

MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS

by
DU BOSE HEYWARD
Author of
PORGY

A Story of Sacrifice, Romance, Humor and Tragedy

SYNOPSIS

MAMBA—Not a full-blooded Negro but whose dark color suggested an admixture of American Indian, is the much beloved employer of the white aristocratic Wentworth family.

THE WENTWORTH FAMILY—Consists of Saint Julien de Chatigny Wentworth, Polly Wentworth, and Mrs. Wentworth, their widowed mother. The family is more aristocratic than wealthy.

MAUM NETTA—Another colored member of the Wentworth household, who has been with them for many years.

Mamba has an uncannily clever understanding of the ruling white class and gives pleasure a naturally deep and unusually rich contralto voice.

The Wentworths are unable to pay Mamba, but Mamba is so devoted to the family that she is satisfied with her board and the opportunity of acting as maid to Polly, a young lady of inherited social eminence.

Polly was very apt in school, but Saint was a disappointment to everyone in the Wentworth family except Mamba, whose keen insight into human nature enabled her to see latent ability even though he did not respond creditably to the school system. Mamba alone understood Saint.

HAGAR—Mamba's giant, muscular slow-witted daughter, had an inordinate liking for strong drink, much to Mamba's distress. Two qualities she had in common with Mamba, namely, a fine contralto voice and a large body. Mamba had said Hagar was "born for trouble."

LISSA—Hagar's daughter, was the object of Mamba's sacrifice and the cause of Mamba's constant remonstrances against Hagar's habit.

Mamba leaves the Wentworths for the Atkinsons, who are also wealthy incidentally more wealthy than aristocratic—in order that she may obtain more pay.

In the meantime Saint obtains a five-dollar-a-week job as storekeeper at the mines and begins a business career.

One of Hagar's escapades leads her into a brawl with a Negro, whom she belabors with so much severity that she is arrested and charged with aggravated assault.

Hagar is given a two-year suspended sentence. Mamba sends her to Saint for a job at the mines. Hagar astonishes the miners by performing a man's work. She turns her earnings over to Mamba, who saves them for Lissa.

At a combination church service and "Love Feast" Hagar (whose new name is Baxter) befriends Blaton, a very much despised mulatto, by carrying him to a city hospital after he has been seriously "clashed" by one of the frolickers. Under Hagar's suspended sentence, she was forbidden to come within the city limits and she barely escapes prison again.

The season's most exclusive social event among the white folk is the ball of the St. Cecilia society. The Atkinsons are elected over their invitation to attend this event, consequently they invite Mr. Atkinson's pretty niece, Valerie, to attend as their guest. Mamba takes Lissa, who is now about ten years of age, to the Wentworth home to see Polly's evening gown. While there, Lissa is found to be developing into a very beautiful girl.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

INSTALLMENT VII

The next afternoon Saint came face to face with Valerie in an alcove of the Gibbs Art Gallery. Meeting anyone there was a little surprising, as there were several teas in progress, and at that period art found it difficult to hold its own in competition with society in Charleston. He stopped short, his surprise and pleasure plainly evident. "You here!" he exclaimed.

"Of course," she smiled at him. "This is where I belong. But you! I did not gather from the men I met last night that they went in very much for art."

"They don't, and I suppose that is why I have always been rather lonely. After all, friends have to more or less like the same things, don't they?"

"They do nowadays, I am afraid. Life is so short, and being bored can kill so much of it."

They had drifted to a window and stood looking across the street into an old churchyard where great live oaks were bronzed by the late sun. "That's the sort of thing I like," she said—"funny old tombstones—pictures—music—books."

Valerie looked up quickly, and he closed his catalogue with "and brown eyes."

"And champagne," she supplemented.

He was immediately embarrassed. "That's unkind of you. Last night was an event, a sort of initiation. It won't happen again. And now that I come to think of it, you were unkind last night, too. You laughed when I toasted you at supper."

"God forbid," she replied piously. "A nobody from New York laugh at a Charleston gentleman?"

A suspicion caused Saint to bend and glance under her lowered lashes

then they laughed together in the quiet echoing room. "Oh," she gasped, "you were such a gentleman. I did not know that they made them like that any more. I suppose it takes lots of grandfathers to get away with a jag like that."

She swung him around and slipped her arm through his. "Come," she said. "It will soon be getting dark and we must see what your local artists can do. I am out discovering Charleston today."

"You know pictures. What luck!"

"I ought to. I have starved for them long enough. There, those etchings are rather nice. Who is the artist?"

"Oh, she is a Charleston woman. Been plugging away mostly alone for several years, but she has taken several awards lately. I love her work, but I don't know enough about etchings to say why."

