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The Devil's Jaw

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Cap'n Lucius Shackel had been getting the gold fever regularly for years—and finally it took. A roaring saga of the Gulf

I

I BEEN tow-boatin' with Cap'n Lucius P. Shackel ever since he left his port leg in a shark's belly somewhere off Cuby, a little matter which forced us to give up sail and buy the *Mary Shackel*.

Tow-boatin' bein' an easier life and all, Cap'n Lucius has acquired such a terrible lot of beam an' ballast that it now takes a full fathom of 'gator hide to circum-navigate him and hold his britches up. This fact concernin' the size of his bilge is not particular important as long as you don't refer to it within his hearin', and as long as he has plenty of turnin' room and a clear channel ahead.

But just git him tangled up somewhere, and git him riled in the bargain, like, say, that time up at Spanish Landin'—then you've got something started that'll be the talk of every town on the Gulf coast.

There's been all kinds of versions about what happened that time at Spanish Landin', and no two of them alike. You can take this statement as the cold naked truth, as I was right there with him when he fought Shark-face McTigue and rammed his hickory spar slap down into the Devil's Jaw...

But I'm workin' too far to wind'ard. It starts with a little canvas bag that Cap'n Lucius takes off'n a feller over at Pensacola for a bad debt, What's in this bag I don't know, except that from the day he gits it Cap'n Lucius is a changed man. Instead of his usual three dozen batter cakes for breakfast, he don't pack away but hardly a dozen, and he acts worst with dinner and supper. When he's offered a smackin' good price to bring ten barges of pulpwood around from Mobile, what does he do but turn it down and snap up a little job like haulin' two lighters of saw lumber to Apalachicola.

"Lucius," I says to him, bein' his pard-ner with a third interest. "Are you gone plumb daft? Here you go turnin' down or-ders that would take care of the first payment on that new pair of Diesels we need so bad, all for a two-bit job what won't cover fuel costs."

"Minnego," he says to me, my name bein' Minnego Jones, "your job on this here craft is mate, engineer, an'-"

"-and chief cook, cox'n and shop's car-penter when the need arises," I finishes.

"Exactly," says he, "When we signed the articles together forty-odd years ago, there was nothin' mentioned about you doin' none of the thinkin'. I'll take care of that, Minnego."

"If your thinkin' don't improve more in the next forty years than it done in the last forty," I says, "then I'll quit an' take up oysterin'."

"Don't try it," he advises. "Ye wouldn't know a oyster from a trollop."

"Trollops or scallops?"

"Don't make no difference. Ye're too old for either one." He unrolls a map of west Florida on the chart table, points at a spot; and says: "Minnego, ye was born on that there river. Ye ever hear of a place called Spanish Landin'?"

It seems I know of it, but can't recollect it right off. "What about the place?" I ask.

"Tradin' post of some kind back in the old days. The Spanish had it first, then the Frenchys, then every dirty renegade under the sun. Used to be a landin' place for slaves an' contrybrand."

WHEN I hear this last I know what's wrong. Lucius has done gone and got gold fever again. It's something that's been happenin' to him twice a year regular as far back as I can remember.

"Well," I says, lettin' out a long breath and speakin' casual like. "What's on your mind. You

thinkin' of runnin' a little con-trybrand yourself?"

"Minnego," he says. "If'n ye got any brains, dust 'em off. Ain't ye ever heard tell of the Devil's Jaw?"

"The *Devil's Jaw*!" I gape at him so hard my pipe falls plum out'n my mouth and set fire to my pants. "Sure I heard of the Devil's Jaw," I says, puttin' out the fire. "Who ain't? I know it's supposed to have more money buried there than any other place on the whole durn coast—but what good's that doin' us? Ain't nobody livin' knows what the Devil's Jaw is, or where it was located. It's just a bloomin' myth!"

"Tain't no bloomin' myth, Minnego. I got a mighty strong suspicion what it is, an' for months I been figgerin' out just exactly where we'll find it. All ye got to do is help me git a bearin' on Spanish Landin'—then I'll show ye more money than ye ever dreamed existed."

"Bilgewater!" I says. "Why don't you tell Amos McTigue of the *Cajun* about it so he can go git himself lost up there in them swamps; then we'll be rid of him for good. He's spent twelve years lookin' for the Devil's Jaw—when be ain't stealin' business from us."

"Minnego," he says earnestly. "Don't crack no jokes about that Shark-face Mc-Tigue. I'm mighty serious 'bout this busi-ness. See this?" he says, holdin' up the little canvas bag what is the cause of all his craziness.

"I see it," I answers, reachin' for it. "Let's have a look at what's inside."

But he shoves it back in his pocket before I can grab it. "Naw," he says. "I'll demonstrate it at the proper time. I don't want to start puttin' no 'wrong ideas in your thick head."

Well, there ain't a thing to do but humor him, so I study on this Spanish Landin' business all the way in to Apal-achicola. By the time we are clear of them two lighters of saw lumber, I've scraped the barnacles off'n my memory and the thing has come back to me.

It was called Spanish Landin' in my pa's time, but these days it's known as Gun Landin' on account of the Civil War cannon what was placed there to keep the Yankee boats from steamin' up to Georgy. The cannon has fell down into the mud and everybody 'uses it to tie up to when they happen to stop there at night. I been by it lots of times, but to tell the truth I ain't tied up there since McKinley was shot.

It's a wild and lonesome bit of country, all swamp and blacker'n hell. And it's a mighty onhealthy place in more ways than one—specially for a feller what wants to go pryin' around where he ain't got no business to be. It is with this last thought in mind that I amble down to the Bray's Saloon to feel the bartender out on the subject. This bartender he is an old river man, and he talks to river men every day in the year.

