

By **ELLERY
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When the mob would no longer listen to Hardesty, the lovely native girl offered first her confession of shame and then followed it up with the sacrifice of her life!



SUNRISE had just exploded like fireworks over the Magdalena jungle country in north-central Colombia when Tim Hardesty found the corpse. Anger and swift concern filled him as he stared at the dead man slumped over the controls of a caterpillar tractor, with four feet of Motilone Indian arrow protruding from the bloodstained back. Death, Hardesty realized, must have been instantaneous.

A quarter mile downriver, Hardesty's construction camp was now stirring into activity in preparation for the forthcoming day's toil. But with his discovery of the slain tractorman, Tim Hardesty knew there would be little work accomplished on the pipe-line job that morning. Not with the savage



FLOW of GOLD

Motilones on the war-path! The native workers would be thrown into panic; would refuse to venture beyond the safety of the camp proper without military protection.

There was the rub. That military protection, now so badly needed, was being withdrawn this

"Fire and I shall kill this girl!" he said.



very morning. Even as Hardesty stared at the murdered tractor-man, he knew that the troops were preparing to leave his construction camp.

He went plunging back down the river trail toward his headquarters, fists clenched, grey eyes narrowed, holstered automatic slapping against his whipcorded thigh. He must reach Captain Wilhelm Obermann before that worthy embarked his little company of Colombian soldiery for the downstream trip to Covenas; must arrange for the garrison to stay on the job. There was a forty million dollar investment at stake—not to mention two hundred human lives.

Smashing through the rank undergrowth, sweat pouring down his cheeks, Hardesty suddenly halted. *What the devil was that?*

He strained his ears; heard again the faint cry that had arrested him. It came from the river. "Help me . . . !"

IT WAS a woman's voice, desperately beseeching. Hardesty dashed to the water's edge, unmindful of thorns that plucked ribbons from shirt and breeches. He gained the river, peered across its swiftly-flowing surface. A sharp exclamation leaped to his lips.

A girl was swimming out there in the churning water that maelstromed around jagged outcroppings of midstream rocks; a blonde girl, young, white-faced, bashed and buffeted by a river that seemed determined to crush her against the boulders to which she clung. Even as Hardesty spotted

her, she almost lost her hold on a flintlike jut, to be borne toward the waiting teeth of a rocky death-trap farther downstream.

Hardesty whipped off his high-laced boots and his gun-belt; flung himself into the river. He swam with powerful overhand strokes, battling the pull of water that tried to suck him under. "Coming!" he shouted. "Hold hard!"

The girl's response was a frightened wail. "I can't! My hands are slipping—"

He put more drive into his kicking legs and flailing arms; forged ahead at a faster clip. His muscles rebelled at the strain he put upon them, but still he drove himself, fighting the current as if it were a live enemy to be conquered. Then, when he was within a yard of the girl, she let go.

The river picked her up like a chip, rammed her toward a jagged serration of boulders. She screamed, just as Hardesty reached out and hooked his fingers into the neck of her soaked silk dress.

The fragile material tore. Naked feminine shoulders gleamed wetly, like sleek ivory, under Hardesty's hand. The current boiled around him and he lowered his grip, snagged the thin lastex strap of a brassiere where it crossed the girl's flawless back. The strap, too, parted under the strain.

Stroking savagely with his left arm, he encircled his right about her torso, rolled her over so that she floated face-upward. "Felicia Cabrozen!" he breathed as he recognized her. She was the daughter of *Coronel Juan Cabrozon*, of the

Colombian Army, whose station was far upriver near the gorge that led to Rieber Pass. More than once, at army-post holidays, Hardesty had danced with her; casually flirted with her under the watchfulness of an ubiquitous duenna. But what the devil was Felizia doing here in the river now, so far from her father's headquarters?

Her eyes, he noticed, were dark pools of fright; her lips were parted as she tried to cry out. Hardesty's forearm was under her breasts, jamming them upward out of the loosened brassiere, and the sight of those mounded charms sent a tingle through him, despite their mutual jeopardy.

