

**DION
BOUCICAULT**

THE
OCTOROON

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The Octoroon

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The Octoroon or, Life in Louisiana; A Play in Five acts:*

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The Octoroon or, Life in Louisiana; A Play in Five acts

ACT I

Scene I. — *A view of the Plantation Terrebonne, in Louisiana. — A branch of the Mississippi is seen winding through the Estate. — A low built, but extensive Planter's Dwelling, surrounded with a veranda, and raised a few feet from the ground, occupies the L. side. — A table and chairs, R. C.*

Grace discovered sitting at breakfast-table with Children

Enter Solon, from house, L

Solon. Yah! you bomn'ble fry — git out — a gen'leman can't pass for you.

Grace. [*Seizing a fly whisk.*] Hee! ha — git out! [*Drives Children away; in escaping they tumble against and trip up Solon,*

who falls with tray; the Children steal the bananas and rolls that fall about.]

Enter Pete, R. U. E. [he is lame]; he carries a mop and pail

Pete. Hey! laws a massey! why, clar out! drop dat banana! I'll murder this yer crowd, [*He chases Children about; they leap over railing at back. Exit Solon, R. U. E.*] Dem little niggers is a judgment upon dis generation.

Enter George, from house, L

George. What's the matter, Pete.

Pete. It's dem black trash, Mas'r George; dis ere property wants claring; dem's getting too numerous round; when I gets time I'll kill some on 'em, sure!

George. They don't seem to be scared by the threat.

Pete. Top, you varmin! top till I get enough of you in one place!

George. Were they all born on this estate?

Pete. Guess they nebber was born – dem tings! what, dem? – get away! Born here – dem darkies? What, on Terrebonne! Don't b'lieve it, Mas'r George; dem black tings never was born at all; dey swarmed one mornin' on a sassafras tree in the swamp: I cotched 'em; dey ain't no 'count. Don't b'lieve dey'll turn out

niggers when dey're growed; dey'll come out sunthin else.

Grace. Yes, Mas'r George, dey was born here; and old Pete is fonder on 'em dan he is of his fiddle on a Sunday.

Pete. What? dem tings – dem? – getaway [*makes blow at the Children.*] Born here! dem darkies! What, on Terrebonne? Don't b'lieve it, Mas'r George, – no. One morning dey swarmed on a sassafras tree in de swamp, and I cotched 'em all in a sieve. – dat's how dey come on top of dis yearth – git out, you, – ya, ya! [*Laughs.*]

[*Exit Grace, R. U. E.*]

Enter Mrs. Peyton, from house

Mrs. P. So, Pete, you are spoiling those children as usual!

Pete. Dat's right, missus! gib it to ole Pete! he's allers in for it. Git away dere! Ya! if dey aint all lighted, like coons, on dat snake fence, just out of shot. Look dar! Ya! ya! Dem debils. Ya!

Mrs. P. Pete, do you hear?

Pete. Git down dar! – I'm arter you!

[*Hobbles off, R. 1. E.*]

Mrs. P. You are out early this morning, George.

George. I was up before daylight. We got the horses saddled, and galloped down the shell road over the Piney Patch; then coasting the Bayou Lake, we crossed the long swamps, by Paul's Path, and so came home again.

Mrs. P. [*Laughing.*] You seem already familiar with the names of every spot on the estate.

Enter Pete.— Arranges breakfast, &c

George. Just one month ago I quitted Paris. I left that siren city as I would have left a beloved woman.

Mrs. P. No wonder! I dare say you left at least a dozen beloved women there, at the same time.

George. I feel that I departed amid universal and sincere regret. I left my loves and my creditors equally inconsolable.

Mrs. P. George, you are incorrigible. Ah! you remind me so much of your uncle, the judge.

George. Bless his dear old handwriting, it's all I ever saw of him. For ten years his letters came every quarter-day, with a remittance and a word of advice in his formal cavalier style; and then a joke in the postscript, that upset the dignity of the foregoing. Aunt, when he died, two years ago, I read over those letters of his, and if I didn't cry like a baby —

Mrs. P. No, George; say you wept like a man. And so you really kept those foolish letters?

George. Yes; I kept the letters, and squandered the money.

Mrs. P. [*Embracing him.*] Ah! why were you not my son — you are so like my dear husband.

Enter Salem Scudder, R

Scud. Ain't he! Yes – when I saw him and Miss Zoe galloping through the green sugar crop, and doing ten dollars' worth of damage at every stride, says I, how like his old uncle he do make the dirt fly.

George. O, aunt! what a bright, gay creature she is!

