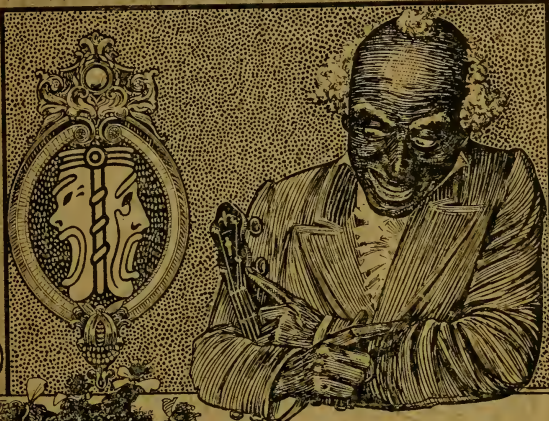
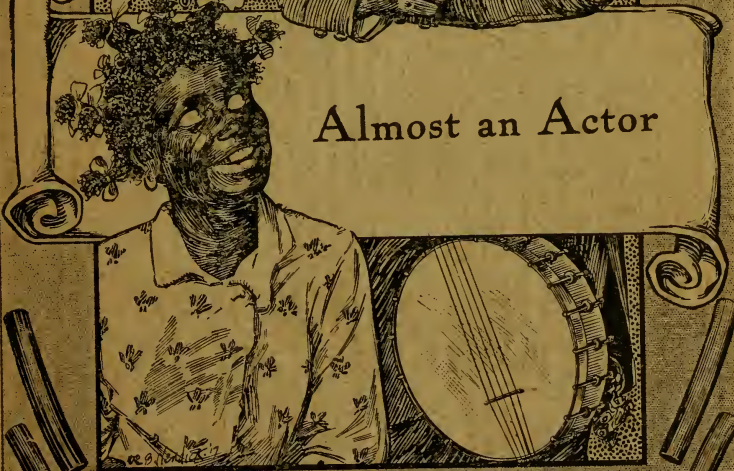


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Almost an Actor



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ALMOST AN ACTOR

COONTOWN CROSSFIRE

BY

WADE STRATTON

AUTHOR OF

"An Awful Appetite," "The Barber's Bride," "Cash Money,"
"Hitting the African Harp," Etc.



CHICAGO

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

ALMOST AN ACTOR

CHARACTERS.

AMBROSE *A Dusky Actor*
JASPER *Almost Another*

PLACE—*Who Knows?*

TIME—*Who Cares?*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About Twenty Minutes.*

COSTUMES.

AMBROSE—Pompous, swaggering negro of the conventional “ham actor” type; battered silk hat, gaudy suit badly frayed; carries battered suitcase containing soiled shirt, a few celluloid collars and fake shirt fronts, etc. Piece of paper in pocket to hand to JASPER.

JASPER—A down-and-out coon; worn and patched overalls or other dilapidated costume; station porter’s cap, preferably red.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; C., center; R. C., right center, L., left; 1 E., first entrance; U. E., upper entrance; R. 3 E., right entrance up stage, etc.; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

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ALMOST AN ACTOR

SCENE: *A street or wood drop, if available, in "one"; but scenery is not essential.*

LIGHTS: *Up all through.*

MUSIC: *Lively jazz for opening and closing.*

At rise, AMBROSE enters, with JASPER trailing after him, the latter trying to get possession of AMBROSE'S suitcase. Each is clutching the handle. AMBROSE tries with his free hand to push JASPER away. After a brief comic struggle the suitcase falls open and the contents are spilled on the stage. Both drop the suitcase. Music stops.

AMBROSE. Now look what you done, you fresh, ignorant niggah!

JASPER. Ah ain't done it. The valise done it.

AMBROSE. Ah got me a good mind fo' to git you arrested fo' assault an' battery.

JASPER. Boss, you is kind o' salt an' peppery. Wha' fo' you got mad on me?

