

personal storm

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personal storm

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Summary

Branzy is a pirate captain. The weather is kicking his ass.

Branzy has opinions about the rain.

Water? Water is downright pleasant. Water is lovely. Water is what the ocean is made of and, as a self-made pirate, Branzy likes the ocean a lot. He has full confidence in himself- he's sure he'd able to figure out *something* without an ocean to do all his pirating in (and how many horses would it take to pull a ship on wheels anyway?) but it's nice and convenient to have that large body of water to keep all of his stuff in. Water is great.

Light rain- now that's where his opinion starts to divide. On the one hand, he loves listening to it patter against the deck from underneath. And, well, Branzy isn't a renowned storyteller by any means, of course, but what pirate doesn't consider himself to be just a *touch* bit of a raconteur? And what raconteur doesn't enjoy a captive audience in the form of his crew trapped below deck and forced to listen to his tales? An amateur, that's what. But, on the other hand, there are the days where it doesn't stop raining, where it's just a constant steady stream of droplets so fine that they're almost mist. When the rain is cold and almost magically inclined to seep unpleasantly into Branzy's warmest undergarments; when the rain's chill is so perverse that it settles into his bones and stays until long after the sun has shown its face again. Light rain is... okay. Not great, but not bad either.

Storms, though.

...

What can he say about storms? They're terrifying. They aggrieve the ocean into a slurry of passion

and uncontrollable aggression. They send him waddling to and fro across his deck, sea legs working overtime to keep him upright as the storm tries to toss him overboard. There's something about tying himself to the mast- about cold fingers scrabbling against rough rope while he prays in desperation to every god -the real and the frauds- and begging that the knot won't come loose.

Branzy squints over the helm and at the deck below. There's so much movement in a storm- his crew, rushing to tie down anything not secured. Rain, so thick in heavy sheets that he can hardly find the air amongst all the water, visibility thrown to shit. Sails fluttering and ropes flying and everything caught by the wind clattering against the deck as everyone works not to tame the storm, but just to survive it.

He grins against the wind's burning kiss. Blood rushes through his veins, sending his heart dancing to the beat of the waves against the prow. He shakes, adrenaline drunk, and clings to the ship's wheel with all of his might.

Storms are *exciting*.

He's dreamed about storms. It might have been what first called him out to sea- the writhing brutality of an ocean that isn't even aware of tearing you asunder. There's something so intoxicating about that thought- about surviving what doesn't care enough to kill you.

It might have also been the promise of treasure. That might have helped get him out here. He likes treasure.

A scream, sharp and sudden, pierces through the thunder and his thoughts alike. It sends an icy bolt of terror to his heart. He does not like *that*.

There's movement on the deck. Shadows scrambling, more shouting. Something over by the starboard- there's too much movement there, too much shouting. Then-

A glint of light. Another scream.

Red? Is that blood? A trick of the light?

Branzy very seriously considers going and hiding in his cabin.

He doesn't, if only for the fact that his crew would never respect him again. He doesn't need a mutiny on top of- whatever sea beast this is. He can't retreat (not yet, not without shouting at his crew to deal with it so he can pretend that he did all he could. He's not *stupid*).

Another shout, more red, and shit fuck damn he needs to move *now*-

His fingers slip as he locks the wheel, and then he's moving, flying down the stairs as he approaches the congregation of shadows-

The ship lurches, there's more shouting. Thunder crashes and rumbles as Branzy is thrown to the ground- onto something that is not the ground. *Cold*, but not as cold as the ground should be. Something scrabbles at his sides- fingers?

A wave crashes over the boat just as he takes a breath, and for a moment he's left to drown as the boat rocks again. His crew are around him -are they drowning too?- and something *cold* slices *hot* pain across his arm and there's that glint again-

Is that a knife?

Was a knife, because the ship rocks again and Branzy scrabbles back to his feet as he watches the glint flies through the air, towards where he *thinks* the edge of the ship must be. He doesn't hear a clatter -there's more thunder- but he knows it to be lost to the gloom of the storm.

Why was there a knife? Well- *that's* obvious- it's a pirate ship, of course there are knives. But why would someone have a knife *out*? In a storm like this! Defending everyone from the sea monster, probably, but Branzy can't see the other blurry shapes of his crew with any swords, nor any sea monsters, so why-?

There's another wave. He takes a break from thinking to drown again instead.

He stops drowning and returns to thinking just in time for the boat to lurch yet *again*, sending his crew shouting and ropes pulling taught. One of the crew falls further than they should have, and the thought hits Branzy like a lightning bolt.

