

# ***Berber Loot***

**H. Bedford Jones**

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*Title:* Berber Loot

*Date of first publication:* 1933

*Author:* Henry Bedford-Jones (1887-1949)

*Date first posted:* Aug. 18, 2022

*Date last updated:* Aug. 18, 2022

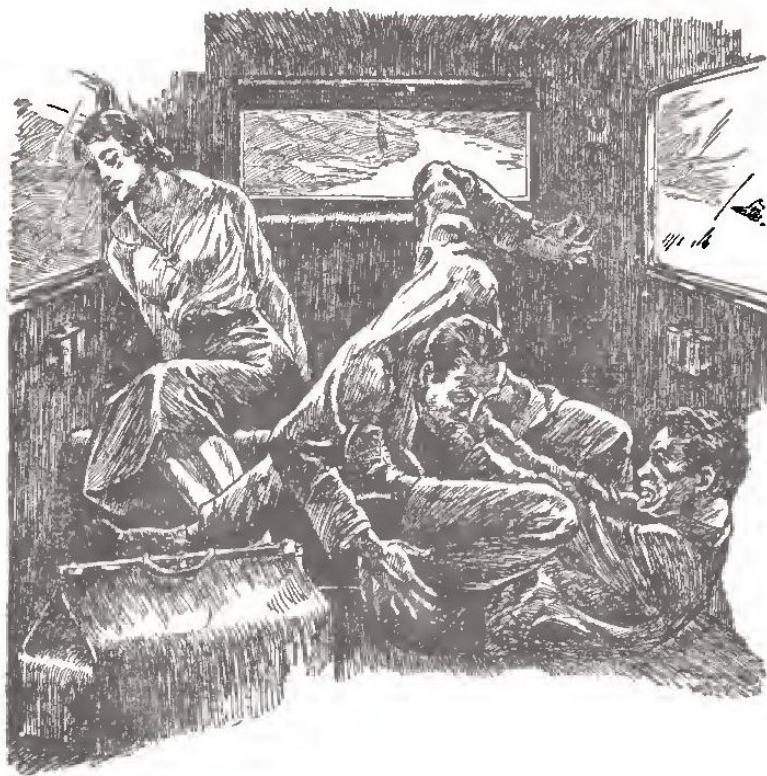
Faded Page eBook #20220836

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# Berber Loot

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

*The story of a madcap adventure in Morocco, told as only Bedford-Jones can tell it—a story of thrills, romance, and sudden death, in a wild hunt for stolen treasure*



*“The unbound fingers gripped his throat like iron bands.”*

ennessy was a tough egg, any way you looked at him, and at the present moment he was in a tough place.

**H**is cap, his attire, his fingers, the silver Senegal coins he handed out, all showed that he was from the engine room of the tramp. She had just arrived in Casablanca from Dakar. He was bronzed, efficient, scarred, with a warm but deceptive grin.

Croghan, lean and dark, sat beside him. They drank, and watched the Berber dancers whose thudding feet seemed about to tear the platform apart. Shipmates two years previously, they had met here in Morocco, by sheer accident, half an hour ago.

Croghan seemed at home here. This was the one place in Casablanca where they might have met. It was the new "*ville Arabe*," expressly designed for pleasure. And it was the one place where Croghan could tell his amazing story in safety. The squealing fifes and fiddles, the monotonously beating drums, the iron heels of the Berber men thudding dust from the planks, all served to cover up his words.

The room was long and low. At one end, a platform held a score of Berber men and boys, the platformers. The trestles were crowded with girls of all shades from pitch-black to white, and with all sorts of men—Arabs, Berbers, French civilians and tourists. Occasionally one of the fuzzy-haired girls would approach the two men who sat talking together, only to be sent away by a negative gesture from Hennessy. Men and girls were coming in or leaving every moment, causing a continual flow of movement in the place.

As the police agents in the streets outside, and at the entrance gates, bore witness, this was a place created not alone for the native quarter, in this comparatively new city of Casablanca, but for every one—and for the amusement of every one. From down the street came other music, indicating Arab dancing, and the bustle and stir on every hand showed that the night had just begun for this Moroccan underworld.

Hennessy gave the dark Croghan a hard, level look.

"Are you talking stage money, Frog dough, or cold cash?" he demanded.

"All kinds, cash included," said Croghan. "The Berber who told me about it was one of this crowd right here. Met him here last night and he recognized me right off. He was going to meet me tonight. And half an hour after telling me, from what I can learn, somebody cut out his gizzard. I mean just that, too; you know, these natives think a knife is meant to rip any one from the ribs down——"

“Keep to the point,” said Hennessy. “How come this Berber recognized you?”

“I was running guns up into the hills last year. Rather, acting as agent for the main guy, and collecting,” said Croghan. “That’s all ended now, of course. Durell, the head of the outfit, is here in Casablanca now. I quit the game and have been running an auto stage to Rabat and Fez the last few months. Are you interested or not?”

“In fifty thousand dollars? Boy, you said it,” Hennessy assured him.

“All right, then listen,” said Croghan, dropping his voice. “During the troubles, this Berber and some of his pals raided the hill castle of a pacha; you know, the Berbers hate all the pachas, who are held in power by the French. They got the old boy’s loot, got away, and then set in to kill each other off for the loot.

“This Berber of mine, and another named M’tel, double-crossed the rest of the outfit and cleared out with the loot. They ran afoul of a French column and were captured, but hid the stuff first. They were sent up for two years each, to different prisons. M’tel was sent to Marrakesh, but my chap went to the prison at Rabat. That’s where I got next to him—he fixed it for me to get in touch with his people and so forth, about the munitions.”

So Croghan had been in prison, then! Hennessy sipped his mint tea and said nothing.

“Day before yesterday, time was up for them both,” said Croghan. “This bunch of Berbers met my friend in Rabat and came down here to keep their dancing engagement; I dropped in last night, and all was jake. The other one, M’tel, is in bad with his tribe. Most likely, he came along and knifed my friend. I had a hint he had thrown in with Durell, the same chap——”

“Say, listen!” broke in Hennessy abruptly, “Is this some pipe-dream or what?”

Croghan leaned forward earnestly, sweat standing out on his forehead, a snarl on his thin lips, his dark eyes blazing at Hennessy.

“Cash: banknotes and gold! Is that a pipe-dream, you fool? I know exactly where it’s hidden. I can get it.”

“What I want to know,” said Hennessy, “is why somebody——”

“I don’t give a hang what you want to know,” snapped Croghan. “I can answer every argument you put up, explain everything you don’t understand; but not here and now. I’ve no time. I’ve got to get somebody to

lend a hand with this job, because M'tel and that chap Durell will be after the stuff in no time. If you want in on it, say so—yes or no. A fifty-fifty split.”

Hennessy grinned.

“Agreed,” he said. “When do we start?”

“In an hour, if you can be free of your ship in that time.”

“I can so,” said Hennessy promptly. “All I have to do is get my pay from the Old Man and leave her. He can ship a dozen engineers here, and he knows it. Will you come to the dock for me?”

“Not much,” said Croghan. “I’m scared, I tell you; I’ll not monkey around the port at night! Hennessy, I’m plenty tough, and so are you, but let me tell you that we’re up against a bad gang if Durell is in on this. Let’s separate here and now. Meet in an hour’s time at my hotel, the Bonaparte. It’s a little joint, clean and honest, in Rue Bonaparte. I’ll have my car ready.”

“Okeh, feller,” said Hennessy. “Your car? Where do we go, then?”

“A hell of a long way,” said Croghan, and drained his glass. Then he started and set down the glass abruptly, and slid from the bench. His hand gripped Hennessy’s shoulder for an instant. “Look there—the chap with the chauffeur’s coat! That’s Durell himself. So long.”

Croghan was gone, through one of the several exits—gone like an eel.

