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4800 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio,
January 16, 1931.

Dear Carlo,

Because you know something about the matter already, and because you are my friend, I'd like to ask your advice about what has turned out to be my third disappointing experience in the theatre. (I suppose the best thing to do about it is to do nothing, but anyway—) You remember Zora and I telling you about a folk-comedy that we were working on together the day we came to see you off to Europe? Well, we did it last spring, me doing the plot, construction, and guiding the dialog toward the necessary situations and climaxes, Zora supplying the little story about the trial of the man who hit another with a mule-bone, giving the dialog it's Southern flavor and many of the "wise-cracks." We did most of it by dictation jointly to the typist we were using at the time, the three of us working together. All but the second act was finished when Zora had to go South taking all the outlines, etc. for that act with her. I went to Hedgerow later with the other two acts which I showed to Deeter, and he seemed to think it would be a grand play, and gave me a little advice on some bits of dialog, etc. When I came back to town, Zora was back, too, so I suggested that we finish up the play and send it in to the Guild. (as it was Theresa Helburn's asking me for a Negro comedy at Taylor Gordon's party last winter that began it all—I told Zora about it, and we went to work.) But this fall Zora evaded all appointments to work, would never be in at the hours agreed upon, or if she was, would have to go out at once; or else said she had no copies of the play in the house to work on as she'd given her new revisions to a friend to read; said she thought we ought to take out the love interest and put in a turkey; said she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and couldn't work anyway; and the last time I saw her, said she was leaving town the next day for she didn't know how long—and I believed her! Then I heard from you that she had given you the play to read. And the first thing I learned from my friend who manages the Gilpin Players here in Cleveland was that several weeks ago the agent, French, had written them about a Negro comedy they had sent to the Guild called MULE-BONE by one Zora Hurston—so now I see why she wouldn't work any more. The play must have been in the hands of French when I last talked to her, but she would say nothing to me about it—and is evidently claiming the comedy as entirely her own. At least she could have told me she wanted it that badly. We had been such good friends—this unexpected deception is the first disappointment. And the second one is several
weeks of work again going up in smoke. I've written Zora, of course, asking what it's all about, but she doesn't answer. Did you read the play, and did you think it was interesting? And would you do anything, or nothing, in the present situation, if you were me? Anyway, I had the experience of trying to build a play, and if the Gilpén's get the rights to it for their downtown season here, I'll be able to see how my ideas turn out in an actual production. They expect the script today, rehearsals begin at once, and they open on Feb. 16th. The only other choice they have is a play called夸迈re which they do not like, so more than likely it will be MULE-BONE, and if it is I'm going to stick around and watch rehearsals......But I'm amazed at Zora's performance! Is there something about the very word theatre that turns people into thieves? I've heard enough about the Broadway crowd, but Zora and I weren't on Broadway yet......Well, I gave a reading out here attended by all the head library people, etc. And a Mrs. Power, national advisor on children's books for the Library Assn. of this country and Canada, who was there, asked me to compile a selection of my poems for children, as she feels that I have some that would be grand for library-reading kids. I'm to bring the manuscript to her office and we're to fix it up together—so maybe something will come of it. I have a kid's play that the BROWNIES' BOOK published some years ago that can go in it, too......Dear old man Cheanutt came to see me the other day. He beat me to it, as I had intended to call on him. But I was most surprised and honored at his visit. He said that he had an article on his first novel due to appear soon in Celophon—or something like that—a book collector's magazine, and that he was also working on a story. He said the stock market crash left him broke just as he was about to retire, so now, he has to keep on working at his office. He is quite old and feeble, and I thought it was wonderful of him to look me up......Guess you have the manuscript of poems all right. Meant to tell you why I call it THE SINGING DARK. Most people never got FINE CLOTHES TO THE JEW as a title, never knew why or what it meant, so I thought this time I would choose something obviously poetic and simple in deference to the nice old ladies and lovely inter-racialists who have always preferred my less niggerish modes, who skip over lots of my pages, but speak quite highly of the nice poems they do like. Part of this collection anyway ought to be down their street.......Be sure to read Arna Bontemp's GOD SENDS SUNDAY. That's the jokey story I told you we want to make a musical play of—if collaboration will work one more time......I'm hoping to finish my own play while I'm out here. It's coming along......Lotus and water-reeds to you;

