

CAPTAIN HORROR'S ISLAND

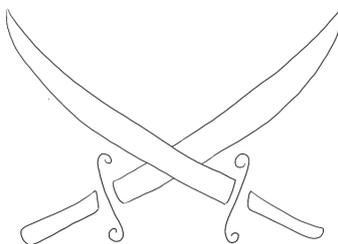
*This comes at a time ripe for fearless women who can stand up for themselves
and for what they consider to be morally right.*

INTRO

If you have a look at a map, right in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and thousands of miles away from any land worthy of being called that, you will see a tiny little dot. If your map is a really good one, right next to the dot there will be written:

Captain Horror's Island
The Happiest Place on Earth
?

This is the story of the island.
And of the question mark.



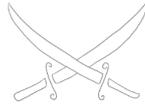
ONCE UPON A TIME, in a fishing village in the south of Greece a boy is born. It is the early 19th century. The boy's name is Vrasidas Astrapopoulos and he is the son of a relatively honest grocer couple. He is born with a bush of red hair on his head, which the village elders interpret as an omen that the boy will some day end up being a pirate. Maybe it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fact is that little Vrasidas starts his career at a tender age. Just by hanging around in his parents' shop, he quickly masters the art of shortchanging one's patrons. Not much later he acquires a kind of a treasure chest, where all sorts of lost items mysteriously end up: the priest's teeth and top hat, the innkeeper's postiche, the teacher's pince-nez, his school-mates' pencils. They are to be returned to their owners at as high a ransom as possible.

Longing to broaden his horizons, Vrasidas leaves the village in his early teens to work as a fisherman's apprentice. Soon after, he is caught red-handed, expropriating bucketfuls of merchandise to sell on the black market, and it doesn't take long for him to join a real pirate crew. Years later he has his own ship and crew of pirates, who are every bit as vicious and savage as the worst villains on earth. We find him promising them that, if they even touch an old muddy shoe or a copper penny from the loot, he will chop them up so fine that the fish won't bother eat them. Vrasidas has become the infamous Captain Horror, the bloodthirstiest of all pirates of the five continents and the seven seas. And arguably the richest man on earth.

Like every successful pirate, Captain Horror owns a desert island. It's in the very middle of the Pacific Ocean. That's where he plans to spend his old age in peace, away from a world full of bloody rascals, as he often says. One evening, while enjoying the sunset after an exquisite meal of plundered delicacies he realizes that he's the only one on the island never to have been married. That is what you call sacrificing family life for career. A man of his age, not to mention

his social standing, must have been married at least once. Eager to make up for lost time, he asks for a wife to be sent to him from his village, where he hasn't been since his teenage years. He remembers a pretty, delicate girl from his school who, back then, was going to marry the village butcher. If she has a daughter, she must be of marriageable age by now.

That's how Afroxylanthi, or Xoula, a sturdy woman in her early thirties with a loud voice and a fine mustache enters his life. In her, Captain Horror finds his equal. She turns out to be very talented as a pirate herself and enthusiastically joins her husband in his expeditions. That pleasure she has to temporarily give up when she's about to have a child.



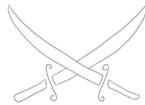
A healthy child is born. It's a girl. She is called Melinda, the name of a ship with a marvelous booty: tons of first quality booze, tobacco, cured meat, and plenty of duchesses and dukes, who were exchanged for a real fortune. Not long after the blessed event, the mother declares that she won't allow anyone attack a ship without her. So the pirates have to take turns looking after little Melinda. Coming from different parts of the world, they speak and sing to her in their mother tongues. They tell her stories from their pirate careers and from their lives before, which turn out to have been not much different from Captain Horror's own. And each one has something to teach her: one puts her to bed explaining how a canon is properly fired, another feeds her describing the most spectacular way to set up a plank, a third bathes her while advising her on how to strike the best ransom deals.

To everyone's surprise Captain Horror proves to be a doting father. He happily prepares his daughter's food, changes diapers, improvises lullabies about the bold and the brave of the oceans, satisfies all her whims. Everyone has great expectations for little Melinda. And sweet little Melinda doesn't disappoint anyone. She turns out to be as fierce as her parents. By the age of five she is deft with every type of sword and dagger and can hit an approaching vessel with a canon, jump on ships, disarm an opponent with a bite.

As chance would have it, the day after her ninth birthday she discovers a trove of books in a cave filled with looted junk. Books are not particularly respected by pirates, who are in fact quite displeased when ships prove to have an undue quantity of them. They normally throw them straight into the sea, with the exception of some, randomly chosen, which are kept to stuff old shoes, fix broken windows, and start fires. Those are the books Melinda finds. Some of them have pictures that fascinate her: animals with beautiful long necks, huge trunks and tusks, elegant stripes, bright white fur; imposing waterfalls, mountains with sparkling peaks, lakes with trees reflected in their water, endless expanses of sand; or, buildings, big and small, plain or ornate, much different from the huts she is used to. Also, the humans in the pictures seem to do so many different things apart from robbing or being robbed.

