

82,414 Words

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The Tale of Cloran Hastings

A Novel by Brandon M. Dennis

Prologue

“Lower the sails, now!” cried Captain Rueben over the sound of the roaring wind. *Wavegrazer* thrashed violently in the gale as the crew scrambled to lower the sails. The storm had appeared instantaneously on what was once a calm sea and took the sailors by surprise. The ropes creaked and groaned and a few snapped, and the men struggled frantically. The wind filled the sails, wrenching the ship back and forth. The sea surged onto the deck, knocking a few of them out of the riggings. At last the main sail was loosed and it fluttered, releasing its wind.

“What did you do to anger the sea?” called Percy to his captain. Rueben held the large green wheel in his hands and strained every muscle, trying to keep her steady.

“She doesn’t have to have a reason, boy,” shouted Rueben over the din. “She’s fickle and jealous and kills men irrationally.”

A swift moving wave rose suddenly over the bow and crashed down onto the deck, knocking all but Rueben over.

“Everyone get below!” ordered First Mate Cloran. “We can talk about it afterwards.” Rueben motioned for Cloran to come. As the other sailors made their way to the door, Cloran struggled towards the wheel.

“This is no natural storm,” said Rueben. “She wants me dead this time. I’ve eluded her for too long.”

“Don’t be foolish,” said Cloran. “We’ve weathered far greater storms than this. As long as the captain stays at the wheel, we will come through!”

“Look,” said Rueben. “The winds are dying down. She knows that she can’t get me with them. Waves will come now, I know it.”

“Cloran! Let’s go!” called Len. Most of the men had gone below, but Len and Percy held open the hatch, waiting for their friend. Just then the ship was lifted and the men felt their hearts sink into their stomachs. The sky crackled with lightning and rain began to pour at a sharp angle. From atop the rolling wave, Rueben could see the expanse of the sea out before him. For a brief moment, he felt a familiar calm that he only obtained by sailing the sea, but a great fear soon replaced it. He could feel her anger in the air, and it was directed towards him.

The wave crested and *Wavegrazer* slid down its back awkwardly. Its nose dipped into the ocean and flooded the deck when it bobbed back up. It rocked to port and the men clung to the ship with all of their strength. Water came at them from every direction and Cloran coughed on the salty spray.

“Here she comes,” said Rueben calmly, and he looked off towards the horizon. “I’ll soon be given a sailor’s end. Tonight I’ll dine in Old Roper’s court.”

“Don’t say that! What’s wrong with you?” cried Cloran.

Suddenly the rain stopped and *Wavegrazer* leveled out. A dark shadow engulfed the ship and Cloran faced the prow. A pillar of water raced towards them. Percy and Len shrieked, but Cloran couldn’t even move. The horrible sight paralyzed him, and as the pillar came nigh he swore that it contorted into the shape of a clawed hand, clenching shut.

“Never tempt the sea,” said Rueben in a dead, calm voice. Cloran faced his captain, whose fierce green eyes pierced his soul. Reuben’s hawkish face was deathly pale but his eyes flashed violently. He grabbed Cloran by the collar and shouted into his face.

“Do you hear me Cloran? Never!” he cried, and then the water fell.