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Langston Hughes,
4800 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Mr. Carl Van Vechten,
150 West 55th Street,
New York, N.Y.
Dear Carlo,

Yesterday the Gilpin Players received Much Ado About Nothing which turns out to be the very play Iora and I did together—except that Iora has rewritten the end of the 1st act, inserting the turkey and a fight off-stage—thus spoiling the climax which was a fight over the girl on the stage, at the end of the act. French have sent her two versions of the 3rd act—one we did together, and other a new one evidently leaving the Gilpin Players to
take their choice. By a most fortunate coincidence, the typist who worked with Zora and I came through Cleveland yesterday on her way to Chicago—so together we explained the whole matter to Roberta Jeliffe (director of the players). She is advising French tomorrow. I am still trying to get in touch with Zora—as the Gilpins prefer our collaborated version and want to put the play in immediate rehearsal. Do you know where Zora is? Do you know what the Guild thought of the play? I'm terribly sorry Zora sent them such an unfinished, messed-up version. She evidently tried to change what we had done together—and the result is a grand tangle—that's her trouble—no sense of order at all. I hate to see an amusing comedy spoiled—and I don't know yet why Zora would attempt a steel like that. This is an amazing world! Langston
Langston Hughes,
4000 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio.

4

Mr. Carl Van Vechten,
150 West 55th Street,
New York, N.Y.
Dear Carlo,

Forgive me for worrying you to death—but once more the MULE-BONE. Last night I talked to Zora by phone. She said she knew nothing about French handling her play, or how it got to Cleveland. I told her how it got here, and that it came in a terribly tangled up version with two first-act endings, and two different third acts—one our collaborated version we did together, another evidently her new version—seemingly leaving it up to the producer to decide which endings and which acts he wanted. I told her the director as sent from French here, Mrs. Jelliffe, couldn’t make head or tail of it, but, liking the version I have here (the one we did together) she wished to put it on, and would Zora be willing that she do it, using the script we had originally planned? Zora would not answer yes or no, but kept stalling over the phone and asking what good it would do her to produce it in Cleveland. Then I asked Zora was she attempting to sell the play alone under her name? She replied that at first she hadn’t intended to, "but, well—I’m writing you a letter." What she’ll say in that letter, I don’t know...... Anyway, this morning Mrs. Jelliffe phoned Barrett Clark, representative for French and also, I understand, reader for the Guild. She explained the whole matter to him, asking at the same time what he could do so that she could go ahead with her production, as time is getting very short. Barrett Clark said that he had
gotten the manuscript through you having first sent it in to the Guild and, feeling that the Guild would refuse it, he had, some weeks ago offered it to the Gilpin Players here; that he didn't know Zora Hurston but that he would get in touch with her at once and see if he could persuade her to allow the Cleveland production to go through, and under our joint names, (since he had not been aware before that I had any thing to do with the play,) He is to wire Mrs. Jelliffe after he has talked with Zora. Now, Carlo, the situation regarding the production here is this: The Gilpin Players, probably the best Little Theatre Negro group in the country, must open downtown with this play on February 15th, so you see how pushed for time they are. The play came to them through French quite without my knowledge, and bearing only Zora's name, but in such a confused form that I don't see how the Guild or anybody else read it. The Jelliffe's are friends of mine and swell people, and realizing the predicament they are in for time, (and also being interested myself in seeing a trial production of the comedy) I am willing to overlook Zora's seeming attempt to get rid of the play without my knowledge, and to do my best to patch up the script using from French the two acts that I have, and the script of the second act which I had worked on with Zora before she went South, and thus enable the Gilpins to put it on out here and to begin rehearsals at once, doing the play under Zora and my names, as she and I had originally intended. This is what I tried to make Zora see over the phone last night but New York to Cleveland calls are expensive and I couldn't talk all night. The Gilpins plan a two-week season for this play, opening under the auspices of the CLEVELAND PLAINDEALER's Theatre of Nations downtown (which means a great deal of publicity through the PLAINDEALER) and later moving to the Ohio one of the big legitimate
downtown houses here, as they have done in past seasons with Rosasane, In Abraham's Bosom, and other plays, and with great success. This is their first Negro comedy downtown, and they feel that it would go over big, which would be fine for both Zora and I from the standpoint of both publicity and royalties. The Gilpin Players are in a sense a semi-professional group and have been offered try-outs by the Guild and other New York managers before, and a production here would mean that representatives of the New York people would see it—which is important to us too, since the Guild has turned it down, from all I can discover.....So Carlo, would you, please, get in touch with Zora and try to make her see all this. I am not at all angry about her actions, because she always has been strange in lots of ways, but I do hate to see a good Folk-play go to waste, because for some reason I do not know, she no longer wants to work with me. Tell her the Gilpins would be happy to have her come out for rehearsals and the opening, if she wants to.....This morning I got some legal advice on the matter and with all the proof I have: a file of notes in my own handwriting, pages of construction and situations, carbons of the first draft, and the testimony of the stenographer who worked with us for three or four weeks, Zora can certainly do nothing at all with MULE-BONE without my permission. Why she should have set out to do so is beyond me.....Of course, I know that you knew nothing of all this until I wrote you, and I hope it won't be putting you to a great deal of trouble, but would you do what you can to get it untangled, and explain to Lawrence Langner or some of the Guild people how sorry I am that such an unfinished version ever reached them.....Since time is so pressing for the Gilpins, if you could send me a night letter or something about Zora's attitude, I'd appreciate it immensely.....Snowballs to you,

