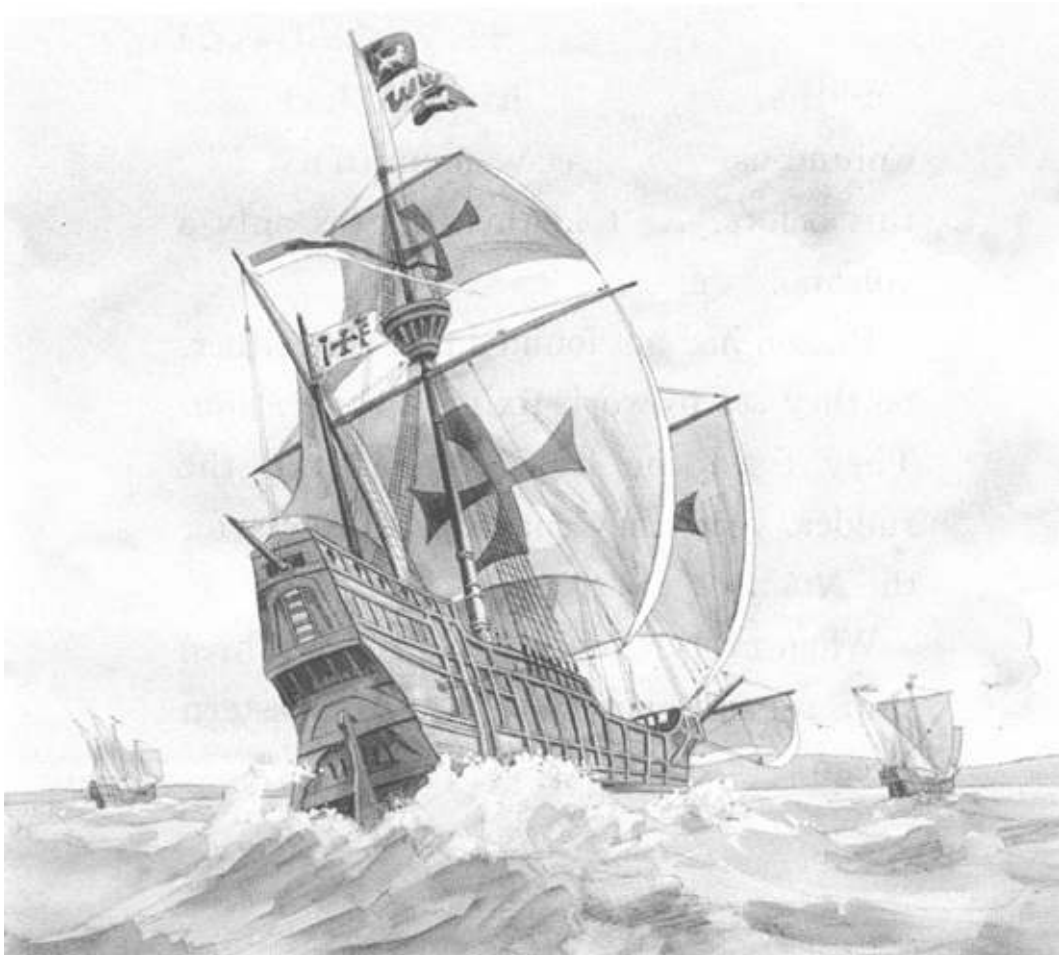
Columbus headed the ships toward the Canary Islands. These islands were near Africa. They belonged to Spain. He planned to stop there on his way to the Indies.

The ships sailed for three days. Then a strong wind started to blow. The three small ships tossed and rolled. The waves smashed against them. Columbus saw that the *Pinta* was in trouble.

The *Pinta's* rudder was broken. The men could not steer the ship. The *Santa María* could not help. The waves were too high for the two ships to come together.

Martín Alonso Pinzón fixed the rudder with ropes. But the ropes soon snapped. And the *Pinta* began to leak. Many of the sailors were afraid the ship would sink.

For another day they struggled through the heavy seas. Then early the next morning they saw land. It was one of the Canary Islands.



Pinzón and Columbus decided to separate for a few days. They did not think the *Pinta* could go on. They would look for another ship.

Columbus went to another island. But he could not find a new ship. He sailed back to meet Pinzón.

During the night the men saw a mountain that seemed to be on fire. They were very frightened. They said it was a sign that they would have bad luck. But Columbus had seen

mountains like this before. He told them it was only a volcano.

Pinzón had not found a new ship either. So they set to work fixing up the *Pinta*. They fixed the leaks. They fixed the rudder. And they made better sails for the *Niña*.

When everything was ready, the three ships set sail once more into the Western Ocean.