Valerie coolly removed the thumb tacks and carried the picture to the light. "Feel that surface. Get that texture? Good strong work. You know how they're made, don't you?"

Saint shook his head, and she gave him a brief account of the process—scratching the design on the protected plate then biting the picture out with acid. "I wish I had you in Dad's studio for a while. I'd show you. And that group over there. That's interesting."

She hurried Saint across the gallery to a small collection of misty low-country landscapes. At a distance they gave the impression of pastel, but on close scrutiny they appeared to be treated by some process of colour wash.

"Say, here's something new," Valerie exclaimed. "Strong Japanese influence, and yet how individual, and how they have captured the mood of your country. It is local work, of course."

"Yes, and I know her quite well."

Saint boasted, "You must meet her. And I don't think the Japanese influence is conscious. She is much too unspoiled for influences. Like most of us here, she has had to work out her own salvation. I've seen her out doing the marshes near the mines, sitting day after day like a tiny wren, painting away at a certain mood until she got it."

"We'll all be hearing of her some day," Valerie affirmed with conviction. "She's got something of her own."

Saint insisted on her seeing the permanent exhibit in the main gallery. They were portraits, for the most part, and the girl moved quickly along the big room. "These are interesting," she said after her inspection, "but not as art. I like them because they help to explain you. I suppose most of them were colonels, and I am sure they all carried their liquor like gentlemen."

For an hour they loitered through the pleasant rooms, and Saint got his first glimpse behind the surface of paper and canvas into processes and methods. He watched the girl avidly while she talked. Down the street St. Michael's flung out the quarter hours. He did not hear them strike. She had the thing that he had always wanted. She lived it, breathed it as naturally as air. He had waked that morning with a firm resolve to let the old dreams go, to find some solid terrain where he could plant his feet and renew his struggle, to give his mother and Polly their chance. But his motive had not been altogether unselfish. There had been something about his own experiences of the night before that had shifted values. Somehow the affair had assumed a greater significance than he could possibly have imagined. Now he stood as the recognized head of the family. There was a new and pleasurable sense of self-importance in the thought. His mother had accomplished, by being quietly and serenely exactly what she was, what no amount of argument could have brought to pass, and behind his mother that sharp invocation of his father. Then there had been the approval of the older people at the ball, an approval that tacitly assumed that he was being what was expected of him, that made him understand that measuring up to those expectations was after all a fulfillment. But now the cross current of Valerie's talk threw his mind into confusion. A longing that had nothing to do with reason twisted him with a pain that was almost physical. In a moment he had blurted out:

"I have always meant to go in for this some day. I am going to paint."

She turned and studied his face seriously, her own very grave. "I didn't know you felt that keenly about it," she said at length. "Tell me more about yourself, please. I really want to know."

He asked to escort her home, and they took their way through the crisp January evening around the Battery, where a winter sunset burned low across the Ashley and flooded the river with crimson lacquer. But now Valerie had turned from the contemplation of beauty to the more practical aspects of life. She asked bluntly: "What do you do for a living?"

Saint flushed. Her forthrightness challenged his own, but habit prevailed, and he gave the old, vague

answer: "I am employed across the river in Phosphates."

"Phosphates," she wondered, "suggests something to do with soda water to my uninitiated mind, but I don't suppose a gentleman has anything to do with soda fountains."

"No," he said, too preoccupied with the threadbare deception to smile. "I have the management of the Phosphate Mining Company's commissary."

She gave him her wide gaze. "That sounds important. I am duly impressed."

Under her look his own eyes began to waver. Suddenly he blurted out: "No, that's all rot. It isn't important. In plain English, I serve a gang of phosphate Negroes all the week, then on Sunday I wash up, come to town, sit in the family pew, and play the gentleman. So there you are."

She patted his arm in the gathering gloom. "I am so very glad you told me that," she confided. "Now we're going to be real friends."

"Not until you have told me something about yourself," he qualified.

"It's an awfully short story," she said, "and a gray little one. You see, Father is one of those artists who missed greatness. He even missed distinction. He thought that because he loved painting he could be a painter. Now he knows how little that has to do with it, and he is too old to start over at anything else. Mother—Uncle George's sister, you know—she's such a brick. She works, too, at lots of things, and helps, and when I get home I will have to turn in, too, and find something to do—not painting. Father says one artistic failure in the family is enough. But in spite of everything we do, we don't get anywhere. Father can't leave New York because he can get odd jobs there—something from the scenic studios, interior decorations, dribbling little things that keep us chained there yet won't give us enough to really live on. And New York is such a bitter place to be poor in."

Saint slipped his arm through hers and pressed it. She let her fingers remain in his, and after a moment of silence, looked up at him with her long scrutiny. "The two of us," she whispered. "Cinderellas at the ball. That was why I was so glad that you told me about your work, too."