AMBROSE. Wha' fo' is Ah got mad on you? *Wha' fo'?* Wha' fo' is any gen'man got mad 'on any low-down, rough-neck, bolshevikamous niggah what comes an' busts open his fav-o-rite, special, high-priced wahdrobe trunk? (*Straightens his collar, smooths his coat, etc.*) Yo' ignorance rendahs me completely diso'ganized!

JASPER. Boss, Ah ain't done nothin'.

AMBROSE. (*sarcastically*). Oh, no. You ain't done nothin'—nothin' a-tall!

JASPER. Ah jest comes up to you at the deepo, an Ah says, "Boss, kin Ah smash yo' baggage?"

AMBROSE. You smashed it, all right.

JASPER. No Ah 'ain't.

AMBROSE. An' Ah says you is! (*Angrily.*) Look at it!

JASPER. Boss, that valise done lost its vitality when you

an' me was puffec' strangehs. (*Picks up garments and puts them in suitcase.*) Ain't nothin' busted.

AMBROSE. Ain't nothin' busted 'cause ain't nothin' combustible. Suppose Ah had had some precious crockery in mah valise? Suppose Ah had had a pint o' gin?

JASPER. That's what Ah did suppose, which elucidates mah activity. (*Finishes packing, closes bag and picks it up.*) Carry yo' valise fo' a dime, Boss?

AMBROSE. Ought to be proud to carry mah valise fo' nothin'. Ah is a notorious personage.

JASPER. Sure 'nough?

AMBROSE (*thrusting his hand in breast of coat*). Boy, yo' is beholdin' the classic features of Ambrose Shakespeare White, the immortal tragedian actor.

JASPER. A actor! But Boss—(*scratching his head*) Ah ain't nevah saw you in the movies.

AMBROSE. Movies! You low-brow rough-neck! In course you ain't! Mine is a loftier spear. Ah interpolates the world's most classic litterchure.

JASPER. Ain't you simply splendiferous! Boss, Ah reckon a actor is somethin' what Ah wouldn't rathah be anything else than which.

AMBROSE. You ambitiates fo' to be a actor?

JASPER. That's what Ah pre-tickelerly perspires fo' to be.

AMBROSE. Then Ah got you a job! Ah is not only a actor, but a manageh. Ah got a position fo' you. (*Puts hand on JASPER's shoulder.*) Consider yo'self undeh arrest—(*JASPER cringes*)—'scuse me, Ah means undeh engagement.

JASPER. How much does Ah git?

AMBROSE. Boy, Ah fears you is too mercerized evah to rise to extinction. Yo' salary is the last thing to be considahed.

JASPER (*starting away*). Then this job is likewise the last thing to be considahed.

AMBROSE. Whah you gwine?

JASPER. Gwine fo' to kiss mah rosy dream of thespian fame goodby, an' smash a valise fo' a thin dime.

AMBROSE (*extending his hand*). Hol' on! Now is yo' glorious opportunity! If you kin domonstrify yo' circumnavigation as a elocutionary prodigy, yo' financial status will be indefinable!

JASPER (*coming back*). That's different.

AMBROSE. Ah will proceed to scrutinize yo' disqualifications. Now you got to act. Git ovah thah. (*Points and JASPER moves as directed.*) Ah will come ovah an' condemnify you as a villyan an' a traitor to the state, an' you will draw yo'self up fiercely an' call me a liah. Now. Hyah Ah comes. (*Strides over to JASPER and slaps him hard on the back. JASPER nearly falls.*) You is a villyan an' a traitor to the state!

JASPER (*in a very weak voice*). Liah.

AMBROSE (*disgusted*). Oh, that's terrible, terrible!

JASPER. Don't git mad, Boss. Ah ain't mean it. You done tol' me fo' to call yo' a liah, an'—

AMBROSE (*excited*). In course Ah tol' you fo' to call me a liah! But Ah ain't tol' you fo' to sing it like a mosquito! Ah'll show you. Now you call me a villyan an' a traitor to the state.

