

Chapter 1a: Brujo is Spanish for witchdoctor

Guillermo stepped out of the churning sea, all of the sudden feeling cold and tired. He waded out of the ocean until he was finally back on the beach. He shook himself, trying to dry himself up, and began to look around him. He had just realized that he was nowhere near his family, and now he grew increasingly concerned. He looked all around him, trying to find a familiar face in the crowds that filled the beach. He sought desperately to find either a family member, or the yellow and black parasol that his family had brought with them. Gradually, he had begun to feel that choking sensation of fright close his throat. It was a clear and hot summer day, and the beach was swarming with people. Many were swimming or playing in the surf, others just milled about, but most just lay on the sand sunning themselves. Guillermo looked again and again all around him, increasingly desperate to find his family.

These holidays in the coast were his reward for the good grades he had gotten; he had worked so hard in school all year. He had battled countless hours with intractable math problems involving fractions, until they became easy. He had memorized the name of the many dynasties of Spain throughout the centuries, by reciting them aloud again and again. The hardest thing had been Spanish grammar, oh how he hated Spanish grammar. Now, he was enjoying the fruits of his labors, spending the summer with the rest of his family in Vigo. Today, just as they had done for the last couple of weeks, they had all gone to his favorite place, the Samil beach. Guillermo loved to play in the ocean, to build sandcastles, and horse around with his older brother and any other boys of his age that happened to be there that day.

Today was another perfect day to be in the beach and play in the ocean. Today, the surf was high. An endless succession of big and tall waves created the ideal playground for Guillermo. He loved to get in the water and wade in up to the point where the waves were on the cusp of breaking. He enjoyed the rollercoaster that the passing waves offered as they went by. The fast moving mound of water would lift him and give him a ride up and down. Even more fun was the fact that as each wave passed by, he would be pushed back, and moved closer to the beach, forcing him to scramble back out to the sea, lest the next wave break over him. Playing in the surf was a lot of fun for Guillermo. From time to time, when he did not move fast enough, the next wave would curl over and crash over him. The wave, now a churning wall of froth, water and sand, would knock him off his feet, and send him tumbling back towards the beach. When that happened, Guillermo would pick himself up after the wave had died, clean up the sand that had been driven into his underwear, and quickly run back out to the ocean to catch the next wave.



Gradually, unbeknownst to the boy, the surf had pushed him further and further down the beach, away from the original spot where he had started to play that day. Tossed and turned by the surf, he had not paid any attention, and the boy had totally lost track of his whereabouts. Now, after playing for countless hours, the boy suddenly began to shiver with cold. Guillermo wisely had stepped out of the ocean, and sat on the sand to warm up. The ocean water was chilly, and the warm and intense sunshine felt sensational.

It was then, while he warmed up, that Guillermo realized that he was in an entirely different spot in the beach. Nowhere near from where his family was. Distressed, and not sure which way to go, he marched down the beach, trying to find his family. The further he went, he more scared he got, as he failed to find them. It all came to a head when his walk was stopped by a wide and swift river, which flowed in from the land and out to the ocean stopping his progress. Guillermo did not recognize the spot at all, but he could at least clearly remember that he had been warned about this part of the beach, and in more than one occasion. His dad had told him, “the river produced riptides, and the flowing water makes tall sandy shelves, prone to giving way with out warning, STAY OUT”. It was thus not surprising that this part of the beach was almost deserted, making Guillermo feel all alone, abandoned, vulnerable.

The boy was growing increasingly worried. Suddenly he began to tear up, as little boys do when they loose track of their mom. To Guillermo’s credit, he stopped himself before breaking down in tears, and admonished himself. He was a big boy now, he had just finished 4th grade, and he was determined to behave like a grown up. Calming himself down, He devised a course of action for himself. He reasoned that he only had to start heading away from the river, and that he would probably find his parents at some point; probably. However, still cold, and fatigued from his long hours of play with the waves, Guillermo sat back down on the sand, away from the sea breeze to let the sun warm him up again.

Anyone would have commended the boy for his presence of mind. He was after all only 8 years old. He had wisely gotten out of the cold water, stayed out of the swirling river, and had put together a course of action to find his way back to his family, just like a sensible adult would. The boy was proud of himself, he was not a little boy anymore.

As the sun shone on Guillermo, his shivering gradually subsided, and soon he was ready to start the planned march up the beach to find his family. It was then that he noticed two men approach him.