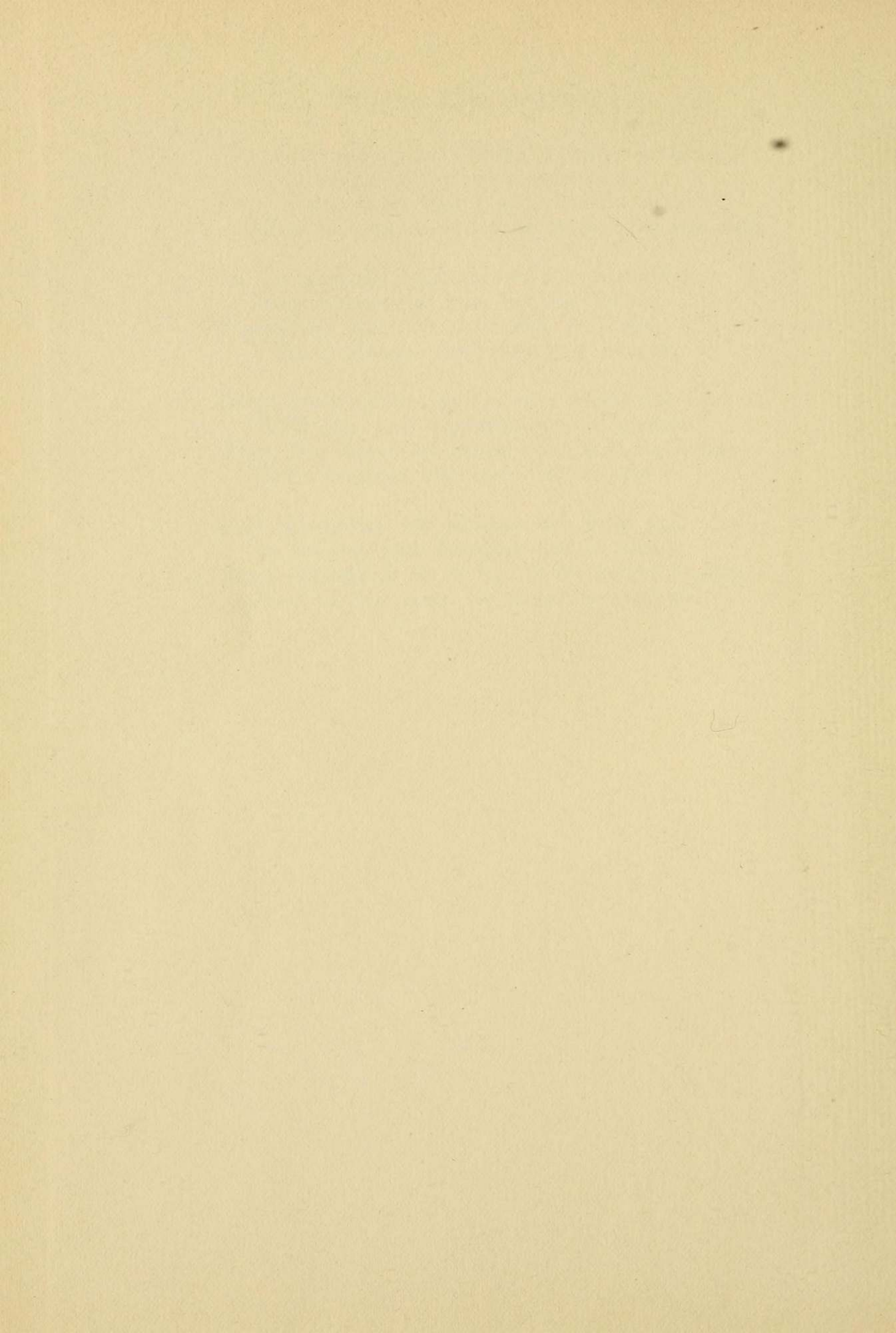




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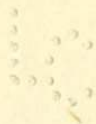


Mandy's Lost Opportunity

A NEGRO MONOLOGUE

BY
MARY MONCURE PARKER

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I tell you, Liza Johnsing, ef you don' take 'vantage of chances you loses out in dis heah worl' jes as sho' as you live.

