

BRADLEY BAZZLE

MAGELLAN

By the end we were starving. Barros and me. Magellan had long since lowered the sails, so we lay on the deck in the naked sun. Sweat trickled through fresh cracks in our skin, and the acid inside our bubbling, distended stomachs sloshed with each rock of the boat onto hidden sores, and with each slow, creaking rock came a dim chorus of moans from belowdecks, where Pigafetta and the other survivors were chained. Magellan had caught them cannibalizing the boatswain. It was an atrocity he would not tolerate, and he made Barros and me, the only crewmen who had refrained, chain up the cannibals a safe distance from each other. Now they spent their days sleeping and starving and setting homemade traps for the turkeys.

Lying on the deck, I imagined the crow's nest that teetered above me to be an obscene metronome, counting off their lives. Neither Barros nor I had the energy to check on them, and what energy we did have was spent scouring inside the great wooden pepper boxes for stray peppercorns. It had been twenty days since our last proper meal. Lately, we had been chewing on a length of rope. It lay between us. I touched it with my foot to gauge its heft and said that I thought we could chew on it some more.

Barros raised his head a few centimeters to see for himself. He shook his head no, and he was right. If the rope had been a snake, what lay at our feet was its skeleton. The edges of my eyeteeth were jagged from sucking on it.

"Jew."

Both of us pretended not to hear the word. Barros was Jewish. As soon as Magellan learned this, he had fixated upon it. "Every man has his weakness," he said to Barros, echoing his famous proclamation to the Lapula Indians. He whispered to me right after, "Yours is that you're a slave and a Malay cannibal. You want to take a big bite out of my ass, don't you, you hungry cannibal?" He was always whispering things like that to me. Secretly, I was thankful when he found out about Barros being Jewish.

Barros raised his shallow buttocks from the deck and rolled onto his belly. He pressed his mouth and forehead against the bleached, buckling wood.

"Don't cut your face on the deck," I said. "We haven't swabbed it for quite some time." This was a joke, based on Magellan's utter abandonment of traditional seafaring.

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“Jew.”

The door to Magellan’s cabin was slightly ajar, framed in the forecabin by two dark, circular windows like expressionless eyes. Wheezing confirmed that Magellan was standing in the narrow shaft of darkness. Was he staring at us? Was his mouth hanging open? I could almost smell the turkey meat.

The sea was as gray as dishwater, complete with scummy froth. A shiny dolphin breached the surface, and I turned to watch a thin tower of water shoot from its blowhole. When I turned back, Magellan was standing in the doorway, his pink and purple robes flapping in the breeze. He held a turkey leg. He said, “Get over here, you Jew.” His voice was slurred. “Your shiny head is like,” he said, then thought for a moment. His insults had become strange and abstract. “Your shiny head is like a disgusting moon.”

Barros sighed. I could tell he was preparing to stand up and go to Magellan. Barros was the navigator of the *Trinidad* and at one time had wanted very much to help Magellan. I pressed my foot against Barros’s leg, and he looked at me. I hoped my face said, “Don’t go talk to Magellan,” but it was so wrinkled and blistered, who knows what it said? Barros mumbled something and began to sit up. Then Magellan withdrew. The cabin door closed. Barros lay down beside me again, a little closer than before. Relieved, we reminisced about how, in the land of the giants, Magellan had lashed his legs to the torsos of José and Pigafetta and worn his longest robe in order to look like a giant himself. The natives had discovered this stupid trick immediately, but instead of running, Magellan had pulled out his penis and swung it around. Either because of its absurd length or its many fleshy colors, the natives had been fascinated by it. They served us fruit the consistency of sand.

Laughter came from the cabin, as if Magellan were listening to our story. His laughter was like a series of short, monotone yells. It was hysterical and lasted for minutes.

Barros covered his ears. He was cracking up from it, I could tell. I took a rag out of my pocket and put it on his head because the sun was directly above us, and Barros, though young, was quite bald. He mumbled thanks. Soon the laughter stopped.

