

MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS

by
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PORGY

A Story of Sacrifice, Romance, Humor and Tragedy

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 Chastigny Wentworth, Polly Wentworth, and Mrs. Wentworth, their widowed mother. The family is more aristocratic than wealthy.

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

Mamba has an uncanny clever understanding of the ruling white class and also possesses 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 prominence.

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 glib, unscrupulous, 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 Aikinsons, 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 steerscraper 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 owners by performing a man's work. She turns her earnings over to Mamba, who saves them for Liisa.

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

The women's most exclusive social event among the white folk is the ball at the St. Cecilia society. The Aikinsons are elated over their invitation to attend this event, consequently they invite Mr. Aikinson, a pretty nice, Valerie, to attend as their guest.

Mamba takes Liisa, who is now about ten years of age, to the Wentworth home to see Polly's evening gown. While there, Liisa is found to be developing into a very beautiful girl.

Reverend Grayson becomes persona non grata in the community. However, he succeeds in establishing a lasting friendship with Baxter and saves his New York address with her.

Saint has become a successful business man, while Valerie has been abroad and acquitted herself creditably in the service of her country during the World War.

Liisa, now seventeen, has blossomed into a maiden of exotic beauty. She has become identified with an intellectual group where her voice—the deep contralto, handed down from Mamba through Baxter—has attracted much attention.

Liisa is now a member of Charleson's intelligentsia, where she meets Frank North, a young Negro painter and violinist. He is very talented and worthwhile, and is interested in Liisa.

Liisa is considerably disgusted with her lofty associates. One day she tells Mamba that in spite of the fact that she is told to be proud of her Negro heritage, all her associates are trying their "damndest" to be white.

Gardinia Whitmore, a mulatto beauty and a true flapper type, seeks Liisa's companionship. But Liisa, because of her yellow nature, is rather afraid of Gardinia's overtures.

Gardinia has asked Liisa to accompany her on a "wild" party. After much inward conflict Liisa consents to go. But she soon abandons her accustomed reserve and becomes the scintillating life of the party.

Prince, the village shik, whose favor is courted by all the fair damsels, is attracted to Liisa. He proceeds to give Liisa a "good time."

Prince does not meet with the approval of Mamba. Nevertheless, Liisa introduces Mamba to Prince as the young couple are about to go upon another of their frequent auto rides.

that zigzagged around other cars and went out slowly like a star in blowing smoke.

Mamba sat at the open window. There was a tensely about her attitude as though she were waiting for prearrangement for a certain occurrence and that she was unsure only of the hour. St. Michael's chimes had spoken to her every quarter hour, and each time at the first mellow note she had sat forward, counted with an inaudible movement of the lips, then in the ensuing silence, let herself go slowly back in her chair and wait for the next. She was fully clad, even to the sedate, black straw bonnet which was an emblem of respectability without which she was never seen upon the street.

Midnight had passed, heavy-footed and weary, then, almost drowsy by comparison, came the single clear note announcing the new day.

A ramshackle automobile rattled noisily up the quiet street and stopped with a sigh before the Aikinsons' gate. At the same moment that Mamba's form strained from her window, Gardinia Whitmore arrived breathless on the grass below.

"Liisa home yet?" she asked.

Mamba disappeared immediately and a moment later stood beside the young woman, her fingers closed in a grip that was almost painful about Gardinia's arm.

"No," she said briefly; then: "Ah been waitin' fer yo' to come fo' me. What yo' tink she gone?"

Gardinia's voice was edged with hysteria. She had been drinking, and exhaled an effluvia of corn whiskey.

"I swear to Gawd I didn't have nothin' to do with it, Gran'ma," she began. "I did just like I promised. I kept my eye on her, but there was something about that lick of Prince's. It knocked me out, an' it knocked out Slim, an' we ain't no babies. When I come round, the first thing I looked for was Liisa and Prince and when I ain't see them I

made Slim burn it down here to you, just like I promised."

Mamba's voice came urgent, steady: "Where dat nigger Prince lib? Tell me all yo' know 'bout um, gal."

"Nobody don't know much about him, and he's such a liar, you can't count on what he says about himself. All I know is he lives across the bridge. He says he runs a big truck farm and a lot of stores over there."

"What he name? He mu' hab more ob a name dan jus' Prince."

Gardinia stood silent, trying to remember. Then she called Slim: "With maddening deliberation he detached himself from the car and slouched irresolutely forward."

"What's Prince's real name?" the girl demanded.

The man stood shuffling one foot backward and forward on the grass, his mouth sagging open, while he pursued the glimmer of a memory through the labyrinth of his befuddled brain. At last he announced, "Ah got it. Ah done heard some of the men call him Bluton—Gilly Bluton."