**H**ennessy drew down his brows and looked at the man swaggering in, seeking an empty place at the long table. He wore the white dust-coat of a chauffeur, and a cap pulled over one ear, but he was clearly no chauffeur. His figure was lean, spare, powerful, his high-boned face was framed by black hair, sideburns, and centered by a short black mustache. It showed hard and ruthless lines, an expression of cool effrontery and the nerve to back it up. It was plain that Durell was well known here. Some called to him, others glanced at him and muttered hastily to their neighbors. Durell waved his hand, sauntered along, and slipped into the place just vacated by Croghan.

Hennessy sipped his mint tea, and stared at a soldier and a half-caste girl opposite.

“If you know what’s good for you,” said a voice in faintly accented English, somewhere close at hand, “you’ll get back to your ship and leave

that rascal Croghan alone.”

Hennessy glanced around, but no one was paying any attention to him. Durell had just given an order to the waiter and was breaking open a packet of “jaunes.” As he selected a cigarette, Hennessy shoved a package of matches along the board.

“Thanks,” he said. “Have a light.”

Durell glanced up swiftly and met his gaze. The dark, vivid eyes struck against the calm, laughing gray ones, and a smile curved Durell’s hard lips.

“Obliged to you,” he said. “Stranger here?”

Hennessy nodded. “You seem to know,” he said amiably. Durell surveyed his clear, laughing eyes, his heavily built, strong features, his wide shoulders, and shrugged.

“Better take my advice, my friend. Croghan ignored it; he’ll be sorry, within the next half-hour. Better take it.”

“Thanks, I will,” said Hennessy, and rose. “I’m back to the ship right now.”

He started for the door that gave on the street. Half-way to it, two Frenchmen wearing the blouses, red sashes and voluminous corduroys of workmen, suddenly seized on a girl who was passing them—a girl whose tattooed white forehead showed she was a Berber. One grasped her hair, the other caught her arms, and the first tried to empty a cognac bottle down her throat.

Amid the rough horse-play all around, the scene was unnoted, except to provoke laughter, but Hennessy caught a glimpse of the girl’s face, and the stark fright in it jerked him into action. With a shove, he sent the first man reeling headlong into the wall, and his fist smashed into the face of the second man, who was knocked sprawling. The first man came to his feet like a cat, a knife glittered, shrill screams went up; but Hennessy crashed in a blow that doubled the man up in agony.

Then, elbowing a way out, Hennessy left the tumult behind him and slipped into the night, well aware of the police consequences for using fists—something abhorrent to the French taste. He strode down the street to the entrance, whose significant posters on either hand indicated the character of the place, and so to the line of taxicabs waiting outside the wall. Two minutes later, he was on his way back to town and the waterfront.

He settled back comfortably in the car and thought of Croghan. He knew perfectly well that Croghan was unscrupulous, hard as nails, and a distinct social liability; on the other hand, he was dependable and resourceful. Hennessy was no shining society light himself. Having knocked around the French and Mediterranean ports considerably, he had a working knowledge of impolite French; while his ability to handle recalcitrant men and at the same time take care of himself, resembled that of an old-time bucko mate. The engine room is not a school of polite manners.

That Croghan had been pursuing fickle fortune in Morocco for the past couple of years, doing everything from filibustering to killing jail lice, did not convince Hennessy that his yarn of Berber loot held any truth. What did appeal to Hennessy was the intervention of this Durell, and the fact that Durell had been keeping a watch on Croghan, as his words proved.

“He’ll be having me followed, too,” reflected Hennessy cheerfully. “So I’ll stop long enough aboard ship to convince him. Then I’ll slip off up the docks. Hm! Not far uptown, and this Rue Bonaparte isn’t a great way off. I’ll walk. If Croghan is waiting, I’ll take a chance with him. If not——”

Would Croghan be waiting? He strongly doubted it. Durell’s words showed that something was in store for Mr. Croghan, and something distinctly unpleasant. On the contrary, Hennessy was well acquainted with Croghan’s innate abilities. The odds were about even.

Having been in port for three days, Hennessy was by no means loth to throw up his job and go careering off on a wild gold-hunt in Morocco. With Croghan as cicerone, there would be nothing tame about the trip—even leaving himself out. It might end in jail, or worse, but it would certainly not lack in excitement. Croghan certainly believed in the existence of this loot.

“It’s plausible, anyhow,” decided Hennessy, and dismissed further arguments.

Forty minutes later, without the least misadventure and without being followed so far as he could tell, Hennessy approached the Hotel Bonaparte on foot. It was a small hotel in a small street well down from the old Arab town. As he drew near, the lights of a car standing before the hotel entrance were flashed on, and he heard Croghan’s voice.

“If that’s you, Red, hop in and do it quick.”

Hennessy, whose hair was not red but close enough to it to get him the name, quickened his pace. The car was a small but powerful Fiat sedan.

“Step lively,” said Croghan. “Can you drive this outfit?”



“Me? I can drive anything,” returned Hennessy.

“Then get under the wheel and let’s go,” ordered Croghan, his voice urgent. “Straight down past the docks to hit the Rabat road. Don’t switch on any dashlights, either.”

Hennessy obeyed. As he settled under the wheel he was aware of Croghan’s dim figure at his side, and sniffed.

“What you so blamed busy at? Smells like blood.”

“It is,” snapped Croghan. “Found two birds up in my room laying for me. They’re still there and I’ve got repairs to make. Hurry and get out of here, blast you!”

The gears clashed. A moment later the Fiat went roaring down the street, and Red Hennessy was off on the trail of Berber loot.

## 2

A few miles outside Casablanca, on the straight paved highway following the coast, Hennessy pulled out of the road and halted. Under the headlights of the car, he assisted Croghan in his repair job.

This was no elaborate matter. Croghan had suffered a number of slight cuts about the arms and hands, which momentarily interfered with his driving, and a life-preserver had given him a nasty rap over the ear, but he was quite content.

“You should see those two birds who laid for me!” he observed darkly. “Luckily, I knew Durell’s little ways, and kept my eye peeled.”

“No police around?” queried Hennessy. The other sniffed.

“Police? You don’t know this country; anything goes! Between the native police and the French police, the double court and jail system and so forth, you can get away with murder. This isn’t part of France, but a separate country so far.”

Hennessy started the car again and related his encounter with Durell, touching briefly on the incident of the Berber girl. At this, Croghan cursed.

“Durell will have the cops after you for that, sure! Why didn’t you kick, instead of hitting—don’t you know the French yet? So he had you spotted, eh? Sure, I knew I’d been trailed for the past day anyhow.”

“Well, produce some information,” said Hennessy. “How do you know this money has been lying untouched all this time, huh? Why didn’t those two Berbers send somebody for it?”

“Nobody to trust,” replied Croghan. “You don’t know this country. Anybody would cut his own brother’s throat for a tenth part of that coin, Red! And the French would grab it in a minute if they caught on. No, that cash is lying under a boundary rock up in the hills, fifty feet off a road, an hour’s drive outside Fez.”

“Lying under a rock!” repeated Hennessy in scornful accents.

“Yeah. Boundary rocks don’t get moved in those parts, without bullets flying. When these two chaps got caught by the French, they slipped the money under that rock, and it’s still lying there, all right.”

“Maybe. Once out of jail, why didn’t either of ’em head straight for the spot? Especially if it was a question of which one got there first?”

“Why did my friend take me in on the deal? Why has the other chap, M’tel, taken Durell in with him?” responded Croghan. “Allee same need help to dispose of the loot; the country isn’t what it was a couple of years ago. There’s slathers of buried money, but not banknotes. An unknown Berber can’t walk into a foreign bank with that amount of money and cash in on it, not without questions asked! But one of us can. Have you got a gun?”

“Two,” said Hennessy. “Well, what’s your program? How far is this place Fez from here?”

“Let’s see. Ninety-two from here to Rabat; from there to Meknez, a hundred and forty; from there to Fez, sixty more. That’s nearly three hundred.”

“Miles?”

“No, you nut! Kilometers. About a hundred and seventy-five miles.”