Langston
Langston Hughes,
4800 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Mr. Carl Van Vechten
150 West 55th Street,
New York, N. Y.
4800 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio,
January 20, 1931.

Dear Carlo—

It turns out that Zora
was jealous of the stenographer!
A letter from her this morning
concerns itself almost entirely
with the young lady who did our
typing, and scarcely mentions
the play—so it seems that
colored can’t even have secretaries
in peace. She makes up a most
fantastic argument, saying
that if I wanted the steno to
have an interest in the play,
and therefore she withdrew
“cut to the quick.” In a post
script she adds that no
situations or dialog are mine.
I only made some suggestions—but they are not in the play! ...... I am writing her as kindly as possible to try and persuade her to allow a Cleveland production. At the same time I am putting the whole matter into the hands of my friend, Arthur Shingles. But if you can do anything to make Nora see a Cleveland try-out, please do...... Send the Singing Darkey on back here. I must use that title now! I really meant to ask you was Karsavina dead—it hadn’t the least idea—but I got the poem-idea in your book—from looking at your book about her. Thanks for the wedging out suggestion. I’ll cut down and see if I can’t make it short and singing and at least half Darkey....... Loved your grand letter. Hug, owls and spoon-bread to you, Laugaton.
Zangewa Hughes, 4800 Carnegie Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

