

The
Cats
of Old San Juan

THE PIRATE'S
REVENGE

“The Captain Has Returned”

by

MJ Surrena

Clú

Clú Creative

The Pirate's Revenge

The Cats of Old San Juan - Book One

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This is a work of fiction. You may know the names and faces of various cats who live along the wall El Morro or of old men living on the beach. Some of them might remind you of the characters in this tale. The great wall El Morro and Old San Juan are indeed real locations, but the specific events, characters, and places described within this book were born from the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

*to the People of Puerto Rico,
the Cats of the Wall,
and All Who Believe that the world can be far more
wonderful than it seems.*

El Morro

Eastern Wall

Marino's
Tide Pool

Pirate's
Dig Site

Campeon's
Bedroom

Malcom's
Tower

Main
Kitchen

Great
Hall
of the
King

The Front Door

Western Wall





INTRODUCTION

In Spanish, El Morro means “small hill” or “headland,” and when spoken sounds like a cross between a meow and a purr. Try it. El Morrrrrro.

Anyway, the old Spanish fort called Castillo San Felipe del Morro (or El Morro for short) sits at the edge of a peninsula just beyond the city of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. A massive stone wall stretches around the peninsula protecting it from invaders. Living below it, on top of it, and inside it are hundreds of cats, all meowing and purring over many hours of the day. These cats called themselves “The Cats of the Wall” or the Cats of El Meow-rrrrro.

But how, you may ask, did all these cats get there? Well, in 1492, Columbus “sailed the ocean blue,” and in 1493, came across the island of Puerto Rico. Of course, it was not called Puerto Rico then, and Columbus had no idea where he was going...but he brought a crew of cats. Back in those days, every ship had cats to catch rats, so it was no wonder cats were aboard. These cats, however, were more than your typical run-of-the-mill mouse catchers. There were sailor cats

and cook cats and soldier cats, as well as king and prince cats—and these cats worked right alongside the humans to build a rich legacy.

They settled on the shores of Puerto Rico and made El Morro their home. Behind the walls and in the hillside, these cats carved out a kingdom. They built grand halls, ballrooms, tunnels, mazes, magic corridors, and hidden harbors. It was a castle, community, and city in itself. The cats proudly defended the coast from pirates and helped the town prosper. Everyone thought the kingdom of the cats would last forever.

Then it didn't.

Time passed, and the world changed. The cats forgot the things that made them great. Even the legends of their deeds fell to dust. You would think that such a prosperous past would be impossible to forget, for these deeds were stamped into the very walls of their ancestral home and drawn on tapestries that filled the Great Hall of the King. Yes, there was still a king—Cat King Haragán, a lazy and fat king who dwelt in the shadow of those who had come before.

When you look at something for a long time, it becomes commonplace. It is no longer a thing of wonder. So, it was with the cats, for it was only the children who remembered. In fact, there was one kitten in particular who loved the stories of old above all else. His name was Campeón.

Campeón was magic-marker orange and striped like a little tiger. He ran through the ancient halls of El Morro, gazing up at the rusted suits of cat armor, pondering the mysteries of the past. These mysteries followed him into the night when he slept, and he had the most incredible dreams. In these dreams, he traveled back in time hundreds of years and performed the bravest and most daring deeds. There he met dark pirates with glowing eyes, sleek fur, and shining swords.

Campeón was brave to a fault. If you have ever heard the expression “look before you leap,” Campeón was never very good at that. Luckily, cats tend to land on their feet. He rarely took the time to watch where he was going but had an uncanny knack for getting there all the same.

He always found new and unexpected things because he was more daring than the rest.

I'm not saying Campeón was right to be as he was, but that's how he was.

So our story begins on one particular night not long ago when Campeón and his friends were out way past their bedtime, seeking adventure.



Campeón was magic
marker orange and striped
like a little tiger.



CHAPTER 1

PIRATES & SUPERHEROES

Campeón tripped lightly along the upper edge of the great wall that stretched like a silver ribbon over the hills and under the moon. Scattered clouds drifted across the night sky, strewn with cold, clear stars. The warm Caribbean breeze rolled off the ocean, washing over his face and fur. He held a long stick in his paw that he pretended was a sword. On his back, he wore a red cape that he pretended made him invincible. He ran as fast as he could along the stretch of wall with the ocean before him and the lights of Old San Juan twinkling like stars. It felt like he was flying through the night. He skipped and slipped, his paws barely touching the ground. This was his time, and it felt like the world belonged to him. He stopped to take in the view. The sleeping town had lights like flames in the windows. The palm trees waved and bowed in the wind, and the roar of the ocean slipped and shushed and murmured, spilling out an unending chorus like thunder rolling through the dark.