“That’s easy,” declared Hennessy, with a laugh. “No speed limit in this country, I hear. We’ll tap your rock sometime tomorrow morning—it isn’t eleven yet. Good roads, too.”

“Sure. Only, Durell will know that we’re on the way. He’s got a Cadillac.”

Hennessy stepped on the gas. The needle rose to a hundred, and passed it.

“We’re doing sixty now, in miles. Suit you?”

“This is no race, Red,” said Croghan bitterly. “Get that out of your head. Durell ain’t in any great rush. He’s got a pull, get me? All he has to do is telephone on to Rabat or Meknez, and have us pinched or else met by some of his gang.”

“Well, what d’you expect to do? Fly?” asked Hennessy. “Can’t we cut around those towns?”

“Not a chance. No network of roads in this country. Have you any papers?”

“Nary a one,” said Hennessy cheerfully. “The skipper promised to leave the necessary documents at the consulate in the morning, with my pay.”

“Then you’re in dutch if the police hop on us. Maybe Durell will stick to his own gang, though.” Croghan lit a cigarette, passed it to Hennessy, and lit another for himself.

“Well, what’s your program?” asked Hennessy. “Crowd her through regardless?”

“You bet. Suit you?”

“Okeh by me, feller.”

They swept on by hill and dale, once the coast was abandoned, then swooped down long valleys, leaving the occasional farms and old towers to right and left, the rolling boom of surf coming to them again to speak of the returning shores.

Twice they plunged across great chasms on suspension bridges, the road following the railroad rails with what seemed to be a dizzy lack of appreciation of any danger. They were ten miles out of Rabat when, topping a rise, the lights picked up a car stalled by the roadside below, two figures beside it. One of these stepped out and signalled frantically with a pocket torch.

“Go through,” said Croghan. Hennessy slowed.

“Nope. Women. Have your gun ready, though.”

“What the hell!” exploded Croghan. “Durell has women agents——”

**T**he brakes ground. Croghan, his gun ready, opened the window. Hennessy kept the headlights on the stalled car and its two passengers

—a chauffeur in white dust-coat and cap, and a woman in a dark cloak. It was the latter who had signalled, and who now addressed them in French with a strong accent.

“*Messieurs*, can you have the goodness to help us in to the city? Our petrol has given out, and no other cars have passed to give us aid——”

Hennessy saw that her car bore a French license, indicating a tourist, as did the luggage piled on the top. It was a handsome car, a large Renault painted a bright blue, with brass trimmings; no hired hack.

“Certainly, *madame*,” responded Hennessy. “One moment, if you please.” He turned to Croghan and spoke in rapid English. “Get out and look at their tank. See if it’s a stall. I’ll keep ’em covered——”

“Oh! Are you Americans?” came the quick exclamation from the woman. “So am I! And I took you for French! This is certainly a relief. You can give us a ride to the city?”

“Yeah,” returned Hennessy. “Go on, Croghan! Take no chances. I’ve got an idea.—Miss, let me talk with you a minute. Come over here by the car. My name’s Hennessy, usually called Red for short, and this here is Croghan, and we’re in a tough jam.”

He paused in astonishment. The ray of the electric torch fell for an instant on his face, while Croghan was getting out. Then the woman who held it, flashed it on herself briefly. Hennessy had a vision of a laughing face, framed in masses of dark hair, and gasped.

“Lord! I thought you were an old hen,” he exclaimed, as she came close. “Who are you?”

“Good sir, I am a poor wandering damsel out of gas but with plenty of road-money,” she responded merrily. “By name, Mary Gray. My chauffeur speaks no English, luckily. You look too bronzed and happy to be a tourist.”

“Correct,” and Hennessy chuckled. “Where you headed for? And why all alone?”

“Because I *am* alone,” she returned. “I’m not as young as I look, Red, being thirty-one last week; so I don’t need to be chaperoned, if that’s your notion. I’m an artist, a painter of this and that, and I’m supposed to put in a couple of weeks at Rabat and have an exhibition and so forth. The luggage you see is mostly works of art. Now do you know enough about me?”

“No,” said Hennessy promptly, “not near enough.—Croghan! Never mind; gather round and listen. This party’s on the level, and I’ve got an idea.

—Miss Gray, we need your car.”

She broke into a laugh. “How’ll you make it run?”

“Listen, this is serious!” exclaimed Hennessy. “Half of Morocco is or may be looking for us right now, having a description of our car. Chances are, we’ll never get to Fez without trouble, unless we get another car——”

“Check,” she broke in quickly. “Who’s after you? The police?”

“No.” Hennessy caught a growl from Croghan, and grinned. “She’s straight, partner, so shut up. No, not the police, but they may be later. Right now, a bad gang is looking for us. We’re looking for treasure, if you want it straight, and the gang wants it——”

The flashlight bit up at him again.

“No,” she observed, “you certainly don’t look drunk, Red! Does this car belong to you?”

“Belongs to me, miss,” said Croghan.

“What we want,” went on Hennessy quickly, “is to swap cars. We’ll put most of our gas in your tank. You put your luggage in this car and go on to Rabat. Then later on, we’ll bring back your car. We’re responsible folks ——”

“Yes, you talk like it,” she broke in, with a silvery laugh. “Is your treasure hunt on the level?”

“Croghan has a few knife-cuts to say it is,” replied Hennessy. “And if this cussed Durell ever catches up with us, they’ll get paid back——”

“Durell!” came her voice sharply. “Not Carlos Durell, of Casablanca?”

“My gosh! Do you know him?” snapped Croghan.

“I’ve met him, to my sorrow; only a couple of days ago. Here, wait! Climb out of your car, both of you, and shift over some gas. Can you do it?”

“Sure,” said Croghan. “I’ve got a rubber tube. Siphon it easy.”

“Pull up beside us, then, and get to work,” she ordered with decision. “I’ll have Jules change the luggage. Where’s yours?”

“We travel light,” said Hennessy. “If we have luggage later, we’re satisfied.”

He drew up alongside the other car. Croghan was mouthing admiring oaths as he glimpsed the strategy in view, and leaped to work on transferring

some gasoline.

“How’d you come to run out?” demanded Hennessy, as Jules shifted over the luggage.

“Came up from Marrakesh today,” replied Mary Gray. “Thought we had enough to go right on to Rabat, but there’s something wrong with the gage. Where are you headed for?”

“Fez, or the other side of there,” and Hennessy proffered a cigarette. She accepted. “Was Durell down at Marrakesh?”

“Yes.”

To himself, Hennessy thought that this rather backed up Croghan’s yarn, for the Berber M’tel had been in prison at Marrakesh. Durell had probably met him when he was turned loose and brought him on to Casablanca.

“There! Got enough to reach Rabat now.” Croghan straightened up and turned to the woman. “Miss Gray, it’s mighty white of you to let us use your car like this. Means a lot to us. If we win out, we’ll sure let you know how much we appreciate it! Come on, Red.”

“I’m going too,” said Mary Gray abruptly. The two men stared at her in the starlight.

“You are not,” spoke up Hennessy. She laughed lightly, and then he caught her arm and led her to one side. “Listen here,” he said, “don’t be silly, now. We don’t want any woman along on this trip. It’s not safe.”

“So I judged,” she returned coolly. “That’s why I’m going. I’m interested.”

“Well, get uninterested, then,” snapped Hennessy. “Me, I’m a second engineer out of a tramp from Senegal. This guy Croghan is an ex-jailbird and gun-runner. Durell’s gang——”

“Better and better!” she cut in. “But you listen to me a minute. I’ve met this Durell, as I said. And I’d give a good deal to meet him again and help any one else give him a black eye. I’m going with you, and that’s flat. Maybe I can help.”

“You can’t. You’d be in the way.”

“Nothing of the sort. You can swear all you like; I can swear too, for that matter. I’m no tenderfoot, Red. I can drive as well as you, too. I use a chauffeur for looks and as a guide. Jules can take my things on to the

Transat hotel at Rabat and wait for me. I'm going, so you may as well stop your protests."

