

# The Sugar Sacrifice

Lyle Garford

Except where actual historical events and characters are being described for the storyline of this novel, all situations in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to living persons is purely coincidental.

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## Dedication

This one is for my racquetball and squash friends

Prologue  
June 1792  
St. Lucia

The Captain made his way to the end of the dock as dusk brought growing shadows to the harbour. He was scanning all directions for signs of trouble with each step while the man waiting for him with a travel valise in hand nervously did the same. The Captain felt tired and drained of energy to a depth he had not experienced before as he reached out to shake the man's hand. He studied the man's features, seeing fatigue and tension etched on his companion's face. The Captain knew it was mirrored on his own.

"Are you certain of your course of action, Captain Deschamps? I still think they will come after you, just as I am sure they are even now looking for me," said Colonel Jean Joseph de Gimat, Governour of the French island of St. Lucia in the Caribbean. "And what of your men? Are you still confident of them?"

Marcel Deschamps, the greying, but dapper and fit Captain of the French Navy frigate *Marie-Anne*, now into his early fifties in age, gave a weary shrug in response. "To be honest, I am not certain of anything. A year ago I wouldn't have thought what is happening now possible, but obviously I was wrong. It's no matter, though, as I am willing to take the risk. I don't think these bastards Montdenoix and Linger even know who I really am, at least not yet. They may have succeeded in stirring the colony up, but they aren't as smart as they think they are."

"Captain, we *both* thought they were buffoons, but somehow they managed to convince the garrison of the fort

on Morne Fortune to change sides and fly the tricolour flag of the Revolution. Sooner or later they will turn their attention to you. You command the most powerful warship in St. Lucia and I don't think even your devious skills will keep you safe. And if they find out what we have done they will stop at nothing. We both know they will be looking for it probably sooner than later."

The Captain nodded. "I am not afraid, Governour. We have talked of this before. The fact remains I am best positioned to get it safely away and nothing has changed to warrant a different approach. Besides, if things worsen as we suspect then someone has to step into the breach to help the remaining loyalists here and deal with it all. As I said, I remain prepared to take this risk."

The Governour studied the Captain's face for a long moment before reaching out to place a hand on the Captain's shoulder. "You are a brave man, Marcel. Well, the ship is waiting for me and I must flee. If they catch me lingering here I'll be hung on the spot."

Turning, the Governour stalked up the gangplank and signaled to the clearly impatient Captain of the small mail packet ship he could finally depart. Captain Deschamps was left standing by himself and feeling alone as he watched the ship leave the harbour of Castries, the capital of St. Lucia. The packet ship Captain was fortunate enough of a breeze was present, despite the stifling heat of a summer evening, to enable a relatively swift departure.

Having found ways to remain assigned to St. Lucia for many years, the island had long since become Captain Deschamps home. But the sudden departure of the Governour brought an unsettling feeling his island home

was now a strange and foreign place. When he was certain the ship was well away he gave a deep sigh, struggling to master his unspoken desire to simply flee too. But he knew this was impossible, so he turned to make his way back to his ship. As he retraced his steps he began scanning all directions for trouble once again.

Chapter One  
December 1792  
St. Lucia

The sound of the sudden, grating fall of the gleaming blade as it dropped down its guide was replaced by a harsh and resounding thud as it struck the base of the framework holding it all in place, jarring the senses of everyone nearby. One of the workers installing and testing the apparatus in the public square stepped forward, beginning yet another detailed examination of the various pieces holding it together. Calling two other workers over to him, he pointed at a spot he seemed dissatisfied with. After a quick, muttered conversation they all nodded agreement and he reached for a hammer, pounding at a supporting cross beam which appeared a little out of place while the other two watched him. After finishing the small adjustment, they hoisted the blade and let it fall three more times before finally looking more content with their work.

The three men all stiffened as they turned to face the officer that had been watching them when he moved to join their group. They had reason to be on their guard, as this man's hard, thin-lipped countenance matched his behaviour. Still physically strong despite being over forty in age and taller than all three of the workers, the officer was well known for using his overbearing physical presence to dominate everyone.

"Are you finally done?"

"For now, yes, Captain La Chance," said the worker with the hammer. "There is one other final piece I want to adjust, but I need a different tool from the ship, so we will

return later. This may seem like a straightforward device, but it must be properly set up if you want the blade to do its job without problems or delay. I have learned much over the last several months while working with these new devices and the most important lesson was to take my time and do it properly from the start."

