



Sluggers on the Beach

Howard, Robert Ervin

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About Howard:

Robert Ervin Howard (January 22, 1906 – June 11, 1936) was a classic American pulp writer of fantasy, horror, historical adventure, boxing, western, and detective fiction. Howard wrote "over three-hundred stories and seven-hundred poems of raw power and unbridled emotion" and is especially noted for his memorable depictions of "a sombre universe of swashbuckling adventure and darkling horror." He is well known for having created — in the pages of the legendary Depression-era pulp magazine *Weird Tales* — the character Conan the Cimmerian, a.k.a. Conan the Barbarian, a literary icon whose pop-culture imprint can be compared to such icons as Tarzan of the Apes, Sherlock Holmes, and James Bond. Between Conan and his other heroes Howard created the genre now known as sword-and-sorcery in the late 1920s and early 1930s, spawning a wide swath of imitators and giving him an influence in the fantasy field rivaled only by J.R.R. Tolkien and Tolkien's similarly inspired creation of the modern genre of High Fantasy. There is no evidence that Tolkien was influenced by the earlier author, however. A full century after his birth, Howard remains a seminal figure, with his best work endlessly reprinted. He has been compared to other American masters of the weird, gloomy, and spectral, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Jack London. Source: Wikipedia

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THE MINUTE I seen the man which was going to referee my fight with Slip Harper in the Amusement Palace Fight Club, Shanghai, I takes a vi'lent dislike to him. His name was Hoolihan, a fighting sailor, same as me, and he was a big red-headed gorilla with hands like hairy hams, and he carried hisself with a swagger which put my teeth on edge. He looked like he thought he was king of the waterfront, and that there is a title I aspires to myself.

I detests these conceited jackasses. I'm glad that egotism ain't amongst my faults. Nobody'd ever know, from my conversation, that I was the bully of the toughest ship afloat, and the terror of bucko mates from Valparaiso to Singapore. I'm that modest I don't think I'm half as good as I really am.

But Red Hoolihan got under my hide with his struttings and giving instructions in that fog-horn beller of his'n. And when he discovered that Slip Harper was a old shipmate of his'n, his actions growed unbearable.

He made this discovery in the third round, whilst counting over Harper, who hadst stopped one of my man-killing left hooks with his chin.

"Seven! Eight! Nine!" said Hoolihan, and then he stopped counting and said: "By golly, ain't you the Johnny Harper that used to be bos'n aboard the old *Saigon*?"

"Yuh—yeah!" goggled Harper, groggily, getting his legs under him, whilst the crowd went hysterical.

"What's eatin' you, Hoolihan?" I roared indignantly. "G'wan countin'!"

He gives me a baleful glare.

"I'm refereein' this mill," he said. "You tend to your part of it. By golly, Johnny, I ain't seen you since I broke jail in Calcutta—"

But Johnny was up at last, and trying to keep me from taking him apart, which all that prevented me was the gong.

Hoolihan helped Harper to his corner, and they kept up an animated conversation till the next round started—or rather Hoolihan did. Harper wasn't in much condition to enjoy conversation, having left three molars embedded in my right glove.

Whilst we was whanging away at each other during the fourth, I was aware of Hoolihan's voice.

"Stand up to him, Johnny," he said. "I'll see that you get a square deal. G'wan, sink in your left. That right to the guts didn't hurt us none. Pay no attention to them body blows. He's bound to weaken soon."

Enraged beyond control, I turned on him and said, "Look here, you red-headed baboon, are you a referee or a second?"

I dunno what retort he was fixing to make, because just then Harper takes advantage of my abstraction to slam me behind the ear with all he had. Maddened by this perfidy, I turned and sunk my left to the hilt in his midriff, whereupon he turned a beautiful pea-green.

"Tie into him, Johnny," urged Hoolihan.

"Shut up, Red," gurgled Harper, trying to clinch. "You're makin' him mad, and he's takin' it out on *me!*"

"Well, we can take it," begun Hoolihan, but at that moment I tagged Harper on the ear with a meat-cleaver right, and he done a nose-dive, to Hoolihan's extreme disgust.