The fire in her voice, the vibrant personality of her, conquered.

"All right, but when the shooting starts——"

"I have a pistol in the car, and a government permit to carry it."

Hennessy threw up his hands and strode to the Renault, where Croghan was still standing.

"Does she mean it, Red?"

"She does. And short of using force——"

"Let her come, then," said Croghan bitterly. "Damn it, we've got to be half-way decent, but for two cents I'd ditch her somewhere."

"Better not try it," said Mary Gray, who had caught the words, and laughed again. "Cheer up, Croghan! I'm not such a bad sort, really. Jules! Take the other car to the hotel in Rabat and say I've been delayed and will be along later. And keep your mouth shut."

"Yes, *mademoiselle*," responded Jules.

Croghan climbed sullenly into the Renault, and two minute later, with Hennessy under the wheel, they moved off. As they got into speed, Hennessy chuckled. Mary Gray, who had the front seat beside him, gave him a sharp look.

"Well? What's the joke?"

"I was thinking that Jules might run into trouble with that car."

"Oh! Well, I was thinking so myself. That's one reason I'm in this car now."

Hennessy broke into a low laugh. She was all right!

### 3

**A**s Croghan admiringly stated, one had to admit that Mary Gray was a useful companion.

While the two of them huddled under a blanket on the floor of the tonneau, she got the Renault filled with oil and "essence", and drove off; then Hennessy resumed the wheel, and Croghan steered him out of town,

knowing all the back streets of the French city that here, as in the other old Arab towns of Morocco, had been built adjoining the more ancient huddle of masonry and apart from it.

Then they went soaring on through the night to Meknez, the great garrison city, whose enormous ruined walls in which thousands of Christian slaves had been buried alive ran off across the hills for miles. It was two-thirty when Meknez fell behind them, and a quarter past three when the lights of Fez flashed into sight ahead.

Hennessy pulled out of the road and wakened his two companions, who were dozing.

“Conference, partners,” he exclaimed gayly. “If you ask me, we’ve made time.”

“I’ll say you have!” said Croghan. “There’s Fez. What you stopping for?”

“Orders. We need gas and oil, not to mention sleep. Do we go straight through, or break the trip here?”

“I need daylight to locate the right spot,” said Croghan, doubtfully. “And you must be about done up. It’d be safer to go right through, but——”

“There’s a new hotel in the French town, this side of Fez,” spoke up Mary Gray. “Why not take rooms there, get an hour’s sleep and an early breakfast, and go on about six?”

“The only reason why not,” said Croghan, “is that we must give our names when we light, and fill out the usual police card. If any one is looking for us, they’ll know it in twenty minutes.”

“Well, no car has passed us, so Durell’s not ahead,” said Hennessy, “We’ve broken the back of the trip, and I vote to start fresh at six.”

“O.K., then,” assented Croghan.

Another ten minutes, and they halted before the Hotel Splendide. Here Mary Gray took charge, issued the orders, obtained rooms, and Hennessy thankfully crawled between the sheets and was asleep on the instant. The nerve strain of that night drive at top speed had been terrific.

He had no luggage except the clothes he stood in and a toilet kit. Wakened at five-thirty, he was shaved, dressed and downstairs ahead of the others, and went outside to find that the hotel had refueled the car. Over the



ancient twin cities of Fez was hanging the usual morning mist of smoke, so that, with the hill forts on either hand, it looked like a scene from fairyland.

Hennessy turned back into the entrance, then halted. A big car was just coming up, a Cadillac with a Moroccan license. With sharp premonition, Hennessy drew back into the doorway and watched. The new arrival halted behind the Renault. Sure enough, Durell got out, stretched himself; he was followed by two other Frenchmen, and then by a red-headed Berber in a new white jellab.

Waiting to see no more, Hennessy strode back into the lobby and encountered Croghan.

“Hey, Red! She’s in the dining-room. Hustle in and eat—what’s the matter?”

“Durell’s here. Looks pretty done up. Come along, take a chance on the dining-room. Damned if I want to hide from that skunk! If he doesn’t come in, so much the better.”

**T**hey passed into the dining-room, a small alcoved room highly decorated with tiles and carved plaster in Moorish fashion. And here Hennessy had his first real look at Mary Gray, as they came toward her table.

Again he got that impression of vibrant personality, of laughing energy. Dark hair and dark eyes, firm feminine features—nothing spectacular about her, until she laughed and spoke. Then her face lit up with animation, with eager interest in everything around her. Thirty-one? He would have set her down as little over twenty.

And she, looking up at Hennessy, warmed to his quick laughing blue eyes, his alert, crisply carven features, the touch of whimsical recklessness that set him apart. She gave the two of them a bright greeting, and waved her spoon at the chairs adjacent.

“Settle down, comrades. I’ve ordered for you. A real breakfast, not a French snack. Well? What’s gone wrong?”

“Durell’s here,” said Hennessy, as he seated himself.

She was facing the door, and looked past him, then frowned slightly.

“Let him be here, then!” she exclaimed. “When did he come?”

“Just now.”

Their words died, as the waiter approached with a laden tray. During their night ride, Mary Gray had heard the entire treasure story, by snatches, but had related nothing about her knowledge of Durell. Now Hennessy recollected it, and spoke.

“You seem downright set against poor Durell. What’d he do to you?”

Anger lightened her dark eyes.

“He kissed me.”

“Shucks!” Hennessy grinned cheerfully. “That’s no crime. That’s merely following a perfectly natural inclination.”

She gave him one furious glance, then broke into a laugh.

“You’re—well, Red, you’re a caution! Not only that, however; he was insulting about it, and I didn’t like him anyhow. He came along when I was sketching the Koutoubia, down at Marrakesh; it was built by the architect of the Giralda at Seville, you know. He just naturally got his face slapped, and then he grew ugly, but Jules came along and he decamped.”

Hennessy rose and laid down his napkin.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” he said. “Just thought of something——”

“Sit down!” she exclaimed sharply. “You hear me? Sit down! None of your nonsense, Red. I can read your mind. I won’t have it, d’you hear? Leave Durell alone.”

Before her determined words and look, Hennessy shrugged and seated himself. Croghan grinned.

“You’d better not be reading his mind, Miss Gray——”

“Hold everything,” she said quietly. “Here he is. Please don’t have any trouble in here.”

The two men, seated with their backs to the entrance, exchanged a glance and fell silent.

Durell descended the two steps into the dining-room, glanced around casually, then came to a dead halt as his eyes fell on Mary Gray, facing him. Delight sprang in his eyes, and regardless of her cool stare, he approached and doffed his cap with a gay greeting.

“My lady of Marrakesh!” he exclaimed. “Come, this is nothing short of a miracle! What good fortune has brought you to me here?”

Mary Gray regarded him for a moment, then shrugged.

“A madman,” she observed to Hennessy. “Pay no attention to him.”

Durell broke into a laugh. “Ah, but——”

Hennessy came to his feet and swung around to face the other. Then Durell recognized him, glanced down at Croghan, and for an instant seemed frozen. His eyes hardened into cold pin-points. The recognition was an obvious shock.

“So, this is it!” he said slowly. “This is where you disappeared——”

“On your way,” said Hennessy, curtly. “Did you ever hear of the bum’s rush?”

Durell’s gaze bored into him with a flame of hatred; then the man bowed, turned, and went striding out of the room.

With a grunt of disgust, Hennessy resumed his seat. “Eat fast,” he said. “Pitch in, everybody!”

“And get away,” said Mary Gray. “Right. Everything’s paid, including breakfast, and a lunch is being put into the car now. Quickly!”

No time was lost. Swallowing a hasty meal, all three rose and departed. They saw nothing of Durell. His two companions stood in the lobby, and by the door was the red-headed Berber, who looked at Croghan with a curl of his bearded lips and a flash of hatred.