"Fine, fine. And the blade is sharp?"

"But of course. We worked it over yet again last night. You do know it will require some periodic maintenance depending on how much it is used?"

The officer gave them a cold smile. "Oh, I fully expect it will get some use and you will need to maintain it. How much remains to be seen. You may all return to the ship, but have your work completed today."

As the three men gathered their tools and left Baron Jean Baptiste Raimond La Chance, newly appointed Captain of the French Navy frigate *La Felicite*, smiled once again and examined the device before him with a professional eye. Machines designed to separate a man's head from his body were in use in different forms and various countries for centuries. Captain La Chance felt proud it fell to the enlightenment of the French people and their Revolution to refine the design to its current form.

In most parts of the world little concern was focused on whether or not an offender suffered or felt pain when being executed. With this new device, called a guillotine, deliberate care was being taken to ensure a swift end to an offender while inflicting as little pain as possible. Unlike earlier versions relying on axe heads and blunt force to do the job, the relatively thin, sharp, and angled blade together with its sheer weight falling from a great height ensured no



need to let the blade fall a second time to finish the job, if it was properly maintained.

Satisfied, Captain La Chance turned away from the guillotine brought with him on the long journey from Brest in France to St. Lucia and found the watching crowd packed into the square was growing even bigger. The soldiers holding the crowd back were showing obvious anxiety about its size and weren't hesitating to use the butts of their weapons to club the more boisterous members of the crowd back when they got too close. The square was right beside the jail just off Peynier Street in Castries and was left empty for the specific purpose of public executions. Most of the previous executions in St. Lucia were accomplished by hanging the offender. A gibbet used until now sat dismantled off in a corner of the square.

The novelty of this new device clearly piqued the interest of the crowd, which was filled with an almost equal mix of both white and black faces. What was interesting for Captain La Chance was the mixture of reactions on those faces, ranging from outright horror at what they were seeing to absolute glee over the potential entertainment to come. The remainder in between those extremes seemed to wear equal mixes of outright fear, dismay, and fascination with what they were seeing.

A warm gust of wind blew through the square, making the new tricolour flag hanging from the flagpole beside the guillotine flap with the breeze. As Captain La Chance stared up at it he felt another surge of pride to know the new Minister of the Navy for the Republic, Gaspard Monge, chose him specifically for this mission. As he gazed upwards he saw in the periphery of his vision two

other men were walking over to stop at his side and he turned his attention to them.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think?" said the Captain.

"It has certainly caught everyone's attention, Captain. Perhaps for good reason," said Emile Martin with a smirk, one of the two civilian members of the tribunal Captain La Chance headed.

"We are ready to begin our work, Captain. What do you see are the next steps?" said Jeremy Bernard, the third member of the tribunal.

The Captain shrugged as he gave the two men a cold smile. Both still looked and behaved like the weak, petty clerks they were before the Revolution and he knew they needed his leadership.

"We must establish ourselves in the administrative headquarters. I think from my brief glimpse of the outside of the Governour's quarters it will suit our purposes. Since this island no longer has a Governour we may as well move in. It was important to set up the guillotine before all else to send a message to the reluctant ones about who is now in charge here."

Emile Martin waved a hand toward the device beside him. "Do you think we will actually need to use this much here, Captain? I thought the National Convention conferred the title of "The Faithful" on this island. They wouldn't have done this without reason, I should think."

"You are correct, sir. We received ongoing support for our cause from this colony, even back in the early days of the Revolution, unlike Martinique and Guadeloupe and the

others. Why, many of the slaves on this island simply walked away from their masters as far back as 1790."

"Well, at least we are welcome here if nowhere else, Captain."

All three men knew well how true this was. Prior to arriving in St. Lucia Captain La Chance stopped first in Dominica, another nearby Caribbean island. The Captain bore a commission to take charge of St. Lucia until a new permanent Governour could be appointed and sent out, but part of his instructions were to stop on at least one British held island to introduce himself. The government was anxious for a report on what kind of reception he got to give them intelligence on how receptive other world powers in the area were to the change in administration. La Chance scowled at the memory before relenting as he saw how taken aback the two men were by the look on his face.

"Sorry, gentlemen, I am not displeased with you. It was the memory of how I was treated by Sir John Orde on Dominica. I know, I haven't told you much of the encounter. I was too angry, to be honest."

"Yes, we could see that," confessed Jeremy Bernard.

