

4th November 1501

I hardly like to make a mark on the beautiful, blank pages of this book, but I must. Mama gave it to me as a parting present so that I could write about this journey from Spain to England. "Don't waste it" she said "Just write about the important things, the big ones."

That was three months ago. It was August when we sailed from Corunna - but how could I write in that terrible storm? One of our ships sank. I came up to get some air because the smell below decks was so awful, and I saw her roll over, helpless as a dead thing, and then the towering waves swallowed her. We were driven back to the Basque coast, with broken masts and rigging washed overboard, and it was a month before the repairs were done and we could start out again. Even then, we were tempest-tossed but at last we landed in Plymouth.

I'm sure she would be impressed by the great procession in which we have slowly made our way from the West Country to London. Horses and carriages, litters and baggage-waggons and attendants, soldiers, courtiers, ladies, pages, jesters - and Catherine herself, Catherine of Aragon, on her way to wed Prince Arthur, eldest son of the king of England.

Tonight we are lodged in the manor house of some lord, not far from London. It is cold in this room although a smoky fire burns in the hearth. The candle flame gutters in the wind that blows in through the glassless window.

It is dirty too. The floors are covered with rushes, fresh ones being scattered over the filth and dropped food of the previous day, and although the dishes are made of gold or silver-plate, the noblemen do not always bother to go outside or to the retiring room when they need to relieve themselves.

"Tell me, Mister Cromwell," said the king "How are the improvements to Hampton Court proceeding?"

Thomas Cromwell stood to the side as the king admired himself in the large looking glass. Two grooms, dressed in black with the Tudor rose embroidered on their jerkins, sprayed the king from head to toe with lavender water.

Then I heard a woman's voice say "I have heard of a spell that will raise the dead - if you say it quickly enough. And it will work only the once!" I

My duties were numerous but the one I liked best was gathering the doctor's ingredients from the markets of London. Sometimes I had to travel quite some distance around the great stinking city. I especially liked going down to the wharves by the Isle of Dogs where the privateers' ships brought exotic spices from Asia and the Indies. Once, I even saw a ship that had returned from the New World where they say the natives who live there have painted faces, stand ten feet tall and have feathers on their heads instead of hair. I would love to see one of those.

I was busy noting down the ingredients my master had wanted me to collect from the market in the morning. But despite being in mid sentence, I stopped writing immediately and put down my quill pen. It didn't do to keep Cook waiting!


Hurriedly, I blew upon the fresh ink and when my scratchy letters had dried, I laid the parchment down upon my wooden desk. Then, I rose from my stool and blew out the beeswax candle that lit my tiny bedchamber. As the room was plunged into darkness I opened the door and ran down the stairs, stopping to give some seeds to my master's pet on the way down.

We rushed through the great kitchens which seemed to be in utter chaos. In the first kitchen, great hunks of wild boar, venison and beef were roasting on enormous spits; in the next chamber stews were simmering in saucepans and pottage was bubbling in great cauldrons.


The King is always on the move and when he moves, his court moves with him. In years gone by Henry roamed England with hundreds of retainers, servants and important nobles, not to mention his various wives and all their ladies-in-waiting. From London to Norwich to York and to Bristol. Hunting, singing, playing tennis, wooing women. Mind you, back then, Henry was a lean, mean, hunting machine, but not any more.

Within moments we were amongst the large crowd of merchants and traders haggling and arguing over prices for the spices and fruits that had just arrived from exotic lands. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the last few pennies I had. It didn't take long before they were all gone.

Where to hide? That was the question. The hold would be best. Luckily everyone was busy loading the ship or tightening the rigging, so no one took much notice of him. Leaving John Drake in the grand cabin, Dickon headed back to the ladder as the ship started to rock. The tide was on the turn. Soon the ship would leave. *He must be quick. Down the ladder he went – and down again – and again.* The lower he got, the darker it got. Now he could hear men heaving cargo into place, but only see their shapes. Dodging behind the ladder, he heard someone above shout orders.



Soon after his speech, Drake ordered them to dock on the east coast of Brasilia. He wanted to get repairs done before the dreaded straits. He also decided to repaint the *Pelican* in red and yellow, the colours of his backer, Sir Christopher Hatton. He renamed the ship too. From now on she was the *Golden Hinde*. The carpenter had to carve a new ship's head in the shape of a hind. Drake said they would coat it with Spanish gold as soon as they had boarded a Spanish galleon and taken all of its treasure!



The storm lasted for thirty days: thirty days of being lashed by wind and sea with little to eat or drink. When at last it blew itself out the *Golden Hinde* was alone. A much leaner Drake looked at his charts and compasses and scanned the sea with his Bring 'em Near.

"First the bad news. We are at least fifty miles off course and there is no sign of our sister ships." Someone said he had seen the *Marigold* go down.

A man stepped out from the shadow of a doorway. He wore a yellow jerkin and red trousers; he was the man from the churchyard.

That night, when the *Golden Hinde* crept alongside the Spanish ship, Dickon had to watch as the rest of the crew leapt aboard. But he shared the excitement when the crew came back with 25,000 golden ducats, thirteen chests of plate, eighty pounds of solid gold and twenty-six tons of silver, as well as fruit preserves and sacks of sugar!