I missed de chanst ob mah life wid Mose once. Me an' de Lawd had him dead to rights—yes, honey, dead to rights—we had him skeered 'nuff to promise to wuk an' then mah sof' feelin's got the better of me. I 'spose it's been so long since he done a lick dat hit seemed like takin' 'vantage of a baby or cripple or some other he'pless thing. You see it was de time when we done had 'vival meetin's in our chu'ch, kasen ev'body was skeered 'bout de Comic.

Mr. Halley got to messin' round' in de hevins wid dat Comic of his'n. Dat man's gwine to come to some bad end muxin' in de firmamun which is de Lawd's—He made it—an' any human pusson what tries to put Comics or any other truck up dar's gwine to git his fingers burnt some day.

Dis heah worl's tryin' to git too smart wid Comics an' flyin' machines. De Lawd done sot mah feet down on dis heah earf an' I aint gwine to monkeydoodle 'roun' tryin' to intimate a bird. Ef I'd been 'spected to fly, the wings would have growed out of mah should-ers, an' thank de good Marster fer dat blessin' dat dey

don'. It would have been a good thing fer Mr. Halley to minded his own bizness, stid of skeerin' fokes outen dere senses. I used to wuk fer a woman onet what was full of other fokeses bizness. Ef dey had comp'ny nex' do', or was gwine to have a new baby, or bought new flannels, or had unbleached sheets—she knowed it all—de whole fambly hist'ry, by de washin' on de line.

One day some new nabors moved in beside her, an' she spent most of her time cranin' her neck tryin' to see somethin'. "Dat man rides' round' in a taxi a good deal an' his wife has lots of clothes an' them chillen is fussed up awful 'spensive; I wonder what his bizness is. I jes' know he can't 'ford all that," she says to me one day. "Well, Liza Johnsing," I says to her, "Don' know nothin' 'bout it—my bizness is washin' an' I spec' his bizness is mindin' his own bizness." Whopee she was mad! But she owed me fer sev'ral weeks' wash an' she couldn't let out on me very well.

Well, goin' back to mah story, I certainly was skeered mahsef ovah dat Comic. An' Mose—um-um-chile—fer de fus' time in yeahs dat nigger moved 'roun'. You know Mose is a pretty good chairholder. Well, one night when dey said we was goin' through de tail of de Comic, I was kin' of nervious mahse'f an' I set up all night.

I didn't see nothin'—but Lawsy who should come put-terin' 'roun' but Mose—now you know, Liza, Mose would ruther sleep nex' to eatin' than nothin' in the worl'. He's jes' like an old bar in winter time, an' ef he slep' more'n he usually do, he mought as well be layin' under a headstone in the seminary, wid one of them lyin' subscriptions on it tellin' what a good man he usen to be.

Did you ever notice, Liza, what a queer thing it am, dat no matter how mean an' rambuntious a man am—dat when he's a corpse an' fokes walks up to the casket and looks at de remnants, dey allus busts out a cryin' an' says, "What a Saint de worl' has los'."

I knowed a woman onct what was so plum cussed dat ev'body jes' despised her an' when she died dey all sheddin' enuff tears to float a ship. Her husban' couldn't think of nuthin' good she ever done, but he stood wailin' an' moanin' an' wringin' his han's—"Oh, Mandy, honey," he says to me, "I'm gwine to miss Cymbeline so—she suttingly was a good feeder."

Well, I'm varigatin' from mah subjec'. As I done tole you I was settin' in de shadder a waitin' fer some sign from de sky, when Mose bumped into me. He didn't know I was dah an' Liza, honey, you nevah seen sech a skeered coon. He drapped on his knees—his teeth chatterin' like a squirrel's an' commenced to pray.