The memory still rankled. The Governour met him in Fort Young, the strong, dominating fortifications overlooking the capital Roseau and its deep-water harbour. The Fort was in an excellent strategic location, but the Captain found little time to admire it as he was soon marching back down the hill to his ship, clenching his fists in anger. He shook his head in reminiscence.

"The man has a reputation as a seasoned British diplomat, but there wasn't any diplomacy involved in his

dealings with me. I couldn't believe how rude he was. He practically threw me out of his office."

"You'd think they would at least have the presence of mind to see which way the wind has blown and do what they must to build a relationship with us. We represent the new power in France, after all."

"Well, I confess I was a little disturbed at just how many ships flying the Bourbon flag were in Fort Royal harbour on Martinique when we stopped there too. I am thinking Sir John was aware of this and it may be the British still have a lingering fantasy the royalists there will find a way to turn back the clock here in the Caribbean."

"So what is your plan to deal with them, Captain?"

La Chance smiled. "The power of ideas will be their downfall. I could not hope to defeat them with the forces at my disposal, but cannon balls are not the only weapons we can wield. Montdenoix and Linger assured me our pamphlets are already enjoying a positive reception here on St. Lucia even though we have only just released them. Once we are certain of the reaction and can be assured of success here, we will find ways to deliver more to Guadeloupe and Martinique."

The Captain could see the two men were doing their best to maintain bland looks, but having spent weeks sailing out from France with them he knew when they were being skeptical. He also knew why they felt this way.

The flurry of pamphlets and proclamations he quickly issued on arrival in St. Lucia walked a fine diplomatic line when it came to the sensitive issue of slavery. Over time the mulattoes, slaves with one white and one black parent, had come to form a significant group within the overall

population. Because they carried at least some white blood in their veins, white slave owners believed the mulattoes would have higher intelligence and ability to learn. As a result, many held varied degrees of education and training in a wide range of skills. A smaller group within this population had actually been freed by their owners for various reasons and now even owned their own slaves.

The Captain's pamphlets assured this group the new French republic would respect their right to the freedoms of citizenship. The problem was the pamphlets also reassured the plantation owners their right to keep slaves, including mulattoes, would be respected. How this seeming contradiction would be reconciled was left unclear. Captain La Chance knew the possibility existed he could be challenged on the point, as the links between republican thinking and the abolitionist movement were clear. The Society of the Friends of the Blacks was a force in republican circles, having advocated abolition for several years. Captain La Chance remained unconcerned, knowing he could simply brush it all off as something for the National Convention to sort out.

The other reason for their skepticism was his characterization of the September 1792 Battle of Valmy as the turning point which would ensure the survival of the republic. While true the success of the republic over the vaunted Prussian army made many skeptics sit up and take notice, there were already warning signs more battles were on the horizon. The biggest reason for their doubt, however, was his announcement of the imminent arrival of a powerful expeditionary force to support his efforts. All three men knew no such force existed.

But as a true believer in the Revolution, Captain La Chance didn't care about their skepticism. His supreme confidence the power of ideas would win the day gave him strength. Beset by enemies on all sides, the new Republic was left with little choice but to rely on them to deal with problems outside the borders of France itself. General Rochambeau himself devised the strategy Captain La Chance was employing in order to buy time. The Captain believed the strategy, coupled with a big dose of fear of the guillotine beside him, was going to serve him well.

"Come, gentlemen, its time we talked with our agents Hubert Montdenoix and Fleming Linger. They have promised me a full progress report and details on the other matter they were tasked with accomplishing."

The guards roughly shoved aside the waiting crowd to make a path for the three men to walk to the nearby Governour's office on the far side of the public square. The expectant faces were silent as they passed, but an excited buzz of conversation grew seconds after they went by.

Their eyes needed a few moments to adjust from the bright sunshine of the day to the cool, dark interior of the entrance to the Governour's offices as the soldier standing guard outside let them in. Captain La Chance knew the sturdy stone building also held the main jail for the town. An officer and an officious looking clerk were waiting inside and both stiffened when the men introduced themselves. The clerk's demeanour became deferential in an instant.

"Gentlemen, they are expecting you. This way, please," said the clerk, leading them to a large meeting room in the rear of the building on the second floor. Across

the hallway was an open door into another equally large room, occupied by a desk that dominated what was obviously the Governour's office.