Before the boatswain incident, we used to gather belowdecks during the hottest hours to play cards and tell lies about exotic sexual positions we had learned from native women. For a while after the incident, after chaining up the others, Barros and I still went below and attempted conversation. But the men resented us for chaining them up. The last time, Pigafetta read

from his journal that I was a slave and a criminal and easily the most poorly trained seaman with whom he had ever voyaged. I explained that I was not a trained seaman and had been purchased by Magellan ten years before, but Pigafetta pretended he hadn't been there when Magellan showed up pulling me, his new translator, by a rope tied around my waist. Pigafetta waved the open journal at me. He believed that after all of us died, the journal would be discovered, and the truth of my villainy would be known. I asked him, isn't the real enemy Magellan? But he was unwilling or unable to admit this. Now, he and the others had languished so badly that their knobby elbows and knees made me gag. I worried, too, that after I climbed the ladder down to the cavernous hold, I would not have the strength to climb back up. And, of course, there were the turkeys: a gift from the Cocha Baloa Indians. Once, there had been thirty of the strange creatures, mostly female. The few males had made such awful noises—yelping like dogs, purring like cats, cackling like maniacs—that Magellan ate them first. He ordered us to kill them, and they faced us down like sexual rivals, puffing out their chests, worming their penis-like necks back and forth to show the reds and blues in them, spreading their dark tails in semicircles that shone green in the sun until finally, with a girlish scream, they leapt at us with their feet out like claws, and we stuck them.

“Get over here, you Jew.”

I didn't dare turn my head to look at the source of the slurred, wheezing voice. Neither did Barros, who closed his eyes in horror.

“You are like two skinny wolves from Muscovy, trembling and horribly shaved. One is black and one is white. I wonder if you can have puppies together!” Magellan laughed raucously. With luck, he would stand in the doorsill flinging curses at us until he grew bored and retired again. But when the deck began to creak under his prodigious weight, I knew we were in for more substantive indignity.

Barros worried the tattered edge of his shirt. A drop of sweat rolled from his bristly chin into his ear. I patted his hand and considered how to deflect Magellan's tirade away from Barros and toward me. But secretly I did not want to do this at all. I did not want Magellan looking at me with his hungry, desperate eyes.

The smell of barely cooked turkey was overpowering, and from it I knew he was standing beside us. It was too late to hope that by ignoring him he would go away. Now it was time for appeasement. I sat up.

Magellan was holding a turkey leg, wiping it back and forth across his chapped lips. Pieces of skin clung to his strange beard, which grew exclusively from beneath his jaw like a ragged, putrid bib. He had the pelt of an exotic animal thrown over his shoulder and wore, as always, several layers of filthy and colorful robes, the bottommost cinched with a rope, barely concealing his pendulous scrotum and penis.

Magellan carefully placed his toes over Barros's, who had not raised his head to look at him. "Your penis is like," he said, then thought for a moment. "Your penis is tiny, like a seahorse smoking a cigarette." Laughter erupted like a fusillade from which, instead of smoke, rose a cloud of turkey smells and particles. "Eh?" he said. He slowly rocked toward Barros, shifting his weight onto Barros's foot. Barros sat up but kept his eyes down, away from Magellan. "Eh, Jew?" Magellan repeated.

With all my courage, I said, "I believe that Barros has lost his voice from dehydration."

"If I'm talking to a Malay cannibal slave interpreter named Henrique, he will know it from the bowl of human fingers I use to make him do my bidding."

I mustered a quiet laugh, knowing that this was not an insult but a joke. Weeks before, I would have raised my hands like claws and made a snarling face, which Magellan loved. But I no longer had the energy or will to please him. Also, Henrique was not my name. Henrique. How had he decided on it? It sounded nothing like my real name. This is Henrique, he had said to the others after he dragged me by a rope up the plank onto the *Trinidad*. Though it was cold, he had insisted I remove my shirt to look more like a slave. Henrique is our new interpreter, he said, then laughed outrageously as the others poked my chest and pinched my trembling arms.

Now Magellan reached into his robe and withdrew the corroded metal pieces of an astrolabe. He dumped them into Barros's lap, where they lay like the bones of a rodent picked over by birds. "Where are we?" he asked. "Where is land? Where is land, Barros the navigational Jew?"

Barros ran his hands over the pieces of astrolabe, inspecting each one. As he did this, Magellan turned the phrase "Barros the navigational Jew" into a tuneless, manically lighthearted song: "Barros the navigational Jew! Barros, Barros! Barros the navigational Jew!" The addition of song to his usual nonsense was nearly impossible to stand, so I concentrated on Barros's careful

movements over the astrolabe. He fit some pieces together, tried to fit others, raked through those pieces for other pieces that surely were missing.

