

My Husband Was Unemployed and I Needed Things, So — Does Blackface Acting Exert a Spell Over American Audiences?

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Two he introduced me as his private secretary. They smiled cordially. It was a new experience to me. Always I had had a secret ambition to meet people who "amount to something," who had culture, refinement, and education. Attorney Dreazen must have noted my pleasure, for he leaned over familiarly and said in a low tone, "I lunch and dine here every day, Mrs. Jackson. Wouldn't you like to join me?"

"Oh, but I couldn't do that, Mr. Dreazen," I replied, "it wouldn't look well."

"It would be all right," he assured me, "you are my confidential secretary now." So at least three times that week we lunched together. I enjoyed it thoroughly, and, of course, there was nothing wrong about it. Perhaps Henry would not have approved if I had told him—but I didn't.

On the next Friday evening at four o'clock, I was called into his office. I took dictation until five when he dismissed me, telling me to return the letters for signature when they were finished. By that time it was well past six o'clock.

The Office Dinner

"I find I have a great deal of other work, Mrs. Jackson," he announced, "so you'll be kept pretty late. I



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guess you'd better telephone your husband so he won't be worried." I thought nothing of this and did as he ordered.

When I entered his office again, I was amazed to find a linen table cloth over the desk, a full course dinner spread on it, and two bottles of champagne in a pail of cracked ice, while from the radio cleverly made into the lower drawer of the file case came lilting music.

"Don't be frightened," he soothed, approaching me, "you have been such a fine secretary that I thought I would surprise you. You won't be angry at the whims of someone old enough to be your father, will you?" he asked with twinkling eyes, escorting me to my seat.

Although I was a little worried about it all, I had to admit that the dinner was delicious and the wine excellent. In fact, it was quite strong as well as excellent. I soon became delightfully dizzy.

Suddenly Matthew Dreazen rose a little unsteadily as the strains of "Puttin' on the Ritz" came over the air, and approached me with outstretched arms, inviting me to dance. Not wishing to offend him when he had been so nice, I consented, and I had to admit that he danced well.

Then, crushing me closer to him and finding my lips with a firm kiss he cried hoarsely, "I love you, Mary! Haven't you noticed it all along? Kiss me, darling! Don't you care a little bit for me?"

"Honor Versus a Job"

I tore myself from his grasp, brushed away his loathsome kiss and leaned weakly against the wall. "No! No!" I cried, "I care nothing for you. Let me out of here!" I rushed to the door. It was locked!

"Don't be a little fool," he hissed, not attempting again to embrace me but resuming his seat rather heavily. "I can give you everything if you will let me. I have money, power, social prestige; you and your husband have nothing. I like you and want you. Be reasonable, Mary. Your husband need never know. I'll protect you from any scandal. You know I am a man of honor!"

"No!" I cried, "you've made a mistake, Mr. Dreazen. I'm not that kind. I love my husband. Now let me out of here. I want to go home!"

"Well," he sneered, "it's me or this job, see! You give me a 'break' or you haven't got any job. There are plenty of little half-starved stenographers in Harlem who will jump at this job for half of what you are getting and won't be so uppity, either. Are you going to listen to reason?"

"Not in a thousand years," I replied, although I knew all that he said was true. "Take your job. I came here to work, not to be a sweetheart."

As I rode home on the subway a few minutes later, I wondered whether I had been a fool. After all, thousands of girls were doing it and getting away with it. How else was one to wear expensive clothes in New York and have the best of things? After all, did it pay to be "silly"?

"Oh, Mary!" Henry yelled as I walked disconsolately into our drab little room. "What do you think has happened?" He was grinning like a Cheshire cat and looking happier than I had seen him since we arrived in New York.

"I don't know, Henry," I answered, hoping against hope.

"Well, kid, I've got the swellest job you ever heard of. Working in a garage. Forty dollars a week. Begin Monday. Aren't you glad?"

Oh, how glad I was! How glad that I had not listened to the siren call of temptation. So glad that I had not let my need, my hunger for pleasure in the big city make me untrue to my husband.

"Darling," I cried, embracing him hungrily, the tears of relief coursing down my cheeks. That was all I could say.

MOTHER'S WORK EASY?

For some time elaborate tests have been conducted to ascertain how far various types of people walk as they do their work or play.

It has been learned that we average almost 8 miles a day, although a policeman was checked at 14 miles a day and a letter carrier at 22. A golfer walked 8½ miles playing 18 holes (no mention was made of his score).

A housekeeper, without leaving the house, walks every year a distance equal to that from Boston to San Francisco, but when this woman goes down town to shop she averages about 8 1-3 miles in the stores alone,

have directly pirated their comedy scheme from this popular pair, but no one has ever been able to confirm this report.

Whatever may be the truth of this report, Amos 'n' Andy have gone much farther with the development of their idea than Miller and Lyles. They have employed a serialized method of presentation and have coined many catchy phrases that no doubt are totally original. Nevertheless, the enchanting humor of the blackface appearance has undoubtedly carried "little Lyles" and "big Miller" to the top of stage pairs in this type of work.

It seems peculiarly significant that blackface acting has had such tremendous acceptance in the United States. There appears to be some degree of actual "luck" attendant upon all those who have adapted it.

A good number of the really great and popular actors and actresses in this country have at some time associated themselves with this manner of presentation. Apparently it is one means of sure success, and many actors recognizing this availability have advantageously hid their real countenances to attain the popularity that they had otherwise failed to achieve.

It is strange, too, that the road to fame in America should be through a generous use of prevalent Negro characteristics. That the Negro who is in a unique position in America, should be mimicked to achieve fame and wealth is just another anomaly of American life. One would think that it would be anathema to imitate one who in practically every field of endeavor is considered "inferior"—whatever that may mean.

Particularly attractive faces have been hid under the mid-night make-

up. There can be no doubt that Ethel Barrymore is of truly beautiful and striking appearance. And Johnny Huggins, whose blackface antics carried him to many successful receptions abroad, is a handsome fellow—having a rich brown complexion, he presents a pleasing personality. Bert Williams was in every respect a presentable person, of dignified and clean-cut appearance.

But these many fine personalities have been sacrificed to the plaudits of the galleries, for they are, after all, the judge of what is most satisfying.

The fancies of audiences are much more demanding than one would ever think. In the blackface artist, the theatre audiences receive an effect that has never yet been duplicated and that reaches their "funny bones" or their sympathies as no other artifice known to the American stage.

The whole condition is one which would lend itself undoubtedly to the analysis of psychological experts. It has no counterpart either here or abroad.

The tragic condition of the American Negro in the popularity of the blackface artist paradoxically gives rise to a much more hilariously funny type of entertainment than any situation in the United States. Nor does the acceptability show any signs of abating.

THE REAL THING

Young Jack, just home from his first visit to the country, was telling the folks of its wonders.

"And say, ma," he said, "out on the farm they get milk from cows, and it's just as good as any."

—Orange Judd, Farmer.



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