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No. 305.

# THE READER

A Comedy in One Act

BY  
ADA TULLY AMMERMAN

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NEW YORK  
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## CAST OF CHARACTERS.

MRS. SAUNDERS.....Landlady  
GERALDINE.....An angel child  
MISS PERKINS.....A pessimist  
JEMIMA.....Negro servant  
MRS. PATCHETT.....From Pottstown  
MISS JONES.....A detective  
MISS SHIRLEY GREEN.....A reader



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# THE READER

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SCENE:—*Reception room in a New York boarding house.*

(JEMIMA enters with dust brush duster and carpet sweeper—starts in to “straighten up,” singing “Way down Yonder in the Corn Field.”)

JEMIMA. (*Running carpet sweeper vigorously*) My land sakes! It ain't no satisfaction doin' the work in a boardin' house like this. Just as soon as yo' gets done cleanin' up after one mess of folks, some more triffin' sinners comes in an' tracks it up, tracks it up—Ha, ha, Mis Sanders says, Mammy—clean up the *RE*-ception room. Ha, ha, reception room. This is where Mis Sanders *re*-cepts the new boarders (*Imitating bowing, etc.*) and where the boarders *re*-cepts their board-bills, and where Mis Sanders *re*-cepts their money—if they got it, and where they *re*-cepts their notice to get out if they haven't. (*All this time loafing*)

(*Enter MRS. SAUNDERS, goes to writing desk down stage right. JEMIMA proceeds to work hard, looking at MRS. SAUNDERS out of the corner of her eyes, and, whenever she thinks she is looking, working vigorously.*)

MRS. SAUNDERS. Jemima, have you see Miss Perkins, this morning?

JEMIMA. No, Mis Sanders, I have been *spared* that so far this mornin', but I expects the calamity

every minute, cause I heard the board creakin' in her floor (*Looking overhead*) and I knows she's up and stirrin'. When she's up she's *always* stirrin'—stirrin' up some kind of *trouble* for somebody.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Hush, Jemima.

JEMIMA. Yas, Mis Sanders. (MISS PERKINS *heard outside*)

MISS PERKINS. J E M I M A.

JEMIMA. There she is, she's startin' in on me, Jemima *has* done somethin' or Jemima has *not* done somethin'. (*Imitating her*)

(*Enter MISS PERKINS, face wrinkled, sharp tongued, shrill voiced.*)

MISS PERKINS. Jemima, you mussed the sham on my bed, made wrinkles right across the face of it and spoiled it.

JEMIMA. Excuse me, Miss Perkins, when wrinkles is across *anybody's* face it usually spoils it, and if the wrinkles gets in too deep—Oh, way down to your *feet*, it spoils your *soul*, yessum.

(MISS PERKINS *whisks around and addresses* MRS. SAUNDERS.)

MISS PERKINS. The incompetency of these colored people is only exceeded by their impertinence.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Oh, well, Miss Perkins, they *mean* well.

MISS PERKINS. Yes MEAN is the word, that's what they are *Mean*. (*Glaring at JEMIMA, seats herself L.*) Mrs. Saunders, what on earth sort of persons are those in Room No. 25?

MRS. SAUNDERS. Oh, Mrs. Patchett? She's from the country *seeing* New York.

MISS PERKINS. Humph! A pity she couldn't have done that without giving us all the pain of

*seeing* her, and worst of all *hearing* her. Such a vocabulary is appalling. She keeps on talking, talking, just to annoy one.

(*Enter* MRS. PATCHETT, *dressed for the street, old-fashioned, gaudy.*)

JEMIMA. (*Giggles*) Here she comes, bringing her vocabulary.

MRS. PATCHETT. Good mornin' Miss Janders, Good mornin' Miss Pekin. I allers recommend your name, Miss Janders, because we had a old yella cow up home, with the janders. It was yella to start with, and when it got the janders, it was almost orange. Your complexion bein' a little yella, and your yella bow, and your name bein' Janders, I reflected it was quite a coincidence.

MISS PERKINS. (*Hissing*) Appalling.

MRS. PATCHETT. What did you expectorate, Miss Pekin?

MISS PERKINS. My name is *not* Pekin. Do I put you in mind of the map of China? My name is *Perkins*.

