

To Octavia Dockery all people were outsiders, strangers, potential enemies. To the people of Vermillion, Mississippi Octavia Dockery was the goat woman, the mysterious, precocious co-inhabitant of an old plantation once called Glenburnie but now more vulgarly called Goat Castle. Goat Castle was not a prime subject of gossip among the more loquacious members of Vermillion's society. The old house and its weird inhabitants had existed too long for that. But rather the old place had become part of the Vermillion landscape, like a particularly large and beautiful tree or one of the huge red cliffs that rose from the newly paved streets right in the middle of town; It was to be regarded with interest but an interest that was much milder than scrutiny.