

Kate chopin's "desiree's baby"

Literature



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In Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby," the story begins with Madame Valmonde visiting her daughter, Desiree, and her new baby. She begins to reminisce as how "it seemed but yesterday that Desiree was little more than a baby herself" (Chopin 2005). Desiree was not Madame Valmode's biological daughter. She took her in when Monsieur Valmonde "found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar" (Chopin 2005) as she saw Desiree as a gift from God with her being childless, in spite of rumors going around as to where the child came from.

Desiree grew up to be a beautiful young lady and as such Armand Aubigny fell in love with her so much that he wanted to marry her. Monsieur Valmonde tried to discourage him from marrying Desiree by reminding him "that she was nameless" (Chopin 2005). This did not matter to Armand. Eventually, they were married. Armand had been known throughout Louisiana as a strict and cruel plantation master. However, Desiree mentioned to her adopted mother excitedly that after the birth of their baby, he had been so proud about the birth of their son that even his demeanor to the slaves of the plantation had changed.

When Desiree's child was three months old, she began to notice that not only did her husband become distant towards her and her son, but has become more cruel and stricter towards their slaves. It was only when one of the slave boys was attending to her son that she noticed that there seemed to be a similarity between her son and the slave. When she asked Armand about it, he accused her that the reason why her son looked similar to the slaves was because she was not white, and that she was actually the daughter of a slave girl.

Hurt by the accusation of her husband, Desiree writes to her mother pleading for her to convince her husband that the accusations are not true. Madame Valmonde wrote back and told her to return home to her and to take the child with her. She asks her husband if she could leave. Armand had practically driven her and her son away. He “ no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name” (Chopin 2005).

After she left with her son, Armand burned everything that once had belonged to his wife, along with a stack of letters. As he collected these letters, he came across one that did not come from his wife. Rather, it was a letter from his mother thanking his father for his love and that their son, Armand, “ will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery” (Chopin 2005). Commentary Kate Chopin had depicted in her story “ Desiree’s Baby” the racial discrimination faced by African-Americans and Caucasians.

During this period, men and women of color were seen as inferior to Caucasian. This was clearly seen on Armand’s demeanor towards his slaves and Desiree’s plea to her adoptive mother to convince her husband that she was indeed white and not an inferior African-American slave. Discrimination was also seen here between men and women. Because Desiree origins were unknown, Armand automatically concluded that the reason why their son looked like his slaves was because of her.

To him, this was the only explanation. Desiree’s adoptive mother’s decision to advise Desiree to return to her home with her son further strengthens this. This made the ending extremely striking. The letter of his mother to his
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father clearly gave the reason as to why his son looked very much like his slaves. It was not because of his wife who he harshly drove away and blamed as the cause of his family's shame. Armand himself was the son of an African-American, a slave and not his wife.