Scud. What, Zoe! Guess that you didn't leave anything female in Europe that can lift an eyelash beside that gal. When she goes along, she just leaves a streak of love behind her. It's a good drink to see her come into the cotton fields – the niggers get fresh on the sight of her. If she ain't worth her weight in sunshine you may take one of my fingers off, and choose which you like.

Mrs. P. She need not keep us waiting breakfast, though. Pete, tell Miss Zoe that we are waiting.

Pete. Yes, missus. Why, Minnie, why don't you run when you hear, you lazy crittur? [*Minnie runs off.*] Dat's de laziest nigger on dis yere property. [*Sits down.*] Don't do nuffin.

Mrs. P. My dear George, you are left in your uncle's will heir to this estate.

George. Subject to your life interest and an annuity to Zoe, is it not so?

Mrs. P. I fear that the property is so involved that the strictest economy will scarcely recover it. My dear husband never kept any accounts, and we scarcely know in what condition the estate

really is.

Scud. Yes, we do, ma'am; it's in a darned bad condition. Ten years ago the judge took as overseer a bit of Connecticut hardware called M'Closky. The judge didn't understand accounts – the overseer did. For a year or two all went fine. The judge drew money like Bourbon whiskey from a barrel, and never turned off the tap. But out it flew, free for everybody or anybody to beg, borrow, or steal. So it went, till one day the judge found the tap wouldn't run. He looked in to see what stopped it, and pulled out a big mortgage. "Sign that," says the overseer; "it's only a formality." "All right," says the judge, and away went a thousand acres; so at the end of eight years, Jacob M'Closky, Esquire, finds himself proprietor of the richest half of Terrebonne —

George. But the other half is free.

Scud. No, it ain't; because, just then, what does the judge do, but hire another overseer – a Yankee – a Yankee named Salem Scudder.

Mrs. P. O. no, it was —

Scud. Hold on, now! I'm going to straighten this account clear out. What was this here Scudder? Well, he lived in New York by sittin' with his heels up in front of French's Hotel, and inventin' —

George. Inventing what?

Scud. Improvements – anything, from a stay-lace to a fire-engine. Well, he cut that for the photographing line. He and his apparatus arrived here, took the judge's likeness and his

fancy, who made him overseer right off. Well, sir, what does this Scudder do but introduces his inventions and improvements on this estate. His new cotton gins broke down, the steam sugar-mills burst up, until he finished off with his folly what Mr. M'Closky with his knavery began.

Mrs. P. O, Salem! how can you say so? Haven't you worked like a horse?

Scud. No, ma'am, I worked like an ass – an honest one, and that's all. Now, Mr. George, between the two overseers, you and that good old lady have come to the ground; that is the state of things, just as near as I can fix it. [*Zoe sings without, L.*]

George. 'Tis Zoe.

Scud. O, I have not spoiled that anyhow. I can't introduce any darned improvement there. Ain't that a cure for old age; it kinder lifts the heart up, don't it?

Mrs. P. Poor child! what will become of her when I am gone? If you haven't spoiled her, I fear I have. She has had the education of a lady.

George. I have remarked that she is treated by the neighbors with a kind of familiar condescension that annoyed me.

Scud. Don't you know that she is the natural daughter of the judge, your uncle, and that old lady thar just adored anything her husband cared for; and this girl, that another woman would a hated, she loves as if she'd been her own child.

George. Aunt, I am prouder and happier to be your nephew and heir to the ruins of Terrebonne, than I would have been to

have had half Louisiana without you.

Enter Zoe, from house, L

Zoe. Am I late? Ah! Mr. Scudder, good morning.

Scud. Thank'ye. I'm from fair to middlin', like a bamboo cane, much the same all the year round.

Zoe. No; like a sugar cane; so dry outside, one would never think there was so much sweetness within.

Scud. Look here; I can't stand that gal! if I stop here, I shall hug her right off. [*Sees Pete, who has set his pail down L. C. up stage, and goes to sleep on it.*] If that old nigger ain't asleep, I'm blamed. Hillo! [*Kicks pail from under Pete, and lets him down.*]

[Exit, L. U. E.

Pete. Hi! Debbel's in de pail! Whar's breakfass?

***Enter Solon and Dido with
coffee-pot, dishes, &c., R. U. E***

Dido. Bless'ee, Missey Zoe, here it be. Dere's a dish of pen-pans – jess taste, Mas'r George – and here's fried bananas; smell 'em, do, sa glosch.