"Oh Lawd hab mussy! I ain't done much of nothin'."

"Git up heah, Mose Brown," I says. "Dah ain't no need to tell the Lawd dat. He knows you ain't done much of nothin' all yo' life—you lazy no-count nigger."

But Mose suttinly was skeered. He kep' right on his knees. "Oh Mandy, chile," he says, "I didn't know you, but pray fer me, honey. You allus went to chu'ch an' maybe de Lawd'll listen to you. Can't nobody tell what'll happen, honey. Maybe we'll git wedged in the Comic's tail an' den de earf can't turn ovah no mo. An' what den—no mo' day; jes' night an' darkness—Oh Lawd, my good Lawd, hab mussy!"

Liza, his groanin's was awful—I got de creeps up an' down mah spine. "Hush, up, Mose, hush up. I'll make

you some hot coffee an' brace you up." Mose ain't much, Liza, but he's all I got.

"Oh Lawd, hab mussy on me," Mose groaned. "Mandy, honey, make dat coffee hot an' I'm so skeered—Hab mussy, Marster! Mandy, honey, maybe it's mah las' meal—gimme a little of dat chicken an' de cocoanut cake dat you brung from de 'Ception today. Oh Marster, hab mussy!"

You know, Liza, I hepped at a 'Ception on Michigan Avenue dat day an' I brung home quite a lot of stuff. Mose sat there with his teeth chatterin', but he managed to put away a good square meal 'tween his groanin's an' prayin's—an' de res' ob de night he was groanin' kase he done et so much.

Liza, honey, you oughter seen Mose de nex' Sunday, chile. I feel like bustin' my sides laffin' ev'y time I thinks of it now—I was too skeered ovah de Comic then, to think of much else.

Mose aint been to chu'ch fer yeahs, but de nex' Sunday ef Mister Mose didn't dress hissef up in his bes' Sunday-go-to-meetin' an' go along with me to chu'ch. He set up jes' as straight as though he thought he could fool the Lawd into thinkin' he'd been thar ev'y Sunday an' to all de 'Vival meetin's. An' de sermon dat day—well de sermon was enuff to raise de wool right offen yo' head, Liza Johnsing—'bout de las' days when dey was gwine to be wahs an' earfquakes an' de worl' was gwine to be darkened an' de moon changed to blood or maybe 'twas de sun, I don't know, honey. Mose was shakin' like he done had a chill.

"Mandy, chile," he leaned ovah an' whispered, "ef de worl' should bus' up while we's in chu'ch, an' de Marster shouldn't reconnize me—will you tell him I'se yo' man an' dat I ain't been to chu'ch much fer yeahs

kase I ain't been able—had de misery in mah side fer all dem yeahs—you jes' 'splanify to de Lawd, honey—you is so convincin', chile."

Dat was de chanst of mah life—to make dat nigger promise to wuk—but I was so confiscated 'bout dat Comic masef dat I jes' tole him to shet up an' hol' mah han' an' we'd bof go togedder.

Mose even put his ha'f dollar he'd been savin' fer tobacco in de contribution box.

No'm, Liza, Miss, I tell you dis heah Halley ought to be locked up—tryin' to skeer fokes outen dere senses wid his run mad Comic. Dah's a use fer de Moon an' a use fer de Sun an' the little stars looks nice when dey stays whar dey b'longs—'ceptin' now and then one gits kin' of combuntious an' goes shootin' off roun' de heavens—but there ain't no harm in dat—but dese heah Comics is 'rangements of de Debbil an' de less we mixes up wid de Debbil's wuks de better it's gwine to be fer our own pussonalities. But, Liza, Miss, think of mah lost opportunity.

I might have kep' Mose skeered 'nuff to wuk—an' now it's too late. He's jes' as fat an' lazy as evah—an' sassy—why he ain't any more skeered of the Lawd than nothin'. I b'lieve ef He'd come roun' Mose'd say, "Set down, Marster, an' have a talk with me." I certain sho' missed mah opportunity.



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