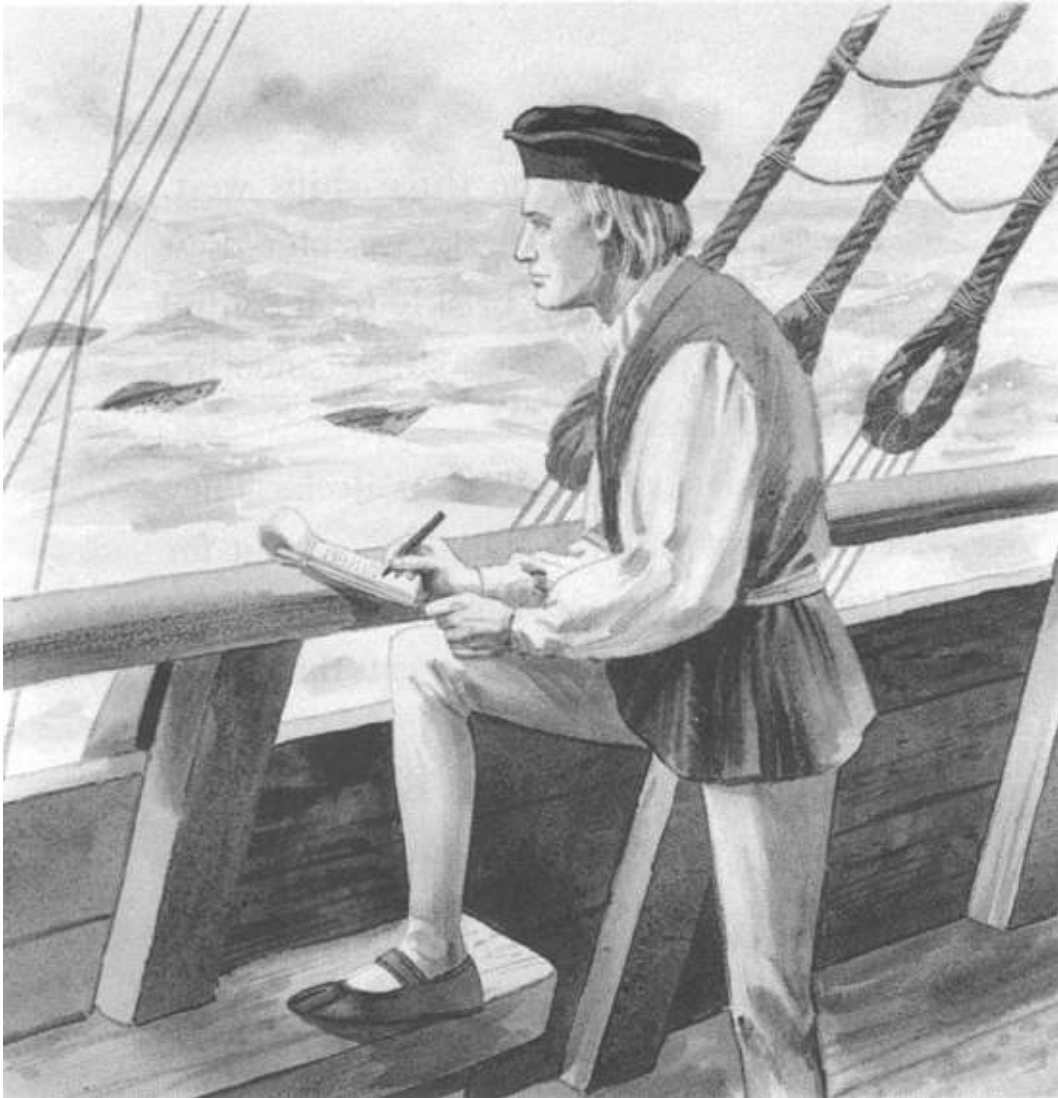
ON THE WESTERN OCEAN

Columbus headed the three ships west. The sea was quiet. The sky was blue. Best of all, the wind blew briskly from behind them. It pushed the ships smoothly through the sea.

The men made fires on deck. They cooked hot suppers. This was a treat for them. In stormy weather they could not make fires. They had to eat their food cold.

Columbus was happy. His ships held enough food and water and wine to last his men for a year. He did not have to worry about their starving to death.

Columbus wrote down everything that happened during the voyage. He wrote about the weather. He wrote about the stars and the winds. He wrote about strange fish that swam around his ship. He wrote about the birds that flew overhead. Often he worked far into the night. Sometimes he did not sleep at all.



Each day Columbus put down the number of miles they sailed. But he played a trick on the men. He wrote in two different books.

In one book Columbus wrote the real number of miles he thought they sailed. He did not show this book to the sailors.

In the other book Columbus wrote a shorter number of miles. He let the men see this book. He wanted them to think they were not too far from Spain. Then they would not worry so much.

Only Columbus knew how far, far away they really were from home.

“LAND! LAND!”

For about two weeks the ships sailed steadily on. The sky was clear. The air was fresh and clean. Then, slowly, the wind died.

The three small ships stood still in the middle of the ocean.

The men went swimming. The water felt wonderful. They had not had a bath for two weeks.

Soon the wind picked up again and the ships sailed on to the west.

The king had promised to give a prize to the first man to see land. Columbus was sure the land was near. Every man on each of the ships kept his eyes open.

