

*I know not how
to thank you...*

Letter 21: December 30, 1893, PLD to Frederick Douglass
Dayton-O.
Dec. 30th 1893¹⁴⁹

Hon. Frederick Douglass.

My Dear Friend: Having left Chicago prior to your return I was so unfortunat as not to be able to say goodbye to you. But you know of course it was not neglect on my part or lack of desire. I know not how to thank you for the many kindnesses which you showed me while at Chicago.¹⁵⁰ Indeed I feel that I owe the success and pleasure of my whole summer to your instrumentality. In my gratitude I cannot say — but will try to do, — will try to be worthy of the kind interest which you took in me, and let it not be a vain boast when I say, that if ever I arrive at that estate in letters which you have so kindly wished as my destination, — if haply it should be my lot to write some songs that posterity shall sing,¹⁵¹ the name of Douglass shall not be forgotten in my numbers.

I hope that you and Mrs. Douglass — to whom I wish to be kindly remembered — are very well — and that you are both enjoying the rest to which your heroic labors entitle you.

My mother is well and joins me in much love to yourselves.

For myself I am well in body but not in mind. I have learned all too soon that the price of even meager success is much calming. The people in my town have never encouraged my aspirations, they have done all they could to crush me and now on my return from a summer of hard and honest effort I find a scene of slanders afloat concerning my sojourn in Chicago — as to my reception there, my social status and a dozen other petty trifles, but I did not design to notice any of these until it came to my ears that a Dayton visitor to Chicago had returned and reported here that I was discharged from the Haitian Building, and that the cause of said discharge was drunkenness and desperation.¹⁵² I cannot overlook this, so I thought I would write and ask you to send me a few words of refutation that I can publish in the daily papers here. I am sick at heart and almost discouraged. If I ask for work I am told with a sneer that I ought to have stayed in Chicago where I got on so well. The last straw that raised so much curious antagonism against me was the republication in a Dayton Daily paper of the long complimentary article concerning me in an October Chicago Tribune.¹⁵³ There where my name appeared signed to a long article in the Inter Ocean and a poem in The Youth's Companion in the same week, it was too much and my fellow townsmen fell upon me. I can only fly to you for rescue.

Hoping you will pardon my troubling you and that I may see an early reply.

I am,

Sincerely Your Friend,
Paul Dunbar

149. Frederick Douglass Papers, 1841-1967, MSS11879, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss.collms.ms000009>.

150. Dunbar is referring to Douglass's help in securing a position for him at the World's Fair.

151. Dunbar published an "Ode to Douglass" following his passing in April 1895.

152. To date, Dunbar's biographers have generally ignored this event. Only Virginia Cunningham mentions it, but her coverage glosses over the situation (107-8).

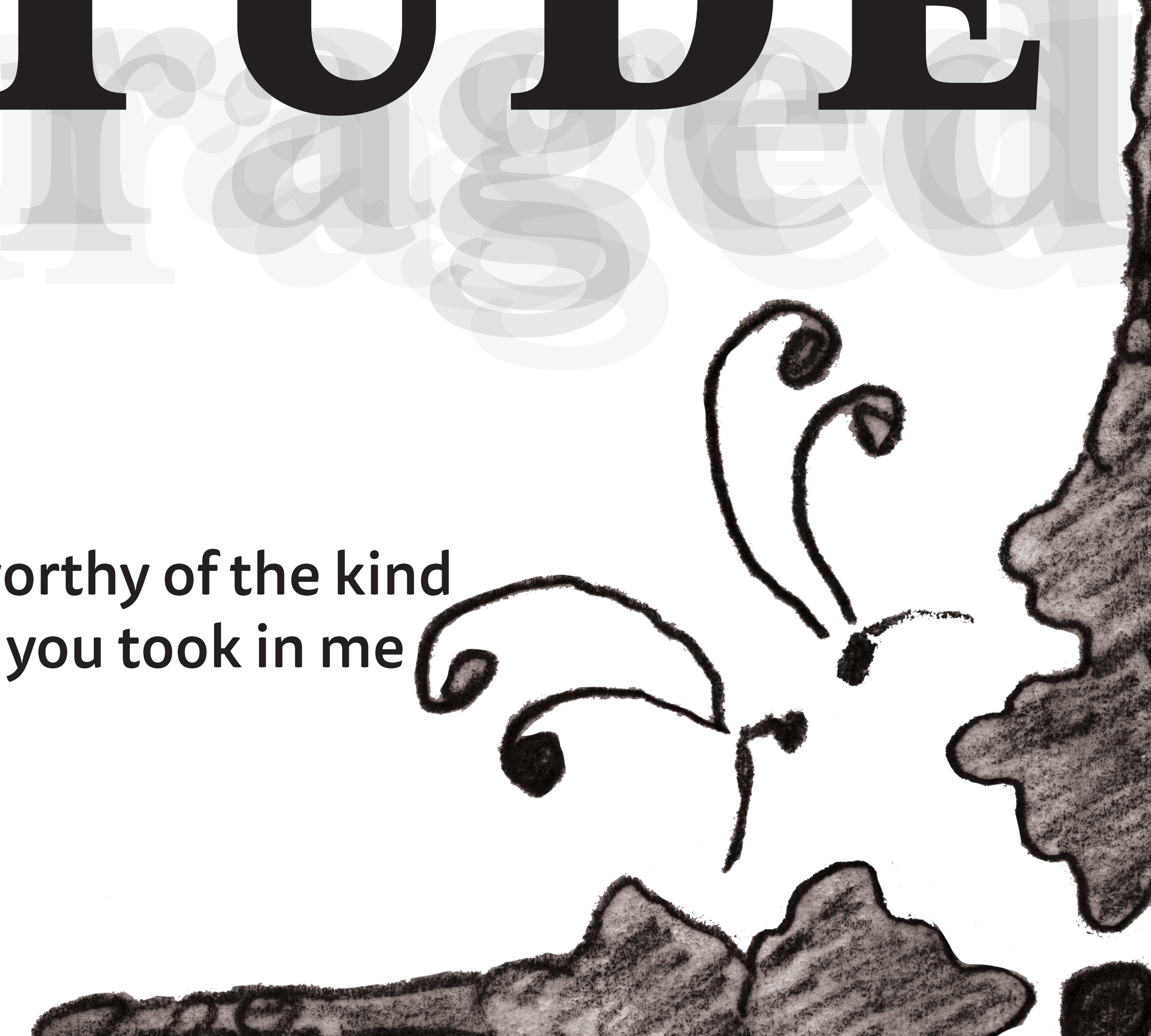
153. Though it is unclear which rejections Dunbar is referring to here, the ramifications of his drinking could have been severe enough to ruin his career.

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