Pete. Hole yer tongue, Dido. Whar's de coffee? [*Pours out.*] If it don't stain de cup, your wicked ole life's in danger, sure! dat right! black as nigger; clar as ice. You may drink dat, Mas'r

George. [*Looks off.*] Yah! here's Mas'r Sunnyside, and Missey Dora, jist drov up. Some of you niggers run and hole de hosses; and take dis, Dido. [*Gives her coffee-pot to hold, and hobbles off, followed by Solon and Dido, R. U. E.*]

Enter Sunnyside and Dora, R. U. E

Sunny. Good day, ma'am. [*Shakes hands with George.*] I see we are just in time for breakfast. [*Sits, R.*]

Dora. O, none for me; I never eat. [*Sits, R. C.*]

George. [*Aside.*] They do not notice Zoe. – [*Aloud.*] You don't see Zoe, Mr. Sunnyside.

Sunny. Ah! Zoe, girl; are you there?

Dora. Take my shawl, Zoe. [*Zoe helps her.*] What a good creature she is.

Sunny. I dare say, now, that in Europe you have never met any lady more beautiful in person, or more polished in manners, than that girl.

George. You are right, sir; though I shrank from expressing that opinion in her presence, so bluntly.

Sunny. Why so?

George. It may be considered offensive.

Sunny. [*Astonished.*] What? I say, Zoe, do you hear that?

Dora. Mr. Peyton is joking.

Mrs. P. [*L. C.*] My nephew is not acquainted with our customs in Louisiana, but he will soon understand.

George. Never, aunt! I shall never understand how to wound the feelings of any lady; and, if that is the custom here, I shall never acquire it.

Dora. Zoe, my dear, what does he mean?

Zoe. I don't know.

George. Excuse me, I'll light a cigar. [*Goes up.*]

Dora. [*Aside to Zoe.*] Isn't he sweet! O, dear Zoe, is he in love with anybody?

Zoe. How can I tell?

Dora. Ask him, I want to know; don't say I told you to inquire, but find out. Minnie, fan me, it is so nice – and his clothes are French, ain't they?

Zoe. I think so; shall I ask him that too?

Dora. No, dear. I wish he would make love to me. When he speaks to one he does it so easy, so gentle; it isn't bar-room style; love lined with drinks, sighs tinged with tobacco – and they say all the women in Paris were in love with him, which I feel *I* shall be; stop fanning me; what nice boots he wears.

Sunny. [*To Mrs. Peyton.*] Yes, ma'am, I hold a mortgage over Terrebonne; mine's a ninth, and pretty near covers all the property, except the slaves. I believe Mr. M'Closky has a bill of sale on them. O, here he is.

Enter M'Closky, R. U. E

Sunny. Good morning, Mr. M'Closky.

M'Closky. Good morning, Mr. Sunnyside; Miss Dora, your servant.

Dora. [*Seated, R. C.*] Fan me, Minnie. – [*Aside.*] I don't like that man.

M'Closky. [*Aside, C.*] Insolent as usual. – [*Aloud.*] You begged me to call this morning. I hope I'm not intruding.

Mrs. P. My nephew, Mr. Peyton.

M'Closky. O, how d'ye do, sir? [*Offers hand, George bows coldly, R. C.*] [*aside.*] A puppy, if he brings any of his European airs here we'll fix him. – [*Aloud.*] Zoe, tell Pete to give my mare a feed, will ye?

George. [*Angrily.*] Sir.

M'Closky. Hillo! did I tread on ye?

Mrs. P. What is the matter with George?

Zoe. [*Takes fan from Minnie.*] Go, Minnie, tell Pete; run!

[*Exit Minnie, R.*]

Mrs. P. Grace, attend to Mr. M'Closky.

M'Closky. A julep, gal, that's my breakfast, and a bit of cheese,

George. [*Aside to Mrs. Peyton.*] How can you ask that vulgar ruffian to your table?

Mrs. P. Hospitality in Europe is a courtesy; here, it is an obligation. We tender food to a stranger, not because he is a gentleman, but because he is hungry.

George. Aunt, I will take my rifle down to the Atchafalaya. Paul has promised me a bear and a deer or two. I see my little Nimrod yonder, with his Indian companion. Excuse me ladies.

Ho! Paul! [*Enters house.*]

Paul. [*Outside.*] I'ss, Mas'r George.

Enter Paul, R. U. E., with Indian, who goes up

Sunny. It's a shame to allow that young cub to run over the Swamps and woods, hunting and fishing his life away instead of hoeing cane.

Mrs. P. The child was a favorite of the judge, who encouraged his gambols. I couldn't bear to see him put to work.

