

said. "But Rodolfo talked him into it."

Her lips started to quiver. "I am frightened, Mike. He seems to have such influence over father."

I went over to her, put my arm on her shoulder. It trembled under my fingers. "I'll keep an eye on him tomorrow," I said. "I don't trust Rodolfo worth a damn."

She smiled then, that slow, sensuous smile I knew so well. That smile was as good as an invitation and in an instant my lips were on hers; her lips that were so warm and moist and inviting. As I drew her closer, I could feel every throbbing line and curve of her body and my heart started pounding madly, in rhythm with the drumming going on in my head. For an instant, she struggled and then she moaned softly and went limp. . . .

A NATIVE boy, pounding on the door, awakened me. He had a message from Carras summoning me to the wharf where the *Bolívar* had come in during the night.

I dressed hurriedly and, fumbling for a clean shirt, my hand hit my .45 which was beneath the shirts in a dresser. I didn't think I'd need it and was going to leave it there when I remembered the night before and Peeper John. If he knew who had socked him, he'd be looking for revenge. I slipped it into my pocket.

Even that early in the morning it was plenty hot. And when I went onto the deck of the tramp steamer the iron plates were already too hot to touch.

Carras was waiting on the

bridge, talking to the captain. The ship was flying an Italian flag.

I was introduced to the captain. He spoke pretty good English.

Carras said: "I want to get an early start, Carmody." He pointed to nearly a hundred natives on the wharf. "So I hired them in addition to the two trucks." He added: "Besides, the captain is anxious to get away as soon as possible."

"Yes," the skipper put in. "And I'm afraid the tourists we are carrying will be disappointed." He shrugged. "Those . . . what do you call them, Vagabond Tours? . . . they are such a nuisance. I have some tourists on board."

I agreed with him. Carras continued. "You will see that the natives hurry the gravel to *Senor del Orto*. And arrange things with the Marine representative."

"I'll do that," I said. "Sergeant Wilson is a good friend of mine. You'll have no trouble."

Carras smiled, fished into a wallet and handed me a couple of bills. I whistled as I saw the two century notes. He said: "Is that satisfactory?"

"That," I grinned, "is highway robbery. Thanks."

On my way down to see Wilson, I bumped into a man on the gangplank. I started to say I was sorry. But I forgot all about it when I saw that the man was Quesada. The expression on his dark face showed he didn't like me, either. I watched as he went toward the bridge and joined Carras. He must have asked about me because I saw him nod in my direction.

Wilson was already on the wharf. He had come over, as a