

# MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS By DU BOSE HEYWARD

(Continued from Page Four)

Wentworth's emotions attained that height at which delight and pain are fused into one and become pure ecstasy. Then the curtain descended in a swift, obliterating rush and stilled the voice. But in the wide silence of the auditorium its vibrations kept beating on like a pulse.

High in the dome constellations of incandescents commenced to glow faintly. A stir went over the audience. Saint felt sudden anger. Why couldn't they leave him alone in the actuality of the music? Why drag him back into the make-believe of people, walls, lights? The glow brightened and flooded the auditorium, calling him back into full possession of his faculties, and he became aware of the well-dressed audience that seemed to be pressing in upon him. For a moment longer they hung breathless, then shattered the silence with a spontaneous thunder of applause.

From the people near Wentworth stray ejaculations and comments leaped clear of the clamour and impinged upon his consciousness. "Good God, where'd she come from?" someone queried. "What's it anyway, a play—an opera—a pageant?" And the rejoinder, "For Heaven's sake, don't label it. That's the trouble with us. What we can't label we damn. Can't you see it's new—different? Can't you feel that it's something of our own—American—something that Stallings and Harley got a glimpse of in 'Deeo River'—that the Theatre Guild caught the pictorial side of in Porgy, that Gershwin actually got his hands on in spots of his 'Rhapsody in Blue'? It's epoch-making, I tell you." Behind Wentworth a man said in a tone of finality: "Well, they've done it. It's native from the dirt up—it's art—and it's ours." "Ours?" a voice inquired. "Do you mean Negro?" "Negro, if you will, yes, but first, American."

The auditorium was aflare now, and the fused single entity of the

audience had melted back into its component atoms. The ugly blur of confused talk swelled suddenly and drowned individual voices. Wentworth let himself go back into his chair. The experience had left him shaken. He hoped that Valerie and his mother wouldn't talk. Sometimes they didn't seem to understand that there were moments when silence can be richer than speech. His emotion had broken his thoughts free from their habitual moorings. Now he'd like just to let them drift. With relief he saw that his companions remained silent, evidently lost in their own thoughts; Valerie with a bright, forward look in her eyes; his mother's lost in reverie. He returned to himself: "God! What music!" he thought. "Primitive?—Sophisticated?—Neither—both. Savage, tender, reckless. Something saved whole from a race's beginnings and raised to the nth degree by Twentieth Century magic—a blues gone grand opera. . . . Not a bad idea that. Make a note of it and use it when I start to write. . . . No, it's too late now—Mother—Valerie—the boy. . . . By God, he'll have his chance—painting—music—literature—it's up to him now. . . . Three generations to make a gentleman. Rot. Five. Ten. Then, war. Two more generations to gather up the pieces—to carry on until the tide turns. Well, those two can't expect everything. . . . Lissa! What a voice—power—beauty—everything, and that heart-breaking pure Negro quality—Hagar—Mamba. Rotten time of it, like as not, for all the laughter and singing—climbing up out of the mud—making a gallant fight of it. . . . Others, too—back at home—different kinds with different sorts of trouble. That banker Broaden, for instance—

good citizen—hoing a hard row and not bellyaching about it—precious little recognition. . . . What would he think if I addressed him as Mister? . . . And what would my white friends think? That's easy: Turn their heads. 'Black menace.' Absurd, looking from this distance. . . . 'Good-morning Mister Broaden,' saying it like that, meaning it. . . . Why not? . . . Little enough, God knows! . . . And Kate Wentworth, sitting close to her son, where she could feel the warmth of his arm touching her own, not understanding his mood, but sensing its existence, feeling him asking to be let alone. "What in the world is opera coming to," she is thinking. "This mania to be different is at the bottom of it, I suppose. . . . Verdi—now he gave us music. . . . Or if one wants to be modern, there is Puccini. But this—outlandish, I call it. . . . Label on the South—nothing less than plain libel. . . . Who, in pity's name, from a section which is famous for its aristocracy, elected to go and hunt up Negroes to be sung about? . . . Mamba's Lissa! Hagar's! Still more incredible. The girl's air of distinction—style—they must have come from somewhere. . . . I wonder who could have been her—No, don't say it—don't think it. Shame

upon you, Kate Wentworth. You are forgetting yourself. To a lady, the —'s of mulattoes do not exist. . . . But if it had to be Negro music why not, at least, the beautiful old spirituals? . . . Lissa—what a remarkable looking child she was, with her speaking eyes and that air of being at ease in the drawing room when Mamba brought her in. . . . Now a famous person. . . . 'Practically born in my back yard.' . . . Well, then, 'raised in my back yard.' . . . Well then, 'the grandchild of our dear old Mamba.' . . . Now that song of hers at the end of the act—no, I wouldn't call that outlandish—strange and different. . . . Perhaps, after all they

did suffer at times on the plantations . . . But not at the hands of the (Continued on page 7)

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