“That was our friend M’tel, right enough,” said Croghan, opening the car door. “Hop in! Durell’s probably telephoning and raising trouble. Straight back to the highway, Red, and then follow it out to the left, around the walls.”

A tip to the attentive garçon, and they were off with a roar, Croghan now sitting beside Hennessy in front. A long block away from the hotel, Croghan uttered a startled oath.

“Stop,” he exclaimed. “In to the curb, Red——”

**A** moment later he jumped out, glanced at the tires, and suppressed certain violent words.

“Nail in the right rear,” he said, climbing in. “Ain’t flat yet—there’s a garage dead ahead, though I can’t say much for it. May be open now. You can reach it.”

“Right,” said Hennessy. “Now we know what M’tel was doing outside, eh?”

“Yeah. He got the nail part-way in, which is some job, and before we rolled a block, the car did the rest. There’s the place, over to the left. She’s open, too! No use sweating around and wasting time with tools, when we can get it done quicker. I’ll give the mechanic a hand. Looks like a native.”

A native it was, who had just opened up the garage. The *patron* was here, he told them, but was at the telephone. Hennessy thought nothing of this, at the moment.

They rolled in. The proprietor, a greasy-faced Provençal, appeared with great expressions of his desire to serve them; and Croghan got the native mechanic to work. Hennessy, having taken for granted that this was entirely a scheme to delay them, was watching the work and talking with Mary Gray, who refused to get out of the car, when the proprietor appeared at his side.

“A thousand pardons, *m’sieu*,” he said with a smirk, “but am I speaking with M’sieu Hennessy?”

“You are. How the devil did you know my name?”

“A lady asks for you, *m’sieu*, on the telephone.”

Amazed, Hennessy followed him into the office at one side, catching a laughing jest that Mary Gray flung after him. The Provençal threw open a door at the end, opening into another room.

“The telephone, *m’sieu*, it is there——”

Hennessy strode through. The door was slammed after him. A blackjack slammed into the door, as he sidestepped like a shadow. A moving streak had given him warning.

Two of them, on him hammer and tongs as he slipped aside; knife and slungshot lunging and falling venomously. No time for questions. Two brown shapes, lithe and active as scorpions, displaying all the marvelous agility of Arabs, despite their apparently clumsy robes.

Somehow Hennessy evaded the rush, side-slipped like a phantom. The pair were silent, deadly, their eyes glimmering with intensity of emotion; they meant to kill, and they were not wasting time about it. Hennessy ducked, took the blackjack on his shoulder with numbing effect, swerved aside as the knife drove in for his belt; then his foot slipped and he shot sideways, falling headlong.

The place was littered with old tires, disused implements, empty tins. Hennessy rolled over and over, came to his feet like a cat, and brought with him a Ford tire-tool. The knife lunged in, but his weapon slanted down athwart the brown wrist. The Arab screamed shrilly as the knife fell.

The second man was rushing in. Hennessy unexpectedly met him halfway, caught his swinging weapon-arm, and slapped him over the skull with the iron. He crumpled, and Hennessy swung about. The first Arab was picking up the knife with his left hand. Hennessy booted him under the chin, then gave him a savage blow across the skull.

“You asked for it, and you got it——”

He started suddenly, now aware of a frantic honking of the car horn. It ceased as he stood panting, listening. Hennessy caught up the blackjack; then the room door was flung open, and into the place came the greasy Provençal, dragging Mary Gray by the wrist.

“Come, pretty one, and join your American friend,” he panted. “Ah! Thunders of heaven——”

He staggered back under a stinging blow in the face from her fist. Then Hennessy came down upon him, just as the man was gathering himself to rush upon her. He swung the greasy fellow about, pinned him against the wall with one long arm, and slapped him hard, twice, with jarring force. Then, deliberately, he swung the persuader and put the man out for good.

“All right, Mary,” he said, and grinned at her. “Hurt?”

“No. But they killed Croghan——”

“Come on.”

Hennessy leaped into action. He was gone through the office like a streak, running swiftly, silently, his face a blazing mask of fury. There was Croghan lying beside the car on his face, the Arab mechanic rifling his pockets.

The native had no warning whatever until Hennessy was upon him. Then he straightened up with a frightful cry of terror. Hennessy caught him by the throat and shook him for a moment, lifted him and shook him again, then flung him down to the cement floor.

“Fix that tire and do it sharp! Or else——”

For the first time, recollecting his pistols, Hennessy jerked one out. The Arab let out a howl and bent over the half-completed tire job. Hennessy

glanced around, and found no one else in the place.

“Here.” He shoved the pistol into the woman’s hand, and spoke in French. “Kill this man if he stops working.”

Stooping above Croghan, he found that the latter was not dead, and had suffered nothing worse than a crack over the head. Mary Gray’s voice struck at him, and he was astonished to find it perfectly cool.

“They struck him down before I knew it. I honked the horn; then they pulled me out of the car——”

“Thought you had a gun!” snapped Hennessy.

“It’s in the car. By the driver’s seat.”

“Keep mine, then. Watch that bird, there!”

He lifted the inanimate Croghan and bundled him into the rear of the car. Two minutes later, as the last nut on the rim was tightened, the Arab mechanic came erect and bleated in stark fear as Hennessy strode at him. The slungshot darted out. The native slumped over and lay in a crumpled mass.

Abandoning the punctured extra tire, Hennessy stepped on the gas. Next moment they were out in the street, swinging on two wheels, heading out and away.

Behind them, the telephone in the office was ringing steadily, vainly.

4

**W**asn’t that brutal?”

“Eh?” Hennessy glanced at the woman beside him. “Wasn’t what brutal?”

“Hitting that mechanic. He was in deadly fear of you——”

“Sure.” A joyous, savage laugh broke from Hennessy. “I aimed to be brutal. When you’re caught in a jam and want to get out alive, young lady, don’t sit around manicuring your nails. That’s a free trip. Say, just how did all that mess happen? By accident?”

“I doubt it.” She regarded him for an instant, fascinated by the fighting glow in his eyes, the splendid laughing eagerness of his expression. “That

Berber put the nail in the tire. There was only the one garage, straight on our road——”

“I see,” and Hennessy nodded, realizing the truth. “Say! That chap Durell is no slouch! He must have telephoned over, probably knew the garage man. Those two Arabs meant to kill me, and no mistake——”

“Two Arabs? Where?” she exclaimed. He flung her a laugh.

“Didn’t you see ’em, in that inner room? Too busy to notice them, I suppose. That was a fine crack you hit the grease-spot! Yes, Durell phoned from the hotel, framed up everything in a flash. How much law is there in this country, anyhow?”

“Depends on what you can get away with, I fancy; about like Chicago. Oh!” She stirred swiftly. “I’ll climb over in back—I forgot poor Croghan ——”

“Right. Wake him up. We need directions. Crossroad ahead——”

“Turn right,” she exclaimed. “We go past Fez, anyhow. When you come to the walls, turn left. The highway circles outside the city.”

They swung into the highway and picked up a small column of marching soldiery, for the camp and aviation field were close by. Hennessy waved his hand gayly as he swept past, and a chorus of eager replies broke from the Frenchmen—something in this laughing, eager man compelled a comradely greeting from them in the sunrise.

Without regard for dignity, Mary Gray climbed into the back of the car and opening a bottle of wine from the lunch-basket, poured some down Croghan’s throat. The latter coughed, opened his eyes, and struggled to sit up.

“Hello!” he exclaimed. “What hit me?”

“The sky dropped on you, partner,” said Hennessy, without looking around. “Wake up and watch the road! looks like we go slap into that gateway ahead——”

“Turn left!” cried Croghan sharply. Directly before them loomed the high crenelated walls of Fez, a wide gateway thronged with men, horses, mules, camels, soldiers. Hennessy saw the left-hand road, swerved into it abruptly, and sent the car roaring along.

