

WRITING SAMPLE, BRANDON M. DENNIS

SAMPLE FROM *THE TALE OF CLORAN HASTINGS*, CHAPTER 8, CACHE COVE

- This first sample is an excerpt from my novel, *The Tale of Cloran Hastings*. Cloran has been searching for marauders that have been attacking merchant vessels. He has stumbled upon an island that he thinks is the marauder's hideout. He is exploring a shack on the island, while his crew searches the other ships.

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Cloran quickly strode across the dock and up the stairs towards the shack with one hand on his sword. He opened the door carefully and peered inside. Seeing no one, he threw it open and entered.

The room was dark, save the few gaps in the walls that let in sunlight. To the right, Cloran saw a stair descending sharply into the bowels of the wooden structure, and maybe into the very heart of the island itself. The small room was bare except for one wooden chair in a corner. He noticed a door in the center of the far wall, and out of it, Cloran heard a peculiar humming. The tune was soft and melodious, and Cloran recognized it somehow. The humming went on and every now and then he would hear a tinkling sound, like icicles falling off the rim of a ship.

Cloran warily stepped sideways until he could see into the room. The door was only partially opened, but he saw the form of a man sitting in a chair to his right. Cloran slowly drew his curved blade and stepped closer, ever so quietly. He squeezed through the doorway without making a sound and turned towards the sitting man. The man sat with his back to Cloran, but Cloran had walked right in front of a glassless window, casting a shadow upon the far wall. The man quickly stood, spun around and drew his sword.

The eyes of the tall man went wide, and his mouth fell agape. His wide, brown hat sat

crooked on his head, and his left hand relaxed, releasing what it had held. Gold and silver coins dropped to the floor, tinkling as they fell. The two men were silent.

“Percy...” said Cloran confused, his sword raised. He looked at his old crewmate, but Percy didn’t speak. Instead, his mouth quivered, and his eyes remained wide as he searched for an explanation. Cloran’s eyes then darted to the table, which was covered with coins, stacked high and against the wall. Other valuables lay strewn across the table—brooches, necklaces, rings and chains. A map adorned the furthest wall, and it was of the sea. It showed many small islands, the northernmost highlighted with a red arrow. It showed dotted lines that made up paths of common merchant travel—trade routes from Rogvelt to Stren, and even to Mioten. All of this Cloran absorbed in a brief, horrified moment, as Percy stood before him wearing a guilt-stricken face and wielding no answers.

At that moment, Cloran felt a pain that he had never felt before. His heart turned cold and froze. His head throbbed and his eyes swelled. All trust he had in his friend vanished, dashed to bits. Any notions he had of friendship and kinship were stripped from him, extracted through a gaping wound in his heart. Fear and sorrow clenched his throat, and he breathed fire, taking many staggering breaths before he spoke.

“It was you...it was you all along?”

Percy dropped his sword and raced for the exit. Cloran threw his own sword and caught Percy’s coat, sticking him to the door. Percy lurched, was yanked backwards and fell to the ground. Cloran leapt over him and lifted up his old friend.

“Did you ever think of the lives you ruined!?” he cried, yielding to his anger.

“Cloran, you don’t understand, I was having trouble, it was during the war and I had no means to live—”

Cloran lifted Percy and threw him against the wall, ripping his coat off. He realized then that his eyes were weeping, but it was anger that consumed his mind.

“Did you ever think of the children you left *fatherless*?”

“I never hurt anybody Cloran; I was always a considerate thief!”

Cloran threw Percy across the room and the man hit the far wall, falling to the floor.

“I saw the bodies at the Reef of Many Graves! I saw their broken swords and burning ship!”

“That wasn’t me! All I do is give orders and count coins...it must have been another marauding vessel. You have to believe me!”

“And I’m supposed to believe this coming from a lying, thieving, backstabbing treacherous—”

With renewed rage, Cloran picked up Percy and relentlessly beat him against the wall.

“Have you forgotten the old days? When we trusted our captain and thought ourselves invincible, when we did what we knew was right regardless of what harm might have befallen us, because it was what a noble and true sailor did? Do you not realize that you sacked ships identical the one we shared as shipmates? Have you forgotten Reuben?”

Cloran’s eyes blurred and his body went numb as he beat Percy against the wall, his face contorted in anger and pain. When he stopped to breathe, Percy’s head trembled and his speech was halting, but his voice was clear.

“W-w-we never killed a soul. Even if all your trust is st-st-stripped from me, you must know that not a man d-d-died at our hands.”

“Oh, such a web of lies! After sacking and burning scores of ships, you managed spare its defenders? Your forked tongue betrays you!”

The sound of many feet echoed up the stairs and suddenly a dozen men burst into the room. With one glance, they took in the situation and cried out, lunging at Cloran. They pulled Cloran away from Percy, who fell to the ground exhausted.

“Do not harm him!” cried Percy between gasps. “Bof, don't lay a hand on Cloran!” Bof, the first mate, let go of Cloran, and the other sailors did as well. But Cloran was unrelenting and feverishly attacked the whole lot of them. It took four of them to restrain the sailor. Percy stood with quivering legs.

“To the ship, quickly,” he ordered, and his men let go of Cloran and helped Percy up. The sailors of *Blue Bane* ran outside towards their ship, and Cloran lunged after them shouting, “traitor!” and, “backstabber!”

The men boarded the large vessel and kicked away the gangway before Cloran could reach it. The rest of Cloran's crew came out of the nearby ships to see what the commotion was, and joined their captain on the dock. Cloran dropped to his knees, panting, as *Blue Bane* gained momentum and sailed away.

“You will pay!” shouted Cloran across the waves. He bowed his head and held his eyes. “I will make you pay.”

Percy came to the side of his ship and leaned over. His face was wrenched in sorrow and guilt, but still he fled, avoiding the consequences of his deeds.

Blue Bane was soon out of sight, and the sailors stood on the dock confused.

“What on earth happened?” asked Jenkins.

Cloran stood up slowly. His face was red but stern, and all anger had passed from him. He didn't meet the eyes of his crew.

“There were no marauders in long, swift boats. It was Percy. It was Percy all along.”

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