"One!" he hollered, waving his arm like a jib-boom. "Two! Three! Get up, Johnny. This baboon can't fight."

"Maybe he can't," said Johnny, dizzily, squinting up from the canvas, with his hair full of resin, "but if he hits me again like he just done, I'll be a candidate for a harp. And I hate music. You can count all night if you want to, Red, but as far as I'm concerned, the party's over!"

Hoolihan give a snort of disgust, and grabbed my right arm and raised it and hollered: "Ladies and gents, it is with the deepest regret that I announce this bone-headed gorilla as the winner!"

With a beller of wrath, I jerked my arm away from him and hung a clout on his proboscis that knocked him headfirst through the ropes. Before I couldst dive out on top of him, as was my firm intention, I was seized from behind by ten special policemen—rough-houses is so common in the Amusement Palace that the promoter is always prepared. Whilst I was being interfered with by these misguided idjits, Hoolihan riz from amongst the ruins of the benches and customers, and tried to crawl back into the ring, belling like a bull and spurting blood all over everything. But a large number of people fell on him with piercing yells and dragged him back and set on him.

Meanwhile forty or fifty friends of the promoter hadst come to the rescue of the ten cops, and eventually I found myself back in my dressing-room without having been able to glut my righteous wrath on Red Hoolihan's huge carcass. He'd been carried out through one door whilst several dozen men was hauling me through another. It's a good thing for them that I'd left my white bulldog Mike aboard the *Sea Girl*.

I WAS SO blind mad I couldn't hardly get my clothes on, and by the time I hadst finished I was alone in the building. Gnashing my teeth slightly, I prepared to sally forth and find Red Hoolihan. Shanghai was too small for both of us.

But as I started for the door that opened into the corridor, I heard a quick rush of feet in the alley outside, and the back door of the dressing-room bust open. I wheeled, with my fists cocked, thinking maybe it was Red—and then I stopped short and gawped in surprise. It wasn't Red. It was a girl.

She was purty as all get-out, but now she was panting and pale and scared-looking. She shut the door and leaned against it.

"Don't let them get me!" she gurgled.

"Who?" I asked.

"Those Chinese devils!" she gasped. "The terrible Whang Yi!"

"Who's them?" I inquired, considerably bewildered.

"A secret society of fiends and murderers!" she said. "They chased me into that alley! They'll torture me to death!"

"They won't, neither," I said. "I'll mop up the floor with 'em. Lemme look!"

I pushed her aside and opened the door and stuck my head out in the alley. "I don't see nobody," I said.

She leaned back against the wall, with one hand to her heart. I looked at her with pity. Beauty in distress always touches a warm spot in my great, big, manly bosom.

"They're hiding out there, somewhere," she whimpered.

"What they chasin' you for?" I asked, forgetting all about my hurry to smear the docks with Red Hoolihan.

"I have something they want," she said. "My name is Laura Hopkins. I do a dance act at the European Grand Theater—did you ever hear of Li Yang?"

"The bandit chief which was raising Cain around here a couple of years ago?" I said. "Sure. He raided all up and down the coast. Why?"

"Last night I came upon a Chinaman dying in the alley behind the theater," she said. "He'd been stabbed. But he had a piece of paper in his mouth, which had been overlooked by the men who killed him. He had been one of Li Yang's soldiers. He gave me that paper, when he knew he

was dying. It was a map showing where Li Yang had hidden his treasure."

"The heck you say!" I remarked, much interested.

"Yes. And the spot is less than a day's journey from here," she said. "But somehow the killers learned that I had this map. They call themselves the Whang Yi. They are the men who were the enemies of Li Yang in his lifetime. They want the treasure themselves. So they're after me. Oh, what shall I do?" she said, wringing her hands.

"Don't be afraid," I said. "I'll protect you from them yeller-bellied rats."

"I want to get away," she whimpered. "I'm afraid to stay in Shanghai. They'll kill me. I dare not try to find the treasure. I'd give them the map if they'd only spare my life. But they'll kill me just for knowing about it. Oh, if I only had money enough to get away! I'd sell the map for fifty dollars."

