MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS

(Continued from Page Six)

already the mood had passed. It was as though the Baxter whom he had known, and even the strange creature who had been there a moment before, had gone quietly out and another woman had entered.

She said in an incisive tone of command, "Now get a pen 'n' paper, an' take down what Ah say. Time's passin', an' Ah got to be gettin' along soon." She raised her voice and called, "Come here, all yo' niggers. Ah want yo' to swear to dis writin' Ah's goin' to gib Davy.'"

When he was ready she dictated in a clear, steady voice, never hesitating for a word, retarded only by the deliberation of the writer.

"Las' night Ah strangle Billy Bluton to deat' wid my two han'. Ah kill um 'cause he use' always tuh be my man, an' he git sick ob me an' t'row me 'way. Dere ain't nobody dere but me when Ah kill um. Dere ain't nobody know nuttin' bout um 'cep' me. Dat's all. Now sign um Baxter an' gimme de pen so's Ah can make de mark."

The Negroes stood goggling at her, petrified into attitudes of incredulity, horror, fear. Davy leaned over the paper like an automaton that had run down, its motive power ceasing while the pen point hovered over the sheet.

Hagar stamped her foot impatiently. "Get on and sign um," she commanded. "De time's close now, an' Ah got to go."

A woman broke through the circle, pushing the paralysed Negroes to right and left. It was old Vina. She was as frightened as anyone, but she had courage. She laid hold upon Baxter's arm and pulled her around.

"Wake up, gal, wake up an' talk de trut'," she pleaded. "Dere ain't been a night sence yo' come here dat yo' ain't slep' all night in my room." She turned to the gaping crowd. "Don't yo' b'liebe she. Yo' niggers—ain't yo' see she ain't right in she head?"

Baxter brushed the old woman away like a fly. She was shaken by a storm of passion that flung the circle from her like physical force. They backed away, knowing at last that their first impression when she had entered was right. Baxter had lost her wits. She glared at them and stamped thunderously upon the floor.

"Ah's talkin' trut'," she shouted, "an' ef any pusson in dis shop say Ah ain't, Ah's goin' make um sorry 'til he done dead."

She spun around again on Davy and shocked him into action. "Write Baxter." The pen descended upon the paper and the letters fell from its point in jerky succession: "B A X-T E R." Hagar took the pen from Davy's fingers and made a firm black cross.

"Now," she said, "To-morrow yo' take dat to Proc Baggart an' tell him Ah sen' it."

She dropped the pen, and in the dead silence of the room it rang a sharp, clear note as it struck the counter. Then she turned, and the watchers saw that her passion had passed and she again wore the odd aloofness of expression with which she had entered. She turned her gaze to the door with its square of misty, moonlight night.

"De time's come," she said. "So long, eberybody."

For a moment they saw her, a huge black silhouette set on frosted silver; then she was gone.

Maum Vina's scream cut the silence and loosed the Negroes from their trance. "For Gawd sake, stop dat gal," she shrilled. "She out she head, an' she goin' do sheself hahm."

They jammed through the doorway an scattered out on the piazza.

Onl' the night was out there; vast and tranquil it lay upon the square of white sand, the pine forests. Above them it was an infinitude of moonstruck mist, its utter silence not even broken by the far whisper of a star. They waited bewildered, not knowing what to do next.

Suddenly from the river came the loud bark of a dog, a single shout, then a confused babel of voices. The Negroes broke into a run, and presently they crowded out on the narrow wharf.

Beside the pier, seeming to strain its spars upward, lay a schooner that had been moored there the day before. Its crew were already at the pier head gesticulating and pointing downward.

All afternoon the September spring tide had been pumping its vast burden of water into the low flat river lands, saturating porous marshes and settin; the grass tops awash, piling incalculable tons of brine into salt creeks, brimming secret lagoons. Now the great heart that lay somewhere out beyond the moon turned from systole to diastole and called its tide home.

On the pier head the Negroes stood in silence and looked down. There was nothing to do—nothing to say. Below them, so close they could have reached down and touched it, the river drummed against the piles. Beneath its surface sleekness the currents writhed and turned like giant muscles under a velvet skin. So fast it sped. An hour, and its crest would be free of the little rivers and out again into the open sea.

END OF INSTALLMENT XV

(Continued next week)

JOE PLAYS HIDE AND SEEK WITH BOOTLEGGERS

(Continued from Page Five)

turn out well.

"Hello, Joe, I think I've got one. Better bring the car," said the voice over the telephone, not long ago.

" 'Got one what,' I answered.

"A gang of rum runners."

" 'All right, I'll be right over too.' "

Since a raid had been planned for later that evening everyone was on his toes.

" 'Where are they, Dillon?' I called when I alighted at the designated spot specified by telephone.

" 'Just down this alley.'

" 'What makes you think they're runners?' "

"Acted mighty queer. Stopped at the corner there and listened, while I was standing in the shadow of that tree."

" 'All right, let's bring them in.' "

They found though, what they supposed to be their quarry at the end of the alley. One fellow skulking down the alley was caught and he was commanded to raise his hands, high.

"What do you want?" the man asked in shaky tones, of Joe.

"We want you," the answer came short and quick. "We have been waiting for you, and you don't get away."

One of the men reported that he found no weapons though many tools, none deadly. A long search of the car failed to turn anything up. It seemed that here was a telephone lineman hunting down interference troubles but due to his manner of work he was suspected of anti-prohibition! This was but another instance when a sense of humor brought a happier spirit.

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