

Saltwater Scramble

For a dish of turtle eggs, take a murder, a fightin' ghost, ten thousand dollars, and a squall. Mix well. *Then* go find your eggs

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Ladybird," etc.

I

THERE ain't but two things what can make Cap'n Lucius P. Shackel forget that he weighs as much as a buck elephant and that his port leg is a piece o' hickory. Ordinarily he never stirs more'n a dozen steps ashore, for in the years since him an' me first started tow-boat'n together on the *Mary Shackel*, he's acquired such a terrible lot o' beam an' ballast that he cracks up an average o' five wooden legs a season. But just put him on the trail o' some buried money, or let him git a yen for a turtle egg omelet, an' then there's goin' to be action—an' sometimes a heap o' trouble. Even so, I'd never a-thought I'd live to see the day when his hankering for turtle eggs would come nigh to bein' the death of us both.

But I better not precede myself on this here egg business. It really starts away back yonder with a certain no-count shark-faced rascal by the name o' Cap'n Amos McTigue, a varmint what is so ornery he would steal the pennies out a blind man's cup, an' maybe take the cup if'n he thought he could turn it to some account.

I reckon everybody on the Gulf Coast has done heard about the last time we run foul o' this Cap'n Amos. That was when we was trackin' down a piece o' buried money in the swamps near Spanish Landin'. It has done been related how Lucius—there was something mentioned about me an' me come back with the money, and how Cap'n Amos come back with buckshot in his britches—a little matter which caused folks all the way from Biloxi to Key West to start layin' bets as to who will get kilt first the next time we meet up with each other.

So that is the way matters is standin' one boilin' hot mornin' when the *Mary Shackel* is nosin' west on St. George Sound, with nine barges o' pulpwood in tow for the Panama mill. It is our first trip out since we installed the new Diesels bought with that money we found, an' there's good reasons why I'm mighty anxious for things to go through without no hitch. One of them is that it took the last dollar we found to pay for them motors; an' t'other is the fact that the radio is reportin' a sou'easter winding itself up down in the keys.

I'm sweatin' in the engine room, proud as a pelican over our thirty-thousand-dollars-worth o' new horsepower—which, by the way, is something nobody else has got in these parts—when I happen to glance out the port window and near swal-ler my store teeth. The island what bounds the Sound here is about two miles nearer than it safely ought to be. I tear up on deck, thinking Cap'n Lucius has done gone to sleep at the wheel. But the ole hop-toad is more wide awake than I've seen him in months, an' he keeps squintin' over at the sand dunes like a cat lookin' at a cage o' canaries.

HEY!" I yells. "Where you think you're goin'?"

"Minnego," he says, my name bein' Minnego Jones, "we're right near Pilot's Cove, an' I was jest a-thinkin'

"I know what you're thinkin'," I cuts in, seem' him run his tongue over his fat chops. "But you just clap a double hitch on your thoughts an' put that wheel hard over to starb'd. We ain't stoppin' at Pilot's Cove."

"Now lissen, Minnego. When we signed the articles together forty-odd year ago, bein' skipper an' you bein' the engineer. So, if I happen to git a notion--"

"Engineer!" I bust out. "Hell, I've had to be mate, quartermaster, ship's carpen-ter, cox'n an' wet nurse—but I'm gittin' durned tired o' playin' wet nurse to a human whale. Sure, I know it's loggerhead season. But this is one year you ain't stuffin' no saltwater omelets down your hatch. Your belly is so big now it gits hung up on the binnacle every time you turn around."

"Ye hadn't orta talk to me that way," he says, easing the wheel over to port. "Ye'll be hurtin' my delicate feelin's in a minnit. Besides, turtle egg season don't come but once a year."

"You crazy buck coot," I says, "we're due for a spell o' weather any hour now, an' if'n it should happen to hit us while we're cuttin' monkey-shines on the beach--"

"Won't bother us 'fore night," he says. "An' in a couple o' hours we kin git all the eggs we want an' be back aboard."

I see there ain't no use arguing with him. There ain't nothin' to do but heave to an' drop the hook, an' then put the dory an' outboard over the side an' take him ashore. I'd rather send Sam, our black nuisance, with him, but I'm the only one what knows how to fiddle with an outboard motor. An' Lucius is one o' these here gourmets what insists upon diggin' his own turtle eggs.

I don't for one second like the idea o' goin' ashore, and' if I'd had even half a suspicion o' what we was goin' to git ourselves into, I'd a' started a little mutiny right there in the wheelhouse, an' taken the *Mary Shackel* away from that durned island in a hurry.

On account o' the shoal water an' all them nine barges we got in tow, we have to leave the *Mary Shackel* anchored more'n a mile off shore. It worries me plenty, 'cause a little wind can kick up an awful chop in a shoal bay. It can make an out-board motor useless, an' raise plenty hell, with nine barges o' pulp-wood.

We are right abeam this spot called Pilot's cove that Lucius has his eye on, so I point the dory to the lower end of it where the island narrows. Trampin' over white sand on a burnin' hot day ain't my idea o' sport, an' I'm figgerin' on savin' some steps to the outside beach them loggerheads crawl up to lay their eggs.

This island is a wild an' lonesome place, miles long an' so narrow in spots you can almost spit across it. The only humans on it is two lighthouse keepers down by the pass. In the old days the pilot sloops used to hang out in the cove, waitin' for tops'l schooners that came up the coast for cotton. Before that it was the o' fellers like La Fitte, an' all the buckaroos that swarmed in these waters. About the only boats that ever stop here now is maybe a stray shrimp fisherman, or a sponger ridin' out a blow—but all you need is to take one look at the rolling mounds o' sand, the little clusters o' palms on 'em and the blue sea beyond, an' you'll know the place has a heap o' past.

I can just feel that past a-closin' in on me when I pull the dory up on the sand. There ain't a breath of air stirring, but from the outside beach a little way over the dunes the surf is muttering an' booming an' slashing in a way that makes scalp prickle all over my head. I ain't superstitious, but I know now the surf was tryin' to warn me to keep away from it.

NOW, on account of his weight, Lucius has to strap a flat piece o' iron to the bottom o' his hickory leg so he won't sink clean to his bilge in the soft sand. While he's doin' that, I load the rifle I've brung take a couple shots at a conch shell to kinda git my eye in trim. There's wild hawgs on this island, an' they're bad critters to meet.

I'm lookin' for something else to shoot when I hear Lucius cuss. He's squintin' way up the cove to where a little inlet makes up in a marsh. For the first time I notice there is a boat anchored in the inlet.

"I'm damned!" he says. "That looks like the *Cajun*!"

The *Cajun*, as everybody knows, is Amos McTigue's boat.

"Can't be," I says. "It's got a white hull an' the *Cajun*'s black."

"Shark-face could a painted it," says Lucius.

"Not unless he stole the paint," I says. "An' 'twouldn't be his nature to steal white paint. He'd jest naturally take black."

"I don't like it," mutters Lucius. "If he's on the island, 'tain't fer no Christian reason. His brother

Scott broke jail 'tother day, an' ye kin always count on devilmint--"

"Can't be McTigue's boat," I says, happenin' to remember something I'd heard last night. "They say McTigue's over at Mobile on a big tow job. Come on an' let's find them damned turtle eggs before the sand flies eat me up!"