The two men sitting in the meeting room stood the moment the newcomers were ushered in. Although the heat of December in St. Lucia was bearable, unlike the summer months, the room seemed stuffy even with shutters in the rear wall open to collect the breeze. The first thing Captain La Chance noticed were the piles of paperwork stacked on the table in front of the men. After introductions were made they all sat at the table.

"Gentlemen, I am curious," said Captain La Chance. "Why are you not using the office with the desk for your work?"

The one identified as Montdenoix offered a cryptic smile in return. "Captain, we prefer to maintain as low a profile as possible. In our line of work it always pays to keep it this way."

"Line of work?" said Emile Bernard.

The Captain coughed and turned to his colleague. "The fewer details you have about these fellows, the better, sir. Let us just say these men are *agents* of our masters and leave it at that, please. And bear in mind everything you hear in this room is to be kept in strict confidence."

As the man nodded in understanding the Captain turned back to the two agents. "So, gentlemen, you know I actually am in the same line of work as you and I do understand. Come, where do matters stand? I know you gave me a quick summary, but now that we have more time I'd like a full report. My colleagues need to hear this too."

The one called Montdenoix responded without even looking at his colleague, leaving no doubt as to who was the senior of the two agents. Stocky and muscular, Montdenoix had a military bearing and the Captain immediately sensed it was earned.

"Sirs, we are glad to see you. As you know, we have been successful in our efforts to grow republican sentiments on this island. By and large the population is quite supportive. Having said this, we are finding the situation has become rather fluid here. In a way, we have been too successful."

"Really? What does that mean?" said La Chance.

"Ever since our success back in June gaining the army's support and forcing the departure of the former Governour, there is very little productive work being accomplished on this island. Many slaves are no longer working for their masters, having taken our rhetoric about the rights of man seriously."

Captain La Chance raised an eyebrow in question. "So? What is the specific concern?"

"Well, food production is not at the levels it once was. Some of the slaves have little plots of land they till and there is fish to be caught in the ocean, so dire starvation is not imminent. But there are many hungry faces to be seen everywhere, as there is not enough to go around. Where food before was just ridiculously expensive, it is now beyond outrageous in cost. The salt fish the owners use to supplement the food of the slaves is very costly because it comes from the American traders. Some of the slaves have actually gone back to their masters to ensure they continue to be fed. On the other extreme, some of the slaves have



taken to bearing arms wherever they go. They claim it is to protect themselves and what little property they have."

The Captain frowned. "So what have you done about all of this?"

Montdenoix shrugged. "We are walking a fine line, Captain. We can hardly compel the slaves to go back to actually serving as slaves again, now can we? At least, we can't do that and remain true to the principles of the Revolution. We have tried to encourage the plantation owners to find ways to lure them back, but most are resisting the notion. They claim they will make no profits if they start paying the slaves even token amounts. With sugar prices as they are, they may well be right. But if you can believe their audacity, some of them are even seeking compensation for the loss of their slaves."

Captain La Chance shrugged. "This is of no consequence. Slaves are just slaves and that hasn't changed. The real problem here is with the royalist plantation owners and not with the slaves. The slaves are merely doing what any of us would do in their position. So, you have records for me, I assume?"

"But of course, Captain. We have done as we were ordered. My colleague Fleming here has compiled a complete list of all plantation owners and their locations for you. I am pleased to report at least half of them profess support for our cause."

"So they say. Well, their actions will speak much louder for them soon enough. Your lists identify which ones are the problems, I assume?"

"They do, sir. You should know we also have a separate list of the plantations where the owners have

already taken flight. Unfortunately, many were able to flee with their resources. We believe many left for Martinique and Guadeloupe, as a number of them have properties there too."

Captain La Chance frowned as he sat in thought for a moment. "You weren't able to forestall this from happening?"

Montdenoix shrugged. "Captain, we could not be everywhere at once. Besides, our brief was to find a way to turn the tide in favour of the Revolution here once and for all, and we have succeeded in this. By the time the army commanders sorted out who could be relied upon and took steps to stem the flow it was far too late. We have a list for you of the officers you can count on for support."

"And what of your other tasks?"

"Sir, we have successfully managed the colony as ordered ever since the Governour fled, although I confess dealing with all these bureaucratic details and this mountain of paperwork is far less to my liking than our regular duties. As I said, we are very glad you are here to assume command. I gather you know the orders you brought with you direct us to return to France for some new tasks?"

