

to the softness of her breast. She pressed closer, her breath coming in little gasps and her head tilted back invitingly. My hands on her arm were hot and vagabond and then as I touched her garter she screamed: "Why, you . . . !"

I had the derringer I had noticed in her garter, when the light went through her dress on the pier, in my hand.

"All right, sister," I said. "Spill it. Why did you kill Carras?"

She recoiled a little, then snapped: "Give it to him!"

A bullet bit into my shoulder and as I tried to turn around a gun came down on my head with terrific force. Peeper's evil face was grinning as darkness descended.

I HADN'T any idea how long I was out. I crawled over to the wall. My head was splitting and blood from the wound in my shoulder had reddened my white coat and coagulated, making the arm look like one of those apples on a stick we used to have back in New York.

I threw up twice trying to get to my feet. Then I finally made it. They hadn't taken my car and I was glad I had the key in my pocket. Peeper must have had his.

My only thought was to get out to del Orto's place as fast as I could. The storm had left the road muddy as hell and the going was slow.

Del Orto's place stood about a hundred yards back from the road. I was just turning into the bend that led into the road when something odd struck me.

There wasn't a sign of a native. No trucks. No nothing except a

coupe outside del Orto's house! I was too late!

I pulled up behind the other car, got out and started into the house.

And then I heard it—a woman's scream, wild and frightened. Monita!

I thanked Heaven Peeper hadn't searched me and taken my gun. I ran toward the sound.

Quesada had Monita in his arms and was dragging her toward the door. Her clothes had been ripped almost off and blood covered her face where he had struck her. The sight of this infuriated me. I let out a bull roar and fired as he saw me and tried to reach for his gun. He went down. Monita sank to the floor.

I ran over, took her in my arms. Her tender flesh was bruised and discolored. She was too hysterical to notice her lack of clothing. And she owned very little of it now.

What shreds remained barely covered her satiny skin and her small, firm breasts ineffectively tried to hide behind the tatters. Her legs and thighs were almost entirely exposed.

She opened her eyes. They were wide with fear. "Mike," she whispered hoarsely, "we've got to stop them. They've gone to the cove. Peeper and that woman."

"Peggy?" I snapped the name. Monita nodded. "He"—she pointed to Quesada—"killed my father when dad found out that he was being double crossed."

She hid her face in her hands. When she took them away, her eyes were wet. "I didn't know," she said slowly, "that dad and Rodolfo had planned to sell sulphur to belligerent nations. The