

MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS

by
**DU BOSE
HEYWARD**
Author of
PORGY

A Story of Sacrifice, Romance, Humor and Tragedy

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW INSTALLMENTS.

Lissa 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.

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

Lissa 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 the true flapper type, seeks Lissa's companionship. But Lissa, because of her refined nature, is rather afraid of Gardinia's overtures.

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

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

Prince does not meet with the approval of Mamba. Nevertheless, Lissa introduces Mamba to Prince as the young couple are about to go upon another of their frequent auto rides. The auto ride ends at a dance, where the whole crowd falls a victim to Prince's bad liquor. Gardinia, a member of the crowd, recovers from her intoxicated spell only after she has discovered that Prince and Lissa have disappeared from the bunch.

Gardinia makes good her promise to Mamba to "look out" for Lissa by immediately notifying her of Prince and Lissa's disappearance.

Mamba senses the danger and immediately summons Hagar, who, having been told that "Prince" is none other than Gilly Bluton, whom she befriended years before, recognizes the necessity of immediate action.

Hagar remembers an isolated cabin frequented by "Prince" during the latter's underworld activities. Thereupon, she and Mamba set out for the cabin. As they approach it, they hear Lissa's frightened voice.

When they open the door they find Lissa seated in a corner with her dress torn and arms locked about her legs below the knees. "Prince" stands over her in a threatening manner.

Lissa leaps into Mamba's arms and together they leave the cabin. Hagar, completely forgetting herself, unleashes her great strength upon the cowering and ungrateful "Prince," and strangles him to death with her bare hand.

Hagar is forced into hiding. Mamba sends Lissa to New York City, where Saint Wentworth meets her.

Saint and Lissa take a taxi for the home of the Reverend Thomas Grayson, who, upon their arrival, offers Lissa the protection of his home—especially after Lissa produces the address given to her mother many years before by Grayson.

Back home, Hagar disposes of Gilly Bluton's body in the swamp. She also amazes the town by committing suicide.

Lissa receives an account of her mother's suicidal death from Saint. She is considerably disappointed, but is comforted by the kindness of the Grayson home.

—NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY—

INSTALLMENT XVII

Her mother was known only as Baxter, a vagrant Negro woman who had come to the mines ten years before, had once saved Bluton's life, and had later, presumably in a fit of jealous rage, destroyed him. But while her mind assimilated these facts, coolly felicitating her upon her escape, upon the final complete erasure of the record of her own origin, an inexplicable tremor seized upon her body, shaking her so that she fell into a chair, seized the arms with her sallow, expressive hands and gripped desperately while the tremor possessed her like the sustained tension of a galvanic current. Presently the seizure abated. Then came weakness as from a protracted illness, and a pang of loneliness and longing that swelled, mounted, and overwhelmed her, flinging her head down upon her arms, and blinding her with a gush of tears.

With everyone there is some picture etched into the child mind by the bite of some early and penetrating emotion. It stands there always, isolated, marking the beginning of memory, obscuring lesser subsequent impressions. Up now from under the drifted years this picture flashed into Lissa's consciousness—a great bruised figure standing in a doorway with a policeman beside it—a strange salty taste upon her child lips where her mother had pressed a farewell kiss. The girl sat waiting. Her tranced gaze had found the window and had escaped the confines of the room into an infinity of sky. Then another picture began to brighten, assume colour, form—a gigantic black woman kneeling in the dirt of the public road, patting her with great clumsy

hands, while her body mingled a tang of sweat and phosphate dust with the druggy perfume of roadside honeysuckle. This memory held a poison that she could not at once identify. Then it came—the beginning of a fastidiousness in herself that had turned her away from the great creature who might soil her dress to the cleanness of Mamba's arms. A gap. A time of things wanted because of a strange loneliness that needed assuaging—a fire in her blood that had driven her in a half-desperate search for the unattainable to the Broadens—the roadhouse dances—the last night with Prince. Her last picture of Hagar, the dominant figure of that insane night looming like destiny over the body of Bluton, taking her in her arms and giving her for one brief moment a sense of refuge, of sudden arrival at some remote and illusory goal. It was strange now that she could not remember a word that her mother had ever said. She imagined her as vast, inarticulate power—encompassing love, possessing her all the more now because of her silence.