Bve

Mr. Carl Van Vechten, 150 West 55th Street, New York, N.Y.
Dear Carlo,

I hope never to worry you with this MULE-BONE business again. You have been more than kind about it already. A letter from Zora today assures me that she has reversed herself, so I guess the split is over. Some days ago, however, I turned over the whole matter to Arthur Spingarn, but now I shall wire him further that things seem to be coming back to their original point. Zora wired the Jelliffe's some three days ago. Okaying the proceedings out here—just a few hours before your first letter came advising against the production. Since then there has been two other wires from her of acceptance, which the Gilpin lawyer considers equivalent to a contract, so they have gone on full blast into production. To try and stop it again now would cause I don't know what other difficulties, and I am just about weary of the whole thing. I am in no way responsible for the beginning of this Cleveland business, and certainly wouldn't have chosen a production here either first—but in the sense that I might not have known what Zora was doing for months, it has been fortunate. Then, too, the Gilpin Players and the Cleveland Plaindealer drama people have been of great aid in untangling the thing for me—a hundred dollars or so burnt up in wires and New York phone calls—so that now I suppose they feel that the play is due them after all that effort and excitement.
Zora has signified her intention of coming on here in a few days, and all in all, to back out of the thing now would take just a little more effort than I can muster, after this hectic week which ended last night by my being in jail.....A not un-exiting experience, by the way.....My big-time cousin came by the house about eight with another fellow and a car. I had just finished some New York mail that needed to go off at once, so I asked if they would drop me by the Post Office. They did, and then started up Cedar, one of the big Negro streets here, full of cops all the time. Later I remembered that I had still to get in touch with Mrs. Jelliffe that night. We stopped near a drug store and went in to call, when my cousin and I came out we walked into the arms of two cops. It seems that some one dented the back of a taxi cab. The cab driver accused us because our car was parked near-by. He had no witnesses, but evidently wanted to get the money out of somebody to pay for his dept. The cops threatened to beat us into confessing, a whole squad of detectives and policemen arrived in two cars, the wagon was called and off we went to the station. We were not allowed to use the phone there, third degree methods were applied to the boy who owned the car, the police and detectives using their hands and clubs on him before us and the cab driver, the whole bunch of them using oaths and insulting racial remarks, and insisting that we pay this driver for his cab. Finally, getting no satisfaction, they put us all in jail (not the cab driver), kept us there until this morning, made us sign Suspicious Person slips, and turned us loose. The boy must now pay a large bill for towing and storage of his car by the police. I've heard of other innocent Negroes being picked up often
here and having to pay bills or fines before they get loose.
It seems to be a sort of graft the police are working in the
colored districts, where they walk in pairs after dark stopping
people and searching them for no reason at all......The jail
or under,
wash bitter cold, with a board and no covering to sleep on, so
if I've caught my death o' cold blame the Cleveland police. The
walls were of steel, which made you just that much colder if
you leaned against them. So now I know what Bessie Smith really
meant by

Thirty days in jail
With ma back turned to de wall.

So with all that, I'm evil in mind, and don't give a damn this morning
whether MULE-BONE is or isn't put on. Brazzie's mule, even in
manuscript, has done a mean piece of kicking, and it will probably
take all of us several weeks to get unbent again, although Zora
writes that she is busy "smoothing out her lovely brow," at
present......That would be great if Shumlin would consider the
play, and when Zora comes here I'll see if we can't get out a
script that would be in shape for his attention......In any case,
matter.
Carlo, you've been grand about the whole......Certainly I'm sorry
that all this mixup came about, and I trust Zora is, too—but
I guess now everything will be the same again. Thank God! So
with 7 wish bones, 11 rabbits' feet, and 777 load stones to
you, (but no mule bones whatsoever) I am, quand même,

P. S. I have some music for Paul Robeson. Have you any idea
where one might send it to him?

"The Singing Darkey" just this moment walked into the
house. Thank unmercifully......Also a letter from Barrett Clark
saying......."I have nothing whatsoever to do with this
affair!"......I don't blame him! X?X!......Oh, the Weary Blacks!
Langston Hughes,
4800 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Mr. Carl Van Vechten,
150 West 55th Street,
New York, N. Y.
Dear Carlo-

Three block prints are by Zell Ingram, 20 year-old Negro boy, who lives on a hot dog stand in the heart of the low-down district along Central Avenue, Cleveland's grand black-way. I'm crazy about the Saturday Night. At a distance it suggests floating cotton blossoms. I sent four of his prints to Opportunity and they turned this one down, because "their readers are so squeamish about Negroid imagery," also Song of the Bagol! The one that they kept was the least colored of the group. I guess they intend to be black no more from now on.

