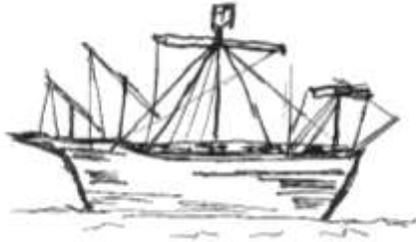


The Port of Seville



We sail in just five days!

I'm as excited as if I were a young girl.

When Don Carlos decided he would go to Paraguay in New Spain, despite the length and danger of the journey, I was fascinated. I knew he had promised his mother to deliver her bequest to her grandson in New Spain and that it was gnawing at him. So far, so difficult and yet, a deathbed promise. By morning after he declared he would truly go, himself, I had resolved, if my husband can go, I can go!

I told that to Don Carlos. He immediately reacted with all the concerns,

“My dear, it is too far. The conditions of travel will not be fitting for one of your age and station. The journey will take at least a year. Surely you will be more comfortable here and would not leave management of the estates to others.”

I had expected that. I smiled sweetly and replied, “Beloved husband, you are older than I am, your duties are more serious, the conditions will be as unsuitable for you as they are for me.”

Then I added, “And you know your heir Carlitos and Doña Catarina his wife are eager to be in control and stop having to report everything to you and me.”

He smiled his conspiratorial smile and nodded, ruefully, “yes, I know.”

A few hours later he reminded me that sailing ships are small, that we would have to mix with unrefined people and they are hazardous.

“But you will have to endure those as well. If I come we will be a bigger party, more impressive, and able to care for each other. Juan is a fine servant but you know from summer in the mountains that several servants provide better service than just one. Isabel knows your ways almost as well as Juan does.”

The next day it was another objection. "If we are gone a year or more, you will miss watching your grandchildren grow,. Anna will be walking and Ernesto riding."

I tried to look pensive. "I would so like to see Don Luis-Filipe again. I doubt he will return to Spain. Yet he was practically raised in this house with our children."

Don Carlos smiled in pride. "Yes, I am very proud and fond of Don Luis-Filipe."

He continued to ask if I was sure, and doubtless he still has reservations, but he never actually argued it with me. Always, he has always indulged. This is asking a lot perhaps, but he likes being comfortable, and I am part of making him comfortable, not solely when he is randy.

And here I am in the port of Seville, with all the arrangements are made for me to accompany him.

It was not so peaceful with Maria Elena. I wrote instructions in case I do not return, of course. For a month she tried to discourage me.

"Mama, it will be your death. A woman your age sailing the Sea! Why, many healthy young men perish in the voyage. How can you, Mama?"

And again, "You will likely die there, Mama, somewhere in the uncivilized lands. Surely you care more for yourself than that. How can you?"

I learned long ago that arguing with Maria Elena when she is in a passion is a waste of time, so I went on packing.

Choosing what to pack was difficult and took me more than a week. I have never been on the Sea, indeed I have never been much beyond Leon, Badajoz and Madrid, and now Seville. I had always thought that made me well-traveled. This however, is totally different. I am told seamstresses, and indeed, good cloth, are hard to find in New Spain, let alone Paraguay. I hear that it is hot and rainy. How hot? How rainy? How could I decide what was needed?

There was no one to ask. Noblewomen do not go to New Spain or do not return. Don Carlos did find two acquaintances who had been to Peru, but Paraguay is distant from there and not at all the same, as far as I can determine.

“Aren’t you taking your court gown?” Doña Catarina asked. She and María Elena spent an afternoon helping me pack, but really questioning all my decisions while Isabel packed.

“Why would I take a court gown? The King is here. At most there are viceroys or governors in New Spain.”

“Yes,” interposed María Elena, “and any society they have will be provincial and backward.”

“So you should show them what Court style is, Doña Inés,” offered Doña Catarina.

“No,” I finally said, firmly. “I must limit the baggage. I do not think there will be many formal occasions and I do not want cloth as fine as the court gown ruined.”

“What of the grain-red silk?” Maria Elena asked.

We got it out. I had it made for the Feast of Santiago last year. It is a beautiful thing, richly dyed and worked over with embroidery and pearls. Not quite the latest style, because my taste is “old fashioned” but a beautiful gown.

I looked at Isabel, who, imperceptibly, nodded.

“This should be enough for colonial occasions.”

“Just the one?” asked Doña Catarina. “Do you want to look so poor you need to use the same dress at gatherings of different formality?”

I had worried about that, but how many receptions, dinners and balls could there be? “I’ll take the emerald silk, and the gray with the complex facing, and it will be enough.

“I have decided to take ells of good cloth, since I am told fine cloth is very dear, and have things made up there. Isabel is packing good linens and wools, and a few silks.

“I have thought this all through, truly, and I will make do if necessary.”

“But you will be gone so long, surely you will need more gowns?” Doña Catarina persisted.

“For months we will be aboard ship, where conditions must be informal. Styles in the Indies or Paraguay may be quite different. The cloth will allow

me to make up new clothes. I do not know how hot it will be and of course it depends on the season, which they say is reversed, Paraguay is so far south.

“Oh, it is so far and so hard to know what to expect that I will simply have to see what is there.”

“But you don’t want to look shabby or unstylish do you?” asked Dona Catarina, “surely there are no seamstresses as talented as ours.”

With an effort to control my temper I said, “How will the provincials in New Spain know it is undistinguished workmanship if that is all they know?”

I closed a chest, hoping to turn the conversation. I just don’t know what it will be like, how can I answer their questions?

“And jewels? Surely you must have adequate gems to look your part,” Maria Elena said.

“What if they are stolen?” asked Doña Catarina.

“They could be stolen here,” Maria Elena snapped, my daughter knowing as I do that my son’s wife will

be a good countess one day but is overly concerned about protecting the family wealth already.

“I will take a chain of pearls, the gold chain with the cross I particularly like and a few others, plus rings, bracelets, hairpins and combs with jewels. It will be more than enough for a traveler.”

And so it went all afternoon, if one did not object, the other did. I wanted to reprimand them and send them away, since these concerns worry me too, but they do care for me and I will be gone a long time, so I endured their criticisms.

Seville, 3 October, Year of Our Lord 1630

