

# MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS *By Du Bose Heyward*

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eyes while she talked to Baxter, then, in a panic, she made her way for her while she trotted back and returned, searching the ground.

The younger woman was impressed. "Ah wish to Gawd Ah had someth' like dat tuh look forward tuh," she said enviously. "Ah ain't got nuttin' but bad luck gib tuh me when Ah talks tuh one ob dem cunjers."

Presently they approached a bend in the road and heard the rattle of a rapidly driven vehicle. Then a light buggy swung the curve into full view and raced toward them behind the finest span of trotters that Baxter had ever seen. Before her the fore legs flashed up and down with the precision of pistons, and she got a fleeting impression of broad muscular chests under glistening chestnut coats, eyes showing glints of white, and mouths quivering open to the relentless pull on the bits. The driver was pushing them hard, using the whip against tight lines, and they were upon the two pedestrians in a flash. As Maum Vina snatched Baxter's big, slow-moving body to the side of the road, the woman looked up in sudden anger at the man. Not personal resentment so much as a militant pity for the horses which were being so hardly used. The appraising of strangers was not a calculated business with her. She had always had instinctive first impressions, and experience had taught her that they were far more accurate than subsequent pondered

judgment. Now, for the first time in her life, she was actually frightened at what she saw in a human face. The head was held straight on the rather spare shoulders, and a broad-brimmed felt hat shaded a long face that was shaped like a coffin—broadest at the high cheek bones, and tapering only slightly to an extravagantly long, square chin. The eyes were narrowed against the wind, and a broad, thin gash of a mouth was drawn in a tight, fixed smile. Under the shading hat brim the skin showed with a fungus-like pallor, most unusual in a country where the white men were used to working out under a subtropical summer sun. A shower of sand from the spurring hoofs stung the women's faces. They stood watching the vehicle diminish down the perspective of the avenue, take a far curve, disappear.

"Sweet Jesus!" ejaculated Baxter in a hushed voice. "Who dat rattlesnake, Mauma?"

Then, while they pursued their way, the old Negress told her about Proc Baggart and the part that he played in the lives of the Negroes of his section. She was an amazingly astute old creature. In the moments when her eyes were not employed upon their eternal quest they had looked into people's souls and minds and told her what they saw there. She knew much more about the operation of Baggart's magisterial office than a Negro was supposed to know. She also knew enough to feign ignorance, which for one of her race is the ultimate in human wisdom. Baggart was the law for the mining district. First as constable, then as magistrate, he had

killed six Negroes. The last killing had been rather spectacular and had served well to put the fear of God into the onlookers. The victim had been drinking, and instead of scurrying to the roadside at the approach of the buggy, had remained in the middle of the road. He shouted something unintelligible at the magistrate, who replied by shooting him dead from the buggy seat with a shotgun; then, with a Saturday-night gang of fifty Negroes about him, driving the vehicle over the body and proceeding deliberately upon his way to give himself up and go through the form of a trial.

The magistrate, it seemed, made more money than any man in the county. There were things called taxes that the Negroes were supposed to pay, but they were afraid to go to the house in town to find out about them, because it looked like a jail. So the magistrate waited awhile until the taxes got penalties—a process which to Maum Vina's

mind was similar to that by which an evil she-dog will eventually come hom ewith a litter of still more evil puppies—then he sent for the Negroes to come and pay him what he claimed. Sometimes he would send official-looking little blue papers by the constable. At other times he would just send word that such a Negro was wanted. Once a new Negro in the camp had asked for a receipt for his tax money, but after that he was hounded so that he had to go away. Then there were the dogs. That was where Gilly made most of his money, it was said. He would come slipping

around when no one was looking and if he saw a dog in a yard he'd report it to the magistrate. If the Negro didn't have a license, and of course no one ever did, he'd have to raise ten dollars for Baggart or sometimes twenty, if he wasn't civil. Gilly would get half of that as in-

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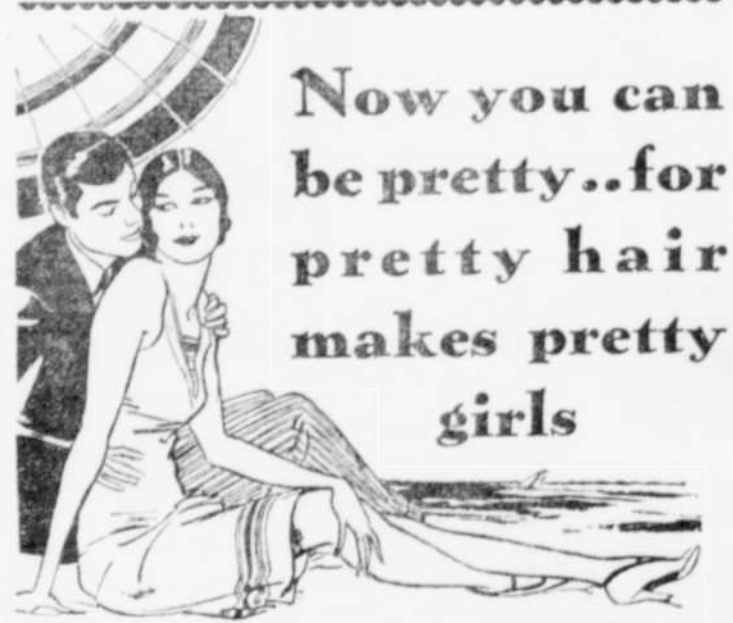
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