George. [*Returning with rifle.*] Come, Paul, are you ready?

Paul. I'ss, Mas'r George. O, golly! ain't that a pooty gun.

M'Closky. See here, you imps; if I catch you, and your red skin yonder, gunning in my swamps, I'll give you rats, mind; them vagabonds, when the game's about, shoot my pigs.

[Exit George into house.]

Paul. You gib me rattan, Mas'r Clostry, but I guess you take a berry long stick to Wahnotee; ugh, he make bacon of you.

M'Closky. Make bacon of me, you young whelp. Do you mean that I'm a pig? Hold on a bit. [*Seizes whip, and holds Paul.*]

Zoe. O, sir! don't, pray, don't.

M'Closky. [*Slowly lowering his whip,*] Darn you, red skin, I'll pay you off some day, both of ye. [*Returns to table and drinks.*]

Sunny. That Indian is a nuisance. Why don't he return to his nation out West?

M'Closky. He's too fond of thieving and whiskey.

Zoe. No; Wahnotee is a gentle, honest creature, and remains here because he loves that boy with the tenderness of a woman. When Paul was taken down with the swamp fever the Indian sat outside the hut, and neither ate, slept, or spoke for five days, till the child could recognize and call him to his bedside. He who can love so well is honest – don't speak ill of poor Wahnotee.

Mrs. P. Wahnotee, will you go back to your people?

Wahnotee. Sleugh.

Paul. He don't understand; he speaks a mash-up of Indian and Mexican. Wahnotee Patira na sepau assa wigiran.

Wahnotee. Weal Omenee.

Paul. Says he'll go if I'll go with him. He calls me Omenee, the Pigeon, and Miss Zoe is Ninemoosha, the Sweetheart.

Wahnotee. [*Pointing to Zoe.*] Ninemoosha.

Zoe. No, Wahnotee, we can't spare Paul.

Paul. If Omenee remain, Wahnotee will die in Terrebonne.

[*During the dialogue Wahnotee has taken George's gun.*]

Enter George, L

George. Now I'm ready. [*George tries to regain his gun; Wahnoteerefuses to give it up; Paul, quietly takes it from him and remonstrates with him.*]

Dora. Zoe, he's going; I want him to stay and make love to me that's what I came for to-day.

Mrs. P. George, I can't spare Paul for an hour or two; he must run over to the landing; the steamer from New Orleans passed up the river last night, and if there's a mail they have thrown it ashore.

Sunny. I saw the mail-bags lying in the shed this morning.

Mrs. P. I expect an important letter from Liverpool; away with you, Paul; bring the mail-bags here.

Paul. I'm 'most afraid to take Wahnotee to the shed, there's rum there.

Wahnotee. Rum!

Paul. Come, then, but if I catch you drinkin', O, laws a mussey, you'll get snakes! I'll gib it you! now mind.

[Exit with Indian, R. U. E.]

George. Come, Miss Dora, let me offer you my arm.

Dora. Mr. George, I am afraid, if all we hear is true, you have led a dreadful life in Europe.

George. That's a challenge to begin a description of my feminine adventures.

Dora. You have been in love, then?

George. Two hundred and forty-nine times! Let me relate you the worst cases.

Dora. No! no!

George. I'll put the naughty parts in French.

Dora. I won't hear a word! O, you horrible man! go on.

[Exit George and Dora to house.]

M'Closky. Now, ma'am, I'd like a little business, if agreeable. I bring you news; your banker, old Lafouche, of New Orleans, is dead; the executors are winding up his affairs, and have foreclosed on all overdue mortgages, so Terrebonne is for sale. Here's the Picayune [*producing paper*] with the advertisement.

Zoe. Terrebonne for sale!

Mrs. P. Terrebonne for sale, and you, sir, will doubtless become its purchaser.

M'Closky. Well, ma'am, I spose there's no law agin my bidding for it. The more bidders, the better for you. You'll take care, I guess, it don't go too cheap.

Mrs. P. O, sir, I don't value the place for its price, but for the many happy days I've spent here; that landscape, flat and uninteresting though it may be, is full of charm for me; those poor people, born around me, growing up about my heart, have bounded my view of life; and now to lose that homely scene, lose their black, ungainly faces; O, sir, perhaps you should be as old as I am, to feel as I do, when my past life is torn away from me.

M'Closky. I'd be darned glad if somebody would tear my past life away from me. Sorry I can't help you, but the fact is, you're in such an all-fired mess that you couldn't be pulled out without a derrick.