He just shakes his head when I mention Gun Landin'. "Better keep away," he says. "Or was you thinkin' of goin' up there?"

"Oh," I says. "I just heard there was good turkey huntin' thereabouts."

He starts to give me some more dope, then looks over my shoulder and lets out a grunt. Behind me a new voice speaks up, raspin' like a rusty file.

"Don't you know, Minnego," says the file voice. "That the huntin' season ain't open yet?"

I'D RECOGNIZE that voice if'n I'd had both ears blown off, and I wouldn't have to see the sneakin' little hatchet-faced buzzard that it belongs to. I speak advisedly, for. Cap'n Amos McTigue of the *Cajun* is the ace scavenger between here and Tampa. He's just a young squirt of fifty or so, but he's as cussed as a man three times as old.

I says. "And as for huntin', there's an I open season on carrion, so don't you for-git it."

He gits purple and mad as a hornet. "Damn you!" he rasps, stickin' his beak out at me. "If you didn't belong in the old men's home, I'd trim you down and teach you some manners."

"Any time," I says. "Any time." And I slips on my pair of brass knuckle dusters what has served me so handsomely ever since the Garfield administration.

The varmint looks at them and he looks at me, and if'n looks was buckshot and I was a regiment, I'd all be dead. "We'll settle this later, Minnego," he says.

"Suits me," I tells him as he starts for the door. "I'd hate like hell to smell up this place with the likes of you."

I'm hopin' I'm rid of him by the time I start back to the *Mary Shacklel*, but durned if I don't run into him again when I'm turnin' the corner at Water Street. He is just standin' there under the street light, squintin' contemplative across at where the *Mary Shacklel* is tied up and when he sees me he grins, real nasty.

"So you're goin' turkey huntin' up it Gun Landin', eh?" he rasps. "I s'pose you're gonna dig them turkeys out with picks an' shovels."

"Picks an' shovels?" I says kinda blank,

"Yeah," he snarls. "Picks an' shovels." And before I can reach him and put a new twist in his crooked jib, he slides around the corner and is gone again.

I finds Lucius at the chart table, swelled up like a sore bullfrog and latherin' at the mouth like a mad dog. Behind him against the bulkhead are two new shovels and a pick, something Lucius has to have on account of he's plum wore out the old ones. It don't take much thinkin' to see what's happened.

"So Shark-face McTigue seen you carryin' them implements, did he?"

"He did," Lucius grinds out. "An' that ain't all. How—how in the name of the blighted sin did that buzzard learn about what I am up to and where I'm gain'?"

"Elemental," I answers. "He sneaks in and overhears me askin' the feller in Bray's about Gun Landin', an' he seen you with shovels. The rest—well, he's got buried money on the brain as bad as you, and a don't mean but one thing to 'im."

Lucius raves, and pours himself a stiff of swamp lightnin' from a jug. When he's cut the edge off'n his exasperation, orders me to git the Diesels turnin' and for Sam to cast off the lines. Sam is our black nuisance, something we'd like do without, but never been able to. I start for the engine room, then stop. "Where," I ask, "are you figgerin' on this time of the evenin'?"

"To Spanish Landin', ye durned jass-axe!" Lucius bellows.

"Lissen," I says. "It's near black dark, and the river's terrible low. There ain't no moon tonight an' the channel winds a snake up in them swamps."

"We're pullin' out of here right now!" he bellows, knockin' over a chair with his hickory spar and nearly takin' down the doorframe as he barges into the wheel-house. "Ye ole goat, I'm countin' on a low river. We got a searchlight, ain't we? Think I'm gonna let that shark-faced buzzard McTigue git up there an' find the money ahead of me?"

"How the hell will he find it?" I snaps back. "He won't know where to look."

"Ye bat-headed lollapaloose!" cries Lucius. "Sure he'll know where to look. Ain't he got the best gold machine on the hull durn coast?"

THAT'S an argument there ain't no answer for. We starts out, me in the engine room, Sam for'ard with a boathook to watch out for deadheads, and Lucius wedged tight in the wheel-house which he's considerably outgrown since we bought the *Mary Shacklel*. Every once in a while I go on deck to cool off and keep an eye on our position, because navigat-ing these swamp channels at night is anything but a pickneck. There's a million and blacker and meaner'n anything I ever seen on the Amazon.

It's worse'n ever tonight, for when we git above tidewater and I see how low the river is, it fairly makes my flesh crawl to have the searchlight pickin' up dead-heads and mud bars that are all over the place. And it don't do me no good to re-member the *Mary Shacklel* draws five feet—which is about four feet too much for a good river boat.

Now, to come back a minute to this here gold machine that McTigue has. Gold machines is something that's pretty com-mon down here, what with all the money that's been buried along the coast at one time or another. I won't go into that angle of it, for I never was a fool about buried money. It's just down here, and I'm willin' to let it stay where the other feller put it. But not so with Lucius and McTigue, and plenty more like 'em. Naturally, you see, there's bound to be a good traffic in gold machines.

Lucius has owned several, but the only thing he ever found with any of them was a tobacco can containin' a lead dollar and a nasty note from McTigue—which hap-pened when him and McTigue was

both tryin' to track down a box of money what was said to be hid on Dog Island. That's just one of the many reasons why Lucius froths at the mouth every time McTigue's name is mentioned.

These gold machines all look alike—a box containin' a few batteries and gadgets and a doohicky what rings a bell or lights a bulb when you git near the right spot. McTigue's contraption, I understand, has a needle what points right slap to the money, so all he has to do is take a bow--an'-beam bearin' and then start diggin'.