Was someone cutting the ropes?

Another lurch, and he's moving without realizing- falling, more like, onto the poor sod who Branzy is becoming quickly convinced is *not tied down*.

He makes some very quick calculations. Good crew getting lost at sea means that there are less crew to help Branzy kick the shit out of whoever is cutting the ropes. *That* just can't be borne. Decision made, it's easier than breathing to wrap his arms around the lucky bastard he's saving from the ocean's sweet, sweet, furious death dealing batshittery.

"I've got you!" he howls into the wind. He feels the crew member struggle against him- too wiry to be Subz, fabric didn't feel right to be Vitalasy- and kick wildly to get to their feet again, but the storm has tangled the two of them together like loose fishing nets. The crew member's arms are pinned between their bodies, and Branzy is pretty sure the both of them are sitting on the crewmember's legs. He doesn't know why they struggle- he doesn't really care, either. Probably some PTSD thing or whatever. It seems like most pirates would have some sort of trauma response around getting grabbed and clung to with the force of a hundred barnacles. Or it's just a fight response to sudden shock? Branzy can sympathize, he keeps getting shocked by all these fucking-

He gets drowned again as another torrent of water crashes down upon them.

-all these *fucking* waves.

Air returns to them and they surface into the sheeting rain, gasping and coughing together. The fighting has stopped, but that might be a concussion. *Branzy* certainly feels concussed from how hard the waves had slammed their heads together- or, at least, he hopes it was their head that his had met, and not the hardwood of the deck.

Actually, which are softer? Skulls or decks?

That's a good question, a really good question that could inspire some really cool threats later, but it would have to be *later* because there's still shouting from the crew he's not clinging too, but it's less- shouty? Less pain. Which is good, Branzy thinks, in the long run, at least until that crazy rope cutting bastard gets a knife again and- hey, that's a good place to test out his soft skull or deck threats on and-

The boat rocks again, and it rocks *wrong*. He feels it in his bones, the direction he has to catch his balance, the sound of the waves smashing into the sides of his boat.

The thing about storms is that they're exciting. The ship has to drive into a storm, always, just at a

bit of an angle to keep plowing through the waves in relative safety. It makes sense- harder to roll a ship from bow to stern, and plowing through water is the bow's whole *deal*. It makes sense and it's smart and it's something that Branzzy has done so many times before.

The thing about storms is that they're dangerous. The thing about waves is that they start to turn you. The thing about rudders locked in place from an unmanned wheel is that *they won't stop you from turning*. The thing about the boat, Branzzy's beautiful baby, is that its in danger of shipwreck.

Screw that.

Screw the crew, screw the rope cutter, screw the storm.

He tries to get up, trips over the crew member who is *not being helpful right now*, and tries to physically drag them up instead. A hand wraps around his wrist, cold fingers bruising into his skin, and yanks down hard.

Branzzy's head does not abruptly meet the deck, but it almost does. Pain races through the arm he used to brace. He stares, rain pelting further bruises against his back, and remembers the pain from the knife as it had been flung away.

That's a lot of red.

He feels queasy. He also feels the crew member moving beside him, grabbing for him again. The pain is washed out to the background as anger distracts him. "*Stop that!*" he snaps, turning the tables back on them by grabbing and trying to use them to propel himself upright. He can't see who it is, they're little more than a figure obscured by rain and shadow. Nighttime storms are the *worst*. "We don't have time for this! I have to get to the wheel before-!"

Another wave. Another drowning. This lurch is even more violent than all the ones that came before. The rope digs painfully into the softest parts of Branzzy's belly, causing him to wheeze and sputter as he chokes up more water. Branzzy can feel little crescent dots of pain along his arm from where the crew member has clung to him to keep from being washed away.

His muscles ache. He wants to go have a nice lie down. He wants his boat to *not* capsize. "Come on!" he snarls to the crew member, and is blissfully met with no worse resistance as he tries to pull himself to his feet again. The crew member doesn't let go, but Branzzy doesn't need them to let go, he just needs them to *move*. He grabs them by the shoulder, almost tripping over his own feet as he shoves them towards the stairs that lead to the helm.

Absently, Branzzy realizes that there's something weird about their shoulder? Leather straps, like armour, which isn't a *weird* thing to wear on a pirate ship but there's still something weird about it when they're in the middle of a storm and-

Stairs, they're at the stairs, right, gotta go up, gotta go fast. There's water pouring down the steps, like little ramps angled specifically to dump cold bullshit directly into Branzzy's boots. He hears shouting from other parts of the boat, but whoever is with him is silent. They must be struck mute with fear or something, and Branzzy lodges that wildly into his brain as a clue for whoever they might be.