Since none of the pirates can read, Melinda demands that a teacher be nabbed for her sake from the next ship passing by. She is a most diligent pupil and she can soon read all by herself. A fascinating world opens up for her. The books claim that she lives on a planet, Earth, that is round and huge, but much smaller than the Sun, which is constantly burning; that hers is a little tiny desert island, far away from every land worth of the name; that not all children play with swords

and there's more to do with teddy bears than make them walk the plank or disembowel them; that apart from seamen and pirates there are people who plant and build and invent and care for the sick and teach for a living; that pirates are not the bravest and most righteous of humankind as she has been raised to believe, and not even the only bloodthirsty ones... Enthralled, Melinda participates less and less in the pirates' expeditions and eventually spends her days and nights reading: history, philosophy, literature, science, engineering... The worried pirates hear her mumbling words in Chinese and Ancient Greek, and watch her scribbling mathematical formulas.



One day, when the pirates return from a looting expedition, they realize that Xoula is missing. She was last seen inside the attacked ship. She was explaining to a scrawny man, whom she was holding against the wall with her sword, that next time he fails to take off his hat in front of a lady, he will soon not own a head to put it on. None of the pirates knows if she is dead or alive but they all agree that no one would dare kill her. Who would be that much of a fool to risk having such an angry ghost around?

Melinda is devastated. She promises herself that one day she will set off to find her mother. And she has a major fight with her father. She blames him and his crew for the loss of her mother. She calls them a bunch of scoundrels and ignoramuses who can't talk, walk, or eat properly. She even calls them outright robbers and murderers, cruel and cold-blooded. What if her father, too, disappears one day? She demands that they give up their savage profession and declares that until then she wants nothing to do with them. The days after the fight she immerses herself even more in her readings.

Captain Horror is furious and prohibits the pirates from even mentioning his daughter's name. In truth, he is shaken by her words. What if, say, something happens to him. Melinda will be left alone with these... scoundrels, savages, brutes. And if he has ended up being a pirate, she, who starts as one, what will she end up being? Captain Horror also starts to spend time alone, immersed in his thoughts. He is reluctant to participate in expeditions and is abrupt towards his fellow pirates.

Eventually father and daughter make up and conspire to lure the other pirates into reading. They order sentries to be placed outside the books' cave and they strictly prohibit everyone else from laying their hands on any reading material. The two spend hours every day reading to each other. They read about ancient gods and heroes, discoveries of new lands, strange plants and animals and natural phenomena. Captain Horror is happy to discover that he actually knows, indeed firsthand, quite a lot of things and can even impress Melinda. He feels moved when he remembers the teacher whose pince-nez he used to steal. Maybe he could send him a case or two of good rum, if he's still alive.

The rest of the pirates watch and listen to them stealthily and start stealing books to read. When the plot comes to light, they agree to start educating themselves. They actually pay for teachers to teach them good manners and grammar, and give them singing lessons. They learn to cultivate the earth. Some of them become carpenters, shoemakers, tailors. A couple of them almost become vegetarian. And, of course, they give up piracy.

EPILOGUE

Melinda as a young woman returns to the island with a colorful group of young talented artists, scientists, engineers... They get to work and soon the island becomes world-famous as the happiest place on earth. That is, until it suddenly disappears.

Some say it was due to an enormous tsunami or maybe an earthquake. Others claim that Melinda's fiancé discovered a miraculous new material that hid the whole island in plain view. While others insist that they managed to develop such an amazing technology that somehow the island flew to outer space and you can actually spot it if you look carefully at the night sky. It may be so, who knows? Does it really matter?



SEQUEL I – Melinda in Europe and return to the island

Melinda sets off to find her mother in Europe.

She discovers her traces in her parents' village where her mother stayed for a while, trying to find a way to return to the island. Then her traces are lost again. According to rumors she disappeared after attacking a lion that had escaped from a traveling circus and had woken Xoula from her siesta with its roar. In defense, the poor beast had to rip her into pieces – or the opposite happened and the furious circus master made her take the place of the lion in the circus. No one knows for sure.

Melinda decides to leave the past behind and travel to Europe. There she meets several intelligent and talented young people from all walks of life, from shoe-shiners and fire swallowers to students at top-notch universities. She invites them to Captain Horror's island and they all sail together, in ships full of books, musical instruments, scientific equipment etc. On the island they get to work and already after a few years their island begins to appear in maps as “the Happiest Place on Earth”.

SEQUEL II – In space

Technology on Captain Horror's island has advanced to the degree that the whole island is lifted from the Earth's surface and becomes a huge spacecraft.

From outer space the islanders watch the course of the 20th and then the 21st century. They must decide: should they interfere or not? Should they help their underdeveloped fellow humans? Is it worth it? Do they have a moral duty? What will happen if they remain observers? They remember how life once changed on Captain Horror's island. And they decide accordingly.