The more I think on it, the more curious I git about what Lucius figgers on doin' at Spanish Landin'-for the simple reason that he sold his last gold machine as bein' no good and he ain't said nothin' about gittin' a new one. I know that little canvas bag ain't got a machine in it, because it ain't big enough to hold.

I am thinkin' about this when Lucius signals for full speed ahead, and when I give our wheezy old Diesels all they got, he signals for more speed. So I run up to see if'n he's gone crazy and all he can do is sputter and point aft.

I hardly turn around when a searchlight cuts around the bend behind us and stabs me in the eyes. It don't take no guessin' to know that our dear friend Mc-Tigue has discovered our absence and has decided he'd better git to Spanish Landin' ahead of us. I pop back into the engine room and begin sweatin' over them Diesels for all I'm worth, though I know it ain't no use. Our Diesels is second-hand and we've had 'em a long time. Mister Amos Shark-face Buzzard McTigue's Die-sels is brand new, with half again out horsepower.

So after a few minutes I just give up the battle and go on deck to cuss the var-mint when he comes abeam. Lucius beats me to it. His voice explodes like a bull alligator, loud enough to wake the dead for ten miles around.

"Damn ye!" he bellows, when the *Cajun's* side is almost scrapin' our own. Ye stinkin' pusillanimous riprobatin' son of a plucked buzzard! Wait'll I catch ye! It'll be the last time ye ever stick that worm-eaten nose in another man's busi-ness!"

"Take my wash," McTigue yells back. "You peg-legged over-stuffed hop-toad!" And I see him lean from the *Cajun's* wheel-house and sing out to a feller standin' in the stern: "Let 'em have it, Jpoe—right under the bow."

I DON'T git it for about three seconds, but that's time enough for the *Cajun* to swing square in front of us, and for the man in her stern to drop a big bundle into the water.

Our searchlight flickers across it and in that instant I see it's a tangled mass of old hawsers. Sam sees it, yells and makes a futile stab at it with his boat-hook.

I shouts to Lucius: "Hard to starboard and tumble down the engine room companion to cut the motors. I don't make it in time. Just before the Diesels stop there is a sudden chokin' thumpin' sound, and I know the worst has happened. Both our propellers has bit into that mass of snarled rope an' now they is fouled so tight that all hell won't budge 'em.

I tear on deck again and have bare touched topside when the *Mary Shackel* gives a heave and a jolt that near knot me off my feet, and she comes to a stand-still.

"We's aground!" Sam bawls from tit bow, and Lucius lunges half through the wheel-house window in such a fit as I've never seen him in before.

He cusses and hollers and spits and yells at the *Cajun* vanishin' ahead, then gits so choked with bile that he just sputters like a fat stick of dynamite. And when he tries to pull himself back into the wheel-house he can't budge. He is stuck tight between the timbers, an' neither Sam nor me can move him an inch.

"Blast ye!" he bellows. "Do something! Git me out of here! I gotta ketch 'im an' tear out his eyes! The ug—blug—glump—r-r-r-r-r!"

It's a terrible racket he's makin', and suddenly I see lights flarin' on the near shore and hear men shoutin' and runnin'; and all at once skiffs are scrapin' against us and men are swarmin' over the side. I look around and realize for the first time that we're right by Flannigan's Cuttin's, and that it's Flannigan's

timber crew comin' on board.

"What the hell's the matter?" someone yells. "You got an elephant stuck in the window yonder?"

"You sure that's an elephant?" laughs another. "Hit looks more like Peg-leg Shackel."

"Shut up, you dumb swamp angels," cries Flannigan. "That's Peg-leg Shackel an' he's stuck tighter'n a shoat in a corn crib. Git an ax—git crowbars. Git busy!"

So, for about an hour, there is a fine hullabaloo on board, and by the time we git Lucius free, the wheel-house is a total wreck. Lucius don't seem to be hurt none, but he's madder'n a hogshead of hornets. keeps shakin' his fists at the crowd tin' around him, and bellows for Ilan-to loan him a boat of some kind so he can catch McTigue up at Gun Landin'. Flannigan says the only motor boat he owns has gone down the river and won't be back till mornin'. "You don't want to go to Gun Landin' nohow," adds Flannigan. "That's an onhealthy place."

"It's gonna be a durn sight more on-healthy when I git there!~" cries Lucius. "Ain't there no way I kin make it by land?"

"Sure," says Flannigan. "There's a tim-ber trail of sorts leadin' in that gin'ral direction. If'n you want to risk it, I'll let you have a mule an' wagon."

SO that's how come Lucius, Sam and me happen to try navigatin' the dog-gonedest craft that man ever invented. I grab a lantern and the *Mary Shackel's* compass just to be on the safe side, and Sam and Lucius come on board with a bag of grub and the picks and shovels.

Before we leave Flannigan asks us what in the devil we're takin' them shovels along for. The question nonplusses me, because it does look kinda queer, Lucius insistin on takin' them farmin' imple-ments all the way through the swamp to Gun Landin'.

But Lucius settles the matter as quick as a wink. "Why," he roars, "what the blue blazes d'ye think I'm takin' 'em along for, ye old mud-dobber! It's so I kin dig Amos McTigue's grave with 'em, of course."

We shove off, the hull camp laughin' behind us, and in a little while we are bouncin' along slow through the thickest, blackest stand of swamp timber I ever did see. Now I ain't used to the woods and there's something about the thickness and the blackness of this ornery-lookin' place what makes me feel peculiar. Ordi-narily I don't mind it as long as I'm lookin' at it from the water, but I got the wrong kind of deck under me tonight.