JASPER (*rolling back his coat sleeve*). Kin Ah wham you lak you done whammed me?

AMBROSE (*cautiously*). You kin wham me a genteel wham. That's play actin'.

JASPER (*feeling his muscle and limbering up his arm*). Than Ah's a nat'ral bo'n play actor. (*Slaps AMBROSE hard on the back.*)

AMBROSE (*staggering*). The wham ain't the most important part. You is got to say, "You is a villyan an' a traitor to the state!" (*JASPER repeats limbering up business.*) Nevah min' the wham. Jes' say it.

JASPER. You is a villyan an' a traitor an' a cheap skate!

AMBROSE. Not a cheap skate! You fo'got yo' lines.

JASPER. An' you is fo'got mah salary.

AMBROSE. Try again. "You is a villyan an' a traitor to the state!"

JASPER. You is a villyan an' a traitor to the state!

AMBROSE (*fiercely*). Liar-r-r!

JASPER (*shrinking*). Ah done say what you tol' me to says.

AMBROSE. In course you has. An Ah done show you how to say what you is exposed to say back.

JASPER. You is called me a liah.

AMBROSE. Play actin'. It don't mean nothin'.

JASPER. What you says about mah wages, maybe that don't mean nothin' neither?

AMBROSE. Nevah min' yo' wages! Fust you is got to learn how to act. You is got to learn how to make a hit.

JASPER (*turning back his sleeve*). Make a hit is the best thing which Ah does.

AMBROSE. You ain't suspected to make a hit on me. You is to make a hit with the audience.

JASPER. S'pose somebody massage mah face with some ancient hen fruit. Then the audience make the hit.

AMBROSE. Ah'll give you an idea of the plot. Ah is a man of immense fambly.

JASPER. You is got mah sympathy. How does they eat?

AMBROSE. Nevah min'! Ah leaves mah wife an' fo'teen chillen an' the scenes of mah boyhood—

JASPER. With the sheriff aftah you.

AMBROSE. Yes, with—(*checking himself*) in course not! Ah wanders in foreign lands—

JASPER. In —? (*Nearby town.*)

AMBROSE. Yes, in—no, not a-tall! In foreign lands in search fo' gold. Aftah many years Ah returns to mah fambly, with millions of untold wealth.

JASPER. Where at?

AMBROSE. In this hyah valise. (JASPER *grabs for bag.*) Lay off'n that! The money's only in the play.

JASPER. You said it was in the valise. (*Mimics AMBROSE'S tragic style.*) Liar-r-r!

AMBROSE. As Ah enters, you info'ms me that you is mah long lost brothah.

JASPER. Ah is yo' brothah?

AMBROSE. You is.

JASPER (*clasping hand to brow*). Mah mothah has been with-holdin' from me a terrible secret!

AMBOSE. Yo' wife an' chillen is stahvin' for want of food.

JASPER. My wife an' chillen? Boss, you knows mo' about me than Ah knows mahself.

AMBROSE. This is play actin'. You 'is stahvin'.

JASPER. Play actin' nothin! It's the gospel truth!

AMBROSE. Now go ahead an' walk lak you ain't et nothin' fo' a month. (JASPER *walks across vigorously*.) No, no! Get back. You walk like you is loaded to capacity with po'k chops an' gravy! Hyah is yo' lines. (*Hands him a sheet of paper*.) The big paht is where you hides, an' then you sighs deeply, like this. (*Sighs*.) Then you walks like this (*walks wearily*) an' you falls on yo' knees befo' me, an' you grabs me by mah coat-tails, and says, "Brothah, mah wife an' chillen is stahvin'! Oh, give me gold!" Now we'll rehearse.

JASPER. Who said hearse? Ah is stahvin', but Ah ain't dead yit.

AMBROSE. Nevah min'! Go ahead an' act!

JASPER (*reading*). "Thus fah has Ah wandered on the dusty road to peace an' happiness."

AMBROSE. Fine! Go on!