“Sure we’re right?” exclaimed Mary Gray. “If you’re heading for Taza, Croghan, we should have gone to the south of the city——”

“We’re right,” said Croghan. “Straight on up the hill, past Fort Chardonnet, and then swing left on Highway 26. You can’t miss the marker. Well, what happened?”

When he learned, his lean dark features contracted with anger; but he said no word, and after fingering his head and finding no great damage done, lit a cigarette and sat staring silently at the olive groves as they wound up the long hill slope.

So they came to the shell-ruined tombs of the Merinide sultans. Now, below them, lay outspread the massive walls, the far-reaching twin cities of thousand-year-old Fez in the curving valley. Then all was gone, and they were sweeping past olives and cemeteries, circling with the twisting road, until they gained the fork and the six-foot section of wall that served as a marker.

So Fez fell away behind them.

**T**he empty road ahead drew in among the hills, apparently absolutely deserted and yet in reality filled with native life. Suddenly Croghan came to life.

“Hey, Red! Something wrong!” he exclaimed. “What’s that knocking?”

“Search me.” Hennessy slowed, then quickened the pace. They were passing a crossroad, where stood a neat little building corresponding to an American hot-dog stand. Presently, half a mile farther, the knocking became more distinct. Hennessy pulled out of the road, and Croghan uttered a groan of despair.

“Can’t be the bearings, surely! Didn’t they put in oil?”

Hennessy glanced at the gages. “Full when we left. Empty now——”

With a subdued oath, Croghan was out of the car. He dived underneath for a moment, then rose and kicked the front tire savagely.

“Broken oil line. Bearings burned out. This is a sweet mess!” he said. “Probably was broken last night and we got in without oil. Been losing ever since.”

“Can’t we go on regardless?” asked Mary Gray. Croghan gave her a bitter look.

“And have the rods bust through the pan? Not a chance. Ten miles to go yet—blast the luck! Just when we had him beaten——”



Hennessy lit a cigarette and regarded the others, whose dismay was complete.

“Facts are facts; no use blinking them,” he observed coolly. “I suppose Durell must come this way? Or could he take another road?”

“No, he’ll be along,” said Croghan, frowning blackly.

“And he won’t be wasting any time, either, once he finds what happened at that garage. Hm!” Hennessy puffed for a moment, his gaze darting around, scanning the road ahead. They had halted just around the bend of a curve. “Croghan, you hop out. Walk back to that crossroad; I saw a telephone line at the eating-stand. Get another car out here from the city. Can do?”

“Huh? Sure,” responded Croghan, staring at him. “But by the time another car gets here, Durell will be digging up the stuff.”

Hennessy grinned. “Not if he comes this way. You keep your eye on the road as you go, for if he comes along and sights you, you’ll die of lead poisoning in a hurry.”

“And what about you?”

“We’ll be sitting here, partner. And if we have any luck, there’ll be a Cadillac sitting here likewise, when you come along.”

Croghan stared at him for a minute, the dark eyes a-glitter.

“You’re a fool to chance it! What about her?” and he jerked his head toward the woman.

A laugh broke from her. “Never mind about us!” she said gayly. “You get going, will you? Trust Red.”

“All right.”

Croghan climbed out of the car, waved his hand, and started on the back trail without more questions. Hennessy met the merry, inquiring eyes of Mary Gray, and chuckled.

“You’ve got a lot of faith in me, young lady!”

“You deserve it. What’s your program?”

“You’ll see.”

Hennessy started the clanking engine and ran the car a dozen feet ahead, then halted it half on the road, half off, as though it had run suddenly out of

control. He pointed to the scattered boulders lining the sloping hillside to the right.

“You get up there and take cover—and keep it. Understand? No matter what happens, you remain out of sight. If anything goes wrong, stay hidden.”

She nodded, her eyes searching his face. “And you?”

“I’m taking cover too, but closer to the road. This has come down to a real private war, and the less you have to do with it, the better. Promise to keep out of it?”

“Of course. But you’ve got to tell me what you mean to do——”

“You’ll see that for yourself.” Hennessy got out of the car and extended his hand. “Come along; I want to see you tucked away securely.”

She shrugged, and obeyed.

Fifty feet up the hillside, Hennessy left her ensconced in a snug nest of boulders and cactus, completely hidden from the road below. The sun by this time was mounting well into the blue sky and was blazing down fiercely. As usual in upland Morocco, the landscape was precisely that of the California hills, with the exception of the huge cactus cultivated for centuries by the Arabs in place of fences or hedges. This was scattered wild over the hillside among the boulders, and came down close to the road. On the other side of the road was a steep descent, running off out of sight into a ravine.

Some distance ahead of the car, Hennessy settled down behind two small boulders, completely screened by cactus that hid him without preventing his observation, and composed himself to wait, pistol in hand. He was convinced that Durell would halt at sight of the Renault; if not, he would be halted anyway. As he well knew, no half-way measures would now be used, for he was dealing with Durell in person, and that made all the difference.

**T**he moments dragged. Every minute of delay now meant that Croghan was farther on his way to the crossroads; in fact, Hennessy calculated that Croghan must have reached there long since.

“No doubt whatever now, about that loot!” he reflected. “Impossible as it seems, this is a country of improbabilities, sure enough. Durell wouldn’t be so cursed hot after it, if he wasn’t certain. He’s a slick one, too! The way he walked out of that hotel dining-room and then got his gang to work was a

caution. Well, if I have any luck now, I'll pay him back for the tire he ruined, and with added interest——”

The hillside gathered and reflected the vibration of a car's engine. Hennessy gathered himself together, assured himself by a glance that Mary Gray was out of sight, and gave all his attention to the curve in the road.

An instant later, a car swept around this, going at high speed. It was Durell's Cadillac, and the Frenchman—though Mary Gray had intimated that he was half Spanish—himself was at the wheel.

As Durell sighted the stranded Renault, his brakes screamed. By his side was M'tel, the red-headed Berber; in the rear seat were the other two men Hennessy had seen at the hotel. All were craning out at the Renault. The Cadillac slowed down; then Hennessy saw Durell make a sudden gesture and pick up speed.

“Too smart to stop, eh?” thought Hennessy. “Doesn't like the deserted look of things. All right, mister——”

His pistol came up. He fired twice, rapidly. A third report made answer, as the right rear tire of the Cadillac was blown into ribbons. The big car lurched, swerved wildly, and just to make sure, Hennessy fired again and the other rear tire went out.

There was his mistake. He knew it instantly, too late to check his action. Instead of firing again, he should have held them under his gun. Even as he realized this, pistols roared from the halted car, almost directly opposite him. The cactus around him popped and split under a hail of lead.

Hennessy fired twice more, frantically, then fell forward and lay quiet.

Durell's imperious voice halted the fire of his companions. One of the two Frenchman lay slumped in the rear of the car; Hennessy's last bullet had gone through his brain. Durell's gaze searched the hillside rapidly.

“No sign of the other two,” he observed. “See anything, M'tel?”

“*Mais oui!*” responded the Berber at his side, after an instant. “Something moved in that clump of rocks and cactus up above.”

“So? Croghan's there, hurt, no doubt; their car ran off the road,” said Durell, and then spoke rapidly. M'tel nodded and wriggled out of his jellab. Durell got out with his remaining companion, on the far side.

“With me, Pierre,” he said, then lifted his voice. “He's shot dead? Good! Come along and take care of him. Why the fool shot at us, heavens knows!

Luckily we have two spare tires——”

He beckoned Pierre. They darted forward to where Hennessy lay, a trickle of crimson running over his face. Durell spoke rapidly, softly.

“Lift him to the car. Hurry. She is up there, you comprehend?”

Meantime, the Berber had slipped from his car, free of the jellab, and darted forward down the road. After a moment he began to ascend the hillside among the rocks.

Lifting Hennessy’s body, Durell and Pierre carried him to the far side of the car. Then Durell flung himself on the American, with a snarl, and searched him thoroughly. Finding nothing of importance, he straightened up.