Lucius don't pay no attention to it, as he's got other things worryin' him now. "That hellion Flannigan bothers me," he keeps sayin'. "When his launch comes back in the mornin', I'm just afraid he'll git curious an' bring his crowd up to Gun Landin' to see the fun. I got troubles enough without him."

"We ain't got to Gun Landin' yet," I says, tryin' to read the compass by the lantern. "And if you don't make that mule step lively, we ain't never goin' to git there."

"Now lissen, Minnogo. I'm the skipper an' I'm willin' to do my part about pilotin' this here craft, but by the seven-tailed sin' ye're the engineer an' it's your job to make the durned thing run."

"By glory," I tells him, "I ain't no mule engineer! A mule is a job for a nigger. Sam, can't you-"

"B-boss, I'se a salt water nigger; I-I don't know nothin' 'bout a mule varmint."

"Aw hell!" growls Lucius and slaps the mule with the rope's end. "Full speed ahead, ye lop-eared porpoise! Starboard, damn ye! Hard to starboard!"

But that crazy animal don't know star-board from port, and the only speeds he's got is slow ahead and reverse—when he ain't stoppin' dead in the channel. Fur-thermore, there ain't no rudder or tiller of any description on the hull crazy craft, except mebbe a couple of lines leadin' for'ard which corresponds in a way to the jib sheets on a little sloop. An' who the hell ever heard of steerin' a vessel by the jib sheets?

The mule he has taken a notion to go to port and when I git out an' sorta kedge him over to the main channel, he just stops. It is then that our little black monkey Sam gits the idea of lightin' a fire under the mile's stern post to give him some incentive.

So he finds him a pine knot, lights it and starts applyin' it as he sees fit. It works. It works so doggone well that the first thing I know 'we are tearin' along like a wild harricane has caught us with all

sail set, and the best we can do is fall back into the cockpit an' hang on to the gunnels.

Why our craft don't bust up and spill us all over the swamp is something I never will know. With branches an' vines scrapin' the deck we don't dare raise up to see if'n we're keepin' to the course, and the motion is so rough I can't even watch the compass. But there is one thing Lucius keeps remarkkin' on.

"Look," he says, pointin' aft to where the lantern light flickers on the boles of the trees. "See the water-line? The swamp's near dry."

"What the hell difference do it make?" I growls.

"Plenty," says Lucius. "I was figgerin' on low water to help us find the Devil's Jaw."

"Right now," I tells him, "I wish you was crammed neck-deep in the Devil's Jaw an' that there wasn't no way to git you out." An' those are words I soon had cause to regret.

III

TO MAKE a long an' terrible ride short, our mule starts sloshin' in mud, and all of a sudden he comes to a violent and terrific stop, the wagon tiltin' high on a log and hangin' there. The jolt throws me clean out, and Lucius rolls over the stern an' falls on top of me—which is tantamount to bein' mauled by a whale. Sam helps us up and cleans the mud off'n us, but for awhile I am so befuddled r don't know where I'm at.

Then Sam starts pokin' around with the lantern, finally returnin' and announcin' in an oneasy voice that there is a deep slough of water dead ahead and bog on both sides, and that the only way to go is to turn around an' go back.

"Then let's go back," I says fervently. "We ain't goin' no place," says Lucius, "till we git this critter an' contraption off'n that log. Then ye kin go back—but I'm goin' to find Amos McTigue and the Devil's Jaw."

"You're the skipper," I says, and we start heavin' on the wagon. It won't move on account of the mule has to move and he won't. Sam tries the fire system but every time he gits close with the knot in his hands, the fool beast starts rarin'. It threatens to tear up the wagon or turn it clean over, and we can't afford to be marooned up here with no way out.. So there we are, unable to budge the wagon off'n the log without pickin' up the mule and movin' him too.

It is a hell of a predicament. We hold a conference on it, an' decide the only thing to do is camp till mornin', and mebbe by that time the mule will have made up his mind what he wants to do. Sam fixes us a fire an' a bit of grub, an' as the mosquitoes is eatin' us alive, we just sit there in the smoke tryin' to git a little shut-eye between slaps.

I'm sittin' there, snoozin' and slappin', when daylight comes with a bang. Two bangs in fact.

The sound of it snaps me right up on my feet with my pistol in my hand.

"Naw ye don't!" whispers Lucius, takin' my pistol and slidin' it in his pocket. "We got to proceed with finesse from now on Minnego. I'm thinkin' that what we hyeared is not McTigue shootin', but Mc-Tigue bein' shot at."

"Shot at?" I gulp.

"Of course, Minnego. Fiannigan said this was an onhealthy place."

We stand there in the early dawn and I see for the first time that we re near the edge of a creek, with the jungle crowdin' thick an' black on the other side. Moored to the opposite bank is a skiff. Lucius eyes the skiff, then squints at our mule which ain't moved an inch all night.

"Sam," says Lucius. "Swim over yonder an' git that boat for me. There's a feller in them woods I got to dicker with."

"C—Cap'n," answers Sam, who ordi-narily would fight a buck shark with his hands tied.. "I-I wouldn't swim dis creek if'n there was a milliun on de other side!"

"Ye bat headed monkey!" cries Lucius, "There may be more'n a milliun dollars the other side. You go git-" And abruptly he stops, starin' straight across e creek, his mouth workin' like it can't find the right words.