Please, I thought, just fix the astrolabe and tell him where we are. At least pretend to fix it and tell him we're somewhere, even if it's wrong. But Barros was like the badger who, instead of knocking, scratches at a door until a badger-sized hole appears. In his lap were half an astrolabe and a handful of pieces that may not have been in the astrolabe to begin with.

Barros mumbled.

"Yes?" asked Magellan. "Yes, speak up?"

"What did you do to this astrolabe?" The question hung in the air for a moment. Barros seemed on the verge of tears. "Did you destroy it on purpose?"

"That is none of your concern!"

"Here," I said, and I took the astrolabe from Barros's lap, gathered a handful of the remaining pieces, and made a show of arranging them on the half-astrolabe, like a house of playing cards. Magellan watched this, nodding with interest. Then I held the device aloft and pretended to orient it according to the position of the sun. (I had never seen one used and did not know they were used at night on the stars.) I put my face to the edge of the circle and squinted. The sun glinted on the brass. I chose a mark at random and slowly turned the device until the sun hit that mark.

"That is the way," I said, pointing more or less in the direction we were headed.

Magellan followed my finger and squinted into the distance. In profile, backlit by the sun, he looked every bit the hawkish captain. "What is that way?" he asked.

"The island," I said. "The island with food and water."

"Hmm," he said. He raked some turkey out of his beard and stared into the blue and gray distance where my finger had been pointing. "I believe you're right. What about you, Barros? Do you agree?"

Barros looked at me, at the pieces of astrolabe in my hand. I wonder still why he did not say "yes, yes, of course" and let Magellan retire to his cabin. Instead he said, "I don't know."

Magellan blinked. His mouth hung slightly open. It was the look of a wolf caught napping after a large meal, with stupid eyes that tricked you into forgetting that it could be, at a whiff of blood or weakness, electrified into terrible violence.

Barros continued, "We should wait for a nighttime reading."

"But don't you believe Henrique?" Magellan asked. It was impossible to tell if he was joking or serious, asking for a second opinion or about to wrench out Barros's beating heart. He leaned down to put his face near Barros's face. I wondered if Barros's eyes stung from the moist cloud of Magellan's breath, which filled the short distance between them. Magellan whispered, as if to a lover, "I hereby appoint Henrique navigator of the *Trinidad*. Henrique, chain him up with the other turkeys."

Barros did not look up or turn his head as Magellan shuffled across the deck toward his cabin. One of Magellan's hips was bad, so the foot beneath it made a hissing sound as it dragged across the planks. The door opened and shut, leaving us in silence. A seagull cawed.

"If you go belowdecks, he won't know if you're chained up or not," I said. "He never goes down there." Barros knew this as well as I did.

"It's only a matter of time before he kills me or I starve to death." He reached his hand into my lap and petted the brass pieces of astrolabe. "Why?" he said, more wondering aloud than asking.

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My answer—that Magellan was as cruel and as arbitrary as nature, as life itself—was as yet half-formed, so I shrugged. Barros's stubby fingers ran the length of the great circle and up a skinny part that looked like a sundial. Other parts were so oxidized that they looked like patches of moss. I should have said, "Why anything? Never ask why." But I didn't understand yet that silence was my secret; that "why" was the question that would have driven me insane when the old men sold me to him for gold and mirrors, when my sword first passed through a smooth-skinned native, when my fellows began nibbling the meat off their little fingers, when Magellan put a turkey bone in my nostril and tried to lift me by it, screaming that my penis was like a shaved baby panther and my face like a starfish's penis.

Barros took the loose pieces of astrolabe off my lap and stuffed them into the pockets of his ragged trousers until all that was left was the great circle, the heaviest piece. I thought about pitching it into the ocean before Barros could take it, but he peeled my fingers off it and slid the heavy ring under his shirt. Holding it in place against what remained of his belly, he used his free hand to squeeze mine. I did not look at him.

"Henrique," he said, "is that even your name?"

"Yes," I lied. I raised my free hand and stoically patted his. The three hands clasped together in my lap looked like a brown and pink octopus.