MRS. PATCHETT. Oh, I beg your parding, Perkins, oh I'll reccommember that by some special gherkin pickles that we have on our place up state. My, but they were *sour* things. I done up some just before I come away.

JEMIMA. (*Under her breath*) I wish she'd done up this one.

MRS. PATCHETT. I won't forget you again Miss Gherkin. I seldom become confusidated concerning names because as I say I always alleviate them with something in Pottstown—that's where I live up state. In fact, I can't say I live right *in* Pottstown, but adjadescent alongside it, about two mile from the station. Well, I must be off. I am going to see New York to-day. Yes, I thought I'd give up the whole day and *see* New York. Thought I

might as well take time enough to see it *all*. I capitulate I'll be through in time to meet the 5:20 train from Iowa. I expect my cousin. I'm goin' to take her up to Pottstown. Her health is a little defunct, and she thought up home with me it would be a good place to recapitulate, being different. Variety is the specimens of life, as the psalmist says. (*Going out*) Well, Au re want. (*Exit* MRS. PATCHETT)

MISS PERKINS. This is perfectly overcoming. I am going to my room to rest.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Yes, come on do. (*Exeunt*)

JEMIMA. (*Looking after them*) Yes, go on do, and give *me* a rest.

(*Enter* GERALDINE, *the Angel Child*; *noisily jumps at* JEMIMA *and nearly knocks her over.*)

GERALDINE. Oh, Mammy, Mammy, mother has gone out and left me to play with my dolls, but I'd rather play with you (*Putting her arm around* JEMIMA, *who is kneeling left front dusting the rounds of a chair*) I think you are the nicest little old soft (*Patting head*) dolly in the world. Oh let's play you were my dolly and your name was Arabella—Perkins.

JEMIMA. (*With both hands up*) No, no, I won't be no Arabelda Perkins Um hum.

GERALDINE. (*Laughing*) Oh, well, be just *plain* Arabella.

JEMIMA. All right, I don't have no strenuous objections to Arabella plain.

GERALDINE. Well, I'll lay you down, and you must close your eyes and go to sleep. (*Suiting action to word; then covering her with a child's handkerchief, waits a minute*) Then when I raise you up you must open your eyes. When I punch you in the stomach you must say Ma-ma (*Punches hard*)

JEMIMA. GOOD GRACIOUS!



GERALDINE. Oh, no, you mustn't say that.  
(*Laughing*)

JEMIMA. I don't want to play that no more.

GERALDINE. All right I'll tell you what let's play.  
Let's play I was a suffragette.

JEMIMA. Sufferin' who? (*Holding stomach*)  
No, I don't want to play no more *sufferin'* games.

GERALDINE. Oh, *I'll* be the suffragette. I'll be  
Inez Milholland and you be the snow white, oh, no,  
jet black horse she led in the parade. (*Reflectively*)  
I just forget whether it was a white horse or a  
black horse (*Looking doubtfully at JEMIMA, who  
rolls her eyes. Then, hurriedly*) but I guess it was  
a black horse with white eyes. (*Proceeds to put  
duster around JEMIMA'S neck as bridle, grabs news-  
paper from table, rolls it into horn, snatches yellow  
tidy off chair and drapes it over horn, grabs bridle  
in left hand, toots horn with right. Both start across  
stage to right, JEMIMA on all fours, child tooting  
noisily. Enter MISS PERKINS; holds up both hands  
in horror*)

MISS PERKINS. What on earth does this mean?  
(*JEMIMA grabs broom, carpet sweeper, and noisily  
scampers out of room, scared to death*)

GERALDINE. (*Undisturbed*) Why, we were  
playing Suffrage Parade. I'd love to be a suffra-  
gette. Are you a Suffragette?

MISS PERKINS. (*Aghast*) No, indeed.

GERALDINE. I don't know which I'd like to be  
best, a suffragette or a eugenic. They're both  
lovely, only of course eugenics are the latest. Suf-  
fragettes are a little old-fashioned now. Mollie  
Anderson's mother belongs to a new one. It's a  
sex hygiene. Do you like them? Mollie Ander-  
son's mother always has everything the latest. I  
think next time I'll be one of them.