He should not have stopped to catch his breath, though, for there were others afoot. Others with flashing cat eyes and swords and capes and fast fleet feet dancing in the moonlight over the old rocky

walls and grassy fields. These were indeed his friends, and they were in the midst of a game called "Pirates & Superheroes." Right now, Campeón—a superhero—was on the lookout for pirates.

He jumped lightly from the wall onto a broad stone path by the sea where a ship cleaved the briny deep headed to shore. A black flag with skull and crossbones flapped in the whistling wind. Campeón caught his breath. Surely this was a great pirate ship for none other than at the helm was a fearsome pirate, Calypso the Crazy. Naturally, she wore an eye-patch and had a sword at her side, which she called her "blade of ill repute." A snarl curled her lips, her mouth ready to form the well-known "argh" pirates like to make. She glared at Campeón, who stood on the shore below with his sword raised in defiance.

Her chubby little first mate, Alfie, in a striped shirt and long fur of an angora, swabbed the deck. He didn't seem interested in fighting. He put all his effort into mopping while Cali did piratey things like talking about how awesome and crazy she was.

"Argh! I, Cat Captain Calypso the Crazy, will pillage and plunder and fill me treasure hold with yellow gold! Aye?"

"Aye?" asked Alfie, looking up from his swabbing. He hadn't really been paying attention.

"Aye!" said Cali.

She left the wheel to spin, dancing up to the prow where she balanced with perfect poise. She was about to do more boasting about her piratey prowess, but...

"With all due respect, your craziness, I've never found gold to be all that yellow," commented Alfie.

"Of course it be yellow! Argh!" exclaimed Cali.

"I don't know. When I think of gold, I think sparkly or shiny. It glimmers," said Alfie, pausing momentarily in his mopping.

Cali looked over at him. "Geez, Alfie."

"What?" asked Alfie.

"It's a figure of speech. You know, like calling storm clouds purple or darkness like a shroud—you know, a shroud of darkness. It's romantic!" she said.

He should not have
stopped to catch his
breath, though, for
there were others afoot.



"You think shrouds are romantic? Have you ever seen a shroud?" asked Alfie.

"Well, no, but neither have you I'm guessing," said Cali.

"I doubt they're very romantic, though," responded Alfie.

Cali threw up her paws. "Oh, just agree with me so we can get on with it!"

"Right. I mean, aye!"

"Aye!" shouted Cali. "Argh!"

"Argie!" exclaimed Alfie.

Cali ignored the mispronunciation of the important piratey word and continued to preen herself. "I be the most fearsome pirate who sails the seas!" she said. "I be so fierce that I could best even Campeón the Courageous, famed superhero and Cat of the Wall."

"As if!" said Campeón who climbed up the side of the boat while the two kittens were distracted with all the "shroud talk." He stood before her, cape billowing triumphantly.

"As...really! I mean, of course I could," said Cali. She drew her sword and leaped at Campeón.

Campeón leaped back.

Their swords met in a thunderous mid-air clash, and a mighty fight would have ensued with many acts of bravery and derring-do, that is, if it were not for what happened when they landed.

During all this tussling and boasting, they completely forgot about another cat on deck. This cat, which I have not mentioned yet, happened to be sleeping in a hammock when the clashing cats fell right on top of him.

Fun and games and make-believe are wonderful things, particularly when you're a small kitten, but not in the middle of the night when grown-up cats are nestled down all snuggly in dreamland. As it was, they landed on top of Iggy. His hammock spun around and dumped him onto the wooden deck with a bone-splintering thud.

He was not pleased.

"Ow!" moaned Iggy, who had fallen right on his head. He had just been having the most wonderful dream about a sea full of fish that

would jump into his mouth at will, and the fish were the most varied and delicious in the world. His stomach gurgled at the thought.

“What’s going on?” he said, blinking his eyes.

Campeón, Cali, and Alfie froze. Suddenly, Campeón was no longer a superhero—just a kitten in a cape with a stick. Cali was no longer a pirate. She was just a little calico kitten with an eye patch and two good eyes. Alfie still had his mop, which he now used to wipe up a particularly nasty spot on the deck, probably so he did not have to face Iggy. Cali, however, met Iggy’s eyes apologetically.

“Hi, Dad,” she said, reaching out a paw to help him up.

“What? Cali!” He looked around and saw the three kittens standing there in their costumes, looking a bit bashful. “Do you know what time it is?”

Iggy was normally a pretty mellow kind of cat. Not much rattled him, except maybe getting woken up in the middle of the night because kittens decided to take a joy ride in his boat.

“Well, we just thought...you know, it’s a beautiful night for sailing,” said Cali.

“Sailing? Now?” asked Iggy, confused.