“I have a favor to ask you,” he said, “because of my religion.” He stood up, and I followed him to the railing. He sat down facing me, then pulled my hand onto the great circle of the astrolabe, which was hard and bumpy beneath his shirt. He closed his eyes. His lips were slightly parted, as if he were expecting a kiss. Was he going to say something? I wondered. How would I know when to do it? When he squeezed my hand I stepped forward just a little. His eyes opened as he tipped backwards. The back of one of his shoes caught on the railing, popped off, and twirled in the air before crashing into the sea with a small splash, an echo of the big splash of Barros’s body. The sailors had told me that, after the panic, drowning was not an unpleasant way to die. Some had come very close to drowning before being rescued, usually by Magellan, who dove like a spear and swam like a stingray. It was hard to imagine a time when Magellan saved people instead of teasing out their deaths.

I sat down on the opposite railing. The sun was behind some clouds and didn’t sting my neck. The door to Magellan’s cabin was open. Of course, I thought. It had been open the whole time, for his twisted pleasure. I pictured him staring, smiling, pleased at the entire episode and its strong effect on me. I closed my eyes before the footsteps began, the creaking of the sun-bleached planks beneath the massive, calloused feet, the smell of turkey, the deep, phlegm-cracked breaths.

“Where’s the Jew?”

His voice was close. The smell of turkey was strong. Something poked my cheek, and my mouth began to water. I opened my eyes and saw a turkey leg, now no more than a bone.

“I was going to make you two fight for it,” said Magellan. He passed the bone under my nose. The smell of marrow released a hidden cache of stinging juices in my tender stomach. “You would have killed him for it, yes?”

I grabbed the bone from his hand and began to suck it. Later, I broke it into pieces with my teeth and sucked on each piece one by one for hours, like hard candy. Then I fell asleep.

When I woke the next morning at dawn, he was back in his cabin. The door was closed, bathed in red by the giant sun on the rippling horizon. The black windows on either side stared at me, unblinking. With the door, they formed the face of a high-mouthed insect, red and monstrous as the devil that sailors say creeps behind every corner of the city and in every island

cave. Beside the cabin, off the edge of the *Trinidad*, a strip of gray crowned the horizon like an answer to the sun's red challenge.

"Land," I whispered. Could it be? I did not trust my eyes, but the strip of gray was so steady, so dull—it had to be real. "Land," I shouted. "Land!"

The cabin door creaked open. From the sliver of black he wheezed, "Land?"

"Eleven o'clock!" I yelled, having overheard this parlance, which referred to the hands of a clock. The yelling sapped me, and I pressed my palm to the railing and leaned on it.

Magellan emerged from his cabin. Seeing him, all my joy at discovering land was replaced by anger. He withdrew a periscope from beneath his robe and looked through it at the strip of land. I would never have guessed that the periscope was not broken. I relished the idea that Magellan had taken care of it, had wrapped it in clothing or laid it under his pillow; it struck me as a sign of weakness.

"Smoke!" he yelled. "There are men there!" He came toward me with his robes flapping open, his pale torso and penis bathed in red from the rising sun. He stopped a few meters away, since he had no interest in torturing me with the smell of his meaty breath. "Wash off your tongue, you filthy Malay, because those natives will need some talking to. How many mirrors do we have left?"

"Two or three, all broken."

"Put them in a sack. The idiots won't know the difference if they haven't met any white men before. While you're down there, put on some brighter clothes. You look like a street urchin. Brush your hair too. Are you listening to me?"

I was, but I was also staring at the fragments of bone that lay on the planks between us. Magellan noticed them. I leaned my head forward and peered at him from under my dark brows, with a look I hoped was full of animal menace. He would regret having fed me, having made me that much stronger. "I'll go belowdecks," I said.

My legs and arms trembled as I descended the ladder. It was darker than I remembered, and with such a mixture of foul smells that no one smell rose distinguishably above the others. Before, the turkeys had roosted in the middle of the room, away from the men chained to the perimeter, who were constantly setting traps for them with jewelry and scraps of clothing. Now I could tell from the gray smears of guano that the turkeys strutted wherever they pleased. There were five of them, maybe six. Half of these were pecking

at the slumped body of a sailor, possibly José. Another stood quite near me, raising one leg, then the other, and flashing the elbows of her wings. Her beak swung from side to side as she examined me with each eye.

“She doesn’t like you,” someone said quietly. I knew from the nasal, aristocratic accent that it was Pigafetta. How many men remained? I wondered. I would not give Pigafetta the satisfaction of counting, as if I cared. “What sort of land is it?” he asked.