"Yes, I am aware of your orders. I share your distaste for dealing with paperwork, so I too am glad my commission to take charge here is only temporary. I have been led to believe my replacement will be here in February next year. These gentlemen here with me have the job of taking on the day-to-day administration of St. Lucia and to sit in tribunal to deal with some of our more reluctant citizens. I am actually tasked with consolidating

what you have achieved here and more importantly, carrying the struggle to other islands."

"Well, we wish you gentlemen success. We will work with your colleagues to ensure a smooth transition and be on our way home soon."

Captain La Chance leaned forward, an intent look on his face. "There is one other matter to discuss, of course. How have you fared with him since your last correspondence?"

The man's eyes narrowed in response. "Captain Deschamps continues to prove obstinate, I am afraid. He remains in jail along with a number of other particularly vocal owners we were left with no choice but to incarcerate, given the probability they would cause us grief."

"Your last report to the Minister was a little vague on the specifics of your approach regarding the Captain?"

"Yes, well, one doesn't want to detail some of the less savory aspects of an interrogation in case it falls into the wrong hands. I— Captain La Chance, are we authorized to speak of this in front of your colleagues?"

"Yes, yes, they know. Please continue."

Montdenoix nodded. "I assure you the question of what he did with it was put to the Captain most strenuously, on several occasions over a period of weeks, after his crew mutinied and turned him over to us."

La Chance smiled. "Mutiny is a harsh word to a navy officer. I would prefer something like *joined our cause*."

The rest of the men dutifully chuckled as Montdenoix held both palms out and offered a rueful look in return.

"Indeed. In any case, he has proved quite resilient. As

ordered, we ceased active interrogation of him in September to await your arrival. He has been rotting in jail ever since."

Captain La Chance sat forward once again, looking thoughtful. "No change of heart, then? Hmm. Look, are you certain he was placed in charge of it?"

"Captain, we are. We know the Governour didn't take it with him as we have questioned the Captain of the packet ship he took flight on. We have reliable witnesses backing up what this man told us. We also have reliable witnesses from the crew of the *Marie-Anne* who have confirmed their former Captain was definitely up to *something* around the time the Governour fled. So, yes, Captain, we have no doubt this man knows what we want. It just remains to get the information out of him."

"Indeed. I am surprised he has held out this long. Well, we will just have to renew our efforts."

Montdenoix looked troubled. "I am sorry we have failed in this one aspect, Captain La Chance. The truth is the need to succeed is critical. You recall I mentioned earlier the economy here is struggling badly? This is all having a bad impact on our revenues, sir. Revenue from tolls and duties are down significantly. Either people simply don't have the money to pay or they are getting even better at avoiding them, or maybe even both. Sir, we have managed to pay the army *some* of what they are owed by appropriating what we could from the recalcitrant owners we locked up, but we are rapidly running out of options. In truth we have faced difficulty from day one given we started off with virtually nothing."

Captain La Chance frowned as he sat back, deep in thought for a few moments. "Yes, you are right. It is critical we succeed on this. One way or another the plantation owners will be made to fill in the gaps, but this may take time."

After pausing to think again for one final moment La Chance shrugged to let his indifference show. "Yes, well, our friend Citizen Robespierre stated it best last year in the Constituent Assembly, as I recall. *Perish the colonies, but not the principle* I believe he said, or something like that. If he is not concerned with the changes we have wrought from introducing the rights of man to the slaves then I won't be either, and if we must sacrifice the sugar and the wealth it brings for a time until we find a better way to manage this, then so be it. We must sacrifice *whatever* is necessary to achieve our goals."

Sitting forward once again he changed the topic. "But what of this possibility Deschamps is a spy for the British? I know you were pushing him on this point, but has he confessed to this? Does he know about the letter?"

"No on both counts, Captain. We decided to save the fact we have the letter as a card for you to play. But we do agree with Paris the man has to be a spy. We know the intercepted letter you brought came from this island and it obviously contains a message in cipher. The fact it was on its way to Barbados is telling. I showed it to the new Captain of the *Marie-Anne* and his people yesterday, and they swear it is the handwriting of Captain Deschamps, despite efforts to disguise it."

"Well, then," said Captain La Chance as a smile returned to his face. "Perhaps we should point this out to

our British spy. I suggest my colleagues remain here with your man Linger to get on with the details of the handover to us. This will leave you and I free to take the letter and have a friendly conversation with Captain Deschamps."