The wind is worse up here, these whole seven feet up on the helm. The rain buffets into him, spraying directly into his eyes, and he squints against the might of the storm as it bears down on him in what feels -when he *knows* it's not- its totality.

"Hold on to me! Don't let go!" he shouts to the crew member, who hasn't let him go once since

they made it to the stairs. He amends, quickly, as he reaches blindly in search of the wheel, “Grab my waist! I need my arms!”

The cold hands stop digging holes into his flesh to start digging holes into his clothes, which is only *barely* better, but Branzzy begrudgingly accepts it.

Then the rope snags on the corner of the stairs, which Branzzy knows even though he can't see because it always, always does that, which means that the helm is just over *here* and he reaches and when his hands touch the familiar wood he almost bursts into tears.

Manly tears.

Manly, terrified tears because they've found the helm and now he just has to pray, again, that the rudder will meet the water; that they won't be capsized before Branzzy can fix this; that his injured arm won't be a problem.

He unlocks the wheel. It jerks, hard. His arm is immediately a problem. It gives out against the weight of the wheel and he has to jam his shoulder in to stop the stupid hunk of wood from spinning wildly.

“Come on!” he shouts. Despair, anger, fear, a buzz of adrenaline or the buzz of his heart now beating too fast to have distinctive beats? It all mangles in his head as he tries to brace himself, to push the wheel further in the other direction (is it even the correct direction? Is this even helping? More praying, more praying, the gods must be sick of him).

It doesn't move. The wheel doesn't fucking move. He feels the strain in his shoulders, hears the blood rushing in his ears, and the pain, so fucking sharp and merciless, in his arm.

If he survives this, he's throwing the crew member overboard.

Then there's pressure against his back, and cold hands over his own. He can't see the effort but he can feel it as the crew member starts to pull at the wheel with him. His hands are crushed painfully into the wooden spokes by the other's hands and that's his cue to change his angle, work with the crew member to pull the wheel with their combined weight, combined strength braced against the slippery deck.

The wheel starts to turn.

“Yes!” Branzzy tries to shout. He wheezes it instead, out of breath from the continued exertion. He keeps faltering, then renewing his fight against the wheel with every bit of strength he can muster. The crew member behind him doesn't seem to have that trouble at all. They're steady, strained and continuously pulling even as Branzzy continues to fail.

They're cold, but his hurt arm is warm. That's probably bad. He tries not to think about it, and almost succeeds when the next wave hits the ship and it feels less *wrong*. “Yes,” Branzzy wheezes. “*Yes.*” And the next wave hits, and that's at even more of a good angle, and then the next, and the next, and the next.

The storm carries on overhead. Lightning flashing and thunder rumbling. Branzzy keeps his eyes fixed ahead, struggling for just the barest glimpse of the next wave, the next threat to account for.

He feels woozy. He sees shapes in the dark that he knows are impossible, but he's not sure if that's the exhaustion, the blood loss, or the head trauma.

It gets- It's harder to stand up straight? He blinks here and there to find himself leaning his weight

against the crew member who, to their credit, neither complains nor scolds him when he startles back upright and tries to focus on the wheel.

Branzy pulls on the wheel, suddenly convinced that their path is no longer correct. He pulls on it again, and then twice more before he checks the lock. It's unlocked. He pulls on it again, and this time he actually sees when the muscle twitches in the strange crew member's arm. They're keep the wheel steady against his most captainly wishes, which is *rude*.

Oh, fun, he can see now. When did it stop raining?

“Branzy?”

Branzy turns his head to look, and he waits for just a moment too long for the world to stop spinning. Vitalasy is stopped at the top of the stairs. Branzy can't see his face beneath that silly hood, especially not in the darkness of this still-cloudy night, but his hand is whiteknuckled against the railing. “Yes, Vitalasy?”

Vitalasy stares at him for a moment. He stares at the crew member. He stares at Branzy again. Branzy can feel a low hum coming from behind him- a chuckle? He smiles too, benevolent and bemused. Vitalasy asks, “Branzy, who is that?”

It occurs to Branzy again that he doesn't know. He turns to look.

The grinning mask of the devil's worst nightmare greets him.

“Hello, Branzy,” says the dread pirate Clownpierce.

Storms, huh?

Branzy faints dead away.

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