She sensed the impact of his gaze, and she tried to squirm away from him; tried to cover those pouting hillocks of loveliness with her palms. He said: "This is no time for modesty, *señorita!*" and slapped her hands down. Then he began swimming toward shore, angling downriver with the current.

ONCE out of the rapids, the going was easier. The girl, spent by her efforts, relaxed; and presently Tim Hardesty was lifting her from the water, carrying her to the trail. At last he set her on her feet.

She swayed against him for support, trembling and exhausted. But she still had strength enough to say: "I owe you my life, *Señor Hardesty*. Yet was it necessary to tear my dress and brassiere so that you could so rudely stare at me?"

He felt vaguely annoyed. A girl in peril of death had no reason to be so damned conventional, he thought. Moreover, what if he had looked at her? It had been an accident spawned of necessity; certainly he had not made a deliberate play for her. She was acting like a spoiled child, and he thought he detected an undercurrent of coquetry in her manner—as if, now that they were out of danger, she might be expecting him to display still further interest in her femininity. She was looking at him shyly; he had a feeling that she was secretly evaluating his potentialities as a lover.

Her appraising glance embarrassed him. He wanted no payment for saving her life. "Sorry," he said brusquely, peeling off his khaki shirt and handing it to her. "Wear this and forget the whole thing. Now wait here while I find my boots and gun."

A flicker of disappointment seemed to come into her eyes as she accepted the wet shirt and worried herself into it. The soaked khaki adhered to her nubile bosom, just as the lower portion of her dripping frock delineated her slim hips and thighs; Hardesty turned away from her, aware of a strange and sudden yearning to grab her in his arms and kiss her.

He left her, located his boots and belt, donned them and returned. But she was no longer in sight. Down the trail he heard the crackle of footfalls through underbrush as she ran in blind haste.

Puzzled, he pursued her; overtook her. "Don't you know better than to travel alone in country like this? The Motilones—"

"Yes! The Indians!" she answered. "That is why I must hurry to reach Captain Obermann at your camp, *Senor Hardesty!*" Her firm little breasts jounced under the soaked khaki as she ran.

For the first time in many minutes, Hardesty recalled that he, too, had need to catch the German commander of the Colombian garrison which was scheduled to depart that morning. Temporarily he had forgotten the murdered tractorman in the jungle—and all that the murder implied. But now he remembered, and worry leaped into his heart.

THE situation was simple enough. Up at Petrolea, beyond the mountains, two big American oil companies had bought an oil concession, drilled wells that produced a golden flow of high-grade crude. To bring this liquid treasure to the sea, a pipe-line was being laid along the Magdalena River, through highland passes and jungle danks. Two crews had begun the work, one from the harbor at Covenas and the other starting from the oil lease itself. Here at Hardesty's camp the lines had finally met; only a few hundred feet of pipe need now be laid to join the job, and then oil would start pumping from the wells to the ocean, two hundred and sixty miles in all.

The task had been tremendous; with no roads at the start, eleven million pounds of freight and materials had been flown in by airplane. Motilone Indians, the most savage tribe in the world, had fought the work at every turn.

Now, though, the job was within a single day of completion—and this single day spelled success or failure because, under the terms of the contract with the Colombian government, the pipe-line must be finished by five o'clock tonight. Otherwise the entire concession—wells, pipe-line, everything—would revert to its original owners, leaving the American companies with a loss of forty million dollars investment.

It was Tim Hardesty's job to lay the final length of connecting pipe before expiration time. Until he had found the slain tractorman, the task had seemed easy enough. Now, though, the picture was changed. With the Motilones on the rampage, Hardesty's peon laborers would balk—unless they had adequate military protection. That protection lay in the hands of Captain Wilhelm Obermann. And now Felizia Cabrozon was saying that she, too, had business with the German officer.

"Why must you see Obermann?" Hardesty demanded.

She panted: "My father learned that the Motilones are planning an attack. He also knew that Captain Obermann had been ordered to withdraw his soldiers from your camp, today."

"Well?"

"Something was wrong with the telegraph line. So my father set out in a river launch to reach your camp and countermand Captain Obermann's orders. I came along. Two miles north of here, the Motilones attacked us, destroyed our launch, k-killed my father."

