

# Mamba's Daughters By Du Bose Heyward

(Continued from page 3)

together and went out. The large room was gloomy, and by comparison the doorway seemed almost dazzling in the afternoon sun. It framed a foreground of white sand road and a towering back drop of straight pine boles. In the centre of the picture showing only in silhouette, stood Valerie.

She hesitated a moment, then advanced toward him. While he thought, "This isn't right. This will upset everything again," his quick perception of beauty caught the sinuous flow of the little body, carried now with a childish bravado. He said, "Oh, good God," and stood motionless. On his face was the odd look that had counted so heavily against him when he was a child—the wide-eyed, almost vacuous gaze. Finally he broke into movement, holding out his hand—"Valerie."

"Yes," she said, laughing a little shakily, "right you are, but don't be so frightened. I haven't come to call. That wouldn't be proper. I have come on a mission. I have come to save you. Is there some place where we can talk?"

She had spoken in a light manner but with a serious undertone in her voice. Saint was mystified. He looked the store and opened the door into his own room. She entered, and he followed her in silence. He was bewildered by her sudden and unexpected appearance, and by the faint exciting vibrations that her presence released in the familiar room. She did not look about her, saying at once: "Uncle George was taking the children to see the gardens, so I got him to drop me off here." Then with her characteristic directness, she came immediately to the point.

"You remember what I told you about Father and the bad time he has had?"

Saint nodded assent. "Well, I have been thinking about him a lot since, and I couldn't help thinking about your saying that you were going in for painting. It made me see you in a new light, and it made me see your great danger. I

thought maybe no one else would see it and tell you. You see, it struck me suddenly that Father must have been awfully like you when he was young—his passion for beauty—for knowledge—reading—painting—confusing the love for a thing with the ability to create it." She was talking now in short, rushing sentences, watching his face for any revelation that it might give her of his response, but not giving him a chance to interrupt her. "And Dad isn't the only one that made the mistake. I have seen lots of others go the same way. You see, they are two such different things. I knew a real artist once—he almost hated his art—it was such a relentless taskmaster—he was a terribly lonely soul—but his things are in the Metropolitan now. At first, at the gallery that afternoon, you said you loved pictures. Then, after I had talked to you about them, you said suddenly that you were going in for it. That made me feel terribly responsible. I could not rest until I could come to say don't. Hold on to the thing you have. Try to make it pay the way. Then you can have beauty, too. That's all. Am I forgiven?"

She had been standing tensely before him while she spoke. Now her body went slack. She sighed and let herself go into the depths of Saint's big chair.

The boy stood looking down at her with preternatural solemnity. "You are right to have come," he said "but I don't know yet. I can't think quickly, you know. There has always been a dream. It seemed so far, so hard to get hold of. I kept doing all sorts of things like those fossils there, hoping I would stumble on it and see it clearly. Then came

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the ball. It changed values, made me see other things as important, and on top of that, the day with you and the pictures. Now here I am back on earth again. I see this job for what it is. I am beginning to loathe it all—the ugliness—the cheap hypocrisy. And yet I know now that I can't let it go. I am even beginning to see some justification for the hypocrisy. Polly's got to have her chance. I've got to play up for Mother. So there we are!"

"But there's more than just that," she told him earnestly. "You see, I have been thinking terribly hard about it. It took a lot of courage to come, and I would not have dared if I had not had an idea."

She was so small and so desperately in earnest that Saint could not help smiling down at her.

"Oh, don't take this lightly," she begged. "It hasn't been easy for me, and I can't just waste it all. You must see it like this: Now you are in a job that you can do. I bet you can do it better than other men could, even not thinking about it. But you have lots of imagination that you have just been playing in this room with, keeping that door into the store closed all the time. Why can't you spend some of it on the job? Whatever it is, you can make it grow. Then when you have succeeded you will have time and money for beauty, too, and she won't disillusion you then as she has Dad."

Saint sat down opposite his guest and looked into the fire that crackled on the hearth between them. After a while he said: "Dreams are funny things. They had me mastered when I was a kid—shoulders right to the mat—but out here I have learned to keep them in their place a little. I only let them come into this room, and never across that threshold into the store. It was hard keeping them shut up at first, I can tell you. But now they behave. Then I started

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reading, playing a little, thinking things out, studying. It seemed that if I could only keep alive by what I got beyond that door, I could keep on finding my happiness alone in here. Then there was always the vague hope that some time, somehow, a miracle would happen and I'd find myself writing or painting, and would never have to open the door into the store again."

"But don't you see, you can't keep on that way. That's drifting. You must carry your imagination over that threshold—into life—and make it work for you. You are young and no one can count on always meeting life alone." She blushed hotly, stole a sidelong glance at him that brought reassurance, then hurried on: "I mean life is something to be gone after—fought for—not just dreamed over."

She broke off suddenly, then mocked herself. "Here I am getting as intense as anything, positively preach-

ing to you—and my pose in ruins. My nice casual little self gone moralist. Well, don't lie awake over what I have said. We've all got to think things out for ourselves, anyway."

(Continued on page five)

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