We all see it at the same time. The long moss on the other bank parts a trifle, and the mornin' light gleams on the muzzle of a double-barrel shotgun. "You all got two minnits to git a-goin'!" snarls a voice, and it is the toughest an' most ornery voice I ever heard in my life.

I have mixed up a bit with tough hombres, but this voice just oozes murder. It takes the skin right off my ears an' drives icicles through my brain.

Sam evaporates in a flash and I make a dive for the nearest tree. But Lucius stays put—mainly because his hickory spar has slid down in the mud and he can't git it out. When he flounders about an' see's our stubborn mule eyeing him, he starts gittin' mad.

"Damn ye!" he bellows, shaking his fist at the shotgun. "How d'ye expect a man to leave this place when his mule an' wagon's been stuck in it all night an' no power on earth kin move it?"

"If'n ye bain't got enough sense ter try unhitchin' the critter," snarls the voice, "then I'll unhitch 'im fer yet" And he lets go with a roarin' blast from one barrel.

You never saw a mule and wagon move so fast in your life. What was left of the wagon, I mean. The mule rares about, tears the wagon off the log, slams it be-tween two trees, an' they both vanish in a lot of kindlin',

"Now," says the snarlin' voice. "Let's see *you* move!"

"Wait!" cries Lucius, suddenly wavin' his hands. "I got news for ye! If'n we's anywhere near Gun Landin', let's dicker a bit."

"Ye're slap within spittin' distance of Gun Landin', damn ye! What ye want ter dicker about? Ye look powerful like revenooers ter me."

"Don't insult me!" cries Lucius, and with a tremendous heave he gits himself free of the mud and stomps out into full view. "Are ye near-sighted? I thought everybody from here to Key West knowed me."

"Well I'm damned!" snarls the voice. "I never seen such a mound of flesh in all my days! Ye must be Peg-leg Shackel!"

"I'm Cap'n Lucius P. Shackel," says Lucius, dignified. "An' the P. don't stand for Peg-leg. If'n ye'll come out of hidin' we'll git on with the dickerin'."

"I hain't a-showin' myself ter no man," rasps this murderous voice, "till I hears the particulars, an' finds out if'n hit's wuth while."

"All right," snaps Lucius. "My propo-sition is that if'n ye'll pilot us around the woods a bit an' kinda act as body-guard, I'll forgit about ye destroyin' my mule an' wagon, an' I'll overlook the fact that ye're probably makin' likker on my land. I'll even buy some of the likker—an' give ye a clear deed to the land."

"Sounds interestin'," snarls the voice, and steps into sight.

MY jaw has dropped wide open at the audacious lies Lucius is tellin', but now it flops clean down to my chest. The voice is a scrawny little old man with a shock of white hair and a face completely hid by a beard. He is just a regular old swamp rat, and he looks so weak an' harmless that you'd think he wouldn't swat a mosquito.

I don't git no chance to ask questions of Lucius about his outlandish promises, because I have to hunt up Sam, locate the shovels from the busted wagon, and then this grandpappy of a swamp coot ferrys us across the creek. His name, he tells us, is Ole Man Kilpatrick.

"I was thinkin'," he snarls, in a way that is mebbe intended to be pleasant, "that ye belonged to that other bunch I chased off a little while ago. Ordinarily all I have ter do is jest holler at a man an' hit saves me ammunition. But these fellers was led by a plum, pizenous lookin' varmint what wanted to argue. He was carryin' a funny-lookin' contraption what looked like a new-fangled phonygraph without the horn. I had ter give 'em a dose of buckshot to make 'em move."

"That was Amos McTigue," says Lucius. "How many men did he have with 'im?"

"Two furriners an' a nigger."

Lucius looks serious. "That's his hull outfit, an' none of them's angels. They'll be back. We got to work quick an' quiet."

"What ye after?" Kilpatrick snarls socially.

"I'm scoutin' around," says Lucius. "Er—on a matter of family honor. Dunn' the War," he says, real confidential, "my paw was one of ole Jeff Davis' right hand men. Jeff sent 'im down the river with special orders an' things sealed in a big tin box. But when he got this far he met a Yankee boat a-comin' upstream. The word had got out about paw, ye see, an' there was spies an' gun-boats lookin' for 'im all over. So paw left his skiff an' hid his box o' orders back here in the swamp. Well, the long an' the short of the matter is that paw never could find that there box of orders again, so everybody said he'd sold out to the Yankees. Caused him a heap of trouble, an' he died a disgraced an' broken-hearted man." Lucius stops, swallows, and dabs at his eyes. "I'm here, mister, to find that there box an' vindicate my paw's name."

"Now, that's plum noble," says Kilpatrick. "But how ye aimin' ter find that air box after all these years?"

"Easy," says Lucius, and reaches into his pocket and pulls out that canvas bag. From it he takes a little contraption made of two metal cylinders connected by wires. "I hold the upper part in my hand this here way," explains Lucius. "I put a piece of tin on top so it'll attract tin, an' if'n there's tin in the neighborhood, the bot-tom part'll swing slap toward it."

"That's downright clever," snarls Kilpatrick. "But where's this here Amos McTigue come in?"

"Why," says Lucius. "The shark-bellied shimpanzee has the mistaken impression that I'm loolin' for buried money!"

"Buried money in these parts. Haw! Haw!"

"An' so," says Lucius, "we got to find that box before McTigue does, or he'll destroy the evidence. Now, accordin' to paw's story, there orta be a cave or sink-hole hereabouts, an' if so-,"

"Hm—" mutters Kilpatrick. "There hain't no caves, but if'n hit'll help vindicate the family honor, I kin show ye at durnwalloper of a sink-hole."