"You would?" I ejaculated. "Why, that there treasure is likely to be a lot of gold and silver and jewelers and stuff. He was a awful thief."

"It won't do me any good dead," she answered. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"I'll tell you," I said, digging into my britches. "Sell it to me. I'll give you fifty bucks."

"Would you?" she cried, jumping up, her eyes shining. "No—oh, no; it wouldn't be fair to you. It's too dangerous. I'll tear the map up, and—"

"Wait a minute!" I hollered. "Don't do that, dern it! I'll take the risks. I ain't scared of no yeller bellies. Here, here's the fifty. Gimme the map."

"I'm afraid you'll regret it," she said. "But here it is."

Whilst she was counting the fifty, I looked at the map, feeling like I was holding a fortune in my hand. It seemed to represent a small island laying a short distance off the mainland, with trees and things growing on it. One of these trees was taller'n the others and stood off to itself. A arrier run from it to a spot on the beach, which was marked with a "x." There was a lot of Chinese writing on the edge of the map, and a line of English.

"Fifty paces south of that tall tree," said Miss Hopkins. "Five feet down in the loose sand. The island is only a few hours run from the port, if you take a motor launch. Full directions are written out there in English."

"I'll find it," I promised, handling the map with awe and reverence. "But before I start, I'll see you home so them Whang Yis won't try to grab you."

But she said, "No, I'll go out the front way and hail a cab. Tomorrow night I'll be safe on the high seas. I'll never forget what you've done for me."

"If you'll give me the address of where you're goin'," I said, "I'll see that you get a share of the treasure if I finds it."

"Don't worry about that," she said. "You've already done more for me than you realize. Goodbye! I hope you find all you deserve."

And she left in such a hurry I hardly realized she had went till she was gone.

WELL, I WASTED no time. I forgot all about Red Hoolihan—a man with millions on his mind ain't got no time for such hoodlums—and I headed for a certain native quarter of the waterfront as fast as I could leg it. I knowed a Chinese fisherman named Chin Yat who had a motor launch which he rented out, and being as I had given all my money to Miss Hopkins, I didn't have no dough, and he was the only one which I knowed would let me have his boat on credit.

It was late, because the fight card had been a unusually long one. It was away past midnight when I got to Chin Yat's, and I seen him and a big white man puttering around the boat, under the light of torches burning near the wharves. I bust into a run, because I was afraid he'd rent the boat before I could get there, though I couldn't figger what any white man would want with a boat that time of night.

As I hove up, I hollered, "Hey Chin, I wanta rent your boat—"

The big white man turned around, and the torchlight fell on his face. It was Red Hoolihan.

"What you doin' here?" he demanded, clenching his fists.

"I got no time to waste on you," I snarled. "I'll fix you later. Chin, I gotta have your motor-boat."

He shook his head and sing-songed, "Velly solly. No can do."

"What you mean?" I hollered. "How come you can't?"

"Cause it's already rented to me," said Hoolihan, "and I've done paid him his dough in advance."

"But this here's important," I bellered. "I *got* to have that boat! It means a lot of dough."

"What d'you know about a lot of dough?" snorted Hoolihan. "I need that boat because I'm goin' after more dough than you ever dreamed of, you bone-headed ape! You know why I ain't takin' the time to caulk the

wharf-timbers with your gore? Well, I'll tell you, so you won't get no false ideas. I ain't got the time to waste on a baboon like you. I'm goin' after hidden treasure! When I come back, that boat'll be loaded to the gunnels with gold!"

And so saying, he waved a piece of paper in my face.

"Where'd you get that?" I yelped.

"None of your business," he said. "That's—hey, leggo that!"

I had made a grab for it, in my excitement, and he took a poke at me. I busted him in the snout in return, and he nearly went over the lip of the wharf. He managed to catch himself—and then he let out a agonized beller. The paper had slipped outa his hand and vanished in the black water.