The word shocked Mamba into instant activity. She spun around and re-entered the house, emerging a moment later with a big old-fashioned pocketbook in her hand. She took each of the young people by an arm and propelled them toward the gate, her body rocking with her speed and the intensity of her purpose. At the car she stuffed a bill into Slim's hand.

"Ober de bridge, boy," she ordered, "an' ful Gawd's sake hurry."

Then, while he was obediently cranking the car, she turned and laid a hand on Gardinia's shoulder. "Go home an' sleep it off, gal," she said in a gentle voice. "Yo' ain't a bad gal, an' yo' done what yo' can."

Slim sat silent, giving his whole attention to the task of getting the utmost out of his dilapidated machine. Mamba's thoughts wrestled with the problem that confronted her. It was useless to plan. She would

have to depend on Hagar, who knew the ground. But she had an almost superstitious fear of the consequences that might result from such a dependence. Always it had been the well-meant bungling of her great, awkward daughter that had precipitated trouble. She remembered vividly the summer dawn when Hagar had sent for her to come to the East Bay tenement after she had jeopardized all of her hopes for Liisa by rescuing Bluton and bringing him to the city to be found and cared for by the police. The malign and ironical fate that prompted Hagar's good impulses had never played a more cruel joke on her than that. She had risked everything to save Bluton—for what? To attempt the ruin of her own daughter. The thought stabbed the old woman like a blade, and she broke her silence, urging Slim to greater speed.

It must have been between two and three o'clock when Mamba reached the cabin in which Hagar lived with old Vina. Overhead the great void of sky was filled with drifting mist, dark to the sea, and showing a luminous area over the western treetops where the moon was tilting toward the horizon. In the faint light the cabin had a ghostly, deserted look. Mamba sprang from the car, and knocked upon the door, calling urgently, "Hagar—Hagar!"

Almost instantly the door was opened, and the woman stood in her white nightdress, looming huge against the dark.

"Liisa's ober here with dat damn' nigger Bluton," Mamba shot at her; then she strove by repetition to drive the idea into the sleep-dulled brain. "Here—here—do yo' unnerstan'—wid Bluton."

"Can't be, Ma—not Liisa."

"Ah tell yo' she is. We got to find her quick. Where'd he take her? Yo'

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NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

INSTALLMENT XII

"Ah ain't expectin' no habm to come to she, an' Ah ain't tryin' to ba'by rize gal. Ah trus' she anywhere wid anybody any time. But when she go away from here wid yo', yo's s'ponsible for she. Ef anyting happen to she yo' gots me—Mamba—to settle wid yo' gets dat?"

The man looked her up and down. It was not in him to feel the spiritual power that animated the fragile old creature who hung to the side of his car. He could only see a rather comic little figure with great false teeth gleaming in the lamplight against the black of her face, and a hand that trembled absurdly and impotently on his car. He laughed at her frankly, throwing his head back so that she saw the insolent challenge in his eyes, and a livid scar that crossed his forehead like a long centipede.

Liisa put her arm around the old woman and drew her close to her side. "Here, cut that out," she cried sharply to the man, "Nobody's going to laugh at Grandma and take me out—you can just get that straight now."

Prince's change of front was almost comical in its suddenness.

"Me laugh at de ole lady?—Honey, yo' don't know me. Ah jes' laugh because she think anything can happen while Ah takin' care of yo'."

He reached over and patted Mamba's hand reassuringly. "Don't worry, Gran'ma. Make your min' easy. Your gal ain't never been so well fix' befo'."

During the brief parley the engine had been running slowly. Now he advanced the accelerator, and the sound swelled suddenly and ominously in Mamba's ears.

"Get in, Liisa," he called. "We're late enough already."

But there was no disguising the fact that he had laughed at Mamba. He had not supposed that Liisa would care and he had taken the chance. Now the girl stood with her arm tight about the old woman and hesitated, looking at him with anger and distrust in her eyes. For a moment it seemed as though she would let him drive away alone. But she had longed so for the night to come. The mason in the parade that morning had started a hunger in her for truth that could forget itself and send worries flying—and she had been such a lody all afternoon—and there, half an hour away, were waiting music—dancing—throbbing young bodies—"Life with a red lining."

She caught Mamba to her half smothered her with kisses and sprang into the machine beside Prince. There was a hoarse, triumphant cry

of metal as the gears meshed and the red car lunged northward.

Mamba stood and watched it go, first a crimson blotch that came and went as it passed under successive arc lights, then only a tiny red spark



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