MISS PERKINS. (*Sternly, she has been pacing  
up and down in consternation*) Where is your  
mother?

GERALDINE. Oh, she's gone to a lecture at the National Association of child study.

MISS PERKINS. Indeed! (*Marches out of the room*)

GERALDINE. (*Imitating*) Indeed! (*Marching around. Exit*)

(*Enter MRS. SAUNDERS followed by MISS JONES, the detective.*)

MRS. SAUNDERS. Now I think we can make you comfortable. (*Handing back letter*) Your references are all right. I see you are a member of the Excelsior Detective Bureau.

MISS JONES. Yes, I thought it was best for you to know that I was a detective—it would account for my irregular habits, but of course no one else must know, for one never knows but that in the most unexpected places one may find a clue.

MISS SAUNDERS. Well, I don't think you will find any clues here. Life in a boarding house is very humdrum. (*Rings for JEMIMA. When she appears says*) Take this lady to No. 22. (*JEMIMA eyes her up and down, takes her suit case. They both go out. Bell rings. MISS SHIRLEY GREEN enters. MRS. SAUNDERS rises to greet her*)

MRS. SAUNDERS. How do you do, Miss Green? Have you come to the City again to study.

SHIRLEY. Oh, yes, I am preparing for a Shakesperian Recital at the Waldorf and I am nearly studying my head off. Can you give me a nice quiet little room where I can practice?

MRS. SAUNDERS. Well, I am pretty well filled up, but if you don't mind taking this one. (*Opens door to left of room. They enter other room, which must be seen from audience*)

SHIRLEY. Oh, what a delightful little room. (*Turning to MRS. SAUNDERS*) I shall be all right here.

MRS. SAUNDERS. You can practice here undisturbed. (MRS. SAUNDERS goes out. SHIRLEY unpacks satchel, gets out books and proceeds to study. Enter JEMIMA on other side of wall)

SHIRLEY. I'll try my Hamlet first.

JEMIMA. Somethin' about this place seems kind of spooky to-day, new people comin' you don't know who they is nor what they is nor what their intentions is goin' to be.

SHIRLEY. (From other side) "Look, my Lord, it comes."

JEMIMA. Eh? (Looking cautiously about)

SHIRLEY. (Hamlet) "Angels and ministers of grace defend us. Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned? Bring with thee airs from Heaven, or blasts from Hell?"

JEMIMA. (Transfixed) Oh, my Lawd!

SHIRLEY. (Hamlet) "What may this mean, that thou dead corpse revisitst thus the glimpses of the moon—making night hideous——"

JEMIMA. Well, I should say so.

(Enter GERALDINE seeing JEMIMA shaking.)

GERALDINE. (Awesomely) What's the matter, Mammy?

JEMIMA. Shish (Casting eyes around) there's spooks somewhere around here.

GERALDINE. Oh, nonsense, Mammy, how could there be?

JEMIMA. I tell ye they is, I heard 'em talking.

SHIRLEY. (Hamlet) "Speak."

JEMIMA. Hark!

SHIRLEY. (Hamlet) "I'll go no further."

JEMIMA. Thank the Lawd for that. (Eyeing the wall)

SHIRLEY. (Ghost) My hour is almost come, when I to sulphurous and tormenting flames must return.

JEMIMA. The *Devil* himself.

GERALDINE. Oh, Mammy, I'm afraid too. It's coming under the crack of the door. (*Begins to cry. They stand huddled together looking at spot from whence sound comes*)

SHIRLEY. (*Hamlet*) "Speak, I am about to hear." (*Ghost*) "I am thy father's ghost."

(GERALDINE and JEMIMA quake with fear.)