“And playing awesome games,” interjected Campeón. “Like Pirates & Superheroes. I’m a superhero, of course.”

“And I’m a pirate,” said Cali. “And I couldn’t very well be a pirate without a boat!”

“Yeah! All pirates need boats! I’m first mate. I swab the deck,” said Alfie, who did not want to be left out. “It’s much cleaner than it was.” He went back to swabbing the spot and not meeting Iggy’s eyes.

Iggy looked at the deck to see if this was true. He might have been mildly impressed, but then he shook his head to clear the fuzz from his sleepy brain. “Yeah, well...I’m a giant gorilla. I mean, it’s the middle of the night, isn’t it?” He looked around to make sure.

“It’s daytime somewhere,” said Campeón.

“It’s—what? Well, not here!” exclaimed Iggy. He turned to Cali. “Cali girl, I don’t mind you taking the boat out...but now? I’m—this is very disappointing.” He had finally gotten a handle on the whole situation. He sighed and looked at them with extreme disappointment—the kind

that makes you feel really bad about yourself. After having a kid, Iggy had become a master of the guilt stare.

"But the deck is cleaner. At least, I think so," said Alfie.

"Yeah, man, but I was sleeping," said Iggy. "What do I care about the deck right now? All of you should be in bed!"

"Yeah, but—" said Campeón.

"But nothing! You gotta go back to the wall right now before I tell Major Mooch about this—or Nana Rosana! I thought you knew better," said Iggy.

They stood silently, not making a move.

"Come on—off the boat and back to bed. Now."

Finally, the three kittens nodded their heads. They did not want to get in any more trouble.

"Okay, Dad, back to the wall we go," said Cali.

"Yes, back to the wall. Back to bed." Iggy was already yawning. He sat down on his hammock. He looked like he would fall asleep again any minute.

"Right. Night," said Cali as she swung down from the cat-sized boat onto the beach below.

"Night, Ig," said Campeón.

"I can finish the swabbing tomorrow," offered Alfie. Iggy just frowned at him.

Iggy was too tired—and lazy—to make sure the kittens went back to the wall. As he wondered if they would listen to him, his eyes drifted closed, and the gentle rocking of the boat lulled him back to the world of dreams.

At this point, it might be a good idea to tell you a little more about our three friends, Campeón, Cali, and Alfie.

Campeón was a Cat of the Wall—that is, the Great Wall El Morro in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico. El Morro was a fort built hundreds of years ago, and a grand legacy of cats lived throughout the ages within the hillside behind the wall. They had come there long ago, on Spanish galleons, sailing the seas and settling on the beautiful island they would call their forever home. The kingdom was beautiful, ageless,

and powerful, but like many great things that fade and fall away. So it was with the kingdom of the cats.

The glories of the past fell into the stuff of legend and bedtime stories for kittens, which is how Campeón learned and dreamed about them. He would race through the halls of El Morro and marvel at the things that once were, and, in his mind, could one day be again.

Cali and Alfie were Campeón's two best friends in the whole world, whom he brought on all of his adventures. Cali—or Calypso—her longer and more formal name—was no typical Cat of the Wall. She was a foundling, that is, she was “found.” Iggy had found her to be exact. He was out on his boat one day minding his own business when he saw her floating on a piece of driftwood after a great storm. Her fur was all matted and wet, and her eyes were barely open. Apparently, she meowed the tiniest squeak of a meow. It was enough to make Iggy's heart break in two, creating space for a small amount of love to crawl in and make a home there. Since he had no children of his own, he decided to adopt her.

Cali had no idea exactly where she came from, but she was never happier than when she was out on the water. She was small, wiry and light—one of the best cat climbers you would ever meet. She could balance successfully on a twig without breaking it.

Iggy had taught her as much as he could about sailing and fishing, but he was getting up there in age and liked to let Cali catch fish while he took cat naps and listened to Bob Marley on a beat-up boombox. This was understandable because Bob Marley was the best, and Cali would not have had it any other way.

If Campeón was a cannon ball, Cali was a bullet from a long-range sniper rifle. Alfie, on the other hand, was most like a fluffy pincushion who had nothing to do with artillery other than making a nice, wide target.

Speaking of Alfie, he was even more of a foundling than Cali. Not even from Puerto Rico, he came from a far-off land known as Wisconsin (in the common tongue). Something called “snow” fell from the sky there and looked soft and pleasing but was really quite cold and made one's fur wet and uncomfortable. He came to Puerto

Rico on vacation with his family and got lost. And soon after getting lost, he got very hungry. The Cats of the Wall found him, a little kitten starving and desperate for a way home to the people he loved.