“He’s not hurt; a bullet merely clipped his thick skull. Tie him up and shove him in; we can make use of him later. Leave Moreau’s body among the cactus yonder, across the road. He’s dead enough. We’ll carry him over in a minute. I’ll fasten his murder on this blundering American, you comprehend?”

“And the tires, *m’sieu?*” questioned Pierre. Durell made a sharp gesture.

“Wait. Watch.”

He peered up the hillside. There, nothing was to be seen. Hennessy, firmly tied hand and foot, was bundled into the rear of the Cadillac. Pierre lit a cigarette, waiting. The road remained empty in the morning sunlight.

Suddenly a sharp cry broke from the hillside. The figure of M’tel appeared, and waved a hand.

“I have her, *m’sieu!*” he called. “She’s alone.”

## 5

**T**he men of northern Africa waste no time on recalcitrant women, whose value is that of a few sheep, no more.

Her whole attention fastened on the road below, caught entirely by surprise when M’tel leaped upon her from the rear, Mary Gray had no chance to use the pistol in her hand. M’tel knocked it away, and as she fought him savagely, clipped her over the head with a stone and picked her slim body up in one brawny arm.

He grinned as he came down to the car. He was a big fellow, blue-eyed like many Berbers, brutal and uncouth of expression. Durell came to him savagely.

“Have you hurt her? If you have, then——”

“A tap, no more. She fights like a man,” said M’tel. “Tie her hands if you mean to take her along.”

“No sign of Croghan?”

“None,” answered M’tel positively.

“Then he must have gone for help—ah!” Durell started slightly. “He could telephone from the crossroads, back there! That’s it. Well, to work! We have two tires to change. Let her wait in the car. Don’t tie her up. I’ll take her.”

He took the woman in his arms, looked into her unconscious face, and laughed softly.

“So, my precious one! Your lips are too good for Carlos Durell, eh? We’ll see about that, and if you want to fight, just try!”

He placed her in the tonneau, and went to work with the other two. The body of Moreau was tumbled among some cactus on the downhill side of the road, the two spare tires were slipped in place, and in high good-humor, Durell gave his orders.

“Pierre, you drive. Sit with him, M’tel, and show the road. I’ll ride with the lady and the American. Now to finish it up quickly!”

“And the man Croghan, *m’sieu*?” questioned M’tel. Durell laughed.

“We’ll attend to him. Forward!”

When Mary Gray opened her eyes, the car was bouncing over a rough hill road, and Durell, his arm supporting her, was smiling down into her eyes. She recoiled from him, and his arm tightened about her.

“Fight, little bird, fight!” he exclaimed delightedly, in English. “You have spirit, and when you learn who’s your master——”

Her clenched fist struck him in the mouth, twice, so that the blood spurted from his cut lips. Again Durell laughed, drew her more closely despite her struggles, and pressed his lips to hers until his blood was smeared on her face.

“There, little one, you’ll soon learn to love me!” he exclaimed, the two in the front seat glancing back and laughing heartily. “Come, be a sweet child. You won’t?”

He winced as her fingers sank into his neck, driving his head back. With this, he struck her twice, as he would strike a man, so that she sagged limply back in the seat, unconscious again. A torrent of oaths rushed from him and M’tel uttered a roar of laughter.

“That’s right, *m’sieu!*” he cried. “You know how to handle a filly, eh? Better leave her as she is. We’re nearly there now.”

Durell wiped the blood from his lips, produced and lit a cigarette with a grimace, and then watched eagerly as M’tel pointed to the road ahead. He did not observe that the eyes of Hennessy, doubled up at his feet, were open a trifle, watching what passed.

“We’ll just take no chances on her making a dash for it,” he said, as the car slowed. He leaned forward and knotted his handkerchief about Mary Gray’s ankles, then prodded Hennessy with his toe. “Awake, swine?”

Hennessy gave no sign of life, and Durell, laughing, swung open the door; the car had come to a halt.

To their right was an open field, sown in wheat. To their left, the hillside rose quite sharply. Part-way down it came a ragged hedge of cactus, ending at an irregularly shaped boulder of some size. No house was in sight, nor any living thing.

“There it is,” and M’tel jerked a thumb at the boulder. His bright blue eyes were glittering with an eager light. “There’s a hollow under the stone, into which it fits like a socket. Two of us can lift the rock.”

“How d’you know it hasn’t been lifted?”

“It is death to touch a boundary stone, *m’sieu*—that is, to move it.”

**T**he voices receded. The three men strode away toward the stone, two hundred yards up the long slope.

Hennessy stirred, moved, wrenched himself around. Frantic desperation spurred him to herculean effort, but he was powerless to break the cords about his wrists. He strained upward, flung his voice at the woman on the seat.

“Mary! Mary Gray! For God’s sake, wake up, Mary!”

That urgent, piercing voice broke through to her consciousness. Her eyes opened. She looked down at him blankly. Hennessy spoke again.

“Mary! Get the knife from my pocket—quick! Wake up! Get the knife, cut me free!”

The words registered. She leaned forward, fumbling at his pockets. He guided her with sharp words, twisted his head, looked out. Durell had left the car door ajar. Up the hillside, he could see the three men clustered about the stone there.

Then her hand had found the pocket-knife. She drew it out, opened the blade, and swayed over in the seat.

“I—I can’t——” she murmured, and Hennessy feared that she was about to faint. Her face was bruised from Durell’s blows, and blood-smearred.

“Cut my wrists free!” snapped Hennessy angrily.

The bitter authority of his tone drove into her. She blinked at him, and leaned forward anew. The knife-blade bit at the cords, bit at his skin, sawed almost blindly.

Then a low cry of helpless effort escaped her lips, and she collapsed again.

Hennessy swore in heartfelt desperation, as the knife fell to the floor beside him. He looked down at his bleeding wrists—and to his amazement, perceived that the cords were severed. One burst of straining muscles, and his hands were free. Yet he could feel nothing in them. So tight had been those cords that his fingers were purpled, the circulation was cut off.

He glanced up the hillside. The three men were returning, Durell was holding in his arms a brief-case, of all things. Desperately, Hennessy moved his right hand, caught the knife clumsily in his numbed fingers, slashed at the cords about his ankles. They were severed. He was free, but momentarily helpless. The knife fell by his feet and he could not recover it.

He hurriedly resumed his doubled-up posture, crossing his hands before him as before. He saw in a flash that he must gain time. If they knew now that he was free, they would shoot him without mercy. His hands and fingers were tingling with renewed circulation, strength was flowing into him. He felt no pain from his hurt head. His own fate and that of Mary Gray depended on him now, entirely.

The three were close upon the car. Their voices came loudly.

“She has not wakened, eh?” said Durell, with a laugh. “Excellent. Pierre, you shall have the honor of sitting with *madame*——”

“Stop! First, about the money,” intervened M’tel, his voice ugly.

“You shall look into that while I drive,” said Durell, “and count it. We know that money is here; nothing else matters. Take it.”

“Good,” replied the Berger. “There is that man Croghan——”

“I have thought about him,” said Durell. “Get in, Pierre, get in! And don’t forget poor Moreau. Here are three of us who can swear we saw this American try to hold up our car, shoot our tires, kill Moreau.”

“If the woman tells a different story?” suggested Pierre, climbing in over Hennessy. Durell uttered a low laugh.

“She will not. She will tell no story whatever, because she is to be my guest for a long time; that is, until I grow tired of her. We’ll not return as we came, but drive straight on to your village, M’tel. You keep her there. We’ll arrange everything with the authorities and say that you were a witness. We’ll come back tonight and pick her up and take her to Casablanca. You understand?”

The Berber grunted assent, as he settled himself in the front seat. Durell got under the wheel and started the engine, ordering M’tel to open the briefcase and count the money.

A low exclamation of astonishment came from Pierre. Hennessy peering up through half-closed lids, saw the man staring down, saw him lean over amazedly. He had discovered that the cords were gone from Hennessy’s wrists. He stooped down to make certain of this incredible thing——

The unbound fingers gripped about his throat like iron bands.