One evening a shout came from the *Pinta*. Martín Alonso Pinzón called out that he saw land! The next morning everyone looked and looked. But there was no land to be seen. Pinzón had only seen a dark cloud that looked like land.

The sailors had not seen land for three weeks. They started to worry. Columbus brought out his book. It showed they were still near Spain. Even this did not cheer up the men.

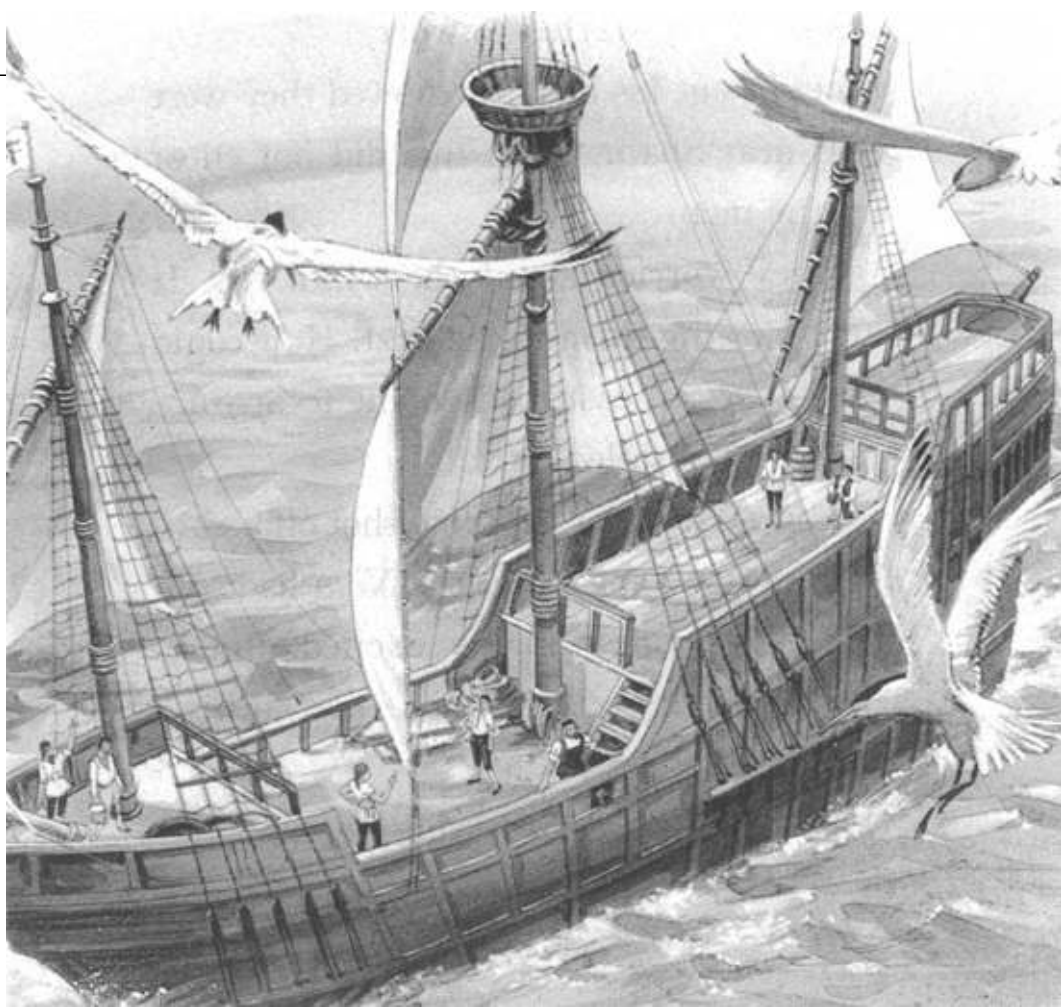
They worried about the wind, too. It kept blowing them to the west. How could they ever sail east, back home to Spain?

Still they sailed on.

A few days later the *Niña* shot off a gun. This meant someone on the *Niña* had seen land. Everyone was very excited. But as the hours passed, the men saw nothing ahead but the sea.

The sailors worried even more. Would they ever see land again? They became frightened and angry.

Every day they saw more and more birds. This made Columbus happy. He was sure they were land birds. It must mean that land was near. But the sailors did not care about birds. They just wanted to go home.



Columbus knew that the men were angry. He knew that they might try to kill him and sail home. But he had spent many years planning this voyage. Now he was sure he was near the Indies. And he was not going to give up.

One night the Pinzón brothers came over to the *Santa María*. They told Columbus they wanted to turn back too. Columbus said they would sail west for three more days. If they did not find land by then, he would decide about turning back.

For two days they saw nothing. But on the third night Columbus looked out into the darkness. Did he see a light?

Columbus was not sure. He told some of the sailors about it. They saw it too. But no one was sure it came from land.

Later that night the moon came up. Now the sailors could see the ocean clearly.



A sailor stood in the crow's nest high on the *Pinta's* mast. He looked hard into the night. "Land!" he shouted. "Land!"
The date was October 12, 1492.

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