Running beside her, Hardesty

slipped an arm about her pliant waist. "I'm sorry about that," he said gently.

She went on: "I managed to

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swim free, under water; I knew I must bring the new order to Captain Obermann. Then the current caught me—and the rest you know."

They reached the clearing that marked the pipe-line construction camp, and Hardesty led the girl to his tent. "I'm sorry if I was gruff with you a while back," he said honestly. "I didn't know what you'd been through."

Her smile was faintly tremulous as she faced him. "I forgive you, *Señor Hardesty*. And... I am not ashamed that you looked at me. I am glad you found me... agreeable to your eyes."

He knew, then, that he could take her in his arms, kiss her; knew that she was his for the asking. And he wanted her, with a desperate yearning such as he had never before experienced. Her supple

body, so frankly limned by her wet clothing, was an ecstatic poem of feminine curves, luring him, tempting him almost beyond endurance. He hungered to harvest the kisses that brimmed in her crimson lips; his hands tingled. But there were other things to be done just now; more important things.

GET out of those wet things, dry yourself, get a dress from one of the native women," he said in a voice strained and curiously frigid with strict repression. "I'll be back later." Not noticing the hurt that came into her eyes, not realizing that she thought he was scorning her, he left her alone in the tent and sped toward the tiny military encampment at the far edge of the clearing.

Uniformed soldiers were already gathered at the dock, where a flotilla of three small, armored steam launches rested. But of Captain Obermann, commander of the troop, there was no sign. Relieved that the embarkation had not yet taken place, Hardesty made for the German officer's tent; entered without announcing himself.

His visit was ill-timed. Obermann was not alone. He had a young native girl with him; a girl whom Hardesty recognized. Her name was Teresa; she was the daughter of a peon laborer. Tawny, small, surprisingly pretty for a *meztizo*, she was on her knees before Obermann, pleading with him. "If you leave, you must take me with you, my lover!"

Sardonic amusement gleamed in Obermann's eyes to match the

cruel uptwist of his slitted mouth. He was heavy, paunchy, and the duelling scar on his face added little to his appearance. He grinned down at the kneeling girl, apparently unmoved by her tears or by the loveliness of her suppliant figure. She was nude to the waist, after the native fashion, and her long black hair streamed down her shoulders to make an ebony cascade over the thrusting promontories of her breasts. Before Tim Hardesty could foresee the move, Obermann stung his fat palm across her face, knocked her side-wise. "I told you I am through with you," he growled.

Hardesty said: "You Nazi swine!" and hurled himself at the heavier man; struck him on the jaw with a knotted fist.

Obermann staggered under the blow's force; righted himself and drew his Luger automatic. "*Herr Gott!*" he growled gutturally. "You dare strike a uniformed officer, you American dog?" His finger tightened on the trigger.

Teresa fastened herself on his wrist, deflecting the weapon. "No, my lover—no!" she whimpered. "You must not kill!"

By then, Hardesty had his own automatic out of its tied-down holster. "Better think it over, Obermann," he advised grimly. "I can shoot as straight as you can. May be straighter."

Obermann gave the native girl a shove. "Get out of here!" he snarled at her.

"Yes. I will go," she answered humbly. "But won't you please take me with you to Covenas?"

"Never." He pushed her from

the tent; turned to face Hardesty. "How dare you meddle in my private affairs?"

"I had no intention of meddling. I just don't happen to like seeing a man hit a girl. However, let's forget that. I've got news for you. Damned important news."

"So?"

"Yes. You can't take your soldiers away from camp. The Motilones are rising." Hardesty sheathed his gun. "One of our tractormen took an arrow in the back this morning. You know what that means. The savages are starting to snipe. The next step will be a full-fledged attack on us—in force."

"Too bad, *Herr Hardesty*. My orders are to ship my troop down-river today."

"If you do, my peons will refuse to work without protection when they learn the Motilones are on the war-path. The pipe line won't be finished by five o'clock this evening. My companies will lose forty million dollars."

