

Glasses and a round-bellied decanter gleamed between them in the soft glow of the candles. The heart of the decanter, being of choice and ancient rum from Martinique, shone red as a ruby.

Drurie was motionless as stone, crouched there close to the warm earth, gripping the hilt of his cutlass with fingers as hard as iron. And his heart was hard as iron, though heated red with hate of the man who sat so close to him, leering behind the candles.

He thought of his dead servant, the lad Nicholas, and of the blood springing across the backs of his men. He remembered the stinging, crushing strokes of the stick across his face. His men stirred behind him, gripping and regripping their weapons and gasping nervously for a full breath of the heavy air.

Laroche touched Drurie's arm and whispered that the lantern was being lowered from the rigging of the schooner. Drurie got quietly to his feet, paused for a moment to hear his men rise behind him, and then dashed for the gallery. The table went over with a crash of glass and silver and the candles were trampled under foot.

"Hold them, lads," cried Drurie. "Do not kill! It is for me to kill!"

In the dark it was hard to know when you were killing a man and when you were simply trying to keep