So we flounder over the dunes to the out-side beach, Lucius with a sack an' me with the rifle. What with the heat an' glare on the sand, an' the insects plumb eatin' me alive, I ain't as watchful as I should have been, or mebbe I'd a noticed a thing or two an' kept out o' trouble.

There's lots o' loggerhead tracks leadin' up from the surf—funny-lookin' things that looks for all the world like somebody had dragged a dead body out'n the water. There's the middle mark where the turtle's bottom plates scrape the sand, an' on either side is the flipper marks, like the prints of a man's shoes scuffling along backward. Maybe it is this ungodly track I don't like, for I'd as soon eat stewed squid as touch a turtle egg.

Lucius passes up a couple o' tracks as bein' too old. The next one is fresh, so he follows it high up on the beach to a big area o' kicked-up sand. The logger-head has done this on purpose to hide its nest, for somewhere in the circle is a hole containin' mebbe a hundred white, soft-shelled eggs, the size an' shape of a golf ball. The only way to find 'em is to take a sharp stick an' start pokin' around in the sand; when the stick comes up drippin' yeller you know you've hit the spot.

We're pokin' around with sticks when all of a sudden a shadow passes overhead, an' I notice there's buzzards wheelin' around us. One of 'em drops toward a big drift log close by.

Them buzzards give me a funny feelin'. I'm lookin' at that drift log when suddenly I see a turtle track comm' down to it from the dunes. It's the wrong direction for a turtle to go—an' right off I realize I ain't lookin' at a turtle track a-tall. What I'm really seem' is what a turtle track always reminds me of.

I holler at Lucius an' go runnin' over to the drift log. One look behind it is enough. In fact, it's nigh more'n I can take at one dose.

Lucius waddles up, an when he sees what I see he grunts like he's been hit with an ax.

There's a man lyin' behind the log, an' it don't take no guessin' to know he'll never git up an' walk away from here.

II

WE'VE both seen plenty dead men in our time, an' ordinarily the sight o' one ain't enough to make either Lucius or me turn a hair. But this is an unusual *corpus delicti*. It is a short ornery-lookin' hatchet-faced young varmint of about fifty, dressed in soiled whites. He's got stiff, iron-grey hair, an' through his torn shirt I make out a mermaid tattooed on his chest. I've seen that mermaid before.

"Gawd!" Lucius croaks finally. "It's—it's Amos!"

It's Cap'n Amos McTigue, all right. If'n I was blind in Hades I'd know him, cause there ain't another human map no-where with as much cussedness writ on it. Death ain't changed it none. He's still got that nasty smirk on his face like he'd just skint a widder out'n her last dollar, an' was gittin' ready to laugh.

But he won't do no more laughin', 'cause there is a bullet hole smack between his little close-set eyes. What's more, his shirt is still damp from sweat—so I know he ain't been dead more'n a little while an' that the feller that kilt him was probably draggin' him down to the water when he seen us commin'.

The whole thing kinda stuns me. It's bad enough to find anybody done to death out on a wild beach in the glarin' sand but to have it be Amos McTigue, of all people, an' to know that his killer is prob-ably watchin' you every minnit, an' that you've walked slap into something that is not only damned queer but mighty unhealthy in the bargain—

"Let's git away from here," I whispers hoarsely to Lucius.

"Wait a minnit," he says, bendin' over Amos. "It's durned funny--"

"I don't see nothin' funny," I says.

"He's ungodly pale," says Lucius.

"You'd be ungodly pale, too," I answers, "ifn you had a bullet hole where your brains is supposed to be."

"We got to notify the law," says Lucius, frowning. "Bill Brennan down at the light-house is deputy for the island, an' one of us ought to go an' git 'im!"

"We ain't notifyin' nobody," I snaps. "Everybody knows how Amos an' us got along. Now I'm just askin' you what the law'd think when we try an' tell 'em--"

I stop, listenin', an' then I jerk around an my tongue goes dead in my mouth.

Hurryin' down the dunes towards us is four men, an' every durned one of 'em has a gun.

Leading 'em is a big red-faced feller in paint-spattered dungarees. It's Bill Bren-nan himself. Right behind him is the as-sistant lighthouse keeper, a little grim-jawed sun-burnt weasel known as Topsy Dean. An' close in the rear is a couple o' dark-complected sea lice off M.cTigue's boat, the *Cajun*. They is Joe Rossi, the mate, an' Tampa Mike, the engineer.

I could a kicked myself all over for not knowin' McTigue's boat when I seen it.

The gang comes up to us, an' for a few seconds nobody says a word. But there is plenty bein' thought, an' from the looks they're givin' us I know we're in for it.

"Talk!" Brennan says at last. "What's been goin' on here?"

McTigue," I says. "His past has caught up with 'im."

"You mean you an' Peg-leg Shackel caught up with 'im!" snaps Brennan. "Sure I seen you come ashore, an' I seen take a couple o' shots at 'im."

"You—you seen what?" I gasped.

"Jest what I'm tellin' you," says Brennan. "I was comm' down to the cove from the lighthouse, goin' to the *Cajun* where Topsy an' the crew was havin' a round o' stud. As I was crossin' them high dunes west o' here, I seen you two land at the other end o' the cove an' I fig-gered right off you'd follered Amos to the island, an' that there was gonna be trouble. So--"

"Damn ye!" bellows Lucius, turnin' pur-ple. "We come here to hunt turtle eggs!"

"Turtle eggs!" says Topsy Dean, nasty like. "Haw! I don't see no turtle eggs!"

"An' I don't either," says Brennan. "But I did see Minnego grab his rifle the minute he got ashore an' start shootin'--"

"I was shootin' at a conch shell!"

"It was a two-legged conch," says Bren-nan. "I seen it jump up an' fall down again—an' it looked like Amos."

"Hump!" sneers Lucius. "You got damn good eyes to be seem' so much at that distance. Suppose ye tell me how Amos got down here behind this log!"

"Why, you big hop-toad," answers Bren-nan, "you had plenty time to drag him here while I was gittin' the boys off the boat. None o' them could a-done it, 'cause the three o' them has been on the *Cajun* all the time. An' there ain't nobody else on the island, so--"

"So nothin'!" roars Lucius, an' I see he's nigh ready to bust with the bile in him. "Ye lyin' connivin' pusillanimous buzzard! Ye seemed damned anxious to pin the hull thing--"

"Easy, Peg-Leg," Brennan interrupts him, thrustin' his rifle against Lucius' bilge. "I ain't got nothin' again' you, an' I ain't tryin' to pin nothin' on you. I'm jest tryin' to do my duty as I see it. I'm the law in these parts, mister, an' there's been murder done."

"Yeah, but ye orta be offerin' a gold medal to the feller what done it. If 'twas me--" Lucius stops with a gulp. He looks up at the sky, an' his face turns green. When I look at the sky, I feel myself gittin' green too.

