GEORGE. (Seeing Zoe.) Poor child! She must be so sad now, thinking she'll have nowhere to go.

ZOE. (Glancing at George.) Poor fellow, he is poised to lose everything.

GEORGE. Zoe, with our ruin, you might be left without a home.

ZOE. Oh, no; think of yourself.

GEORGE. I can think of nothing but the image that remains face to face with me; so beautiful that I dare not express the feelings that have grown up so rapidly in my heart.

ZOE. (Aside.) He means Dora.

GEORGE. If I dared to speak!

ZOE. That's just what you must do, and do it at once, or it will be too late.

GEORGE. Has my love been divined?

ZOE. It has been more than suspected.

GEORGE. Zoe, listen to me, then. I shall see this estate pass from me without a sigh, for it possesses no charm for me; the only estate I value is the heart of one true woman, and the slaves I'd have are her thoughts.

ZOE. (Truly swept up.) George, your words take my breath away!

GEORGE. Zoe, your mirror must have told you that you are beautiful. Is your heart free?

ZOE. (Confused.) Free? Of course it is —

GEORGE. We have known each other but a few days, but to me those days have been worth all the rest of my life. Zoe, you have suspected the feeling that now commands expression — you have seen that I love you.

ZOE. Me! You love me?

GEORGE. As your husband — under the shelter of your love — I could watch the storms of fortune pass by without a care —

ZOE. My love! (Realizing, recoiling.) My love! George, you know not what you say! You? My … husband? Do you know what I am? GEORGE. I know you are illegitimate, but love knows no prejudice. Has not my dear aunt forgotten it — she who had the most right to remember it?

ZOE. (Aside.) Alas! He does not know! And will despise — spurn me when he learns who, what, he has so loved. (Aloud.) George, oh, forgive me! Yes, I love you — I did not know it until your words showed me what has been in my heart and now I know how unhappy — how very unhappy I am.

GEORGE. Zoe, what have I said to wound you?

ZOE. Nothing; but you must learn what I thought you already knew. George, you cannot marry me; the laws forbid it!

GEORGE. Forbid it?

ZOE. There is a gulf between us, as wide as your love — as deep as my despair; but, oh, say you will pity me! That you will not throw me from you like a poisonous thing!

GEORGE. Zoe, explain yourself — your language fills me with fear.

ZOE. George, do you see that hand you hold? Look at these fingers; do you see the nails are of a … bluish tinge?

GEORGE. Yes, near the quick there is a faint blue mark.

ZOE. Look in my eyes; is not the same color in the white?

GEORGE. It is their beauty.

ZOE. No! That — that is the dark, fatal mark of Cain. Of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black — bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the rest; those seven bright drops give me love like yours — hope like yours — ambition like yours — passions hung from life like dewdrops on morning flowers; but the one black drop gives me despair, for I'm an unclean thing — I'm an octotroon!

GEORGE. Zoe, this knowledge brings no revolt to my heart. I love you nonetheless. We can leave this country, and go far away where none can know.

ZOE. And your aunt, she who from infancy treated me with such fondness, she who, as you said, has most reason to spurn me, can she forget what I am? Will she gladly see you wedded to the child of her husband's slave? No! She would revolt from it as all but you would!

GEORGE. Zoe, must we immolate our lives on their prejudice?

ZOE. Yes, for I'd rather be black than ungrateful! (Beat.) Ah, George, my race has at least one virtue — it knows how to suffer …

GEORGE. Each word you utter makes my love sink deeper into my heart.

ZOE. And I remained here to induce you to offer that heart to Dora!

GEORGE. If you bid me do so I will obey you —

ZOE. But no, no! If you cannot be mine — Oh, let me not blush when I think of you! (Exits, running.)

GEORGE. Dearest Zoe! (George exits after her. Beat, before Br'er Rabbit wanders in again, pauses, notices the audience, and seems to inspect it for a bit before exiting. M'Closky enters.)