"Now look what you done!" he howled frantically. "You've lost me a fortune. Put up your mitts, you spawn of the devil's gutter! I'm goin' to knock—"

"Did your map look like this?" I asked, pulling out mine and showing it to him in the torchlight. The sight sobered him quick.

"By Judas!" he bawled. "The same identical map! Where'd you get it?"

"Never mind about that," I said. "The p'int is, we both knows what the other'n's after. We both wants the treasure Li Yang hid before the Feder-
alists bumped him off. I got a map but no boat, you got a boat but no map. Let's go!"

"Before I'd share anything with you," he said bitterly, "I'd lose the whole shebang."

"Who said anything about sharin' anything?" I roared. "The best man takes the loot. I still got a score to settle with you. We finds the plunder, and then we settles our argument. Winner takes the treasure!"

"Okay with me," he agreed, blood-thirstily. "Come on!"

But as we sputtered outa the harbor in the starlight, a sudden thought hit me.

"Hold on!" I said. "Does this here island lie south or north of the port?"

"Cut off the engine and we'll look at the map," he said, holding up a lantern. I done so, and we peered at the line of English which was writ in a very small, femernine hand.

"That's a 'n'," said Red, pointing at it with his big, hairy finger. "It means the island lies north of the harbor."

"It looks like a 's' to me," I said. "I believe it means the island's south of the harbor."

"I say north!" exclaimed Hoolihan, angrily.

"South!" I snarled.

"We goes north!" bellered Hoolihan, brandishing his fists. He hadn't no control over his temper at all. "We goes north or nowheres!"

As I started to rise, my foot hit something in the bottom of the launch. It was a belaying pin. I ain't a man to be gypped out of a fortune account of the stubbornness of some misguided jackass. I laid that belaying pin over Red Hoolihan's ear with a full-arm swing.

"We goes south," I repeated truculently, and they was no opposing voice.

FEELING YOUR WAY along that coast at night in a motor-launch ain't no picnic. Hoolihan come to just about daylight, and he got up and rubbed the lump over his ear, and cussed free and fervent.

"I won't forget this," he said. "This here is another score to settle with you. Where at are we?"

"There's the island, dead ahead," I answered.

He scowled over the map, and said, "It don' t look like the one on the map."

"You expect a ignerant Chinese to draw a perfect map?" I retorted. "It's bound to be the one. Look for a tall tree standing kinda out alone. It oughta be on this end of the island."

But it wasn't; they wasn't nothing there but low, thick bushes rising outa marshy land. We tried the other end of the island, and I said: "This is it. The Chinee made another mistake. He put the tree on the wrong end of the island. There's a sandy beach and a tall palm standin' out from the rest of the growth."

Hoolihan had forgot all about his doubts. He was as impatient as me to get ashore. We run in and tied up in a narrow cove, and tramped through the deep sand to the trees, packing the picks and shovels we had brung along, and my heart beat faster as I realized that in a short time I wouldst be a millionaire.

That tall palm was a lot closer to the water than it looked like on the map. When we'd stepped off fifty paces to the south, we was waist-deep in water!

"I see where we meets with engineerin' problems in our excavations," I said, but Hoolihan scowled and flexed his enormous arms, and said, "That ain't worryin' me. I'm thinkin' about somethin' else. Here we are, there's the treasure, lyin' under five foot of sand and water. All we got to do is dig it up. But we ain't settled yet whose treasure it is."

"All right," I said, shedding my shirt, "we settles it now."

With a roar, Hoolihan ripped off his shirt and squared off, the morning sun gleaming on the red hair of his gigantic chest, and the muscles standing out in knots all over his arms and shoulders. He come plunging in like the wild bull of Bashen, and I met him breast to breast with both maulers flailing.

He'd never been licked in a ring or out, they said. He was two hundred pounds of bone and bulging muscle, and he was quick as a cat on his feet. Or he would of been, if'n he'd had a chance to be.

