

## DE NADA

Something would happen tonight, he was sure of that. Even in his drunken state, the soft night tugged at him in a way it hadn't in the past. He shook his head to clear it, finished the bottle of gin, and shattered it against the wall of his room.

Since arriving at Cristos on the San Paulo peninsula three years ago, he drank. It had become his only consolation and made him forget that he was still *de nada*, an alien to the thick green jungle he wanted to be part of. He closed his eyes. The moon pressed on his lids and the night's heat beat down on him. Bats hanging from the eaves shifted their toes and dropped bird bones onto the plaza below.

After selling his interest in his tobacco shop to his partner it hadn't taken him long to decide where he wanted to go. Cristos was the paradise he had dreamed about, a country of rich, flowery trees, spicy scents, herons, eagles, butterflies, and the gray-eyed gypsy. She'd lain next to him on the cool white sheets stroking his chest with her silky fingers.

"Nothing will be the same after tonight," she had said. "Can you forgive me for what I've done?"

"I don't understand," he'd answered. "There's nothing to forgive."

"Someday you will. By then it will be too late."

"What do you mean?"

"That's all I can tell you for now."

"Will I ever see you again?"

"Perhaps."

She rose, and he followed her to the edge of the jungle. She turned to face him in the swirling mist, then was gone. The smell of gardenias closed around him. The jungle still excited him in the early morning. The shafts of sun and vapor through the trees looked like the start of a new world, waiting to be discovered. A light breeze had rippled the tourmaline sea in front of his hotel. He stared into the dark and thought of the other times he'd lay in his hammock hearing the stir of birds waiting for the gypsy to return and couldn't fall asleep until dawn came.