

Inspired by Kate Chopin's Short Story of the Same Name

Created by John R. Briggs

A Modern Historical Drama of Race

Taking Kate Chopin's story of love, race and prejudice, the stage version of *Desiree's Baby* reexamines race in America, offering historical insights that connect to issues and challenges of today. This drama is a modern drama with powerful characters, perplexing situations and finely tuned dialogue.

A Love Story

This drama begins as a love story, when a childless husband and wife find a baby abandoned and make her a part of their family. Naming her Desiree, the child is loved and treated as if she was their birth child. When Armand, a wealthy and handsome plantation owner falls in love with her, their passion becomes transformational as Armand's harsh ways are softened greatly. But this is not a romantic love story with a happy ending.

Harsh Reality

The drama *Desiree's Baby* gives us a vision of harsh reality too. This play turns on perceptions and cultural norms as they relate to history. Set in the mid-19th century in America, *Desiree's Baby* reveals how cultural and societal beliefs regarding race dictated the thoughts and actions of some individuals, making someone endowed with humanity, warmth and love into a cold, uncaring and brutal person.

Characters and Plot

In *Desiree's Baby*, which is set in 1834 Louisiana, Desiree is found lying under an azalea bush near the front gate of the Valmonde plantation. Assuming that pioneers headed for Texas left her behind, Emile and Marie Valmonde decide to raise her as the child they could never have.

In 1852 when she is eighteen, Desiree meets Armand Aubigny, a handsome and charming man who is the son of a deceased, wealthy plantation owner. Desiree, who is beautiful and innocent, captures his eye, and in time, he takes her as his bride.

The Valmonde plantation, where Desiree grew up, had already freed its slaves, but at her new home, the Aubigny plantation, Desiree finds that slavery still exists. And along with the heinous practice, she sees that Armand is a violent and hard master. But in this drama, his love for Desiree transforms her new husband and Armand softens his ways.

Armand has been married while his mother is away in Paris settling her recently deceased brother's estate. Within a year, the newlyweds are blessed with a baby daughter, who they name Amanda. But several weeks after the birth of their child, Armand becomes agitated, angry and abusive.

The drama turns towards darkness as Armand begins whipping his slaves and avoiding Desiree and Amanda. During a visit by Desiree's mother, he exposes what has been troubling him—he realizes that his daughter is a “quadroon,” a mixed race child, and demands that Desiree return to her parents.

In the heat of the moment, he charges Desiree's parents of tricking him into marrying their mixed-race daughter. After his encounter, Armand returns to his plantation where he starts drinking. His mother finds him in a drunken state and when he reveals what he's done and what, she tells him a shocking secret.

The reason the baby Amanda is of mixed race is not because of Desiree. It is Armand who is of mixed parentage. Armand, shocked and unable to cope with the humiliation he feels over the truth of his heritage, takes a pistol and ends his life.

Audiences and the Drama

Desiree's Baby is a character and plot drive drama dealing with questions related to love, prejudice and perception. The historical context of this drama provides telling insights into the antebellum South and human nature in general. *Desiree's Baby* is filled with thought-provoking situations, startling revelations and penetrating questions. For more

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