We was standing ankle-deep in sand. They wasn't no chance for foot-work. It was like dragging our feet through hot mush. The sun riz higher and beat down on us like the pure essence of hell-fire, and it soaked vitality out of us like water out of a sponge. And that awful sand! It was worse'n having iron weights fastened to our ankles. There wasn't no foot-work, side-stepping—nothing but slug, slug, slug! Toe to toe, leaning head to head, with our four maulers working like sledge-hammers fastened on pistons.

I dunno how long we fought. It musta been hours, because the sun crawled up and up, and beat down on us like red hot lances. Everything was floating red before me; I couldn't hear nothing except Red's gusty panting, the scruff of our feet through that hellish sand, and the thud and crunch of our fists.

Talk about the heat Jeffries and Sharkey fought in at Coney Island, and the heat of the ring at Toledo! Them places was Eskimo igloos compared to that island, under that awful sun! I got so numb I could scarcely feel the jolt of Hoolihan's iron fists. I'd done quit any attempt at defense, and so had he. We was just driving in our punches wide open and with all we had behind 'em.

One of my eyes was closed, the brow split and the lid sagging down like a curtain. Half the hide was missing from my face, and one cauliflowered ear was pounded into a purple pulp. Blood was oozing from my lips, nose and ears. Sweat poured off my chest and run down my legs till I was standing in mud. We was both slimy with sweat and blood. I could hear the agonized pound of my own heart, and it felt like

it was going to bust right through my ribs. My calf muscles and thigh muscles was quivering cords of fire, where they wasn't numb and dead. Every time I dragged a foot through that clinging, burning sand it felt like the joints of my limbs was giving apart.

But Hoolihan was reeling like a stabbed ox, staggering and blowing. His breath was sobbing through his busted teeth, and blood streamed down his chin. His belly was heaving like a sail in the wind, and his ribs was raw beef from my body punching.

I was driving him before me, step by step. And the next thing I knowed, we was under the shade of that big palm tree, and the sun wasn't flaying my back no more. It was almost like a dash of cold water. It revived Hoolihan a little, too. I seen him stiffen and lift his head, but he was done. My body beating hadst took all the starch outa his spine. My legs were dead, and I couldn't rush him no more, but I fell into him and, as I fell, I crashed my right overhand to his jaw with my last ounce of strength.

It connected, and we went down together, him under me. I laid there for a second, and then I groped around and caught hold of the tree and hauled myself to my feet. Hanging on with one hand, I shook the blood and sweat outa my eyes, and begun counting. I was so dopey and groggy I got mixed up three or four times and had to start over, and finally I passed out on my feet, cause when I come to I was still counting up around thirty or forty. Hoolihan hadn't moved.

I tried to say, "By golly, the dough's mine!" But all I could do was gulp like a dying fish. I took one staggering step towards the picks and shovels, and then my legs give way and I went headfirst into the sand. And there I laid, like a dead man.

IT WAS THE sound of a motor putt-putting above the wash of the surf which first roused me. Then, a few minutes later, I heard feet scruff through the sand, and men talking and laughing. Then somebody swore loud and freely.

I shook the red glare outa my eyes and blinked up. Four men was standing there, with picks and shovels in their hands, staring down at me, and I rekernized 'em: Smoky Harrigan, Bat Schimmerling, Joe Donovan and Tom Storley, as dirty a set of rats as ever infested a wharf.

"Well, by Jupiter!" said Smoky, with the sneer he always wore. "What do you know about this? Costigan and Hoolihan! How come these gorillas to land on *this* island?"

I tried to get up, but my legs wouldn't work, and I sunk back into the sand. Hoolihan groaned and cursed groggily somewhere near me. Harrigan stooped and picked up something which I seen was my map which had fell into the sand.

He showed it to the others and they laughed loud and jeeringly, which dully surprised me. My brain was still too numb from Hoolihan's punching and that awful sun to hardly know what it was all about.

"Put that map down before I rises and busts you in half," I mumbled through pulped lips.

"Oh, is it yours?" asked Smoky, sardonically.

"I bought it offa Miss Laura Hopkins," I said groggily. "It's mine, and so is the dough. Gimme it before I lays you like a carpet."