I'll got this swell paper especially in your honor. I wanted
to buy these prints—but he says he always gives them away except to O’fays. So I guess he thinks you’re a Negro! Or at least, part one.

Well, after ten years silence, I’ve had a letter from my father. He’s living with three religious old maids behind the Cathedral in Mexico City, and takes the Crisis “to keep up with all you black monkeys”.

I don’t know what will happen next! Mule-Robe is copyrighted in my name with both of as authors. The card came yesterday... I wrote the Harmon Award lady that the Neary Blacks would now go get their Fine Clothes from the Jews and the world would be not Without Laughter—but to please excuse me from the New York ceremony on the 8th—as I had a Mule-Robe here—and couldn’t come. I came near hitting the other day with a Shetland pony number—but I’m scared of kindy hoppers with reins! I’m going to the Shetland today.
Wednesday
the 4th

Dear Carlo—

This is not an answer to your swell letter at all. Here, I'm only flinging a final mild boke at you: Zora's come and gone!
I was flat on my back with tonsilitis, but got up against the doctor's orders to talk with her and am in bed again as a result. She made such a scene as you cannot possibly imagine—right before the jelliffes, my mother, and a new boy friend Zora brought.
with her. This final performance took place at my house yesterday afternoon. It was mostly about Miss Thompson. Zora laid her out. Also laid out the Jelliffe's. Also me. She pushed her hat back, bucked her eyes, ground her teeth, and shook manuscripts in my face, particularly the third act which she claims she wrote alone by herself while Miss Thompson and I were off doing Spanish together. (And the way she said Spanish meant something else.) She admitted that we had worked jointly.
Last said and that certain characterizations were mine, but she dared not defend me to put my finger on a line that was mine own. One line at the end of the 1st act had been mine, but she took that out, she said. Anyway, she had written a "new" play by herself; she hadn't come to Cleveland to be made a fool of, nor to submit to any sly tricks such as she felt Mrs. Jelliffe had pulled by having the nerve to put my name with hers on the play. Her agent had said the Jelliffes were honorable people, but
now—why she couldn’t even bear the sight of their settlement home, it was so muddy and dirty in the yard, etc., etc. in an absolutely crazy vein, until Mr. Jelliff looked his wife to no longer remain to be further insulted—whereupon they all left, Jora in a rage without even saying Goodbye to me or mother.

I haven’t told you the half of it—but I’ve just finished six typed pages to Mrs. Springarn, and couldn’t go into detail again today. I guess this is the end of "Mulle-Bone." But nine-tenths of Jora’s talk here was not about the play at all,
but Madame Thurman—
the very thought of whom
seemed to infuriate Zora.
The play was a mere side-
issue, but when it did come
up, Zora tried to make it
appear that I wanted to
steal it from her—(as
if I began any of this
Cleveland business!)
And in all cases the stenog-
grapher was a hussy!....So
I guess there is no more
Mule-Bone..... What
probably helped to make
Zora so angry was that
Sunday night, only a few
hours before she arrived,
the Gilpin 8 layers voted
to drop the production, as
they had been unable to
get any word from either Zora or her agent in regard to terms, and they felt that to go any further would make the shot too great as they had requested an answer by first, and none had come. Zora’s defense was that she herself had intended to be here for the meeting, but, she said, she had stopped in Pittsburgh all night Saturday so that the boy she was driving with could buy a present for his aunt. . . . Do you think she is crazy, Carlo?

Thanks for the birthday stallions.

Langston
Langston Hughes,
4806 Carnegie Ave.,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Mr. Carl Van Vechten,
150 West 55th St.,
New York, N. Y.