That sou'easter I been worried about has come ahead o' time. The sky is black-enin' down on the horizon; a sharp wind is beginnin' to make the sand fly, an' I give it less'n a half hour before all hell pops loose.

"Lissen," Lucius croaks thickly, "we got to git back to the boat in a hurry! There ain't nobody but

Sam aboard, an' when that thing hits--"

"Oh, no you don't!" snaps Brennan. "You ain't leavin' this island till I git things settled. An' I'll just take your rifle, Minnego, before it accidentally goes off an' hurts somebody else."

He relieves me o' my rifle, a matter in which I ain't got no choice, what with all the guns pointed at my middle. An' I see we ain't got no choice but to stay here until His Royal Highness Mister Brennan allows us to go. It's terrible hard on Lucius' blood pressure.

"Now," says Mister Brennan, "we'll have a look at them tracks yonder an' see who really did drag Amos down here."

"Ye can't tell nothin' about tracks in dry sand," croaks Lucius, on the verge o' apoplexy.

"No?" answers Brennan, soft-like. "Maybe not ordinary tracks—but if they was made by a man with a wooden leg..."

We all turn an' study them tracks, an' right there I git a jolt. If I hadn't been with Lucius all the time, I'd a sworn he'd made 'em himself. The wind is fast fillin' 'em with drivin' sand, but even so it looks for all the world like a feller with a peg leg had dragged Amos to the log.

I glance at Lucius. He is turned mighty calm now, but I can tell his brain is workin' forty miles a minnit.

He catches my eye with a look that orders me to be on my pins, 'cause he's gittin' ready to yank a trick out of his bag. I'm hopin it's a devilish good trick, for we're needin' one bad. "Come on," he says to Brennan. "Let's foller them tracks up the dune. I'd kinda like to see where they come from."

"That's just exactly what I'm aimin' to do," snaps Brennan. "But we got to hurry before this wind covers 'em up. You lead the way, Minnego—but don't pull nothin' funny, 'cause Topsy an' me will be right behind you."

It's a high dune, an' Lucius is pantin' like a steam engine as we near the top. The first thing I see as I look over the pa'metters is the *Mary Shackel* 'way out in the sound. My heart jumps to my mouth. The wind has whipped that shoal water into a froth o' whitecaps, an' them nine barges o' pulpwood are bouncin' all over the place.

"Great Jeroosalem!" I holler to Lucius. "I got to git aboard an' start them mo-tors! With that tow behind her she'll be draggin' her anchor in a minnit!"

Topsy jams his pistol in my back. "Just slack off, gran'pa. You ain't goin' no place till Mister Brennan says so."

"But you can't let a man lose his boat--" I begin.

"I don't give a damn what happens to your boat!" snarls Brennan. "I thought a heap o' Amos, an' I ain't lettin' no pair o' rascally derelicts that ought to be in 'the old men's home--"

He stops, for there is a sound behind us like a bull 'gator on a rampage. I whirl an' see Lucius struggling on the edge o' the dune; evidently he has managed to slip off his iron shoe, for his peg leg is rammed to the hilt in the soft sand. He tries to jerk loose, grabs on to Brennan for support, an' then the fun begins.

It happens so sudden that Brennan is took completely by surprise. He drops both rifles he's carryin' an' starts clawin' to keep his footin'. But with a half ton o' human ballast hangin' on to him, it don't do him no good. There's a geyser o' sand as Lucius heaves sideways an' jerks his wooden leg free, then the two of 'em topple backward. Mike an' Joe Rossi is right below 'em, an' they can't git out of the way. They are caught head-on, an' the four o' them becomes a huge ball o' tangled flesh that goes rollin' down the dune, spittin', cussin' an' snarlin'. In the middle o' that blast o' language I hear Lu-cius hollerin' for me to run.

I'm rearin' to run, but first I got to deal with this little wart, Topsy. For a half second Topsy is so flabbergasted that he forgets me. It gives me just time enough for my hands to flick into my pockets an' then flash out again—an now I'm wearin' the pair o' brass knuckle-dusters what has served me so handsomely ever since the Garfield administration.

In the next instant Topsy whirls back to me an' his gun streaks up. It don't come up quite quick enough. I'm already swingin' hard, an' one knuckle-duster rakes him across the mouth for a ninety-dollar dentist bill. The other cracks into his right mitt an' sends his pistol kitin' up to the gulls. An' with that I'm off full speed to starboard, sailin' down through the sand an' palmetters to where I left the dory.

I ain't mebbe as young as I used to be, but it ain't made no difference with either my hittin' or my runnin'. It's close to two hundred Yards to the dory, but I figger I can just make it before that passel o' var-mints unscramble themselves an' start shootin'.

III

I'M HIGH-TAILIN' it over the last clump o' palmetters, within ten jumps o' the dory, when I hear an outboard motor start popping.

It breaks into a roar as I hit the beach, an' right there I git another jolt. There's a man in the dory, an' he's makin off it full speed around the curve o' the island!

I'm so durned nonplussed that all I can stand their airin' my tonsils. The fel-ler looks vaguely familiar, an' at first I think he is Topsy Dean an' that Topsy managed somehow to git down to the beach ahead o' me.

I know it can't be Topsy—for I take a quick look back up the dunes I see that the little wart is just staggering to his feet. It's none o' the others, so I realize the feller in the dory a stranger. What he's doin' on the island don't ever try to guess; all I can think about is that he's stole the wrong boat the wrong time an' that I'm left stranded here on the beach.

I take a despairin' look out at where the *Mary Shackel* is heavin' on her hawser, an' for a moment I'm tempted to run down to the inlet an' try' stealin' the *Cajun* so I can git out to her. But the *Cajun* is too far off, an' with the way the beach curves the gang up on the dunes is a lot closer to the inlet than I am.

Suddenly a shot rips over my head. I duck down behind the palmetters an' start runnin. More shots follow, an' then I realize that the gang behind me has got together again an' is aimin' at the fellow out in the dory, an' that they must be thinkin I'm the one what got away in it.

It sure snarls up the situation consid-erable. I'm in a spot, an' the only thing I can see to do is to hide quick before I'm noticed.

I dive head-first into the nearest tangle, an' I've hardly got straightened out an' caught my breath, when Brennan an' Joe Rossi come runnin' down to the water's edge. They ain't ten feet from me when they stop, an' I reckon the only reason they don't see me is that they ain't lookin' for me. They are breathin' hard, an' Brennan is fit to bust a blood vessel.

He stands there cussin' till I can no longer hear the outboard motor. Then he snarls to Joe: "The old coot's learned something, I tell you! He didn't want to go out to the *Mary Shackel* at all. See—he's gone around to that other inlet be-yond the lighthouse!"

"You plum' crazee!" growls Joe. "Why you t'ink he know something? How he learn?"

"Easy," snaps Brennan. "He could have looked in McTigue's pockets and found out plenty. Or he might have found out something before that. I'm beginning to believe now that he came over here for a heap more than just to shoot Amos. There's a lot o' things about this I don't understand."

"I no like it," says Joe. "You remember last night?"

"Yeah. I never seen Amos scared be-fore. He disappears for a couple hours out in the dunes an' when he comes back he's white as a sheet. Now what could have scared him?"