"If'n it's shaped like—like a jawbone," says Lucius hurriedly, "then let's git a-goin'!"

I BEGIN to see the light now, though so befuddled by all the lies Lucius has been tellin' that I can't jigger how in the hell he's goin' to skin out of this business and save his face.

We follow Kilpatrick, and every step I take I git more oneasy. I don't like bein' marooned up in these woods with no way to leave, specially with a back-stabbin' varmint like McTigue sneakin' around where I can't see 'im. Furthermore, I notice that Sam is gittin' more nervous than ever—which ain't normal because ordinarily he's a ornery little coon that I have trouble keepin' out of jail.

It is a terrible time 'we have gittin' to that sink-hole, on account of Lucius' hick-ory leg. Every few steps it slides in deep, and with the gosh-awful weight of him on it he bogs down near to his bilge. And then we all have to lend a hand and yank 'im out. The closer to the sink-hole he gits, the more excited he gits, and when we finally crash through a dark tangle of palmettoes and vines and stand on the brink of the hellish place, he is shakin' all over with gold fever.

An' it is right now, for the first time in my life, that I start gittin' gold fever myself.

And such a tarnation of a place for a feller to git that way. This sink-hole is where there is a flat outcroppin' of lime-stone what has cracked away, leavin' a pit that drops straight down for two fathoms or more.

One look at it and you realize why all these here swamps have such an onhealthy reputation. Moss an' ferns drip down from edge, and the broken stone is jagged places so that it looks like huge teeth about the rim. Ordinarily it must have been half full of water, but owin' to the dry stage of the swamp there is only a little green slime and litter in the bottom, with one side slopin' off in clean white sand.

I don't grasp it right at first, but some-thing about the aspect of the place is plum devilish and

makes me bust out in goose-flesh

And at the same time I am tremblin' all over with gold fever, for the sight of that white sand at the bottom makes a feller want to climb down and start diggin'. I pick a good spot and start scramblin' down the rocks. Lucius is right behind me. And instantly this old coot Kilpatrick raps out an order that freezes us in our tracks.

"Git out of there!" he snarls. "Ye durn fools thet air hole is full of quicksand!"

I yank Lucius back just in time. We lay on the 'rim, pantin', and Kilpatrick pulls up a loose stone and tosses it into the place. That sand shakes all over like jelly, grabs onto the stone, and swallows it like it was a live thing. The sight fairly makes my hair stand on end. And right at this moment I grasp the hull business.

The curvin' pit, the rocks stickin' out on the side like jagged teeth—it looks for all the world like a monstrous mouth yawnin' wide to swallow a feller. I start to say: "It-it's the-

"-the Devil's Jaw!" gasps Lucius.

An' there's no longer any doubt about it bein' just that. For the first time the plain awfulness o' the name rares up and swats me. The Devil's Jaw!

IV

KILPATRICK snaps us out of our befuddlement. "What," he snarls at Lucius, "was yo' paw a-thinkin' about when he throwed Jeff Davis' box down in yonder? I can't figger how ye calc'late on gettin hit out."

That's exactly what's worryin' me. A man can't monkey with quicksand. But Lucius gives me a sidewise wink and says: "It was dark an' paw couldn't see. So mebbe he jest hid it *near* the place. That makes a heap of difference."

With fingers that are shakin' so that he has a hard time controllin' 'em, he takes out this little doohicky from the bag, puts a silver coin on it and starts danglin' it all around the edge of the place. We all follow him, Kilpatrick watchin' close, "Say," the old coot interrupts, "if'n thet box was made of tin, ye shouldn't be usin' silver to locate hit with. Hain't ye done said ye got to use like to attract like?"

"Sure, sure," Lucius answers nervously; "But I ain't certain if'n the box is made of tin, iron or silver. We got to try every-thing."

And Lucius tries everything, my spirits risin' and fallin' so that I'm near wore out from excitement. But he don't git no reaction at all till he tries the queer com-bination of gold and copper—the gold bein' a ring, and the copper a penny. Then things start to happen, only they happen all wrong.

That lower dangling cylinder begins swingin'—not away from the sink-hole, but straight toward it. Lucius thumps all around the place takin' bearin's, and Sam and Kilpatrick and me are right at his heels with our eyes buggin' out and our teeth grittin' from suspense. Then we all let out a groan.

The final bearin' proves the worst. The money is no place but in the sirik-hole. And it is in the meanest part of the hole—where the quicksand is.

Lucius ain't daunted a bit. "We'll probe it!" he cries. "If'n there's anything in there, we'll find it out. An' if it's clean down to Chiny, we'll drag it up w'th grapplin' hooks. Git me some poles!" he bellows. "Git busy!"

I takes' one step and a cold, raspin' voice stops me dead in rhy tracks. "Stay where you are! Drop that gun, Peg-leg! One bad move out of you an' I'll blow that whale belly of yourn all over the swamp!"

Lucius lets fall the pistol he has drawn. Our eyes swing around together. There is a rustlin' in the palmettoes, and Cap'n Amos McTigue of the *Cajun* steps out with a rifle in his hands.

THREE others follow him: his nigger and a couple of dark complected sea lice I recognize as his mate, Joe Rossi, and Tampa Mike, his engineer. These last two are carryin' pistols.

"So," says McTigue, pushin' back his cap and grinnin' nasty. "I said we'd meet again, Minnego.

An' what a deelightful little place to settle our differences."