JEMIMA. I told you so. (*They rush pellmell out and bump into the detective who is coming into the room*)

DETECTIVE. Well, sunshine and shadow seem to be in a hurry. (*Advances, seats herself at desk and starts to write*)

SHIRLEY. (*Ghost*) "I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word would freeze thy young blood, and make each particular hair to stand end." Listen. (*DETECTIVE looks up*) "If ever thou didst thy dear father love, revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." (*DETECTIVE starts up. (Hamlet)*) "Murder?" (*Ghost*) "Murder most foul." (*DETECTIVE goes back to desk and takes notes vigorously*)

SHIRLEY. (*Takes up another book*) Now, old Macbeth, let me give you a turn. (*LADY M.*) "Hark, I laid their daggers ready. Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it, my husband." (*MACBETH*) "I have done the deed. There's one did laugh in his sleep and one cried, Murder." (*LADY M.*) "Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there. Go carry them and smear the sleepy grooms with blood." (*MACBETH*) "I'll go no more. I am afraid to think what I have done, look on it again I dare not." (*LADY M.*) "Give me the daggers. If they do bleed, I'll gild the faces of the grooms, for it must seem their guilt." (*Enter Miss*

PERKINS, *advances front left, eyeing the DETECTIVE, who is deep in study and does not see her; sits in armchair and knocks with hand idly on chair or table*) (MACBETH) "Whence is that knocking. How is it with me when every noise appals me?"

(MISS PERKINS *knocks again nervously looking from DETECTIVE, to SHIRLEY'S room.* LADY M.)

"Hark, more knocking. (MISS PERKINS *stops*) Get on your nightgown lest occasion calls us and shows us the watchers. (MISS PERKINS *is shocked at nightgown.* SHIRLEY *picks up another book and reads*) (ROMEO) "Call me but love, I will forswear my name and never more be Romeo."

(JULIET) "What man art thou, that thus bescreened in night, so stumblest on my counsel?"

MISS PERKINS. (*To DETECTIVE*) There's a man in her room. Scandalous.

SHIRLEY. (JULIET) "How camest thou hither to tell me and for what? The place is death considering who thou art, if any of my kinsmen find thee here.

MISS PERKINS. Well, I should say so.

SHIRLEY. (ROMEO) "With love's light wings did I oerperch these walls, for stony limits cannot keep love out and what love can do that dares love attempt, therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me."

(JULIET) "If they do see thee here they will murder thee."

MISS PERKINS. Murder, the woman is a criminal.

SHIRLEY. I would not for the world they saw thee here.

MISS PERKINS. (*Sarcastically*) I suppose not.

SHIRLEY. (JULIET) "Oh, gentle Romeo, if thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully and not impute this yielding to light love (MISS PERKINS *listening at keyhole*) which the dark night hath so discovered."

MISS PERKINS. Well, I'll see that you're *dis-*

*covered* all right. (To DETECTIVE) I shall tell Mrs. Saunders. I am sure there is a man in that room. Don't you think so?

DETECTIVE. (*Looking very wise*) Yes, it would seem that the woman has an accomplice.

SHIRLEY. (JULIET) "If that thy bent of love be honorable, thy purpose marriage, send me word where and what time thou wilt perform the rite. What o'clock to-morrow shall I send to thee?" (ROMEO) "At the hour of nine."

MISS PERKINS. (*Who has been listening at the keyhole*) They are going to be married at nine o'clock to-morrow. Humph, they ought to have thought about that before. This is scandalous. I shall tell Mrs. Saunders.

(DETECTIVE *gathers up all her papers and notes and goes out.* Enter MRS. PATCHETT.)

MRS. PATCHETT. (*Wearily*) Well, I am so fat-i-gued I don't know what to do. I'll just sit down here and resustiate myself. (*Seating herself in arm-chair to left*) I don't see why when Mr. Amsterdam laid out New York he spread it around so. It makes it so bothersome going from one place to another. Now, in Pottstown we have *Main Street* and everything of interest to towerists is on that street or pertaining to it. I think it would be much better if New York—but I did like to ride in the second story omnibus on Fifth Street—you know, with the fire escapes down the back? Yes, it makes 'em so safe and sanitary.

MISS PERKINS. There's a new boarder in that room.

MRS. PATCHETT. Yes?

MISS PERKINS. And there's something queer going on.

SHIRLEY. That potion scene is the hardest of all. (JULIET) "How, if when I am laid into the tomb



I wake before the time that Romeo comes to redeem me? There's a fearful point. Shall I not then be stifled in the vault and there die strangled 'ere my Romeo come?"