"Dunno. He still white dis mornin' when he leave boat. Jes' like he'd seen a ghost. An' his face stay white when we find 'im dead."

"Damned queer!"

"I t'ink," says Joe, "you better go quick back to lighthouse. Dat Minnego he mebbe try phone mainland—or else he try find them li'l boxes."

"Just what I was thinkin'. Tell Topsy to meet me there—I might need 'im. An' while we're gone,

git that Peg-legged hop-toad down to the *Cajun* an' see if you can make him talk. But watch out for tricks-- he's full of 'em."

"What I do 'bout Cap'n Amos?"

Brennan shrugs.

"He'll keep for awhile."

"He no keep long in dis weather," Joe Rossi says grimly.

"Then put him on the boat an' wrap him in a tarpaulin. You'll have to take him to the mainland later for an inquest."

They hurry away in opposite directions. But this time my head is buzzin' with so many things—mostly questions for which I can't find no answers—that for the moment I've clean forgot the heat, the in-sects, the *Mary Shackel*, the sou'easter that's blowin' an' the fact that I'm so thirsty I could drink a tub o' bilgewater.

THE whole thing has turned into a nightmare, an' it's gittin' thicker all the time. I'd been thinkin' that Brennan knowed a heap more about McTigue's killin' than he let on. But now I realize I was plum' wrong about him, an' that though he is mixed up in something, it ain't murder. As I lay there in the palmetters, tryin' to git my thoughts straightened out, I keep seem' McTigue's queer white face a-starin' up at me from the sand—an' I keep wonderin' about them tracks.

Then there's the stranger in the dory. He's a piece o' the puzzle that just don't seem to fit in no place. He might be just a stray beach rat that couldn't resist run-nin' off with a good boat an' motor. Yet it's beginnin' to seem likely that he's the cause o' that bullet hole in McTigue's forehead.

I'm tryin' to decide what to do next when all of a sudden I remember Joe Rossi's mention of a phone; I recollect that there is a tellyphone in the lighthouse, an' that it connect with the mainland by an underwater cable. I got a heap o' friends on the mainland, an' the county sheriff is one o' them. I figger if I can outsmart Brennan an' Dean somehow, an' manage to raise the sheriff on the lighthouse phone, it won't take him more 'n an hour to cross over here in his big power boat. At the same time he can bring along a couple o' seamen an' drop 'em aboard the *Mary Shackel*. It's the only chance I got to save her, for by now it's turned so rough that no small boat could buck the chop once it left the lee o' the island.

I don't waste no time worryin' about Lucius. Comin' to this ungodly place was his idea, an' a little dusting by Tampa Mike an' Joe Rossi might cure him of his turtle egg habit.

I ease out from my hidin' place, see that the coast is clear, an' then I stoop low an' set out cautiously after Brennan.

The island widens considerable west o' the cove, an' the lighthouse is hid 'way beyond a big stretch o' dense pine timber an' palm jungle. When I hit the timber without bein' seen I feel a heap more comfortable. The only thing that worries me now is how much time it's goin' to take to reach the lighthouse phone. I try to make my legs run, but I'm so gone with thirst that the fool things feel like they was weighted down with lead. I realize I got to have a drink soon, but the only water I know about is at the lighthouse.

Overhead the wind is moaning and screaming through the trees, an' with the surf roaring off to my left, it sounds as if all the dead buckaroos on the island have come back to life. It's worse when I break through the timber and reach the scrub growth and dunes back o' the lighthouse. The sou'easter is really raisin' hell now, an' I'm near blinded with spindrift an' flyin' sand.

The lighthouse is about fifty yards away, rising sheer an' white from the top of a big dune. For the latter half o' the dis-tance there ain't a speck o' cover. There are two or three outbuildings near it, an' so I start crawlin' towards the first one to kinda size up the situation and see if I can locate Brennan an' Topsy Dean. They're armed, an' I ain't; an' bein' as how they're in a highly nervous state about something, I'm kinda uneasy about the dash I got to make across that open stretch o' sand.

I've clean forgot the feller what runned off with the dory, an' I don't realize what a durned fool I've been until something hard pokes me in the back an' a voice as sharp as a fish knife orders me to reach for the sky an' be quick about it.

"Now hold it, grandpa," says the voice. "An don't cut any capers—or else!"

It's a durned Yankee voice, an' it means business. I stretched as high as I can an' don't move a muscle. A hand slaps over my pockets an' then the barbed wire voice says, "All right, grandpa; turn around an' let's have a little talk."

I HEAVE around an' find myself blink-in at a downright villainous critter what looks as if he'd broke jail a month an' has been livin' in the palmetters since. He's a lean, rawboned, lightcom-plected scamp, dirty an' briar-torn, an' nigh shirtless; an' the part his face what ain't covered by a week's worth o' yellor whiskers has been sun-bit to the color of a boiled lobster.

But when I inspect him closer I see that he ain't quite what he appears to be, an' that if'n he was shaved an' washed behind the ears he might look respectable.

"You durned saw-toothed Yankee!" I says. "You gonna git in trouble some day, sneakin' up behind--"

"Cut it!" he barks, holdin' a little blue-nosed automatic on a level with my stomach. "I want to know what you're doing here. Talk fast an' don't leave out the details."

"Dammit," I says, "I'm tryin' to figger out some way to make a phone call!"

"A phone call!" he repeats, nasty like. "That's a good one!"

"It's gonna be a good one on some-body," I snaps, "if'n I can just reach the tellyphone in that lighthouse an' call the sheriff on it. An' if you're the guy that kilt Amos an' runned off with my dory--"

I'm not," he says. "But let's have the rest of it."

I just stare at him. "You parboiled liar," I says. "How can you sit there an' tell me you didn't take my dory when I seen you with my own eyes?"

"Easy, grandpa," he interrupts. "I didn't take your dory but I'm mighty interested in anyone that did. Just hurry up and tell me about it."

Who th' blue-nosed burumpus are you that I should be turnin' myself into a blankety-blank phonygraph?"

His lips git real thin, an' his free hand takes something out'n his pocket an' holds it under my nose. It's a gold badge.

"Now," says he. "Are you going to talk?"

I SWALLER hard. "Son," I says, "you should o' tole me you was a Guv'mint man in the first place. You orta know I'd talk for Uncle Sam till my tongue falls out with dry rot." So I relate to him every-thing that has occurred from the time Lucius gits a hankering for a saltwiter omelette 'til I start for the lighthouse.

"Now," I says, finishing. "What's all this about? Contryband?"

"Maybe," he answers. "I've been here five days trying to find out. I've learned some of the answers, but McTigue's mur-der throws everything out of gear. And the man in the dory makes it worse. I can't tie him in at all; in fact, I didn't even know he was here. Can you describe him?"

"I couldn't tell much about him, son, what with him bein' hunched over the motor an' goin' fast. He had on a black cap like maybe he was a sea-goin' man, and he wore white britches and shirt that was kinda streaked up with grease."

"He didn't have a wooden leg, did he?"

"If he did I didn't notice it. He acted mighty spry for a one-legged feller."