I am so confounded that I can't git out a word. But Lucius explodes. "Blast ye!" he bellows. "Ye dirty rotten-livered cockroach! when I git my hands on ye—"

"Shut up!" rasps McTigue, jabbin' the rifle muzzle against Lucius' paunch. His voice turns cold as a fish and I'm sure he's goin' to scuttle Lucius on the spot. "You overgrown hoptoad!" he snarls. "I'm callin' the cards now. One more peep out of you—" Then he grins suddenly. "Ha!" he says. "Old Peg-leg Shackel—took me fight to the Devil's Jaw. Nice little place," he comments, glancin' sidewise at the pit. "Mighty fine little place. An' you think the money's down in there, eh?"

Lucius turns purple with bile. I stare desperately around for a chance to slug somebody, and realize with a start that Ole Man Kilpatrick is no longer with us. Evidently he has slid off into the underbrush at the first sign of hostilities, and done it so slick that McTigue never even knowed he'd been around.

It takes me just a half second to digest this fact, and to see that I got to play for time. Kilpatrick, I figger, is some-where close, and is just waitin' for a chance to draw a bead on the hull outfit.

"Lissen, Shark-face," I says, edgin' a little nearer to him. "If you got any half-baked ideas about what—"

"Keep your distance, Minnego!" he barks. "An' control your tongue, or I'll be cuttin' the evil organ out." Then nods to the two dark-complected lice standin' behind him. "Search 'em, boys, an' hand me any guns they happen have. An' Catfish," he adds, talkin' to his nigger. "Run back to the boat an' some rope."

While Catfish is gone, I prays that Kilpatrick will do his stuff, but the old coot don't respond. By the time Catfish returns I am sure Kilpatrick has left us for good.

"Want me to tie 'em up, Cap'n?" says Catfish.

McTigue looks us over, smilin', nasty, "No," he says. "Not just yet. We got a lot of past due scores to pay off but we want to git that money first. An' that money, I'm thinkin', is down in our pretty little hole here."

He grins at Lucius. "Peg-leg," he says, "you bought a nice new shovel yestiddy. Let's see you climb down in yonder an' start diggin' with it. Same to you, Mminnego. An' you, Sam. Git down in that hole an' make it a little deeper."

YOU can't put us down in yonder!" I holler. "That's quicksand!"

"Quicksand, eh?" McTigue says slowly. "That makes it all the better."

"Quicksand," mutters Joe and Tampa Mike together, and Joe takes a step to the brink and glances down.

For a split second their attention is off of us—and right then Ole Man Kilpatrick near startles the life out of me.

"Drap them guns!" he snarls from the bushes, and the sound of him fairly makes your blood curdle. "Quick—or I'll blow ye all to creation!"

Joe Rossi and Tampa Mike drop their pistols on the instant, but McTigue whirls and his rifle starts throwin' lead in the direction where Kilpatrick is hid. I don't waste a atom of time gittin' my brass knuckle dusters in place, and then I'm hard at work. I make a swing for Mc-Tigue, only this Rossi is in the way and I just about take off the varmint's nose.

Out of the corner of my eye I see Lucius thumpin' toward Mike with an upraised shovel, so I dive for McTigue. Somewhere behind me a shotgun is blastin' away and are hollerin', but I am too busy tryin' reach McTigue to notice all that's goin' on.

I may not be as spry as I used to be that don't amount to nothin' when I get them knuckle dusters in place. I hand Rossi another one to git him out the way, then fetch McTigue a scalp-lifter that knocks his rifle flyin' and him rollin' head over heels toward Lucius.

When I spin around to help Lucius, I stumble over a black cussin' mass on the ground that turns out to be Sam and Catfish. They're goin' at it tooth an' nail; Sam has Catfish's ear in his teeth, the thing is

near tore off and you never heard such screechin' in your life.

I kicks free of them and races after McTigue—and all at once I fetches up short, starin' at a horrible sight right on the brink of the sink-hole. Tampa Mike is dancin' around, actin' mighty like he's got buckshot in the pants, and fightin' beyond 'em is Lucius and McTigue. Lucius has his back to the pit, and he is teeterin' right on the edge.

I put all I got in an effort to reach him and McTigue. But before I git there Lucius swin~ on McTigue with such a terrible jaw-cracker that the rascal is out before he hits ground. The momentum of that mighty blow spins Lucius right around like a monstrous top and carries him over the edge.

A great roarin' cry comes from him and he drops straight down to where the quick-sand is

I HARDLY hear the shouts of men pourin' from the woods all around me, for I have grabbed the rope Catfish brung and I am heavin' it down into the sink-hole where Lucius has fell. I stare over the brink of the gosh-awful pleee, my eyes buggin' from my head. Then suddenly I busts out laughin'. I can't help it. Down below me, stuck right in the middle of the quicksand like a great big balloon ready to pop, is Lucius.

He sure is a sight.

"Git me out of here," he hawk "Consarn ye, are ye gonna stand there gawkin' like a passel of booby birds! Ye' drivelin' pack o' pusillanimous riprobatin' scuts! Can't ye see the Devil's got me by the laig an' is tryin' to swafler me down. flurry, consarn ye!"

"What a mouthful for the Devil," yells a voice, and I recognize it is Flannigan, and that Flannigan and his hull timber crew have come up the river to see what happens between Lucius and McTigue. They start millin' about the hole, shoutin' and throwin' down ropes, and now Lucius is ravin' and tyin' the ropes about him and everybody is yankin' and tryin' to jerk him out. But Lucius is stuck tight and won't come out.

It is very evident that the weight of him on his hickory spar has wedged it tight on a sunken log or something, for he can't be budged one way or another. And it looks as if it is goin' to take a channel dredge to git him loose. Everybody is makin' a terrible racket, shoutin' advice and laughin' and yellin', but Lucius' voice drowns out everything else. He is gittin' madder and madder and I never heard such a choice selection of boilin' hot lan-guage come out of a human bein' in all my life.