She saw now with agonising clarity all that Hagar had given, and now that she had gone there would never be anything that she could offer in return. She felt an impulse to wound herself in some way, believing vaguely that pain would expiate her thoughtlessness, her indifference. She closed her hands in a muscular spasm that drove the nails into her tender palms, and imagined a slackening of the grip upon her heart. Now she was fiercely glad that she was alone. For the first time in her life she was glad to be free of Mamba and her indom-

"I won't go on", Lissa sobbed, "I hate music. If it hadn't been for that, Ma'd be alive today."

itable will. The old woman would tell her to go ahead and forget what had happened. Now her only comfort came from sending her thought back to the three impressions of her mother, and in a blind search for some way in which she could punish herself for her selfish neglect.

Beyond the window the shortening September day dwindled into twilight. In the street the cooling pavements called the dark children from the serried houses. They swarmed down, noisy as blackbirds, and flung a gay chattering sound up to Lissa's room. From the two adjacent Elevated lines sounded roar and answering roar as the trains hurtled with mechanical punctuality over the darkening streets. To Lissa they seemed like the tick-tock of a titanic clock dividing the present into minute segments and hurling it into the limbo of the past. On the Avenue the windows of an apartment house lost the red of the sunset, stared blank for a moment, then winked to life again, restless in the blue dusk. But these things that Lissa had loved as symbols of her new life had lost their magic. She sat staring through them into the Carolina Low Country. Once she rose from her chair, got from a bureau drawer the prayer book that Hagar had given her, opened it at the flyleaf with its inscription, then sat again with the volume in her hands.

It was not until after breakfast the following morning that Lissa left her room. She wore the clothes that she had had on when she came from her music lesson the preceding afternoon, and she went directly to the study of Thomas Grayson, opened the door without knocking, and entered.

He sat at a large square desk in the middle of the room looking over the notes for the sermon that he would deliver at the morning service. The massive severity of the desk made a fitting base for the bust and head of the man who sat there.

Lissa closed the door behind her, and stood with her back against it as though taking refuge from some pursuer. Grayson looked up and saw her face. The live bronze had gone a lustreless brown, except where it had darkened to violet under the eyes. From swollen lids the eyes looked with a hard brilliance. The hint of tragedy that had been latent in her expression was suddenly all that he saw there, rendering the face drawn and haggard. Her hair was dishevelled, her dress looked as though it had been slept in. There was a shocking incongruity in the pair of frivolous red pumps on her feet.

His response was characteristic. He said in a deliberately matter-of-fact voice: "Don't be afraid, Lissa. Come here and tell me your trouble."

Without rising, he motioned to a chair that faced him across the polished mahogany with its piles of

meticulously arranged papers. The girl hesitated. He seemed unsympathetic—more rock-like than ever in his unyielding power. Then she saw his face soften. He leaned forward and extended a hand across the desk. "Sit down, Daughter, and tell me," he urged. "Ada and I have been fearful that your letter brought bad news."

She sank into the chair, then she placed the letter, clippings, and prayer book before him. "Read that letter and those papers, please," she begged. "They're about Ma."

She watched him take the papers in his heavy, well-kept, hairless hands, and read them through with his habitual thoroughness. Now that she was close to him her feeling toward him changed. Out of his massive silence strong emanations of sympathy flowed toward her. She felt his power now, not as opposition, but as a sustaining force. She was glad that he had not spent it in easy volubility.

He finished the last clipping, then folded them all carefully and returned them. When he spoke his voice seemed stilted, inadequate in contrast with his unspoken sympathy. "Your mother was a truly great woman, Lissa. The just God who knows everything will forgive her. She has given her life for you. You should be proud of your parentage—your race."

She did not comment upon this tribute. Her reply struck out at a tangent, as though she had waited for him to finish speaking to say what had long been on her mind. She leaned forward, swaying slightly in her chair. Her speaking voice had caught the tragic timbre of her low singing notes. Her short sentences were spoken in unconscious rhythm. "I can't stay here now. I can't let it stand like that. See what she says—that he was her lover. She despised him—I took me to put up with his kind—I've got to go home and tell them the truth—I've got to face the Broadens and their crowd with it—I've got to claim her now before everybody. It's all I can do."

Grayson sat heavy, solid, his arms resting on the desk before him, his eyes on her face. Without speaking he made Lissa feel his attitude as it changed from the sympathetic to the coolly judicial.