The Guv-mint man looks at me hard. "I don't get this at all, mister. You tell me McTigue was evidently killed and dragged down to the beach by someone with a wooden leg. If we omit the man in the dory, the only peg-legged man on the island is Cap'n Shackel. And yet--"

"Couldn't o' been Lucius," I says, "I was with Lucius every minnit. And besides, Lucius was wearin' an iron shoe on his spar so he wouldn't git hisself bogged down in the sand. I jest now recollect that them tracks didn't show no signs o' such a thing. In fact--"

"In fact, grandpa, I'm beginning to believe you've got a mighty convenient memory."

"My memory is all right," I snaps. "An' I doh't like bein' called grandpa. My name's Minnego Jones, and I wish you'd stop pointin' that fool pistol at me."

"Okay, mister. I guess you're on the right side of the fence. If you want to, you can call me Smith."

It's not my name, but I use it a lot." He slides the pistol into his pocket. "Now, did anything about McTigue's body strike you as peculiar?"

"Nothing," I says, "except that he was kinda pale. Lucius noticed it, an' so did Brennan an' Joe Rossi. McTigue was a dark-complected feller, but he musta seen something that scared 'im a heap, 'cause he'd lost a little tan."

Smith whistles softly. "You say he was pale? *Pale*? I'm damned!" He sits there rubbing the yeller stubble on his jaw, a funny look in his eyes.

"Say," he asks suddenly. "You got a rod on you?"

"Ifn it's a gun you're talkin' about," I says, "I ain't. But I don't need no gun to git in that lighthouse."

"Forget the lighthouse," says Smith. "I'm no longer interested in Brennan and Dean. There's something else."

"But I got to make that phone call!" I says desperately. "If I don't git somebody on board the *Mary Shackel* what can run them Diesels, there's gonna be nine barges o' pulpwood piling up on St. Vincent's bar in another hour! I don't care if there's a regiment o' buckaroos in the lighthouse—I'm headin' for that phone!"

Smith jerks me back. "Easy, mister," he says, "I've got a better idea than that—and it's a lot quicker. You wait here, I'll be back here in a few minutes."

"What you aimin' to do?"

"Radio the Coast Guard," he answers. "The *Pandora* is standing by about five miles from here, and I've got a portable radio hidden back there in the scrub."

"Fine," I says. "An' I hope you've got some water there, too. I'm near dried to a cinder."

"If you want a drink," he says, "there's a pump at a turpentine camp right back of us ii' the pines. Just follow this pig trail behind me and it'll take you right to it. I'll meet you there when I've contacted the *Pandora*."

IV

WE PART company an' I light off down the pig trail towards the tur-pentine camp. In this kind o' country a man can go just so long without a drink, and if he don't git one he starts turnin' queer in the head. I'm already feelin sick and dizzy, and my tongue has into a dry rag that's near ready to choke me.

As soon as I catch sight o' the turpen-tine camp I break into a run. I can see the rusty pump stickin' up in front o' the place, an' at the moment it looks as pretty to me as the Fountain o' Youth.

But it seems as if fates is all lined up again' me, 'cause I never git to taste a drop o' water out'n that pump.

This turpentine camp ain't nothin' but a one-room shack, which is only used a few weeks during the year when a timber crew comes over to the island to work the pines. I don't pay no attention to it at first, but make right for the pump and start wringing the handle.

Then I happen to notice that the ground all around the pump is wet, like somebody has just finished gittin' himself a drink.

I jerk up quick, my eyes flashing straight to the open door o' that shack.

There's a man half crouched in the doorway, staring back at me. A smallish, hatchet-faced man with a torn shirt and dirty slacks.

He ain't five steps away, an' through his torn shirt I can see as plain as any-thing a blue mermaid tattooed on his chest.

My unbelievin' glance travels from that mermaid up to his face, and as I realize what I'm lookin' at, my heart gives a ter-rible jump like it's torn itself loose, then it just stops beatin'.

The last time I seen that face its dead-fish eyes was starin' up at me from be-hind a log. Them eyes had a bullet hole between 'em then—an' there's a bullet hole between 'em now.

It's Cap'n Amos McTigue.

I ain't superstitious, but I've seen a lot o' things in my day what can't be explained. I ain't sure

now whether I'm lookin' at a ghost or a dead man come back to life—though it don't make no difference which. One o' them is just as bad as the other. My totterin' senses try to tell my legs to start movin', but I've gone numb all over an' I can't budge a inch from the pump.

"Oh Gawd!" I says hoarsely, "Take it away! It's dead!"

But the thing don't go away. It comes me in slow motion, it's dead eyes Starin—an' all at once it begins speakin' me in a hollow raspin' voice.

"I've come back, Minnego!" it says. "I've come back to git the man who shot me!"

"Go away!" I scream. "Go back where you come from! I didn't shoot you!"

"Somebody kilt me, Minnego," the thing says. "He robbed me of twenty thousand dollars! I've come back to find it."

"You—you ain't got no use for money now," I whisper, my voice sounding like a death rattle.

It's not the money, Minnego. It's the score that must be settled. I've a lot of old scores to be settled, Minnego—an' yours is the first!"

An before the words are hardly out the thing's mouth, it's leapin' at me like the shade o' Lucifer.

THEY tell me there was a feller called Jacob what wrestled all night with an Angel o' the Lord, but as far as I know I'm the only varmint livin' that ever had hand-to-hand conflict in broad daylight with an Imp o' the Devil.

I don't remember stickin' my hands into my pockets and bringin' them out fast with my knuckle-dusters in place; all I know is that I've suddenly got 'em on, an' that I'm doin' my best to use 'em on something that seems to be in nine places at once, something with the speed o' greased lightning an' with a raspin' laugh that's straight from hell.

I am dimly aware that the sky has turned dark, like Satan himself has come down to watch, an' that thunder is rollin' overhead an' forked lightning is stabbin' down at us. An' through it all the ghost of Amos McTigue is dancing about me, swappin' blow for blow, an' neither of us botherin' with Queensberry rules.

What with bein' nigh gone from thirst an' fright, I know from the beginnin' that I ain't got a chance. My bones is rattlin' in my skin, 'cause I'm realizin' there's some things a man can't fight. I never feared Amos alive but the resurrected corpse of him is a different matter.

It's then that I take a stiff jolt to the chin an' go staggerin' back. I fetch up agin' a patch o' cactus an' it wakes me up con-siderable. The corpse laughs at me, an' all at once I'm seem' red. I reckon I just go plain hog-wild. I tear into that laughin' corpse, cussin' an' spittin' blood at it, an' swingin' my knuckle-dusters for all I'm worth. There's no stimulant like the feel o' your fist agin' another's jaw—whether it's the jaw of man or ghost—an' suddenly I'm gamin' an' drivin' the thing back.

An' then, abruptly, I don't see it. I'm fightin' thin air, an' things is goin' black before my eyes. There is a clap o' thunder like the knell o' doom; the world seems to be spinnin' about me an' I realize I'm fallin'. I'm fallin' down an' down, an' I scream out in a nasty fright 'cause it seems I'm droppin' through a bottomless pit. I lose consciousness.