In the front seat, Durell was driving slowly along the hill road, with half an eye on the Berber beside him. M’tel had opened the moldy leather case, raking out to view thick packets of banknotes—American notes, Bank of England, Bank of France, Bank of Algiers and so on. Both men were utterly absorbed in their occupation, the Berber aflame with cupidity, Durell half watching him, half intent on the road.

Neither of them paid any heed to the rear seat. There was nothing to draw their attention, except a slight thudding as the wildly flailing hands of Pierre hit the body of Hennessy and the car floor. Pierre had been drawn forward, off the seat and on top of the American as those clamped fingers sank into the flesh of his throat.



Presently his struggles became fainter, then ceased entirely.

**H**ennessy drew clear of the man's body, came to one knee. His intention was to get Pierre's pistol, when he would have the pair in the front seat at his mercy. At this instant, however, M'tel glanced around, glimpsed the face of Hennessy behind him, and broke into a shrill cry of alarm.

The American's fist promptly smashed him under the ear.

Against two pistols, once they came into use, Hennessy well knew that he had not a chance. His whole idea now was to prevent a pistol being used. Durell instantly slammed on the brakes but could not abandon the controls. A flurry of banknotes spread over the whole front seat.

Driving another blow into the Berber's face, Hennessy flung himself on the man bodily, trying for a grip about his throat, twisting his own body over the back of the front seat. He kicked out viciously, and the car lurched wildly as his heel met Durell's cheek. A moment later, the car halted, still on the upper road above the stone marker.

In that moment, however, things happened rapidly.

Hennessy was sprawled above the two men, keeping Durell occupied with his feet, and giving his prime attention to M'tel. Hard as iron, apparently impervious to blows, the Berber put up a vicious fight, but Hennessy roughed him, and then, as the car halted, got a purchase and slammed his head and shoulders forward with terrific force.

M'tel's skull was smashed against the windshield frame, the impact cracking the thick glass. The Berber went limp. Hennessy had caught Durell's neck between his legs, and flung himself backward as the other frantically threw open the car door. Both men tumbled out in the dust together.

Durell came up with a pistol in his hand. It exploded, but the bullet went wild—Hennessy kicked at his wrist, knocked the weapon away, and flung himself on Durell.

He was met with a smashing crack that drove him sprawling.

Durell wasted no time trying to retrieve his pistol. He stepped into Hennessy's rush with a beautiful left from the shoulder that should have finished the matter straightway. Before the American could regain his feet, Durell was in upon him like a dash with a vicious kick to the face.

The engine room of a tramp, however, affords a wide range of education. Hennessy dodged that kick somehow, took another in the chest, then came to his feet, only to meet a storm of terrific smashes to the face and body. Durell could use his fists; he could use everything; and now he used all he had, to the very limit.

Hennessy had been up against many a battering in his day, but after the first ten seconds of this, he knew he had to fight with his head. He gave ground rapidly. Before him burned the snarling, bleeding, blazing-eyed face of Durell, alight with malignant hatred; the man was in the grip of an incredible ferocity. Hennessy evaded, ducked, parried, then got his balance, found his second wind, planted a straight left to Durell's belt and crossed over his right to the jaw.

Durell was halted. Like a flash, Hennessy bored in, beat the man back with a storm of blows, and landed one perfect crack flush to the chin that snapped back Durell's head and shook him badly. Panting, the Frenchman covered up, retreated, took another right and left that dazed him, and slipped in the dust. He was definitely mastered now, and realized it. Hennessy instinctively stood back to let him rise—then cursed himself for a fool.

Durell, lying on one elbow, kicked savagely. Hennessy's feet were knocked from under him. The Frenchman flung himself sideways and his arm shot out. The forgotten pistol in his hand, he came to his feet, cat-like, just as Hennessy rose.

The pistol cracked. Hennessy staggered to the impact of the bullet. Then, surprisingly, he hurled himself forward. Durell fired again, and missed clean. Hennessy was upon him, knocking up the pistol, planting a final blow in that high-boned face—and then slumping down in a heap. Durell looked down at him, laughed, lifted his weapon.

Another pistol-shot reverberated from the naked hillside.

## 6

This shot came from the pistol of Croghan.

Wholly absorbed in that frantically savage battle for life, neither of the two men had observed anything around them. They had not seen the approach of the Renault, had been blind to the figure of Croghan leaping from it and running toward them. Not until Durell lifted his weapon to blow

out the brains of Hennessy, did his eye catch the moving object. Then it was too late.

Croghan's one shot whirled him around and dropped him, for good.

When Hennessy came to himself, he was in the rear seat of the Renault, and Mary Gray was pouring wine between his lips. He spluttered, met the grin of Croghan, and sat up.

"What's this? Thought I was dead! Felt Durell's bullet hit me——"

He looked around in utter stupefaction. No sign of the Cadillac, of the hillside, of anything. The Renault was pulled up beside the gray-green mass of an olive grove, hot in the noonday sun.

"Good lord! Was that all a dream?"

"You'll know if you move around," said Croghan. "That bullet slapped your ribs, partner, and we've been patching you up for some time. Gosh, man! What you did to those three devils was a plenty! You hardly left enough of Durell for me to shoot."

"You!" Hennessy felt under his shirt, found himself bandaged heavily, and comprehended. "You—shot him?"

Croghan nodded.

"Yep. We've got the loot we came after, and now we're going to get something to eat and drink. We all need it."

Hennessy met the dancing eyes of Mary Gray; they were no longer laughing, and their gay merriment was sobered, but the smile that came to her lips, the pressure of her hand, brought swift answer from him.

"And now we've got to pay the piper," he said, and then bit into the sandwich Croghan passed him. The lean, dark man nodded gravely.

A bite to eat, a bottle of wine, and the three regarded one another. Croghan was the first to break the silence.

"No use blinking it," he said. "Durell was a bad egg and no one will mourn him, but all the same, if we go back to Fez there's going to be merry hell raised over all this."

"No place else to go," said Hennessy. "We've nothing to be afraid of. See the thing through, tell the truth and shame the devil——"

"Not for me," and Croghan shook his head. "I've been in jail, remember. I've got a record here. We may get off eventually, sure, but they'll jail us and

grab the money, and we'll not see a red cent of it. We've worked for that loot, partner."

"I'll say we have," said Hennessy, frowning. "What else is there to do, though?"

"Well," said Croghan, "I made a mistake. Got a man out from town, soldered up the oil line of this car—and she'll go. The bearings aren't out after all. I came on alone with her. We can make the north highway and hit for Spanish territory, or get the railroad up to Tangier. There's an afternoon train. In a couple of hours we can be clear outside any zone of danger—or *I* can."

"I've no papers," said Hennessy slowly.

"Won't need any, until you get into Tangier itself. The consul there can wire the consul at Casablanca and fix up your status all right. There won't be any hunt for us if we do the vanishing act—they won't pin this on us, or connect it with us. In fact, there may not be any trouble at all, but I simply couldn't take the chance."

"I don't like Morocco anyhow," said Hennessy whimsically, and met the eyes of Mary Gray. He started slightly. "Hey! But what about you, young lady? If——"

"Let's all go to Tangier and see what happens," she said quickly.

"Nonsense! You have pictures at Rabat——"

"Pictures be hanged!" she exclaimed, her dancing eyes suddenly aglow with eagerness. "What are pictures? All aboard for Tangier! We can make the train, at least, and settle everything else by wire. Ready? Then, let's go! You take the first spell at the wheel, Croghan!"

Croghan twisted about in his seat and shied the empty wine-bottle from the window.

"O.K., then," he rejoined. "Want to sit in front, Red? Won't joggle you so much there."

"No, thanks," and Hennessy met the eyes of Mary Gray, and caught her fingers in his own. "I stay here—all the way! There's better and bigger loot than money. Right?"

"Right," said Mary Gray, with her old silvery laugh.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Berber Loot* by Henry Bedford-Jones]