JASPER. "Mah limbs is weary of well doin'. Ah will hie me to some friendly rock and rye."

AMBROSE. What's that? Ain't nothin' 'bout no rock an' rye! (*Looks at paper*.) "Some friendly rock an' rest!"

JASPER. That ain't so appetizin'. "Ah will hie me to some friendly rock an' rest."

JASPER *crouches behind R. wing and peeks around it, so that his head is visible*. AMBROSE *exits L. and immediately re-enters, in "ham actor" fashion, swaggering steps, with hand thrust in breast of coat, etc.*

AMBROSE (*dramatically*). Gold is not happiness, nor riches peace. Oh, could Ah but find my long lost brothah— (*looks around at JASPER*.) Go ahead. That's yo' cue.

JASPER. My cue? Now is we playin' pool?

AMBROSE. Not a-tall. That's yo' cue fo' to sigh deeply. Listen now. "Could Ah but find mah long lost brothah— (JASPER *gives a piercing scream.*) Fo' love of Pete, what's that?"

JASPER. That's a sigh deeply.

AMBROSE. Sounds lak whistle fo' dinneh time. Has you fo'got you is hungry?

JASPER. Wish't Ah *could* fo'git it.

AMBROSE. Go ahead. Fall on yo' knees, an' spout yo' oratory.

JASPER (*reading*). "Brothah—"

AMBROSE. Brothah? Rinaldo, mah mothah's long lost feeble-minded boy! (*Starts to embrace him.*)

JASPER (*drawing back threateningly*). Who's feeble-minded?

AMBROSE. Go ahead, you jass-ack! Read yo' lines!

JASPER (*on his knees*). "Brothah, mah child an' fo'teen wives is stahvin'!"

AMBROSE. Mah brothah's fambly stahvin'?

JASPER. Ah'll say we is!

AMBROSE. Shut yo' big mouth! That ain't in the play! Stahvin'? (*Extends bag.*) Hyah, Rinaldo, is uncounted gold—

JASPER. "Mah own brothah, returned with all the wealth of creosote—"

AMBROSE. Not creosote, you liver-lipped niggah! All the wealth of Cræsus!

JASPER. "Mah wife an' chillen is stahvin'! Oh, brothah, gimme—" (*forgets to go on reading from paper*) gimme a plate o' Boston baked beans an' chicken gravy an' dumplin's an' fried potatoes an' pigs' knuckles an'—

AMBROSE. Boy! Don't make mention of them things! Yo' savory conversation has completely ruined mah inspiration.

JASPER. Ah wish somebody would completely ruin mah appetite!

AMBROSE. If Ah had two bits fo' to feed mah face—

(*Quick music, very soft.*)

JASPER (*grabbing AMBROSE's arm and pointing off, excitedly*). Look yondeh! Yondeh goes a white man with two big suitcases an' a fur-lined overcoat! Good fo' two bits apiece fo' them suitcases!

AMBROSE (*starting off and dragging JASPER by the hand*). Come on, boy! Hyah's where we eats! (*Shouts off.*) Hey, Boss! Smash yo' baggage? (*Quick exit to music loud and fast.*)

CURTAIN.

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By JEFF BRANEN

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CASH MONEY.—A minstrel spree for three, by Wade Stratton; 3 males. Time, 20 minutes. Two travelers are forced to share a room in a fust-class cullud boad'in' house, with almost fatal results. The handsome waiter is a factor in the mixup. Fine chance for comedian who plays banjo, ukulele or guitar.

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THE MYSTERIOUS SUITCASE.—By Arthur Leroy Kaser; 2 males. Time, 15 minutes. Sam has to carry Harry's grip, and both negroes have a laughable time trying to keep the mystery from leaking out. The fact that they stop to rest near a cemetery also gives Sam cause for serious thinking.

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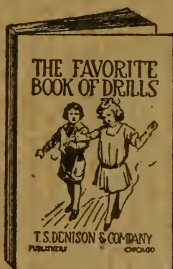
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