“Gray,” I said.

The turkey gurgled, as if speaking for Pigafetta. A sailor moaned in the darkness, and wings fluttered as he or some other half-dead sailor batted away a nearby turkey, who had no doubt mistaken him for carrion and begun probing him for meat.

Dried guano crunched beneath my feet as I walked to the chests. I opened the large one that had contained half-length mirrors. The few that remained rested in irregular pieces at the bottom of the chest. Carefully, I lifted the largest pieces and put them in a canvas sack. The effort sapped me, and I knelt to rest my trembling arms on my thighs.

“What a slave you are,” said Pigafetta. “Rest assured I’ll record your continuing inhumanity to your fellow man in my account of our voyage. The dead turkey beside me has dried up, so I use the blood from my gums to write. Each word is precious now, but your disgusting behavior warrants a few sentences.”

“Soon you’ll have less to write about,” I said.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Aren’t you coming back for us?” He looked at me desperately. “After you die, Magellan will throw your body down here for us to eat. I’ll relish it, you cannibal, despite how skinny and filthy you are. How does one describe the man who cannibalizes the cannibal? José, what do you think?”

José did not respond. I gathered a few handfuls of pearls, parrot feathers tied in bunches according to color, cheesecloth bags of salt, and small wooden statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary covered in chipped gold paint. I said nothing more to Pigafetta.

It was mid-afternoon before we were close enough to shore to drop anchor. Magellan had spent the morning manically swinging the jib of the mainsail this way and that to steer us toward the thin column of smoke. He would scream at me to help him, then perform the task himself before I could figure out what to do. I spent most of the day sitting on the railing and watching

this strange nautical dance, by the end of which his colorful robes lay in a pile on the deck as he scrambled here and there naked. Our brutal ordeal seemed to have made him younger, leeching away whatever fat was hiding in the corners between his powerful muscles. His body had a pleasant, almost oriental complexion. His beard had no snow in it. "Sizing me up!?" he screamed whenever, between elaborate maneuvers of the mainsail, he glanced in my direction. Joy at seeing land reinvigorated his insults: "I'll not be eaten by the likes of you, you shaved panther perched on the railing as you would perch in a tree in your jungle home, waiting for a nice fat white man to saunter by before leaping down and jamming your claw-like penis into his eye!" He laughed ecstatically. "Isn't that what you would do?"

I nodded.

"Good," he said. "I was right, then."

I helped Magellan turn the crank for the anchor and then the crank for the dinghy, which took some coordination because there were two ropes, and I was not as strong as Magellan or as familiar with the turning of cranks. After a stream of particularly incomprehensible curses, the bottom of the dinghy splashed into the calm, shallow water. Magellan told me to climb down first while he put his robes back on. My stomach, for weeks familiar only with the sensation of hunger and pain, began to flutter as I crossed the railing into the air beside the *Trinidad*, lowered myself on the rope with shaky arms, and probed the edge of the dinghy with my toes. But before I could enjoy the strange sensation of bobbing on the waves or examine the glowing blue and shallow water, Magellan was positioning the big canvas bag full of mirrors above me, telling me to get ready, to get ready because he was going to drop it, and was I ready, and would I not flop out of the dinghy on impact and bungle the whole thing? Then the bag crashed onto my feet, and I knew from its limp shape that the largest pieces of mirror had shattered. It would have been smarter to lower it with a rope, I thought, but what was the difference? Cursing, Magellan climbed down to the dinghy.

In what could have been only for show, he demanded that I paddle backwards in the prow as he sat upright and facing me in the aft. Because he was so much heavier, the prow fishtailed this way and that, despite my novice efforts to correct it with the curved strokes Barros had taught me in moments of boredom. Magellan kept twisting to see what was in front of us. The effect was less than regal, and soon he had pulled me by my neck into

the aft and taken my place with the oar. We made quick progress. The bottom of the dinghy hissed onto the sand, and we stepped out of it.