Mrs. P. Yes, there is a hope left yet, and I cling to it. The house of Mason Brothers, of Liverpool, failed some twenty years ago in my husband's debt.

M'Closky. They owed him over fifty thousand dollars.

Mrs. P. I cannot find the entry in my husband's accounts; but you, Mr. M'Closky, can doubtless detect it. Zoe, bring here the judge's old desk; it is in the library.

[Exit Zoe to house.]

M'Closky. You don't expect to recover any of this old debt, do you?

Mrs. P. Yes; the firm has recovered itself, and I received a notice two months ago that some settlement might be anticipated.

Sunny. Why, with principal and interest this debt has been more than doubled in twenty years.

Mrs. P. But it may be years yet before it will be paid off, if ever.

Sunny. If there's a chance of it, there's not a planter round here who wouldn't lend you the whole cash, to keep your name and blood amongst us. Come, cheer up, old friend.

Mrs. P. Ah! Sunnyside, how good you are; so like my poor Peyton.

[Exit Mrs. Peyton and Sunnyside to house.]

M'Closky. Curse their old families – they cut me – a bilious, conceited, thin lot of dried up aristocracy. I hate 'em. Just because my grandfather wasn't some broken-down Virginia transplant, or a stingy old Creole, I ain't fit to sit down with the same meat with them. It makes my blood so hot I feel my heart hiss. I'll sweep these Peytons from this section of the country.

Their presence keeps alive the reproach against me that I ruined them; yet, if this money should come. Bah! There's no chance of it. Then, if they go, they'll take Zoe – she'll follow them. Darn that girl; she makes me quiver when I think of her; she's took me for all I'm worth.

Enter Zoe from house, L., with the desk

O, here, do you know what annuity the old judge left you is worth to-day? Not a picayune.

Zoe. It's surely worth the love that dictated it; here are the papers and accounts. [*Putting it on the table, R. C.*]

M'Closky. Stop, Zoe; come here! How would you like to rule the house of the richest planter on Atchafalaya – eh? or say the word, and I'll buy this old barrack, and you shall be mistress of Terrebonne.

Zoe. O, sir, do not speak so to me!

M'Closky. Why not! look here, these Peytons are bust; cut 'em; I am rich, jine me; I'll set you up grand, and we'll give these first families here our dust, until you'll see their white skins shrivel up with hate and rage; what d'ye say?

Zoe. Let me pass! O, pray, let me go!

M'Closky. What, you won't, won't ye? If young George Peyton was to make you the same offer, you'd jump at it, pretty darned quick, I guess. Come, Zoe, don't be a fool; I'd marry you if I could, but you know I can't; so just say what you want. Here then,

I'll put back these Peytons in Terrebonne, and they shall know you done it; yes, they'll have you to thank for saving them from ruin.

Zoe. Do you think they would live here on such terms?

M'Closky. Why not? We'll hire out our slaves, and live on their wages.

Zoe. But I'm not a slave.

M'Closky. No; if you were I'd buy you, if you cost all I'm worth.

Zoe. Let me pass!

M'Closky. Stop.

Enter Scudder, R

Scud. Let her pass.

M'Closky. Eh?

Scud. Let her pass! [*Takes out his knife.*]

[Exit Zoe to house.]

M'Closky. Is that you, Mr. Overseer? [*Examines paper.*]

Scud. Yes, I'm here, somewhere, interferin'.

M'Closky. [*Sitting, R. C.*] A pretty mess you've got this estate in —

Scud. Yes — me and Co. — we done it; but, as you were senior partner in the concern, I reckon you got the big lick.

M'Closky. What d'ye mean.

Scud. Let me proceed by illustration. [*Sits, R.*] Look thar! [*Points with knife off, R.*] D'ye see that tree? – it's called a live oak, and is a native here; beside it grows a creeper; year after year that creeper twines its long arms round and round the tree – sucking the earth dry all about its roots – living on its life – overrunning its branches, until at last the live oak withers and dies out. Do you know what the niggers round here call that sight? they call it the Yankee hugging the Creole. [*Sits.*]

M'Closky. Mr. Scudder, I've listened to a great many of your insinuations, and now I'd like to come to an understanding what they mean. If you want a quarrel —

Scudder. No, I'm the skurriest crittur at a fight you ever see; my legs have been too well brought up to stand and see my body abused; I take good care of myself, I can tell you.

M'Closky. Because I heard that you had traduced my character.

Scud. Traduced! Whoever said so lied. I always said you were the darndest thief that ever escaped a white jail to misrepresent the North to the South.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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