"Laura Hopkins!" he sneered. "That was Suez Kit, the slickest girl-crook that ever rolled a drunk for his wad. She worked the same gyp on that big ox Hoolihan. I saw her take him as he left the fight club."

"What d'you mean?" I demanded, struggling up to a sitting posture. I still couldn't get on my feet, and Hoolihan was in even worse shape. "She sold the same map to Hoolihan? Is that where he got his'n?"

"Why, you poor sucker!" sneered Harrigan. "Can't you understand nothing? Them maps was fakes. I dunno what you're doin' here, but if you'd followed 'em, you'd been miles away to the north of the harbor, instead of the south."

"And there ain't no treasure of Li Yang?" I moaned.

"Sure there is," he said. "What's more, it's hid right here on this island. And this is the right map." He waved a strip of parchment all covered with lines and Chinese writing. "There's treasure here. Li Yang didn't hide it here hissself, but it was left here for him by a smuggler. Li Yang got bumped off before he could come for it. An old Chinee fence named Yao Shan had the map. Suez Kit bought it off him with the hundred bucks she gyped out of you and Hoolihan. He must have been crazy to sell it, but you can't never tell about them Chineses."

"But the Whang Yis?" I gasped wildly.

"Horseradish!" sneered Smoky. "A artistic touch to put the story over. But if it'll make you feel any better, I'll tell you that Suez Kit lost the map after all. I'd been follerin' her for days, knowin' she was up to something, though I didn't know just what. When she got the map from old Yao Shan, I tapped her on the head and took it. And here we are!"

"The treasure's as much our'n as it is your'n," I protested.

"Heh! heh! heh!" he replied. "Try and get it. Gwan, boys, get to work. These big chumps has fought each other to a frazzle, and we got nothin' to fear from 'em."

So I laid there and et my soul out whilst they set about stealing our loot right under our noses. Smoky paid no attention to the palm tree. Studying the map closely, he located a big rock jutting up amongst some bushes, and he stepped off ten paces to the west. "Dig here," he said.

They pitched in digging a lot harder'n I had any idee them rats could work, and the sand flew. Purty soon Bat Schimmerling's pick crunched on something solid, and they all yelled.

"Look here!" yelled Tom Storley. "A lacquered chest, bound with iron bands!"

They all yelled with joy, and Hoolihan groaned dismally. He'd come to in time to get what it was all about.

"Gypped!" he moaned. "Cheated! Swindled! Framed! And now them thieves is robbin' us right before us!"

I HAULED MYSELF painfully across the sands, and stared down into the hole, and my heart leaped as I seen the top of a iron-bound chest at the bottom. A wave of red swept all the weakness and soreness outa my frame.

Smoky turned and yelled at me, "See what you've missed, you dumb chump? See that chest? I dunno what's in it, but whatever it is, it's worth millions! 'More precious than gold,' old Yao Shan said. And it's our'n! While you and that other gorilla are workin' out your lives haulin' ropes and eatin' resin dust, we'll be rollin' in luxury!"

"You'll roll in somethin' else first!" I yelled, heaving up amongst 'em like a typhoon. Harrigan swung up a pick, but before he couldst bring it down on my head, I spread his nose all over his face with a left hook which likewise deprived him of all his front teeth and rendered him *horse-de-combat*. At this moment Bat Schimmerling broke a shovel over my head, and Tom Storley run in and grappled with me. This was about the least sensible thing he could of done, as he instantly realized, and just before he lapsed into unconsciousness he hollered for Donovan to get a gun.

Donovan took the hint and run for the launch, where he procured a shotgun and come back on the jump. He hesitated to fire at long range, because I was so mixed up with Storley and Schimmerling that he

couldn't hit me without riddling them. But about that time I untangled myself from Storley's senseless carcass and caressed Schimmerling's chin with a right uppercut which stood him on his head in the hole on top of the chest.

Donovan then give a yelp of triumph and throwed the gun to his shoulder—but Hoolihan had crawled up behind him on all-fours, and as Joe pulled the trigger, Red swept his legs out from under him. The charge combed my hair, it missed me that close, and Donovan crashed down on top of Hoolihan, who stroked his whiskers with a right that nearly tore his useless head off.