"Your troubles are no concern of mine. I have my orders."

"Which have been countermanded by your superior officer, Coronel Cabrozon!" the American snapped. "He was killed by a Motilone ambush on his way here, but his daughter reached camp with the message."

Obermann seemed startled, uneasy. "Take me to her. I wish to see the official order."

THEY went to Hardesty's tent. Felizia Cabrozon lay on the cot, dry now, and clad in a shapeless frock of cotton print. Again Tim

Hardesty felt a surge of yearning as she sat up. Even in the formless dress, she was alluringly lovely. The cheap material could not deny the glorious rondures of her breasts, the slender enchantment of her figure. He had a sudden desire to touch her, and he clenched his fists to hold himself in check. "Felizia," he said woodenly, "I present Captain Obermann. Give him the written order commanding him to keep his troop here."

"But I have no written order. It was lost with the launch when my father was k-killed. I have only his word."

Obermann laughed sourly. "I take no verbal commands from women. Not even from pretty women, like the *senorita*. My troop embarks at once, *Herr Hardesty*." He clicked his heels, saluted mockingly, marched out.

Galled by the fellow's sneering insolence, Hardesty sprang after him. But just outside the tent he was blocked by Teresa, the tawny-breasted peon girl. "Let him go, *Senor Hardesty*. You are better off without the treacherous dog!" she whispered.

He tried to go around her. "His treachery to you doesn't count, now. We need him."

She wrapped her arms around his neck, fused her body to his. Her bare charms flattened on his chest and her lips went to his ear. "He is a traitor to you as well as to me. Later I will explain—"

Hardesty tried to wrestle free. For a moment his hands were on her golden shoulders in what might have looked like a caress. And Felizia Cabrozon selected that

instant to emerge from the tent.

She saw Hardesty apparently locked in Teresa's embrace, and she turned away swiftly, her dark eyes moist. Hardesty pushed the peon girl aside; followed Felizia into the tent. He grabbed at her.

She backed off. "So that is why you were not interested in me. You already have a woman . . . a native woman!"

"You're wrong!" he retorted hotly. "Teresa means nothing to me. She—"

"Save your lies, *Senor* Hardesty. I am not interested."

Angrily he caught her, drew her toward him. "I'll make you interested! I'll prove what I'm telling you!" he panted. And he kissed her on the mouth, prying at her lips until she moaned under the questing impact. His fingers traversed her shoulders; and when she tried to squirm from him, he could feel her swelling breasts brushing his chest, filling him with riptides of sensation. He tripped her to the cot; the cotton print skirt rucked upward to reveal tapered legs and lustrous thighs. The sweet vision inflamed his blood. He reached down to caress her.

"Let me go, you—you squawman!" she blazed.

AND then hell bubbled over in the clearing outside the tent. Peons began shouting, milling around. From the river, peanut-roaster whistles beeped as the three steam-launches drew away from the dock, laden with Obermann's soldiers.

Hardesty released the struggling Felizia; raced out to discov-

er the cause of the commotion. The launches were already headed downriver, while brown-skinned laborers gathered at the wharf in a yelling, cursing knot of hysteria. An American gang-foreman hurried to Hardesty. "Bad news, Tim. Somebody discovered a tractor-man up the trail with a Motilone arrow in him."

"Yes. I knew about it."

The foreman said: "The peons are scared gutless now that Obermann's troop has gone. We won't get our job done today, the way things stand. You know what that will mean."

"It will cost us the concession," Hardesty said grimly.

The foreman frowned. "Can't something be done, Tim?"

Interrupting his reply, someone plucked at Hardesty's arm. He turned and saw the native girl, Teresa, timidly demanding his attention. Excitement was in her piquant, stoic face. "Call the workers to order, *senor*. Let me speak to them. I can quell their fears!" she pleaded.

There was something in her manner that convinced him, caused him to obey. He leaped up on top of a pile of pipe, drew his automatic, fired it into the air. The native laborers turned, saw him. He waved them to silence. Then he helped Teresa up beside him. "If you've got anything to tell them, do it now!"