For several minutes the air around that sink-hole fair smokes and steams with the choicer hits out of Lucius' vocabulary.

Then suddenly Flannigan takes a hand. "Git axes!" he bawls. "Cut timbers and brace 'em over the hole!" he shouts. "Git block an' tackle an' rig up a hoist!" he roars. "An' make it damn lively!" he bellows. "Or I'll slap down everybody's ears!"

Now there is a great scramblin' a-goin' on, and a fellin' of trees and a trimmin' of timbers, and finally they git a contrap-tion rigged over the hole. Then they let down the hook on the end of the tackle and ten men start heavin'. And instantly they stop, for Lucius is yellin': "Wait a minnit! Wait a minnit! I ain't got the box fast yet!"

"Box?" cries Flannigan. "What the hell you talkin' about?"

"Hit's his family honor, of course!" snarls Ole Man Kilpatrick. "Didn't ye see him drag hit out from that leetle shelf of rock down yonder?"

"All right," shouts Flannigan. "Honor comes first. Heave on the family honor, boys."

They get ahold of the rope and put their backs into it.

"Heave!" yells Lucius, "Heave, ye dog-eared sons of sea urchins!"

They heave.

The box comes up, mouldy and copper-green and near as heavy as Lucius. Then the hook goes down again and Lucius makes it fast to the snarl of ropes about him. The timber crew sweats and tugs and heaves and groans; suddenly there is a great suckin' noise in the quicksand, then it lets go of its monstrous burden of flesh, and Lucius comes up. He comes up with a yell, and he is minus his wooden leg.

"The Devil took it from you," laughs Flannigan. "You're the first man I ever see what was fast in the jaws of Purgatory an' got pulled up with his family honor. I'll be skittled an' singed," he adds, squintin' close at the box. "That may be the family honor in there, but it looks a heap more like a peck of money the buck-arooos an' the slavers hid."

"Naw," snarls Kilpatrick, emphatic. "Hit's the family honor." And he tells the fool story Lucius has tole him, where-upon everybody laughs and says Lucius must have a family skeleton or two as well as the honor in so hefty a box.

Well, they settle for the family honor for the time bein'.

"WHAT," says Kilpatrick next, "d'ye want me ter do with them pizenous rattlesnakes yonder?" And he points to a tree where he has McTigue and his outfit trussed up tight. "I'm kinda near-sighted," he adds, apologetic, "or I'd a kilt the lot of them. But I runned out of buckshot right in the middle of things and the best I could do was to ketch 'em an' tie 'em whenever one got knocked down."

Lucius glowers at McTigue, and I say that McTigue and his boys look a roughed up, what with an occasional slug of buckshot in a arm or a leg, plus the knuckle dustin' we give 'em.

"The pusillanimous riprobrates!" Lucius growls; "They cost me a fouled pair o' propellers, a ruint wheel-house, a mule an' wagon, an' onhealthy joltin', an' the best -hickory spar a man ever wore. I'll take it out of their hides, the filthy scuts! Ha—I know what. They kin hike back through the swamp to your place, Flannigan. A ten-mile stroll through this hell's country'll cool 'em down considerable. An' we'll all git on the *Cajun*, Fiannigan, an' ride down easy."

"Naw you don't!" snarls McTigue. "I'll have you up for piracy if you touch my boat."

"Ye take anything to co't," says Lucius, "an' I'll have ye up for trespassin', mal-factorin', malingerin' an' sabotage, not to speak of violatin' the Rules of the Road—an' I got twenty good witnesses to prove it."

With that Lucius turns to Kilpatrick, tells him to bring five gallons of his best swamp lightnin' to the *Cajun*, and then orders the crowd to tote him and his box on board, on account of he is minus a leg.

They get 'em onto that craft and Kilpatrick is back with his jugs in practically no time at all.

So that's how come we commit piracy and float back to Flannigan's Cuttin's in style. With five gallons of panther sweat to keep all hands happy and busy, it ain't no time at all before the *Mary Shackel's* propellers is freed and she is off the mud.

And when Lucius tries to pay Flannigan for the loss of the mule and wagon, Flannigan says the mule has done come home, and that 'twas worth the price of ten wagons to see the squabble and help res-cue Lucius from the Devil.

There is just one other little matter to be taken care of and it is this old coot Kilpatrick. He keeps hangin' around Lucius, waitin', and I can't figger for the life of me how Lucius is going to alibi out of his promise to give something away that he ain't got.

But Lucius don't bat an eye. "Why," he says, "ye just come right on down to the coast with us, mister, an' I'll give ye the reward ye so richly deserve. I'll have the papers made out to ye, and we'll take 'em to the co'thouse an' have 'em recorded so it'll be legal."

And when I look at Lucius with my mouth hangin' open, he says: "Why, Min-nego, ye don't think shovels was the only thing I bought yestiddy, do ye? To dig things out'n the ground, Minnego, a feller has to have a clear title to the spot he's diggin' in, else he's liable to git in trouble an' lose everything he finds."

But Lucius always was a logical soul. As for that box he found—well, I won't go into that, for the less a feller says about some things, the better. But you remember it took both gold and copper to locate that box, and the box was certainly copper.

I'll just close by mentionin' that the *Mary Shackel* has a new wheel-house, built double size to hold Lucius and that she's got a fine pair of new Diesels in the engine room what can turn up so smart a RPM that we can pass any doggone tow-boat in the Gulf of Mexico!