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Captain Marcel Deschamps lay on the bunk in his cell in a dazed stupor, willing himself to find refuge in the oblivion of sleep despite it being filled with disturbing dreams. Having already consumed the one meal he was given for the day little else was available to do, although calling the disgusting slop he was consistently fed a meal was questionable. His iron discipline was still intact enough he already finished forcing himself to do his daily exercise routine once again. He thought about engaging in yet another conversation with the inmates sharing his cell or those in the other cells, but no topic he could think of not already debated to death came to mind. The dreary sameness of their days with no end in sight to their imprisonment was unhinging many in the jail.

A few of the inmates were actual petty criminals, but most were leading royalist supporters on St. Lucia. Their crime was to be in the minority and too vocal about what they saw as problems with the changes being forced on them. For this, most were incarcerated along with their entire family. Several of the women were taking it hard, suffering in particular from the utter lack of privacy.

Captain Deschamps had long since lost exact track of the days since his incarceration in late June. Being beaten senseless at random times introduced uncertainty, despite his best efforts to keep track. The others in the jail had not

been abused to the same extent, but they too had lost precise count of the days and weeks.

He did know they were now in the winter months on St. Lucia, perhaps December or January. The stifling heat and still air in the jail in June was so bad when he first arrived the simple act of breathing was a struggle. But the temperature at present was almost bearable, if nothing else was. The stench of human excrement radiated from the pail in the corner of the cell. This was emptied only once every day, if the guards remembered. The reek of unwashed bodies permeated everything else. Insects were everywhere. As the Captain flicked a big, crawling bug off his arm he realized he couldn't remember the last time he actually felt clean. How he survived cuts received in the beatings they forced him to endure while not suffering infections was a mystery.

The distant sound of the only exit door from the cells enclosure being opened caught everyone's attention, putting all of the inmates on edge. Most of the time a door opening wouldn't be cause for excitement. After the random beatings endured by Captain Deschamps stopped several months prior for unknown reasons, visits to the cells by their captors soon resolved into only utterly boring, predictable, and undeviating daily routine to feed them and remove the waste buckets. The only real exception was always when a new group of inmates were brought in to the already crowded prison cells. But a deviation from the established routine could mean anything and without fail it stretched the nerves of the inmates taut every time.

Captain Deschamps remained where he was, eyes closed. Part of him dreaded the possibility they were

coming for him, while unbidden the thought it would be good if they were indeed after him flitted across his mind. As he willed the thought away he knew it wasn't the first time he actually hoped they were coming to put an end to his miserable existence.

He could hear two sets of footsteps coming down the stairs and ever closer, finally stopping outside his cell. He sighed as the harsh metallic grate of the key turning in the lock and the rusty creak of the cell door sounded.

"Deschamps. Let's go," said one of the jailers.

His heart sank at the words, but he knew the people counting on him to be strong included his own loved ones. Bracing himself mentally, the Captain sat up with deliberate care and swung his legs off the bunk to the floor. Two pairs of rough hands seized his arms and jerked him to his feet. As the two burly soldiers serving as guards dragged him roughly out of the cell enclosure a few of the remaining inhabitants called out words of encouragement.

"Be strong, Marcel! Don't let these bastards intimidate you!"

He soon found himself in the all too familiar interrogation room on the second floor of the jail, used with him so many times before. The two soldiers slammed him into the same wooden chair as previously and one tied him to it with his arms behind his back while the other held him in place. Satisfied, one of the soldiers left the room while the other went to a door on the other side of the room. After knocking on it the soldier stepped to the side and stood impassively watching his prisoner.

As Deschamps waited he looked around and squinted in pain, noticing a difference this time as the shutters on the



only window to the outside world were partly open, letting in a bright stream of sunlight. Although he couldn't see out the window because of where he was sitting, it wouldn't have mattered as his eyes were burning from the bright light.

He was still trying to accustom his eyes to it when the door to the room opened and two men came in. As they came into view he struggled to focus and realized the first man was, as expected, the bastard named Montdenoix who interrogated him before. As he shifted his gaze and saw the other man he couldn't help sucking in his breath in audible dismay.

Captain La Chance came over to stand before him, smiling as he folded his arms. A look of obvious, cruel pleasure was on his face. "Marcel, it has been too long. I am pleased to see you again, especially given the circumstances."

"La Chance, you pig," said Captain Deschamps as he glared back, struggling to master his emotions as he did. With deliberate effort he stretched as far forward as his bonds would let him and spat on the boots of the man before him.

"Marcel, is that any way to greet an old friend?" said La Chance, staring down at the spittle briefly before unleashing a devastating punch to the exposed midsection of his prisoner.

