

MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS

by Du Bose Heyward

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and unconsciously to drift in unison with the crowd. When the masses came abreast of her she looked up and met the eyes of a bright-faced young Negro. He had a large trowel in one hand and a small one in the other, and he was beating time in rhythm with the band. Hello dere, Sisuh," he called with a grin. There was something infectious about that grin with its gleaming teeth and full dark lips. She laughed back with sudden camaraderie. "Hello yourself!"

He stopped for a second before her and said boldly: "What boat yo' goin' on dis ebeinin'?" De Planter, de Pilot Boy? Le's make it de same."

She came to herself and glanced around sharply. Had anyone she knew seen her? But what fun they did have! A sudden pang of envy assailed her. She wrenched herself out of their holiday mood and stemmed the tide in the direction of the Broaden home.

Later, all through the eminently polite conversations, the excellently ordered music of the club, the artistic pronouncements of North, she kept seeing the face of the young man and picturing him dancing on the deck of the excursion boat—eating watermelon and spitting seeds over the rail, grinning boldly at the girls. "Hello dere, Sisuh, what boat yo' goin' on dis ebeinin'?" and his comical rueful face as he passed out of sight.

During supper Lissa was silent and preoccupied. Mamba studied her closely with anxiety showing in her keen old eyes. At last she asked, "Yo' goin' out wid dat nigger Prince tonight, chile?"

"Ye, Grandma."

"How come yo' abber bring him to meet me like yo' done promise long ago?"

"Oh, that's so—you did ask me to, 'way back in July, I've been meaning to bring him, but I keep forgetting."

Mamba spoke sadly. "You ain't forget, chile. Ah ask yo' in July, an' Ah ask yo' in August—an' yo' ain't de forgettin' kin. Why yo' don't want to me to see um?"

Lissa looked into the old woman's face. "All right, Grandma," she answered, "since you put it that way it's because you wouldn't like him and he wouldn't like you. He's different. He's new time—you're old."

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time. You'd be thinking things about him that aren't so. I've known him three months now—I know just where he begins and just where he leaves off. We had a good talking out, and since then we haven't had any fooling—just a good time—dancing, riding in his car—that's all."

"Ah saw um at de gate once," Mamba told her. "It be, half dank, but Ah could see woman-chaser writ all over um. Ah ain't want yo' fuh know dem kin."

The girl sprang up impulsively, ran around the table, flung herself into Mamba's lap, and gave her a hug.

"Oh, quit worryin', Grandma," she begged. "I'm just as hard as nails, I tell you, never saw a man yet who could keep me from coming back home to you. But I'm not an old woman—I've got to play a little bit—I've got to dance and cut loose now and then, and Prince is the swellest sport between Savannah and Norfolk—and he sure can show a girl a time. Now, you leave him to me."

Mamba said nothing more then, only patting the head that was buried against her breast, and swaying a little in her chair, as though she were rocking a small child in her arms. But an hour later, when Lissa left the room attired in her red party frock, the old woman lock-stepped her down the stairs and out to the

car that stood at the curb beyond Atkinson's garden. She was going to have a look 'er herself.

What she saw was a small, evil-looking scarlet roadster with two low seats side by side, and in one of them, with his legs extended idly to the left, a man who looked as though he had lived about forty years and had lived them hard. In the faint glow of a street lamp she could see that there were pouches under his eyes. The eyes were shadowed beneath the visor of a checked cap where they could tell no secrets, but when he turned toward Mamba she felt that they were laughing at her from their safe retreat. Lissa must have sensed it too, for her body stiffened and she pressed defensively against the old woman.

Mamba and Prince looked at each other for a moment of silence, then Mamba said: "Yo' been seein' a lot ob my gal?"

She was answered by a low, confident laugh, and: "A lots a big word, ol' lady. Ah ain't seen nuttin' of her yet."

That the sinister implication of the reply was not lost on Mamba was evidenced by a tremor of the hand that she closed upon the side of the car as she leaned over and spoke directly into his face.

(Continued next week)

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THE MYSTERY OF THE VERMILION RAY UNSOLVED

(Continued from Page One)

still beating against his jaw. That was enough for Cain. Consequently he departed from the Rock of the Haunting Woman firmly convinced that there was something strangely out of place. Since then there have been countless investigations made by people, both colored and white, but nothing has been unearthed in the way of a solution. Many theories have been advanced, but none of them are logical. Detectives, doctors, lawyers, plumbers, etc., have presented themselves at the rock, but like the "dumbest" of their companions or predecessors, go away completely baffled. The mystery of the Vermilion Ray on the Rock of the Haunting Woman is still unexplained and probably always will be.

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