It is pourin rain when I come to, an' something huge is bending over me, shakin' me with both hands. For a moment I think it is this dead McTigue that's got me-- then my vision clears and I see it is none other than Cap'n Lucius P. Shackel.

WHAT he's doin' here or how he found me, I don't try to guess. But I'm mighty glad to see him, even though he is in a cantankerous mood.

"Fer Pete's sake, Minnego!" he bellows. "What's happened to ye? What d'ye mean by runnin' away in the dory an' coming over here? What in the name o' sin's got into ye?"

I sit up, rubbin' my head, an' the world kinda rights itself an' turns normal again. But it takes several tries before I can manage to talk.

"I been fightin'," I whisper hoarsely. "I been fightin' a ghost. I had hand-to--hand conflict with a

dead man."

"You—what?" roars Lucius.

"It was McTigue," I says. "It was the corpse o' Cap'n Amos McTigue, an' I fought it. It come might near killin' me."

"It must be a touch o' sun," growls Lucius, an' he slaps me to git up my circu-lation. He slaps me again, an' then hauls me under the pump an' starts pumpin' water on me, even though it's rainin'.

"Now scupper ye, Minnego!" he fumes. "Ye better snap out of it! I've had nigh all that one person kin stand in one day, an' 'it ain't helped my disposition none to be walkin' all over the island a-tryin' to find ye! Why didn't ye go out to the *Mary Shackel* when ye had the chanct?"

"Because," I says, squirmin' from un-der the pump, "somebody else runned off with the dory before I could git to it! What're you doin' here? How'd you git away from Joe Rossi?"

"I'm here because I walked, ye addle-pated ole riprobate! An' I found ye because ye was hollerin' loud enough to be heard all over the island. An' I got away from Joe Rossi because he was durned fool enough to make me help tote the mortal remains of Amos McTigue down to the *Cajun*. 'Twas no job to my likin', so--"

"W-wait a minnit!" I 'says hoarsely. "One of us is plum' crazy. I tole you I jest got done fightin' Amos' corpse!"

Lucius grabs me by the shoulders an' shakes me hard. "Dammit, Minnego, ye've got to git a holt on yerself! Sure, I kin tell ye took a lickin' from something—but it sure as hell wasn't McTigue. A ghost can't give ye a black eye—an' ye've got a pair o' the blackest eyes I ever seen. What's more, Amos is stone dead, an' I've jest finished feedin' what's left of him to the sharks!"

"Um—what—you how--"

"I'm jest tryin' to tell ye what an, how," he snaps at me. "As I was sayin', I was helpin' load Amos on the *Cajun*, but I fouled me hickory leg on something--Mike's toe, I think 'twas—an' at the same time I let go o' my end o' Amos an' let 'im drop. He drops down into nine foot o' water, an' while Mike an' Joe is havin' fits, I relieves Joe of his pistol an' locks the two of 'em in the engine room. Now, Minnego, ifn ye've found your wits again, we've got to git back to the *Cajun*. We're in trouble, Minnego. There's still a chance--"

He comes to a sudden stop, and I see he's listenin' and lookin' at the shack behind me. In a new rise o' fright I turn an' scramble to my knees. When I stare through the rain into the shadow beyond the doorway, I seem to see a dim dark shape takin' form on the floor.

Lucius spits out a cuss word and yanks his pistol out'n his pocket. "I'm a son of a so-an'-so!" he mutters. "Ye musta hit that fool corpse a lot harder'n he hit you, Minnego! He's still here, an' I'm goin' to have a look at 'im!"

He waddles to the door, but I ain't got the power to follow him. I don't know what's in that shack, an' I don't want to know. I've had enough of the whole cock-eyed business, an' the sooner I git off this hant-ridden island, the better I'll feel.

I watch Lucius enter that shack—an' I watch him come out quick. His face is as white as a sheet, an' his hands are shakin' so' that they can't hang onto his pistol. He starts off through the pines as fast as his wooden leg will carry him. I don't waste no time followin'.

It is the only time in my life that I ever seen Cap'n Lucius P. Shackel scared.

V

HOW far we ordinarily might have run in our blind flight I don't know. Ifn his iron shoe had stayed strapped to his wooden leg, I reckon we'd still be run-nin'. But Lucius ain't took a dozen jumps beyond the pump before his iron shoe comes loose again an' he rams his hickory spar clean out of sight in the damp sand of a gopher hole.

He falls with a resoundin' crash that shakes the whole island, lettin' out a bellow an' a blast o' language that scorches the air. When he tries to yank himself free he finds he's stuck so tight he can't

move. I grab onto him an' try to help jerk him loose, but his spar is evidently wedged fast in the pine roots underground an' we can't budge it.

Suddenly he stops strugglin' and looks over his shoulder at the shack. "Minnego!" he says hoarsely, "Quick—run back an' slam that door shut! Hurry! Lock it so that thing in there can't git out!"

I don't want to do it, but Lucius keeps bellowin' that it's our last chance, an' for me to hurry. It takes all the courage that's left in me to force my legs to turn me around an' take me back to that door.

I reach it an' slam it shut, an' as I do so I hear a groan inside that makes my hair stand on edge. There is a rusty lock hangin' from a staple; an' with fingers that's all thumbs I snap the hasp over the staple an' slip the lock in place to hold it, so that whatever's inside can't open the door an' git out.

A man sure does some funny things when he's scared nigh out of his wits. It never occurs to me that a locked door is no barrier to either a ghost or a resurrected corpse than can appear or disappear at will after bein' fed to the sharks. All I know is that I feel a lot better after fastenin' that door; an' just to be on the safe side, I run around to the rear to make sure there ain't no open windows. I find a window in the rear, but I heave a big sigh o' relief when I see it's nailed shut.

The rain has slacked up a little as I go pantin' back to help Lucius. I can't figger what I'm gonna do about him, as the last time he got in such a predica-ment we had to use block an' tackle to git him loose. I'm nonplussed, therefore, to discover he's unstrapped himself from his leg an' is sittin' there beside it like an ole bullfrog, rubbin' his chin an' blinkin' like he's suddenly met up with an idea that's nigh too much for him to handle.

"Jest luff up a bit, Minnego," he says thoughtful-like. "We'll git the leg loose in a minnit. First I want ye to tell me how many people ye've seen on the island today—including Amos McTigue."

I swaller an' try to think. "There's us," I says, "an' the two sea lice off'n the *CaJun* makes four. The lighthouse keepers brings it to six; the feller what stole the dory makes seven; Amos is eight—an' Smith brings it up to nine'."

"Who the hell is Smith? Ye never tole me about him!"

"Good Lordy!" I says. "I'd done for-got all about the feller! He's supposed to meet me here—but something musta hap-pened to 'im!" An' I hurry an' give Lucius the low-down on this Smith, as well as relate to him all I happened to hear be-tween Brennan an' Joe Rossi. When I come to the money that McTigue's corpse was lookin' for, Lucius sits up like I've touched him with a live wire.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" he whis-pers. "No wonder! That explains a heap o' things, Minnego."