MRS. PATCHETT. My, but she is queer, there used to be a girl in Pottstown had them regular, apoplexical fits, and they finally had to put her away in a aquarium. Nice girl too, it was too bad she was queer.

SHIRLEY. Or if I wake, shall I not be distraught? Environed with all these hideous fears, and madly play with my forefathers joints?

MRS. PATCHETT. Oh, she's got another one.

SHIRLEY. (JULIET) And in this rage with some great kinsman's bone *dash* out my desperate brains.

MRS. PATCHETT. My she's real bad isn't she? I think something ought to be done. (JEMIMA *cautiously enters carrying a vase of flowers to the table*)

SHIRLEY. (JULIET) Oh, look methinks I see my cousin's ghost. (JEMIMA *screams terribly drops the vase of flowers, and starts to run back out of the room, SHIRLEY hearing the shriek runs out of the door of her room to see what is the matter, runs right into JEMIMA, whereat JEMIMA shivers and shakes and cries*)

JEMIMA. Oh, my Lawd, help me. (*Backing off toward center front, SHIRLEY following trying to reassure her, saying*)

SHIRLEY. Why, what is the matter?

JEMIMA. Go way from me, you *spook*. I never did nothin' that you should come here and hant me like this.

SHIRLEY. Why, I wouldn't hurt you. Come here and tell me what you mean.

JEMIMA. No, Mam, you ain't goin' to ketch me. I ain't ready to go yit.

SHIRLEY. (*To MISS PERKINS*) She's queer, isn't she?

MISS PERKINS. (*Sharply*) Don't speak to me.

SHIRLEY. (*Starts and looks astonished*) Why—what's—

MISS PERKINS. Oh, I suppose you think I don't know what's been going on in there. (*Pointing to room*) It's a perfect outrage.

SHIRLEY. (*Looking mystified and troubled*) Why, I don't understand you.

MRS. PATCHETT. (*Patting her on the shoulder*) There, there, my dear young lady, I want to tell you how sorry I feel for you. Because you are queer, of course you can't help it. Nobody ought to blame you, but you know, really, my dear, it would be better for you to let them put you away in a aquarium-um, put you away. (*Patting her. To MISS PERKINS*) It's a shame. She seems a real nice girl.

MISS PERKINS. Nice girl, uh. (*To SHIRLEY*) I'd like to know what you did with *him*.

SHIRLEY. Him?

MISS PERKINS. Where is he now, Miss Innocence?

(*GERALDINE runs in, sees SHIRLEY, shies off.*)

SHIRLEY. Oh, little girl, are you afraid of me too?

GERALDINE. Oh, yes, you are a ghost that comes under the crack of the door.

(*DETECTIVE enters, in business-like way, with papers in hand, places hand on SHIRLEY'S shoulder.*)

DETECTIVE. I am sorry, Madam, but I am obliged to place you under arrest.

SHIRLEY. (*Exclaims*) Arrest?

DETECTIVE. Yes, you are wanted in a murder case.

MISS PERKINS. Now see that, the woman is a criminal.



(SHIRLEY looks hopelessly from one to the other.  
Enter MRS. SAUNDERS. SHIRLEY rushes to  
her, says excitedly.)

SHIRLEY. Why didn't you tell me these people were all crazy? I never would have come here.

DETECTIVE. (*To MRS. SAUNDERS*) Madam, I am sorry to make an arrest in your house, but I have circumstantial evidence that this young woman——

MISS PERKINS. (*To MRS. SAUNDERS*) Why, she has behaved scandalously. She was making love to a man that was in her room. I heard his voice.

JEMINA. Well, I know for sure she is a spook. I heard a voice saying, Hamlet, I am thy father's ghost.

GERALDINE. Yes, it came right under the crack of the door.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Oh, I begin to solve the mystery. (*To SHIRLEY*) Have you been practicing?

SHIRLEY. Why, yes.

MRS. SAUNDERS. (*Laughing*) This young lady is a Reader and she has been practicing.

SHIRLEY. (*Runs to room and gets cards; crowd look from one to the other, passing cards to each. Laughing*) For a full explanation of what you have heard here to-day you must come to my recital and satisfy yourselves about this ghostly, scandalously, queerly, criminal READER.

CURTAIN.





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