Magellan strode ahead of me onto the beach as I struggled under the sloppy weight of the canvas bag. Before us stood a deep forest of tall trees with bare, upright trunks and broad waxy leaves that blocked the sun. Magellan walked to the edge of the trees and shouted, "Hello! Hello!" The column of smoke we had seen above the treetops from the *Trinidad* had dwindled, as if the natives had left their fire to inspect us from secret places among the trees. Magellan shouted, "Hello!" and "I am Magellan!" and "I am the explorer Ferdinand Magellan, here with my interpreter Henrique!" several more times before sitting down in the sand, opening his robes and leaning back on his palms. I dropped the canvas bag and sat down cross-legged. "They'll come," he said. "Let them get a look at us first. You know their language, yes?"

"Yes," I lied. Why did Magellan think I knew their language? Were we in Asia, America; who knew? Magellan nodded earnestly. To this day I cannot say if it was the nod of a crazy man or of a great explorer, forever the optimist when it came to strange cultures. His commitment to his work was something the other sailors admired, but I struggled to grasp it. What did he want from these people, anyway? I was about to ask him when something moved in the periphery of my vision. Magellan retied his robes and stood. Far down the beach, a brown-skinned man stood at the edge of the trees observing us. Another stood just as far away in the opposite direction. Magellan waved his arm high above his head and shouted, "Hello! Hello!" and "I am the explorer Ferdinand Magellan!" spinning from side to side to address both men. Other brown-skinned men emerged from the trees on either side, and gradually they walked toward us. I stood and brushed the sand off my ragged trousers, wishing I had changed into something brightly colored, as Magellan had suggested. I was so obviously his slave. How would these shirtless men take me seriously? After Magellan had been done away with, would they kill me too? I wished I were still so enraged by Barros's death that I did not think of myself, did not fear death. How could Magellan smile and shout and wave his arms? Didn't he understand that he could die at any moment?

Slowly, the natives encircled us. They wore rope belts with leather codpieces and had black markings on their chests like the gills of fish. Their faces were soft, nearly hairless, and the hair on their heads made fluffy caps that ended at their ears and eyebrows. There were maybe a dozen in all. One of them stepped forward. He was older than the others and alone carried no

spear. He came very close to Magellan and looked him up and down. I imagined that Magellan could feel the man's hot breath on his chest. Magellan smiled and raised his hands, as if to say, "I have no weapons," before untying his outermost robe and presenting it to the leader, held in one hand and draped over the other arm, like the pelt of a mint-green animal. The leader took the robe from Magellan, squeezed it, and held it to his nose. He frowned and mumbled something, to which another man replied. Then he turned and handed the robe to this other man. Then he said something to Magellan in rapid gibberish.

"What did he say?" Magellan asked me.

"He said he would like the rest of your robes, for his other men."

"Of course." Magellan shed robe after robe and handed them to the confused leader until only one remained, made of tattered silk that had once been pearl-colored. It was very short in the thighs, possibly a lady's robe.

Overwhelmed by the pile in his arms, the leader began passing the robes to his men, who passed them from man to man in an ant line. Now all of the men had a robe; some had two. The leader gibbered something else.

"He wants the last robe," I said.

"Why? Everyone has robes already."

"I don't know. Maybe he likes how silky it looks."

Magellan untied the last robe, exposing his hairy front and penis. The leader raised his hands and shook them, frowning. Magellan stopped. "It seems he doesn't want this robe after all," he said.

"He wants the robe."

Magellan cautiously pulled off the robe and handed it to the confused leader. "It was my wife's robe," Magellan said softly. "At first I kept it for her smell. I can't recall why I started wearing it." He turned to me. "Tell him that this is a very special robe to me, and that I want him to keep it for himself."

I hesitated, not sure if I could adequately mimic the sound of their language. Magellan stared at me urgently, for the leader was touching and sniffing the silk robe with a look of utter revulsion. Finally I said something in my own language, hoping it would sound like just as much gibberish to Magellan. I said, "Three birds were sitting in the bottom of a boat when a fish jumped in and joined them." It was the beginning of a joke that had been popular on my island ten years before.

"That sounds like Malay," said Magellan.

“The two languages are similar,” I lied. “Their dialect is delivered more rapidly, but I think they can understand me. See? Look at his face.”

The chief’s face had gone from revulsion to confusion and, finally, to what might have been resignation—resignation that Magellan and I were idiots, I imagined. During our conversation, one of his men had dragged the bag away from my feet and opened it. He and a few others were passing around pieces of mirror and statues of Jesus and the Virgin. The statues seemed to please them. Seeing this, the leader raised his palms at Magellan and slowly—reluctantly?—spread his lips in what might have been a smile, or at least a gesture of appeasement. He said something.