"It don't explain the feller in the dory," I says. "Or them tracks in the sand."

"Sure it does!" says Lucius. "An' it narrows everything else down considerable. Any fool could o' made them tracks by tyin' a piece o' driftwood to his foot. An' there's jest two people had the chance to do it."

"Which ones are they?" I ask.

"YEAH," says a new voice movin' towards us. "Tell us who they are, Peg-leg. We'd kinda like to know!"

I stare at the thick scrub growth where the voice comes from, an' then I freeze in my tracks.

Out from behind a thick clump o' pal-metters steps Topsy Dean. I don't know how much he's heard, but there's a pistol in his hand an' a red look in his eye that tells me he's been drinkin' an' is wound up for trouble.

Followin' him close is Bill Brennan with a rifle. An' then, right behind Bill, I am. dumfounded to see Joe Rossi an' Tampa Mike. These last are loaded down with heavy sacks.

Lucius gives an apoplectic bellow, an' forgittin' that he's lost his pistol an' that he's got only one leg to stand on, tries to rise. He flops with a strangled cussword, starin' at Mike an' Joe. "W-who unlocked you two buzzards?" he sput-ters.

"I unlocked 'em," snarls Topsy through his swollen lips. "An' you, Minnego," he says, "you made a couple mistakes today. For one thing, you hit me. An' for an-other--"

"Don't try an' talk without teeth," I says. "I'm a patron o' beauty, an' you ain't very pretty."

"You gonna be a sight less pretty when I git done with you!" says the little wart, an' he swings up his pistol.

Bill Brennan grabs his arm. "None o' that, Topsy!" he orders. "You forgit there's a Coast Guard boat out yonder. We got plenty to think about already. Keep your hands clean an' let the law take its course. Besides, I want to ask 'em some questions."

"What for you ask 'em questions?" argues Joe Rossi. "Much better we git rid of 'em queek!"

"Shut up an' hide them sacks like I tole you!" snaps Brennan.

"I stay here," says Joe. "Dat Peg-leg he mebbe see too much already."

"What you got in them sacks?" Lucius asks innocent-like.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?" Brennan says softly. "Is that why you come down here in the woods, Peg-leg? Because if it is--"

"Phooey!" says Lucius, shrugging. "If'n ye're helpin' to run a bit o' contrybrand on the sly, far be it from me to interfere. I've taken too much watered likker out o' Cuby in the dry days to be worryin' over such matters now. The only thing I'm curious about is who got the twenty thousand dollars Amos had in his pocket when he got kilt!"

This last explodes like a bomb-shell among the four o' them. For a few seconds they can't do nothin' but gape at Lucius. Then they all start talkin' at once, an' the loudest of 'em is Topsy Dean.

"You're crazy!" Topsy hollers. "What would Amos he doin' with that much money in his pocket? An' if he did have it, how'd you happen to know so much about it?"

"A little bird tole me," says Lucius sweetly.

"*Mu diablos!*" says Joe Rossi. "I t'ink Cap'n Amos double-cross us! An' Topsy, I t'ink mebbe you double-cross us, too! Mebbe you shoot him an' take de money when you follow him ashore; you had plenty time."

"So!" I says to Topsy. "You wasn't playin' cards on the *Cajun* after all, eh? What was you doin' followin' Amos?"

"You two tryin' to pin somethin' on me?" the little weasel snarls, givin' Joe a nasty look an' then glarin' at me with his battered jaw stuck out. "What if I did follow Amos ashore? He'd been actin' funny an' everybody wanted to know what he was up to. But I never kilt him, you shark-nosed ole so-an'-so, an' nobody knows it better'n you!"

Topsy sways towards me, hate in his little red eyes. He's had just enough likker to be plum' poisonous an' not give a hoot what he does. "Minnego," he says thickly, "you know too durned much about this whole business. What's more, you hit me back yonder, an' you ruint my three best teeth. When you done that, consarn your soul, you drove three nails in your coffin!"

An' Topsy's gun-hand comes up like a strikin' rattlesnake, an' he pulls the trigger.

I been shot at before, an' I've stopped lead from rascals a heap more ornery than Topsy. The second I see his hand move I throw myself forward, divin' low.

The gun seems to explode right in my face an' somethin' hot scorches the edge o' my shoulder. But before Topsy can squeeze the trigger again I've smashed into him, an' we'er rollin' over an' over, fightin' for the gun.

OUT o' the tail o' my eye I see Lucius strugglin' to yank his stuck leg loose, an' I hear shouts an' a peck o' cussin'. But I'm too occupied with Topsy to tell what's goin' on.

What with bein' nigh used up by my other encounter, an' not havin' time to slip on my knuckle-dusters, I am some-what handcapped. The best I'm able to is slam Topsy around so that he loses pistol in the palmetters. He goes crazy like a wildcat then an' starts clawin', an' I have to bite him to keep from havin' eye gouged out. He yells as my store teeth go into him—an' as he lunges away from me my store teeth go with him.

I don't quite realize this at the mo-moment, for there is shootin' goin' on all over the place suddenly, an' the palmetters all once seems to be full o' people. I don't know what's happened or what to do, so I grab the first thing I git my hands on an' start swingin' with it. It's one o' the heavy sacks Mike an' Joe was carryin'. The first swing catches Joe Rossi broad on the beam an' sends 'im sprawlin'; but the weight o' the sack spins me around, an' before I can git it set for another swing I'm face to face with Bill Brennan. An' Bill is crouching with a rifle at his shoulder.

I try to heave that sack at him, only I know it's too late to do any good I'm thinkin' I'm a dead man when something whistles past my ear an' smacks Bill 'Brennan in the face. It's a round piece o' hickory, an' I see it's Cap'n Lucius P. Shackel's wooden leg.

There ain't no more rumpus, for all of a sudden white-capped sailors with guns are swarmin' all over us.

It's Smith come back, an' he's brung with him the skipper an' the crew o' the *Pandora*.

The *Pandora's* skipper is Irish, an' what with bein' nicked by a bullet an' drenched by the rain, he's in no mood for anything. He lines us all up before him, an' then stands glowerin' down at Lucius.

"Ain't it enough, Cap'n Shackel," he says coldly, "that I should be put to the trouble o' savin' your boat an' barges, without me havin' to come ashore in the pourin' damp to mix in a brawl an' arrest ye for murrder? Faith, an' what d'ye mean by killin' McTigue with so many witnesses to hang ye? 'Tis not the deed I'm blamin' you an' Minnego for—shure, the black schoundrel's been a nuisance an' I'm glad to see the last o' him. But at the same time--"

"Cap'n," interrupts Lucius. "I thank ye gratefully for savin' my boat. Now, if ye'll jest allow me a couple o' minnits, I'll not only show ye who really did kill McTigue—but I'll solve a few other things for ye. All I ask is that ye'll not forgit me when the rewards are paid."

"Rewards!" snaps the *Pandora's* skipper. "Rewards for what?"

"Oh, there'll be rewards," Lucius says complacently. "Somebody hand me my laig yonder an' help strap it on. An' Minnego, ye might salvage your teeth. They're still stickin' in Topsy's shirt. I reckon the little scut needs 'em as bad as you, but they prob-ly won't fit his mouth."