She surveyed the group below. "Listen to me, my fellows. You know who I am . . . or was. Yes; I was Captain Obermann's woman. And now I shall tell you about his treacheries. It was not a Motilone



Indian who slew that tractorman this morning. *It was Obermann himself!*"

The mob drew its concerted breath; stared at her in wonderment.

She yelled: "Obermann is a Nazi agent. He hoped to force the American oil companies to lose their wells, their pipe-line, their concessions! Knowing that he was to withdraw his troops on this, the final day of the contract, he murdered that tractorman with a Moti-

lone arrow. He wished to panic all of you; to frighten you so that you would not work without protection."

Hardesty grabbed her arm. "Are you telling the truth?"

She nodded and again raised her voice. "If the American companies could be forced out, Obermann hoped to grab the oil rights for his own country—his own dictator government! Will you then be fooled by this murderer? Will you be cowards, knowing that the Moti-

lone menace is false? Will you desert the Americans who have given you work, food, money?"

A few faint, half-hearted negatives came from the crowd. Then, as the roar swelled, Hardesty himself yelled at the workers. "On your jobs, everybody! There are ten white foremen to guard you—including myself. We'll be armed. No harm will come to you, I promise. Let's start laying pipe!"

HIS invitation bore fruit. A crowd of natives grabbed picks and shovels and machetes; others bent their backs under long lengths of heavy iron pipe. Hardesty leaped to the ground, caught Teresa in his arms as she jumped. On grateful impulse, he kissed her on the cheek. Then he plunged into a torrent of activity, dealing out rifles and bandoliers of ammunition to his Yank foremen; rushing to supervise the pipe-line job. The jungle resounded with peon chatter, the ring of tools against steel, the thwack of machetes against underbrush. A crew of American welders toted their torches and oxy-acetylene tanks from pipe-joint to pipe-joint, fusing the metal sections together as fast as they could be trenched and laid.

Noontime came under a roasting blast of tropic sun, but the work did not stop. A new oxygen tank was needed; Hardesty volunteered to return to camp for it, taking two natives with him. He stopped at his tent for a fresh canteen of water—and found Teresa there, waiting for him.

He was startled, having expected to find Felizia there. He eyed

the peon girl. "Where is *Senorita Cabrozon*?"

"I do not know, *Senor Tim*." There was something about her voice, some tonal quality, that told him she was lying. He had a sudden hunch that perhaps Felizia was in danger of some sort; that Teresa, for reasons of her own, was concealing something important. The native girl added: "Does it matter where the *senorita* is? Why should you think of her when I am here?"

Hardesty's eyes narrowed. "I don't think I understand."

"This morning, you kissed me," Teresa answered simply. "Now I am your woman. You must have no other."

He knew, then, that she really was holding back information about Felizia. He knew, too, that there was just one way to elicit that information from her. He forced a smile, took a forward step. "Yes," he said. "You are my woman. And as your lover, I demand to know—"

She was suddenly in his arms, clinging leechlike to him, jamming her tawny breasts against his chest. She raised her lips to his mouth, succulently parted. "You will be nicer to me than Obermann was . . ." she whispered.

He was human, and he was masculine, and there was something he wanted desperately to know. To gain that knowledge, he must play out the hand; it was not difficult, for Teresa was a blazing flame, and her nearness aroused him more than he had thought possible. His arms went about her body in a crushing embrace. He bent her

far backward; kissed the hollow of her golden throat. She sighed gustily. . . .

MOMENTS later, he whispered: "Now you must tell me about the *senorita*. I demand it."

Teresa raised herself languorously, stretching her arms above her head. "She—"

The tent-flap opened. Something twanged like a harpstring, and an arrow whined past Hardesty to bury itself in the peon girl's bare midriff. She screamed, doubled over, fell.

Hardesty said: "God!" and lunged from the tent, drew his automatic. He saw a brown figure scuttling toward the edge of the clearing—a Motilone warrior.