“He says thank you,” I said.

The leader gibbered something else, something longer that involved gestures and waves toward the forest.

“What is he saying now?” Magellan asked. “Is he inviting us to their village?”

I knew that the longer these people spent with Magellan, the more they’d be endeared to his jovial façade, and the easier it would be for him to exploit them somehow, to trick them out of gold or daughters or thirty wild turkeys. I wished I did speak their language, so I could tell them Magellan was evil and that the nature of evil was unknowable. If they could have seen what I saw, they would have killed him without any trick by me.

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The leader stopped talking, having gotten nothing for his efforts. He stared at the sand for a moment before beginning to repeat the same sounds and gestures. It was hard to determine his tone because he seemed to have difficulty looking at Magellan, who was now completely naked. I suspected from my own experience that the big, hairy body of the white man was disgusting to him. I decided to use this to my advantage.

“Well, you cannibal,” said Magellan, “what is he saying?”

“He wants to see your penis.”

“What?”

“It is curious to him. He wants you to hold it out so he can see it better.”

Magellan frowned a little and glanced over his shoulder, as if to make sure that no one besides these natives was watching. The gesture humanized him, and I tried not to think about it. The flabby penis lay in his hand like a pink and purple sea slug. Magellan sort of pushed it toward the leader like a tray of food. The leader raised his hands over his face and made a wilting noise.

Then he barked something at the man to his left, who rose from inspecting mirror fragments in the sand.

"I don't think he likes this," said Magellan.

"But he does," I said. "He's telling that other man to take a look."

As if on cue, the other man *did* take a look before likewise covering his face and uttering a few sour words. The leader pointed at the penis and yelled, but he was careful not to look at Magellan's face.

"What is he saying now?" Magellan asked.

"He wants you to make it hard."

"What?"

"That's what he said. I won't look, if you want."

Magellan thought this over. "It must look big and strange to them, eh?"

"It must."

This seemed to please Magellan, and he began to rub the back of his hand over the top of the penis. As promised, I averted my eyes. The leader and his man continued to mutter to each other. I imagined they were unable to comprehend Magellan's behavior and wondered if he was crazy or somehow insulting them. I hoped for the latter. Soon the other natives had risen from the sand and were watching too. Their faces were either blank or sour-looking, as if they had just chewed a mouthful of spoiled food. I stole a glance at the penis, which was getting longer and stiffer. It was magnificent, really, easily the longest penis I had ever seen. The pinks and purples stretched until the sheer surface looked like that of a marble column. The natives were silent. All but the leader were staring at the penis, which was now fully erect. The leader looked at Magellan, a blank expression on his face. Then he looked at me. I was startled but tried to keep my face as blank as his. I wanted to say, "Hey, I'm like you. Leave me alone, okay?" But if I had ever been like him, I wasn't any longer. He glanced back and forth between Magellan and me, as if confused. But what was he confused about? How one man could be so large and menacing and the other so small and weak? Couldn't he see that Magellan was evil, vicious, arbitrary, and as violent as a thundercloud, and that I, though possibly corrupted by him, was no more than a slave? Then, silently and without warning, the man to the leader's left produced a spear and, as quickly as he had produced it, drove it through Magellan's stomach. Magellan gasped and writhed only for a moment, then hung from the spear like one of his own stuck turkeys. I had taken two steps back without thinking, expecting that Magellan would turn to me with one

final confusing insult. But he didn't. The natives whooped and hopped up and down. Then two of them carried Magellan away, followed by the others, who took the mirrors and statues. I stayed behind and was ignored.

Later, I gathered as much fruit as I could fit into the dinghy and paddled back to the *Trinidad*. I dumped some fruit belowdecks so the men could see it before I unchained them. Pigafetta and a small man named Colombo were the only survivors. Pigafetta promised to take out the parts of his journal about me. After they had eaten their fill, they set about tacking along the coast of the island. I was too shaken to help. What shook me wasn't the evil of Magellan but the mystery of him, which was also the mystery of all of us and of life. As Pigafetta and little Colombo swung the jib and furled the mainsail, I looked not at the island where Magellan had just been murdered, but out at the open sea. Scummy waves crashed against the bow, and a turkey yelped beneath me, as if in warning.