Ignorin' the snickers, I pluck my teeth off'n Topsy an' wash 'em careful at the pump.

"Now, Minnego," says Lucius, standin' up on his spar. "You gotta help me open the door o' that shack an' bring out what's inside."

He points.

It's the last thing on earth I want to do, an' I feel myself turnin' pale. But Lucius is game, so I take a deep breath an' follow.

As we go up to the door everybody turns silent, even Tampa Mike who has been cussin' over a gun-shot wound in his arm.

I slip the lock off'n the hasp, an' Lucius jerks open the door. He starts inside—an' then leaps back quick.

Something horrible collides with him an' sends him rollin' on his beam ends. I jump aside fast, an' the thing runs out an' stands half-crouched in front o' the crowd, glarin' wildly for some way to escape. It's even worse lookin' than when I seen it last, for my knuckle-duster treat-ment ain't beautified it none.

Even so, it's easily recognizable as the unburied remains o' Cap'n Amos McTigue.

VI

BILL BRENNAN stares at it like the world has come to an end. Suddenly he shrieks. "Leave me alone! You're dead! I know you're dead! I *shot you!*"

"You got my money, too!" rasps Mc-Tigue. "You double-crossin' skunk—what'd you do with it?"

"I don't want your money!" screams Brennan. "It's back yonder in the sand—under that leanin' palm! I don't want it! Oh Gawd!"

Bill Brennan whirls like a lunatic an' tries to claw his way through the crowd. It takes a half-dozen sailors to hold him an' put a rope around him. With everybody hollerin' an' tryin' to hold Brennan, no one notices that Lucius is bellowin' his lungs out for help. He an' McTigue's corpse is strugglin' on the ground, an' the corpse is doin' its best to bust loose an' run, only Lucius has it by the foot.

I don't relish the task; but I heave my-self onto the thing to help hold it—an' it's then I notice that what I took for a bullet head in its head is only a smear o' grease.

"What the holy codfish is this we've got?" I holler at Lucius.

"Bring it out here an' tie it up!" storms the *Pandora's* skipper. "Of all the blhoody nonsense what kind o' shenani-gan are ye tryin' to pull on me? I thought ye said the devilish blackguard was dead!"

"I never even intimated sech a thing!" grins Lucius, turnin' what we're holdin' over to a quartet o' slack-mouthed sailors.

"Then," says the skipper, exasperated, "will ye kindly enlighten me as to who this is, an' how ye come by it?"

"This," answers Lucius, "is Cap'n Amos Sharkface McTigue."

"But, blast ye, who got murrdeed?"

'Twas his brother, Scott McTigue."

Blank astonishment meets this an-nouncement. Even Joe Rossi looks as if he don't believe his ears.

"Sure," says Lucius. "Bein' twins, they looked a heap alike, an' with the mer-maids they've each got tattooed on 'em, Bill Brennan never knowed the difference.

"Ye remember, Minnego," he goes on, "how I mentioned this mornin' that Scott had broke jail? Well, bein' behind the bars awhile kinda makes a feller pale. That's how come—"

"But I never knowed Sharkface's brother was a twin!" I bust out.

"Nor did anybody else around here," says Lucius. "I didn't neither till I started addin' things up. Guess they never had no use for each other, 'cause I never hyeared tell o' them been seen together."

The *Pandora's* skipper gives a snort. "Then what was the two o' them doin' here on the island?"

"I'm thinkin' Scott was cashin' in on the resemblance," answers Lucius. "An' as for Sharkface—why don't ye ask the rascal?"

"I ain't talkin'!" snarls McTigue. "You ain't got nothin' on me!"

"You don't have to talk," purrs Lucius. "Them bags will do all the talkin we need. Somebody tell me what's in 'em

"They're full of little boxes," answers Smith, the Guv'mint man. "It's dope, mister—just like I thought. McTigue's been getting it from the Cuban boats and bring-ing it here to hide. We'd have caught 'im before but for Brennan and Dean. From the lighthouse they could spot a Coast Guard boat miles off—and all they had to do was radio McTigue to keep away."

"Durned clever," I says. "But where does Scott McTigue come in on this?"

"He didn't quite come in on it," an-swears Lucius, "though he tried to mighty hard. Near as I kin figger it, he got wind somehow what Amos was doin'. Bein' his twin, mebbe somebody mistook 'im for Amos an' let the cat out of the bag. Any-how, a varmint handlin' dope has to have plenty ready money to operate with—an' a varmint breakin' jail wants a place to hide an' a way to git his hands on money quick. Now, it stands to reason Amos never brung 'im here, so I reckon he musta stole a motorboat an'—"

"There's a launch hid down near the pass," says the *Pandora's* skipper. "But go on—let's have the rest of it."

"TM JEST guessin'," says Lucius. "Ye'll I have to make Amos tell ye how Scott laid for 'im an' caught 'im out in the sand last night, an' tied 'im up some where. In the launch, mebbe. That right, Amos?"

Sharkface's only answer is a stream o' cuss words.

"Seems to be takin' it kinda hard," Lucius continues. "Anyway, I reckon Scott musta took the key to the *Cajun's* strongbox off'n him an' come aboard to git what money there was. An' this mornin' he goes ashore to see what else he kin lay his hands on—only Bill Brennan catches him in the dunes countin' the money.

"It's jest about the time Minnego an' me come up in the dory-an' when Bill sees us the whole set-up looks like too good a chance to miss. So--"

"I git it now," I says. "Bill shot this feller Scott while I was puttin' in some rifle practice, an' we never noticed the shot on account o' the surf. Then he tied a stick to his leg to imitate your tracks an' dragged Scott down to the beach. All the time he thought 'twas Amos he'd kilt an' robbed, so after hidin' the money he—but say! Who runned off with the dory?"

"Your uptake ain't what it used to be, Minnego. Who else but Amos himself could o' runned off in it? Now, gintelmen," Lucius says to the crowd, "ifn you all will excuse us, I got some business--"

"Faith, ye ain't done yet!" says the *Pandora's* skipper. "What about Amos an' the dory?"

Lucius groans. "Ye orta know that the first thing Amos would do when he gits loose is to head for the *Cajun* to settle with Scott. Which he done—only he come back at the wrong time. The money was gone, Scott was dead, an' everybody was out on the beach raisin' hell. I don't know what all Amos seen, but he seen enough to know somebody had mistook Scott for him an' done some double-crossin'. Guess he figgered his best chance to git at the bottom of it was to lie low an' pretend he was dead. An' there was the dory waitin' to take him away from there in a hurry."

Lucius takes a hitch in his belt. "Now, I'm done answerin' questions. Come on, Minnego; we got some business to tend to."

I stare at him.

"What in glory are you talkin' about?" I says.

"You idjet!" sputters Lucius, "I come over to this blasted island to git me a mess o' turtle eggs an' I'll be a son of a plucked buzzard if I'm leavin' till I've found me a peck o' them!"

I won't repeat the answer I give him, but I'll mention in passin' that I'm durned thankful turtle egg season don't come but once a year.