While Campeón dreamed of adventure, Alfie often dreamed of the ones he lost. He was not ungrateful for the new life he led. He loved Campeón, Cali, and the other Cats of the Wall. He'd found a wonderful home there, but inside his heart was an emptiness he wished he could fill. He tried not to think about it, and as the days passed, the wall slowly became his home. He was still different from the other cats...different from Campeón and Cali, but he wanted nothing more than to fit in and go on adventures and ignore his asthma. Oh, that is another thing. Alfie was severely asthmatic.

So there they were on that night, Campeón, a bona fide Cat of the Wall dreaming of the past glory days; Cali, a "sea urchin" who had washed up into her new home by some fateful tide; and Alfie, who had stumbled there unwittingly with a loudly growling tummy and weak lungs. They played games together in the moonlight and under the distant glimmer of glassy stars, having a grand time forgetting their doubts and fears and imagining themselves as their best selves doing the bravest and most daring deeds. And now they'd been scolded by Cali's adopted dad and told to go back to the wall so they could get some sleep. Well, Campeón was not ready to go to bed. Not just yet. In fact, none of them were.

"I'm not going to bed yet," said Campeón decidedly.

Cali shrugged. "Iggy won't know the difference. All he does is sleep anyway. All day and all night." She seemed sad at this.

"What do you want to do?" asked Alfie.

"I think..." said Campeón. "I think we should explore the cemetery! Wooooo!" He made a ghost sound. His eyes widened, glowing bright like lanterns.

"No, not at night." Alfie shivered. He did not like the idea at all.

"Of course at night. That's the only time to explore that sort of thing," explained Campeón.

"I could do with a bit of graveyard exploration," Cali commented casually. "Let's go! Last one there is a pirate's booty!"



She was never happier
than when she was out
on the water...

With that, she took off down the stone walkway toward the cemetery. Campeón raced after her, determined to get there first. Alfie rolled his eyes, took a puff from his inhaler and soldiered on like every loyal footman or first mate who ever sailed the seas or had two such rambunctious best friends to deal with.

Known as Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery—a very long and important name for a place with a long and storied past—the cemetery sprawled up and down the hillside. Brightly painted tombs were stacked above the ground like rows of wedding cakes next to smaller stone slabs that shone like bleached bone with names worn away by wind and rain. It was a grand place with secrets buried six feet deep whispering from some other world far away.

The gravestones offered the perfect shelter to play hide and seek. The words written on these stones were like poetry telling tales of mysterious histories long forgotten. Of course, these tombs belonged to PEOPLE who lived before, not to cats. So, as far as Campeón was concerned, they were not all that important.

The kittens stopped at the edge of the cemetery.

“You know,” said Campeón, leaping onto a gravestone. “I really doubt you could get to the other edge of the graveyard without touching the ground.”

“Oh yeah, easy!” laughed Cali, pirouetting onto a decorative mausoleum, then racing ahead, prancing lightly from tomb to tomb with little respect for those who rested beneath.

“Hey, not fair! I didn’t say go!” shouted Campeón.

“Then hurry up, slowpoke,” said Cali.

Alfie looked up at them. There was no way he could do any of that. Instead, he followed from the ground and pretended to be lava—bubbling, sizzling lava.

“Sizzle sizzle, bubble bubble, I’m bubbling lava,” said Alfie. “If you touch the ground, you’ll be—uhm—lava-fied! You’ll melt into the red, bubbly lava!”

He ran alongside them as his friends danced lightly across the slender stones shining, sharp and white like teeth in the moonlight. The two kittens waved their sword-sticks fiercely.

He came to Puerto Rico on vacation with his family and got lost.



As I mentioned, many of these graves were awfully old. The thing about older graves is that sometimes they're also a bit crumbly and tumbledown. So, while Cali and Campeón leaped from grave to grave—Cali still slightly ahead of Campeón at this point—a little crumbliness and dustiness puffed into the air. They landed on an old mausoleum with ivy spidering up the sides, its woven tendrils covering the roof. They waved their sword-sticks merrily, not paying much attention to anything except playing their game.

Then Campeón's paw snagged on the twisting ivy, and he fell over the edge of the roof. Cali grabbed his paw to stop him, but he dragged her down, too. They hung there for a moment, suspended in space before the roof caved in and they fell to the ground.

The door of the tomb crashed inward, and creatures with wings the shape of nightmares poured from its depths. They tore into Campeón's face and arms as he fought them off. Cali covered her head with her paws. Alfie cowered behind a gravestone as the giant mass of black blotted out the moon, shrill cries piercing the night. Soon, the creatures disappeared into the darkness and a cloud of silence blanketed the cemetery.

Alfie looked at his friends. "I think we should go home now."

Of course, that was the last thing Campeón wanted to do, but he listened to his friend—this time at least, promising himself they would be back the following day.