Rage clotted Hardesty's thoughts. He damned himself for having believed Teresa's story to the effect that Captain Obermann had killed that tractor operator in order to throw the workers into a panic. On the basis of that story, the peons had returned to work, thinking themselves in no danger of attack. Yet all the time there had been proof that the Motilones really *were* on the war-path. The attack on *Coronel Juan Cabrozon's* launch, for instance. . . .

Hardesty triggered his gun at the fleeing Indian. The savage threw up his hands and dropped flat with a slug through his shattered spine. Seeing no others, Hardesty leaped back inside the tent; leaned over Teresa. "Why did you lie about Obermann? Was it to get even with him for deserting you? Why did you lull us into thinking there was no real danger

of a Motilone attack?"

"It was . . . indeed Obermann who . . . slew your worker, my lover," she gasped. "If the Indians are attacking now . . . it is a thing I did not know about. . . ."

He had a feeling that she was telling the truth; that she would not lie when she knew she was dying. "What of *Senorita Cabrozon*?" he asked more gently.

"You . . . love her?"

"Yes."

The girl's eyes were wet. "It does not matter . . . now that I have tasted your kisses . . ." she whispered faintly. "You will find your *senorita* . . . in the jungle . . . she left camp an hour ago . . . I did not tell you at first, because I wanted you . . . for myself. . . ." Weakly she grasped his hand, pressed it under the tawny hillock of her left breast.

He felt her heartbeats slowing, and a wave of compassion filled him. "Poor kid!" he said softly, and he lowered his mouth to her lips. She sighed, smiled, went limp.

Hardesty leaped upright; there was no more he could do for the peon girl—and Felizia Cabrozon was somewhere in the jungle, perhaps already captured by Motilones. He raced across the clearing, calling her name.

He got a response, but it was not Felizia's voice. From somewhere down-trail, rifle-shots sounded. There could be but one interpretation of that staccato fusillade. Hardesty's pipe-layers were being attacked!

With a curse that was more like a prayer he went plunging along

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Flow of Gold

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the trail. Then, as he rounded a bend, his eyes widened. Dead ahead of him lay a triangular barricade of piled pipe-line lengths, thrown chest high, like a log stockade. Within the enclosure were Hardesty's nine American foremen—and with them was Felizia Cabrozon!

Of the native workers there was no sign. But the surrounding jungle teemed with Motilones, shouting hideously as they launched arrow after whirring arrow at the stockade's defenders. The clatter of arrowheads upon piled metal pipe rang above the steady blast of rifle-fire. Felizia was pelting from man to man, reloading guns, calling encouragement.

A MOTILONE loomed before Hardesty on the trail. He brought up his automatic, triggered it. The Indian sprawled backward with the top of his skull blown open. Plunging ahead, Hardesty gained the barricade, clambered over, crouched. "Felizia!"

She came to him. "I felt that there would be an attack," she said steadily. "So I went forth to scout. I know the jungle; was I not born here? I saw signs of the Motilones coming, so I ran to warn your men. The peons fled, but your Americans built this stockade—just in time."

He pressed her hand. "Brave little sweetheart!" he whispered. Then he rammed himself at an un-

defended spot on the barricade, thrust his automatic through a chink in the piled pipe. He aimed, fired, fired again and again. Spurred by his barrage, his men increased their own triggering. Bullets thwacked through the green thicket, whined like hornets in the undergrowth. For the first time, the Motilones broke; drew back.

Hardesty stood up. It was a disastrous move. A retreating savage sent an arrow at him. It whirred with rattlesnake sound; caught him in the left arm. He staggered.

Felizia crouched, pulled him down. "My dear . . . my very dear . . . !" she moaned. Swiftly she ripped at her cotton print dress to tear a strip from the skirt. The material fluttered up along her bare thighs. She tore again, and the dress split open from hem to neck. The enchanting valley between her breasts came into full view, but she seemed oblivious to her semi-nudity. Expertly she yanked a thin length of cloth from the rent; bandaged it tightly about Hardesty's bleeding arm.

As she worked over him, swelling curves softly teased his shoulder; her lips were close to his face. He kissed her. "To let you know I love you—in case we don't get out of here alive," he said.