The pain exploded in his body as he gasped in agony, almost blacking out and slumping against his restraints. Before the pain even began subsiding Deschamps felt La Chance grab a handful of his prison shirt and use it to wipe

the spittle off his boot while his two captors began talking with each other.

"Captain La Chance?" said Montdenoix. "I didn't know you and Captain Deschamps were acquainted."

"Yes, indeed, we go back a long ways. Don't we, Marcel? You bastard, I've been looking forward to this for weeks."

With no response from the prisoner La Chance looked back at Montdenoix with a cold smile. "His family and mine have been *acquainted*, as you say, for a long time. His father ruined my family, accusing my father of fraud and poisoning everyone against us. Our Captain Deschamps is from a family of high noble lineage, higher than my family, and they used this to their advantage. Life became a struggle as a result. Marcel and I knew each other when we were growing up, and let's just say this bastard continued the family tradition of persecution."

"I see," said Montdenoix, eyeing Captain La Chance with concern obvious on his face. "Well, it would seem our prisoner is paying attention to us again, so let us get on with this, shall we? If I may, we cannot let personal concerns get in the way of doing our duty."

La Chance gave Montdenoix a stiff look. "You have no need to teach me my duty, sir. I am just enjoying the fact this duty is enabling me to do things I've wanted to do for a very long time."

Deschamps gave a start as a rough hand grabbed his chin and pulled his face up, forcing him to look at the two men.

"Still conscious, are you?" said La Chance, as he let his grip on the prisoner drop once he was certain

Deschamps would remain looking at him. "Good. Well, we need to have a little talk, Marcel. Actually, you are the one to do the talking here, as I'm sure you know. I'm also certain you know what we want, so why don't you just tell us and save yourself?"

Deschamps remained silent for a moment before sighing. Drawing on his reserves of strength he sat straighter as he finally responded. "I have no idea what you are talking about. I don't even know why I'm here or what right you have to imprison me."

The two men both laughed, although the laughter held no warmth. La Chance shook his head, still chuckling as he pulled some letters from his jacket pocket.

"So this is how you want it, eh? Fine by me. Look, this first letter I have here is all the authority I need to deal with the likes of you. This confirms the action taken by my colleague Hubert Montdenoix here. You were found to be supporting royalist agitators actively trying to subvert the legitimate government of France and its colony St. Lucia, hence your denunciation and incarceration. Our masters have considered the facts and delegated deciding your punishment to me. But that's not all! We have even better things to discuss with you."

As La Chance put a knowing smirk on his face and put the first letter back in his pocket, Captain Deschamps couldn't stop himself from snorting in disgust. "You bastards call yourselves *legitimate*? You are traitors."

The hard slap to his face rocked his head back and he groaned from the shock of it. Montdenoix gave him no time to recover as he grabbed a fistful of his hair and slapped him hard a second time, bringing stars to his vision.

Montdenoix leaned close to his face. "Listen, you idiot. Watch your tongue or face the consequences."

The mirth in La Chance's voice was obvious as he leaned forward close to Deschamps's face to continue. "So as I was saying, you have other things to talk to us about. Far worse things, actually. Being just a royalist supporter is bad enough, but being a spy takes you to a whole new level."

Deschamps couldn't help himself from stiffening a little as his captor spoke, and La Chance saw it.

"Oh, you know what is next, don't you? Yes, I can see it in your eyes. We have you, Marcel. Our friends were in the office of the former Minister for the Navy, you see. We didn't know who his minion out here was for certain, but we knew there was one. Lots of signs pointed to you and the evidence was overwhelming. And then, there was this!"

As La Chance held the envelope up for him to see, Deschamps felt his heart sink. He could see the address was to a nondescript trading house in Barbados and Deschamps knew the envelope all too well, since he was the one who addressed and sent it. But he composed himself and looked back at his accuser with as bland a face as possible.

"I'm supposed to recognize this, am I?"

"Ah, but you do, don't you, Marcel? Yes, some other friends intercepted this for us and what did we find? What seems an innocent looking letter has a message in cipher written in secret ink between the lines. We know the origin of the letter was this island and, what a surprise, when we showed this to your former first officer and your clerk they both swore this was your handwriting."

La Chance put the letter back in his pocket as he stepped back and spread his hands wide in mock dismay. "So you see, you have a real problem, Marcel. Merely supporting royalist agitators is one thing, but you are a spy. You are up to your neck in dung. But even now, you have opportunity to find our mercy. How, you want to know? It's very simple. Just tell us what we want to know, and we promise you will be shown more mercy than you deserve."

