

Mamba's Daughters By Du Bose Heyward

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She stood up, saying that the car would be back any minute and she had promised to be at the roadside to be picked up without delaying the homeward journey. She had an overdone air of indifference about her and held out her hand with impersonal coolness. Saint took it and held it for a moment. Then he said with the solemnity of youth, "Thank you, Valerie. I have to think this all out. But I'll never forget your coming."

"Oh, that's all right, quite all right," she replied in a deliberately passionless voice. "It is the sort of thing that my sort of meddling person can't help doing for a friend. You've taken it nicely. And now I feel better for having done it."

In the moment of departure she hesitated, turned slowly and for the first time examined the room, noting the etchings, the books, the guitar; and on the table the rather absurd self-instruction book. She completed her survey in silence; then she came and took both of his hands impulsively. In the up-flung light of the fire her face was luminous.

"Oh," she said, "I am sorry for you and I'm proud of you. This little room—can't you feel it? It is not a playhouse, after all. It is your battle ground, and you're going to win." She dropped his hands suddenly and turned her back upon him, leaving him inarticulate and embarrassed. Then she looked over her shoulder and laughed audaciously.

"There's something else I came to say, too, and I had almost forgotten. It's this: you need not be afraid to come and see me in town. I'll promise not to marry you unless you ask me."

The boy goggled at her, his face a mask of comedy. Finally he achieved a grin.

"Poor boy," she laughed. "The Wentworths have never had to contend with my sort before, but you're

young. You'll learn."

He walked with her to the road, and they saw the Atkinson car approaching, a great, shining limousine, nosing its way along the winding sand road. Atkinson was at the wheel, and the children had a friend with them in the deep rear seat.

Saint helped Valerie up beside him while he responded to the cheery greetings, then stood and watched the car diminish toward a far vanishing point. Instinctively he turned back into the old avenue of escape—the splendid abstract dreams that had pulled him through the bitter moments of his adolescence. He opened his mind to them, and suddenly they were upon him, bright and amazing, more actual than life.

The great machine vanishing under the trees turned the trick—its incongruity in that primitive setting. Under the rubber tires, a scant six feet deep—carcasses of dinosaurs, their great teeth and bone fragments waiting for the shovels of the Negroes to show them the light again. They rose before him. In the dusk under the live oaks he saw vast moving shapes oddly balanced on hind legs while they reached to feed on tree-tops. They were so real, so marvellously convincing, he regarded them with a sort of detached pride akin to the thrill of creation. The last glimmer of a sanguine sunset, broken into long bars by the tree trunks, penetrated the dusk and burned faintly on the swaying forms. Then the swamp mists belled in whitely and blurred the huge outlines.

Saint became conscious of the roughness of the bark against which he was leaning. "Yesterday and today," he thought, "and what does it all amount to, anyway?" He pulled himself up sharply. What would Valerie say! She thought he had something in him, and she hadn't put him down as a quitter. He straightened up resolutely and jammed his

Then he strode quickly across the road and entered the store.

One month had passed since Wentworth had been to the city for the St. Cecilia ball, four years since he had gone on the payroll of the mining company. Mr. Raymond had sent word that he would call at noon. There was an important matter to be threshed out. The two men had scarcely met since the morning when they had driven out together and Saint had been installed. Mr. Raymond belonged to a world of statistics, directors' meetings, and conferences, with his orbit definitely fixed in the big Broad Street offices and the surrounding financial district. Wentworth had been directly answerable to the commissary manager, an extremely low order of human being named Goodlow, to whom a trade was as the breath of life, and who naturally regarded his aristocratic subordinate with the traditional suspicion and dislike of the poor-white. Twenty years of penny-pinching had raised him from the keeper of one of the smallest branches to the position of purchasing and managerial head of the chain. Saint knew that the man disliked him intensely, but he also knew that, having come into the job over the manager's head, at the hands of the great Mr. Raymond, he enjoyed a certain mysterious prestige in the Goodlow mind, and that was why he was, at least, left largely to himself.

It was odd that Saint felt no nervous apprehension at the prospect of the visit of his chief. He wondered about this for a while. What had brought about the difference? Then he got the answer: the ball, not the event itself, but the things for which it stood, the odd feeling of importance that it left with him in spite of his disillusioning return to the realities of the camp. He remembered

his panic that day when he had been given his job, and he smiled at his own expense.

When Mr. Raymond arrived he greeted his employe warmly, but there was a subtle something in the air that seemed to temper the extreme cordiality of his attitude towards him when they had driven out to the store that other morning four years ago. He stood silent while the outer door was locked, then, as a gesture of invitation, preceded Wentworth into his little sanctum. Strangely enough, the room seemed to impair the sense of superiority which an employer has every right to experience in an interview that deals with policies of the company. The room was less a part of the store building than it was of the man before him. It confused the issue, making him feel like a guest in his own house. Mr. Raymond stood looking about him in silence for a moment. There were many books, and his roving glance failed to discover a familiar title upon any of the

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