For an ecstatic moment she clung to him. "And I love you, Tim. If there were time, I would prove it utterly, beyond all doubt . . . even though a thousand eyes

watched!" She pressed his head to her bosom, cushioning it there. "But you have fighting to do, *mi corazon*. The Motilones are coming again!"

He dragged himself away from her, his reloaded automatic in his clenched right fist. "Get set, men!" he roared. "Give 'em hell!"

Strangely, gunfire sound came from the direction of the river. That could not be the Motilones, Hardesty knew, for they possessed no firearms. He wheeled, almost tripping over an acetylene-torch outfit that had been dropped by one of the welders when the stockade was thrown up. Skirting the torch tip, from which a flicker of yellow gas-flame still tongued, he peered beyond the river side of the barricade. "Obermann!"

The German officer was crashing through the brush, firing his Luger at nothingness. Terror was in his piggish eyes as he came to the improvised breastworks and crawled over. "The Motilones! They ambushed our launches a mile down-river—wiped us out—I was the only man to escape—*Here they come!*"

It was true. The Motilones were again surging toward the beleaguered stockade. Hardesty's men raised their rifles—

"Do not fire, American swine!" Obermann yelled gutturally. He crouched in the middle of the triangle. "Do not fire, or I shall kill this girl!" He jammed his automatic against Felizia's breast.

Hardesty's throat tightened. "Why, you damnable yellow dog—"

The German grabbed a handful of Felizia's raven hair, yanked her

head back. Then he raised his voice in the Motilone dialect; addressed the oncoming attackers. "Wait! Listen to me! I have your white enemies at my mercy, O warriors! Spare my life and I shall turn all the others over to you—including this woman. Is she not fair and beautiful?" He ripped the dress from Felizia's shoulders, peeled it to her slim waist. "Is she not worth the bargain I offer?"

A MOTILINE spokesman stepped from concealment. "If your words are honest, we will deal with you. The woman will be one of my wives." He signaled, and a score of Indians clambered at the stockade; dropped down inside.

Hardesty's men stood frozen, not daring to fire at the savages for fear Obermann would send a bullet through Felizia's body. And Hardesty himself dared not risk a shot at the German, lest by accident he kill the girl he loved.

A Motilone reached for Felizia, his hand touching her. Obermann tried to shove her into the Indian's arms. She screamed—and Tim Hardesty went berserk.

He launched himself at the German, clawing and fighting like a maniac. Obermann beat him off with the Luger. Hardesty fell. His hand dropped across the metal nozzle of that sputtering oxy-acetylene torch on the end of its length of hose.

He grabbed it up, thumbed the trigger, leaped to his feet. Yellow flicker became roaring blue fire-stab that blasted outward a good twelve inches. He played the searing spray of heat full into Obermann's eyes.

The German screamed shrilly, dropped his Luger. Blinded, he tried to escape; but Hardesty followed him with doom's inexorable relentlessness. Stink of frying human flesh drifted across jungle humidity; and Oberman toppled, his brains roasted out of his skull.

The Motilones backed away. "Sorcery! Magic!" one cried. Hardesty plunged at them, yelling. He stabbed them with the blasting flame, and they dropped like bugs. Now Hardesty's men were at their rifles, firing into the terror-stricken savages. Those outside the stockade took screaming flight, cowed by the fiery deaths they had witnessed; those within the enclosure remained there—as corpses. Within three minutes, a heavy pall of silence cloaked the Magdalena lowland, broken only by the panting of triumphant American

fighting men and the harsh chatter of tropical birds overhead.

A foreman came to Tim Hardesty. "There was just one weld to go when the fight started. You've got the torch, Tim. You finish it."

Hardesty sent blue flame at the final juncture of pipe. Melted metal ran together, fused. He straightened up. "The oil line from Petrolea to Covenas is finished," he announced quietly. "Crude can flow, now."

He felt a soft touch on his arm, and he saw that Felizia had come to him. Her eyes were shining and she seemed unashamed of her torn dress, her revealed figure. "You are a man, Tim Hardesty," she said. "Twice you have saved my life. Now I am yours—forever."

"Forever," he answered, and his lips swooped to hers.