"You're emotionally upset to-day, Lissa," he said at last. "You're in no condition to arrive at such an important decision. You must wait a day or two."

Her form stiffened. She eyed Grayson with distrust. Immediately she was on the defensive. "I thought I could count on you," she said. "I thought you'd see it as my Christian duty and help me, or I wouldn't have told you. But you can't stop me now—nobody can—not even Grandma. I always did what other people thought. Now I am going to think for myself, and I know I'm right. I'm going."

Grayson made no reply; then Lissa realised that he had not been listening to what she had said. He had not

moved, but sat gazing past her, his eyes intent behind their glasses, his brow deeply furrowed. In one of her violent reversions she sprang to her feet.

"A hell of a lot you care for other people's troubles!" she flung at him; then she turned to go.

"Wait!" She was arrested by the impact of the single word and faced him again, her beautiful expressive body fixed in an attitude of fear like that of an animal at bay.

"Now sit down and keep quiet," he commanded.

For a moment longer her defiance lasted; then suddenly she bent her head and commenced to cry softly into the crook of her arm in the manner characteristic of Hagar when faced by overwhelming difficulties. Then obediently she resumed her seat.

When Grayson broke his portentous silence his voice was compassionate but firm. He said: "I've thought it all out now, Daughter. Look at it this way": he picked up the clippings and selected the one which contained Hagar's confession. Lissa raised her tear-stained face, and he pointed to the words. "That," he said, "is your mother's last will and testament. In it she has left you something that she has conceived to be of inestimable value. It was all that she had to give. You cannot repudiate it. You must give her silence in return."

"But it's a lie. I can't go on always living a lie. What am I to do?"

"You must carry on. Make your life worth the price that has been paid for it. There's no turning back now without breaking faith with your mother. There's nowhere for you to go but ahead; no way to praise her but in your works."

"I won't go on," she rebelled. "I hate music. If it hadn't been for that Ma'd be alive to-day. I didn't know until that night how much I was missing her. I was always lonely, and I didn't know why. Grandma never gave me time to think. Now she's gone, and I'm sick of everything. I'm the loneliest girl in the world."

"I know," said Grayson gently, "you think now that it is this great loss that makes you so. I isn't. Like Ishmael, you were born for loneliness. But you have this to be thankful for—you were also born for success. I had a talk with Salinski yesterday. He's extravagant in his praise of your voice. He has never taken a Negro before, and it took all of the influence that I could bring to bear to interest him in giving you a trial. It's a great chance for you. It's more than that. It's a great chance for the Negro race. If you drop it now, go South and perhaps run the risk of being arrested as an accessory to the murder, certainly, at the least, returning to start over again handicapped by a scandal, you will have thrown that chance away. For Ha-

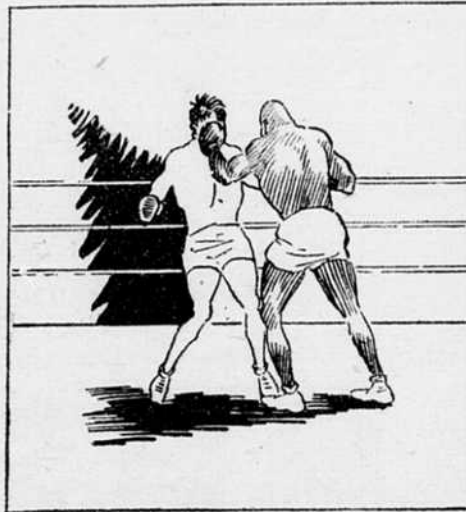
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The Stormy Career of Jack Johnson -- No. 13

Drawn by **FRED B. WATSON**
Text by **ROLFE DELLON**



In New York a few weeks later Jack signed a thirty-week theatrical contract, which netted him a considerable sum and took him over a great part of the United States and Canada. On this tour he gave many exhibitions.



Jack remained in excellent physical condition; hence, between theatrical engagements he took in several minor ring affairs. In one of these he defeated Victor McLaglen, now a famous movie actor.



During this time there had been a spirited search for a "white hope," who could wrest the championship from Johnson. Jim Jeffries, once champion, had retired, but his friends prevailed upon him as a last resort.



Stanley Ketchel was believed to be able to defeat Johnson, so they fought at Colma, California, October 16, 1909. Ketchel was decisively beaten, but succeeded in winning the exclusive distinction of flooring Johnson.