

Comprehensive Vocabulary List

Stevenson uses archaic, nautical, and regionally specific terms to create an atmosphere of "heightened reality."

The Supernatural & Moral

- **Imp:** A small, mischievous devil or sprite. In this context, it represents a malevolent, soul-binding entity.
- **Damnation:** Eternal punishment in hell; the primary "risk" in the story's gamble.
- **Covenant:** A formal, solemn, and binding agreement (the "contract" of the bottle).
- **Efficacy:** The power to produce a desired effect (e.g., the bottle's power to grant wishes).

Nautical & Setting-Specific

- **Boatswain (Bo'sun):** A ship's officer in charge of equipment and the crew; represents the "rough" world of the sea.
- **Lava Field:** Referencing the volcanic landscape of Hawaii, symbolizing a barren, purgatorial state.
- **Schooner:** A fast sailing ship; the primary mode of travel that links the "magic" of the islands to the "commerce" of the world.
- **Kanakas:** A 19th-century term for native Pacific Islanders (used by Stevenson to ground the story in its specific colonial time-period).

The Economics of the Curse

- **Centime:** A fractional monetary unit of the French franc. This is the "plot device" currency that allows for a lower price than the American cent.
- **Reckoning:** The settlement of an account; also, the day of judgment for one's sins.
- **Capricious:** Given to sudden and unaccountable changes of mood or behavior (often used to describe the "luck" the bottle brings).

Narrative Arc Breakdown: The "Descending" Structure

The story follows a **circular but tightening** arc, where the stakes get higher as the price gets lower.

1. Exposition: The Introduction to the Trap

- **The Hook:** Keawe, a poor but literate Hawaiian, wanders San Francisco and encounters a wealthy, depressed man in a mansion.
- **The Transaction:** Keawe buys the bottle for fifty dollars. He is skeptical but intrigued by the promise of wealth.

2. Inciting Incident: The First Proof

- **The Wish:** Keawe wishes for a "Bright House" on the Kona coast.
- **The Price:** His uncle and cousin die, leaving him the land and money as an inheritance. Keawe realizes the bottle's gifts are "tainted"—they come through tragedy, not miracles.

3. Rising Action: The Leprosy and the Search

- **The Complication:** After successfully selling the bottle and finding love with Kokua, Keawe discovers he has leprosy. To be healed and marry her, he must find the bottle again.
- **The Price Drop:** He tracks the bottle down to Ha'ena, but the price has plummeted. He has to buy it for **one cent**. He is now the "terminal owner"—there is no smaller US coin.

4. The Climax: The French Loophole & Sacrifice

- **The Twist:** Kokua discovers his secret. She realizes that in French colonies (Tahiti), they use **centimes** (five of which make a cent).
- **The Double Sacrifice:** Kokua secretly buys the bottle from Keawe to save his soul. Keawe, realizing what she did, tries to buy it back to save hers. This is the moral peak: both are willing to go to Hell for the other.

5. Falling Action: The Brutal Realism

- **The Drunken Boatswain:** Keawe finds a "depraved" sailor to act as a middleman. The sailor buys the bottle from Kokua for four centimes, then Keawe tries to buy it back for three.
- **The Refusal:** The sailor refuses to sell it back. He doesn't care about Hell; he only cares about the bottle's ability to provide endless rum.

6. Resolution: Freedom through Nihilism

- **The Exit:** The bottle is gone, out of the hands of the "virtuous" who fear God, and into the hands of the "lost" who don't. Keawe and Kokua are free, but the "Evil" remains in the world, uncontained.
-

The "Hidden" Logic: Why the ending works

The story ends not because the curse is broken, but because it finds its **perfect host**. The bottle preys on **ambition** and **fear**. When it meets a man with no ambition other than drink and no fear of the afterlife, the "tension" that drives the story snaps.