Hoolihan then crawled to the edge of the hole and looked down.

"It's your'n," he gulped. "You licked me. But it busts my heart to think of the dough I've lost."

"Aw, shut up," I growled, grabbing Schimmerling by the hind laig and dragging him out of the hole. "Help me get this chest outa here. Whatever's in it, you get half."

Hoolihan gaped at me.

"You mean that?" he gasped.

"He may, but I don't!" broke in a hard, femernine voice, and we whirled to behold Miss Laura Hopkins standing before us. But they was considerable change in her appearance. She wore a man's shirt, for one thing, and khaki pants and boots, and her face was a lot harder'n I remembered it. Moreover, they was a bandage on her head under her sun-helmet, and she had a pistol in her hand, p'inting at us. She looked like Suez Kit now, all right.

She give a sneer at Smoky and his minions, which was beginning to show signs of life.

"That fool thought he'd finished me, eh? Pah! I don't kill that easy," she said. "Stole my map, the rat! How did you two gorillas get here? Those maps I sold you were for an island half a day from here."

"It was my mistake," I said, and I added, limping disconsolately towards her, "I believed you. I thought you was in distress."

"The more fool you," she sneered. "I *had* to have a hundred dollars to buy Yao Shan's map. That gyp I worked on you and Hoolihan was the best one I could think of, at the spur of the moment. Now get to work and hoist that chest out, and load it in my boat. You're a sap to trust anybody—*ow!*"

I'd slapped the gun out of her hand so quick she didn't have time to pull the trigger. It went spinning into the water and sunk.

"Just because *you're* smart, you think everybody else is a sap," I snorted. "C'mon, Red, le's get our chest out."

SUEZ KIT STOOD staring wildly at us. "But it's mine!" she hollered. "I gave Yao Shan a hundred dollars—"

"You give him our hundred," I snorted. "You make me sick."

Me and Red bent down and got hold of the chest and rassled it out of the hole. Suez Kit was doing a war-dance all over the beach.

"You dirty, double-crossing rats!" she wept. "I might have known I couldn't trust any man! Robbers! Bandits! Oh, this is too much!"

"Oh, shut up," I said wearily. "We'll give you some of the loot—gimme that rock, Red. The lock is plumb rotten."

I took the stone and hit the lock a few licks, and it come all to pieces. Smoky and his gang had come to, and they watched us wanly. Suez Kit fidgeted around behind us, and I heard her breath coming in pants. Red throwed open the lid. They was a second of painful silence, and then Suez Kit let out an awful scream and staggered back, her hands to her head. Hanigan and his mob lifted up their voices in lamentation.

That chest wasn't full of silver, nor platinum, nor jewels. It was full of machine-gun cartridges!

"Bullets!" said Hoolihan, kinda numbly. "No wonder Yao Shan was willing to sell the map. 'More precious than gold,' he said. Of course, this ammunition *was* more precious than gold to a bandit chief. Steve, I'm sick!"

So was Smoky and his gang. And Suez Kit wept like she'd sot on a hornet.

"Steve," said Red, as him and me limped towards our boat whilst the sounds of weeping and wailing riz behind us, "was it because I kept Donovan from blowin' your head off that you decided to split the treasure with me?"

"Do I look like a cheapskate?" I snapped. "I knowed from the first that I was going to split with you."

"Then why in the name of thunderation," he bellered, turning purple in the face, "did you have to beat me up like you done, when you was intendin' to split anyway? What was we fightin' about, anyway?"

"You might of been fightin' for the loot," I roared, brandishing my fists in his face, "but I was merely convincin' you who was the best man."

"Well, I ain't convinced," he bellered, waving *his* fists. "It was the sand and the sun which licked me, not you. We'll settle this in the ring tonight, at the Amusement Palace."

"Let's go!" I yelled, leaping into the launch. "I'm itchin' to prove to the customers that you're as big a flop as a fighter as you were as a referee."

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