After his week in the rarefied air of the social world, Saint's descent to the earth of the mining camp had been a gradual one, during which he was still enveloped in trailing clouds of glory. The events of the brief sojourn had remained so vividly in his mind that they seemed for those first few days more actual than the humdrum routine in which he moved by habit rather than thought. He measured cloth and weighed out provisions, but there was a shimmer over his tasks, as though an iridescent gauze floated between his hands and the thing that they touched. It was not until the fifth day that he could actually be said to have arrived. He was dining as usual at the mess maintained by the white employes in a cottage near the washing shed. He was always silent at his meals, and the other men usually took him as a matter of course and discussed their poker and hunting across him as

though he were a part of the room's furnishings. But today one of their number returned from town, where he, like Saint, had gone for the ball and a taste of the social season. He ragged the boy rather unmercifully, and the others joined in, with the result that when he stepped again through the commissary door the shimmering illusion was gone—salt pork, cabbages, and herrings were again salt pork, cabbages, and herrings. The swallowtail was definitely back in camphor, and his actual wage was twelve dollars and fifty cents a week.

He seldom had customers in the afternoon, as the Negroes were still in the mining fields, and as the hours dragged by he came into a realization of what the week had meant to him. Now, with the glamour gone, he could see quite plainly that its luminous centre had been Valerie Land. Sitting in his little sanctum behind the store, with his face buried in his hands he looked for the first time into youth's keenest tragedy: a vast aspiration and the overwhelming conviction of his own inability to attain it. He tried to consider it impersonally and debated it as a purely academic question. Was it better to have caught a glimpse of the unattainable or to have stayed in ignorance of it all, sweating it out in the obscurity of the camp, finding escape only in his reading, music, pictures—the sort of things that couldn't hit back? Now even the little that he was sending home was desperately needed there. If Polly was given this year, and perhaps next, she would probably marry, and marry well. In the meantime she and his mother must have the best possible background.

Looking back on his parting from Valerie, he realized that some protective divination had been at work within him, for he had made the farewell deliberately casual, as though they were mere acquaintances parting after a week of festivities. She had said that surely she would see him on the following Sunday when he would come to town as usual. He had replied evasively, telling her that there would be a lot of work to be made up, and he did not know when he would be free again. He remembered that she had looked surprised and hurt. Now he thought bitterly that even that was best. There was no use to go ahead toward an agonizing smash. A clean break—and a memory—surely that was the wisest. Now he must pull himself together—buck up—face it squarely.

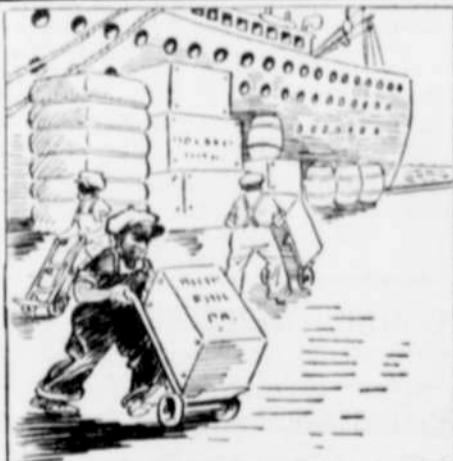
Through the heavy stillness came the sound of an automobile engine throbbing in the sand of the main road some little distance away. It fretted the structure that the boy was commencing to build—challenged its permanence. He dropped his face in his hands. "A bunch of tourists on their way to see the Ashley river gardens," he thought. They were commencing to discover them now. Coming from way up North in their great new machines that looked so out of place in the ancient solitudes of marsh and forest. He wished they'd stay away. Their appearance stressed differences so heavily, started absurd longings.

He heard a step in the store, got wearily to his feet, shook himself

(Continued on page 4)

The Stormy Career of Jack Johnson -- No. 3

Text by **ROLFE DELLON**
Drawn by **FRED B. WATSON**



WHEN he recovered from this accident his friends provided him with funds and he returned to Galveston. At the age of thirteen he went to work on the docks.



HERE his associates were some of the toughest and most hard-boiled imaginable, that fought on the slightest pretext consequently Jack often found himself embroiled in battles with youths much larger and older than himself.



ONE of the most important fights of this early stage of his career was one urged on him by his sister, Lucy. Jack was threatened and covered by a young man much older and larger than himself. His sister pushed him into the fight and he won it.



THIS battle was the first that served to establish his self-confidence. His reputation grew very fast after this significant victory. It was natural that the reigning bully of the docks should challenge Jack's new supremacy, but Jack whipped him before the other dock hands in a decisive and bloody fashion.