Deschamps stiffened and glared back at La Chance before responding. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Captain," said Montdenoix. "Be reasonable. We know Governour de Gimat didn't take the money with him when he fled. We have questioned everyone involved. We also have the word of several witnesses you were up to something around the same time as he fled. Neither of us believes in coincidences, correct? So let's get down to business. I know my colleague here would likely prefer to let you rot the rest of your days in jail or even worse, but I can prevail upon him to, as he says, show mercy and set you free. You have my word on it. If, of course, you tell us where it is."

"If either of you think I would be prepared to accept your word for anything, you are both even more delusional than I know you already are. I don't know what you are talking about."

"Well, there you have it, Captain La Chance. As I said, he is an obstinate fellow, even now."

"If this is the way he wants it," said La Chance, with a shrug. Turning he walked over to where the soldier still

stood awaiting orders. Deschamps couldn't hear the brief conversation, but he knew what was coming.

Pulling out a short, two foot long club from where it hung at his belt the soldier strode over to Deschamps and walked around him a couple of times, as if deciding where to start.

The first blow hammered unexpectedly on the front of his right leg on the shin, where minimal padding between his skin and the bone of his leg gave no cushion for the strike. Deschamps couldn't stop his inarticulate scream of pain in response. The scream was renewed as the next blow landed in the same area on his opposite leg. The blows continued to rain down indiscriminately all over his body for another minute before mercifully the beating finally ceased.

Barely conscious, his body a mass of bruises and indescribable pain, Deschamps was aware his captors were once again talking to him, but the words weren't registering in his brain. He felt his head jerked up by the hair to face them as a bowl of water was dashed into his face. As he focused on what they were saying he realized the bonds tying him to the chair were being undone.

"Well, Marcel, I do hope you enjoyed that as much as I did. Actually, I'm rather hoping you'll continue to be obstinate, so we can keep doing this. And I assure you, now I'm in charge here, we certainly will."

The agent Montdenoix coughed into his hand to gain attention. "Captain Deschamps, I do hope you understand that despite whatever history there obviously is between you gentlemen, our purpose here is to just have you tell us

what we want to know. This is our job. And we will be merciful if he does, *won't we*, Captain La Chance?"

Deschamps watched as La Chance turned to Montdenoix, obviously trying to keep a scowl off his face before finally responding.

"Yes, yes, of course, Hubert. But I think Captain Deschamps needs to fully understand what his fate will be if he continues to show us a lack of cooperation."

Signaling to Montdenoix, the two men finished untying him from the chair and after seizing him under the arms they lifted him up. Weakened and unable to resist, Deschamps winced and groaned in pain at the sudden movement. The two men dragged him over to the window, arriving in time to hear the distant, harsh thud of something hitting a piece of wood hard. La Chance threw the shutters open wide and Deschamps winced once again as the full sun of a bright day temporarily blinded him.

As Deschamps's eyes grew accustomed to the light he saw La Chance's face creased with naked malice as he moved to within inches of his own. "So, Marcel, look what I brought with me from home. I'll bet you've never seen one of these before, but you know what it is."

Deschamps went cold when he focused on the guillotine on the other side of the square, as he did indeed know what he was seeing. The workers were back testing the device and already raising the blade for another trial.

"So, yes, you need to cooperate and tell us what we want. Despite what my colleague here says I am now in charge here. Sooner or later I will lose patience with your lack of cooperation and when I do, this will be your fate. It will be too merciful and quick a death for my liking, but

there is one possibility I enjoy the thought of. I'm told there is always a bare few seconds, perhaps two or three at most, when the head still appears conscious after the blade does its job. I plan to be there so the last thing you see will be *me* as I grab your severed head and spit in your face."

"*Yesss*, well, I think our prisoner gets the point, Captain La Chance," said Montdenoix, unable to keep a hint of annoyance from his voice. "Perhaps we should let him return to his cell to consider his options, eh?"

La Chance took a moment to master himself, the naked hatred on his face slow to disappear.

"Yes, yes. I agree. Besides, he stinks and I've smelled enough of him for today. And there *is* always tomorrow. Let's go get a drink."

As they signaled the soldier to come over and take Deschamps back to the cells below, the rasping, metallic sound of the blade falling followed by the jarring thud of its impact came from across the square once again.