

Mai Mai

POLLY FESSEY
COLLEGE, '43

Willie Mai, or "Mai Mai," as my little sister insisted upon calling her, was for nine years our maid. She was really very attractive and extremely neat. Her hair (on which she must have spent hours, greasing and straightening) was rolled around her head. She took special pride in her white uniforms and would starch and press them until they could stand alone, and then at attention.

Physically, she was as impeccable as Chaucer's nun who never spilled grease on her faultless wimple, yet she had the charm for the other sex that the Wife of Bath had. Even though she was only nineteen when she began working for us, she had had a current husband and her next lined up. When she went to a dance there would be about five to take her, and then she would ask another to avoid going with one of the five.

"Mai Mai" had a flare, too, for the romantic in speech. She referred to her first marriage as a "childhood romance," since she was only sixteen. However, when she met Allen, she knew for certain this was the real thing. But Allen was a chef, and this time it took only one cook to spoil the broth, so, soon, this marriage also came to a sad ending. However, by the time she had her divorce, another wedding was being planned. There had been "boy friends" before, like "King Kong" and "Slugger Joë," but there were none like James. By now she had decided that this must last, and that James would become number three only when he had sufficient funds. By the trial and error method, she had learned that this was an excellent idea.

Even without Vitalis, "Mai Mai" had talents that helped her to "win the love of men and the admiration of women." Like most negroes, she had a rather good voice. Often she would entertain me in the kitchen with words to her favorite, *Moonglow*. She would get a faraway look in her eyes, gently fold her hands, breathe so as

to spread her nostrils even wider, and really put her heart into this "liltin' melody," as she chose to call it. But her abilities did not stop here.

No medieval lady ever took her dream book more seriously than did "Mai Mai." It was no less important to the other cooks in the neighborhood, to me, and the rest of my family. In the afternoon her spotless kitchen was a mecca of troubled people. There was no dream so far-fetched that she could not tell exactly what it meant, and why.

"Mai Mai" was quite a dancer, too. Many is the time I watched through a half-closed door when she thought she was alone. She would turn on the radio, crook her left elbow high in the air, place her right hand in the hand of her imaginary dance partner, and "truck on down." In an undertone, I would hear her utter such phrases as "Blow it out, boys," or "Swing it, you red-hot trumpeter." Of all of her dancing partners I had heard of, "Big Brown" was her favorite, but unfortunately he was married.

The climax of her career while working for us was her part in the ball her club gave. She was a member of the *La Soiree Social Club*, and that organization and the *Gardenia Club* gave a dance. Each was to select a queen, and the club selling the most tickets would have its queen crowned. Willie Mai was elected, and for weeks tried to sell everybody she saw, whether colored or white, tickets. A special balcony was to be reserved for the white people who wished to watch.

Finally the big night arrived, and since we had purchased about a dozen tickets, we decided to go. As my family entered, Irene, the president, came to greet us and assure us that we had nothing to worry about. She alone had sold nearly a hundred tickets. Yes, Irene was a worker—all two hundred and fifty pounds of her.

At last the time for the announcement of the winner came. The five-piece band got the attention by sounding a long, loud blast, and then began playing a waltz (at least that is what we imagined they were playing). The

two clubs marched in, all dressed in white evening dresses, with their respective queen leading them, and stopped in front of the orchestra to await the result. Irene, of course, was to name the winner. Willie Mai was now breathing hard, her lips were drawn in a tight straight line, her nostrils were spread wider. At last the winner was named, and "Mai Mai" was crowned with a wreath of white carnations and presented with a five-dollar silver tray. This was really the biggest thrill I believe she ever had, because now she had actually been named queen of the ball. However, she was little more thrilled than the excited people in the balcony.

Several weeks later, early one morning, the telephone rang. At last the inevitable was to happen. Willie Mai was calling to tell that she was quitting, and on her way to Chicago to get married. Yes, "Mai Mai" was actually gone. With her went the perfect maker of lemon pies, the totally successful social person, the interpreter of dreams, only to be traded for cooks who furnished nothing but nourishing, plain, dull food for the body.

La Cathedral Engloutie

BETSY ANN ROWLETT

COLLEGE, '44

The cold green waves lap gently on
the coral,
The pale tides slowly tremble and
grow still.
A wav'ring form appears amid the
depths,
A great cathedral, sovereign and hal-
lowed.
See Her mighty arches cast huge
shadows,
Her towers imploring fingers heaven-
ward stretch.
Hark Her mighty chimes are pealing
now,
The vasty waters shudder with the
blow,
And earth reels with discordant har-
monies.
Why is she prisoned in the icy
depths?
Was it a vision? Shall I ever know?