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the crowd, it became immediately plain that a baptism was in progress.

A line of women, robed in white, stood on one side; several men, likewise in white, on the other, while the minister, knee-deep in the water, was immersing a subject who shouted wildly as he went under and came up struggling as one in a fit, while two able-bodied men with difficulty bore him ashore.

The scene was scarcely one to inspire reverence to a casual observer, and there was naturally some merriment at its expense. One playful comment led to another until a slashing bit of ridicule brought the entire ceremony into derision, and, as it happened, the remark with its accompanying mimicry was addressed to Agnes.

"Oh, please!" she pleaded, coloring deeply. "I quite understand how it may affect you; but—oh, it is too serious for here—too personal and too sacred—"

While she hesitated, the culprit, ready to crawl at her feet,—innocent, indeed, of the indelicacy of which he

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had become technically guilty,—begged to be forgiven. He had quite truly "meant no harm."

"Oh, I am quite sure of it," the girl smiled; "but now that I have spoken,—and really I could not help it; I could not wish to let it pass, understand,—but now that I have spoken—oh, what shall I say!

"Perhaps you will understand me when I tell you that I should not be with you here to-day but for the devoted care of two old Christian people who dated their joy in the spiritual life from precisely such a ceremony as this. They are in Heaven now.

"My dear old Mammy often said that she 'went under the water groaning in sin, and came up shouting, a saved soul!' I seem to hear her again as I repeat the words, on this same river, in sight of her people and within the sound of their voices. I was small when she died, and I do not clearly remember many of her words; but this I do well recall, for we lived for some years on

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the river-bank, only a few miles from the spot where in her youth she had been immersed. She taught me to love the river, and perhaps I am a little sentimental over it. I hope always to be so. My father remembers many of her words. She was his nurse, too. She told him as a boy that she had insisted on being baptized in flowing water, so that her sins might be carried away to the sea. It was all very sacred to her."

Of course the romantic story of Agnes's youth was known to every one present, and this unexpected allusion awakened immediate interest.

"Oh, yes," she replied to a question; "I suppose I do remember a good deal, considering how very young I was, and yet I often wonder that I do not remember more, as it was all so unusual;" and then she added, laughing: "I seem to forget that no event could surprise a child *in her first experiences of life*. Yet I remember trivial things, as, for instance, the losing of a hat. I

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clearly recall our watching my hat on one occasion when it blew into the river, *and was never recovered!* Think of the tragedy of it! I can see it now, tossing like a little boat, as it floated away.

"And the funny little cabin I remember—I know I do, for there were things which papa never saw, on the inside, in what he calls my 'boudoir,' the white cabin, which I shall never forget. When anything is kept ever in mind by constant description, it is hard to know how much one really remembers. You know, papa spent only one night there and his thoughts were turned backward, so that he naturally kept only vague impressions of the place.

"Yes, he has made a sketch of it from memory, and I am sorry. Why? Oh, because I was sure at first that it was not correct, and now it has come to stand to me in place of the true picture, which has faded. It is a way with pictures if we let them override us. Why, my grandmother in

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Boston has a friend who had his wife's portrait painted after she was lost at sea. He spent all the money he had to have it done by a 'best artist who had made a hasty sketch of her in life,' and when it came home he did not recognize it—really thought a mistake had been made. Then, seeing that it *was she* as authoritatively 'pictured, and that he had paid his all to get it, he bethought him to study it, hoping some day to find her in it. And so he did, gradually.

"He had it hung over his smoking-table, and every evening he scrutinized it until its insistence conquered. For a whole year he lived in the companionship of an absent wife as seen in an artist's mood (this last sentence is a direct quotation from my Boston grand-mama, who is fond of the story). And—well, 'what happened?' Why, *this*: One day the woman came home. People 'lost at sea' occasionally do, you know. And would you believe it? Her widower—I mean to say her husband—

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refused to receive her. *He did not know her!* He simply pointed to the painting and shook his head. And if she had n't been a person of resolution and resource,—descended from the *Mayflower*,—why, she would have had to go away. But she had her trunk brought in and quietly paid the expressman and took off her bonnet—and *stayed*. But it was an absurdly long time before her husband was wholly convinced that he was not the victim of an adventuress. And she says that even now he sometimes looks at her in a way she does not like.

"So, you see, we cannot always believe our own eyes, which are so easily tricked.

"Still, even knowing all this, we consent to be duped. Now I like the picture of the cabin, even while I regret it, and, *although I know better*, I accept it.

"What is truth, anyway? That is what you hear said so often in Boston, where we are said to try to make pivots

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of it for the wheels of all our little hobbies.

“Do I like Boston?’ *Like Boston? No. I adore it!* Oh, yes! But yet, when I am there, I am a little rebel. And at each place I am quite honest, I assure you. You see, I have a grandmother at both places—here and there. Such dears, they are—adorable, both, and so *different!*”

“Yes, that is true. Papa’s portrait, the one Mammy had in the cabin,—yes, we have it,—twice recovered from the river. My father offered a reward, and a man brought it out of the mud, a little way down the levee, and not seriously hurt. It is a funny little picture of papa at six, in a Highland costume, with his arm over a strange dog which belonged to the artist. He looks in the picture as if he were stuffed—the dog does; but papa denies that. I believe this same dog appeared in most of the portraits done by this man, in all of those of boys, at least. For the girls he supplied a cat, or

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occasionally a parrot. The bird *was* stuffed, I believe. He did my step-mother at five, and she holds the cat. The portraits hang side by side now. If we could find him, and the parrot, he should paint me, and we would start a menagerie.

“Oh, yes; going back to the subject, there are many little things which I remember, without a doubt, for I could never imagine them. For instance, I remember at least one of my baptisms—the last, I suppose. I know I was frightened because the minister shouted, and Mammy kept whispering to me that he would n’t harm me; and then he suddenly threw water all over me and I bawled. No, I have no idea who he was; but it was out of doors, and there was a rooster in it somehow. I suppose it was on the levee and the rooster came to see what was happening.

“There is a picture which always reminds me of the time we lived behind the woodpiles, that called ‘The Soldier’s Dream,’ in which a poor fellow, asleep

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on the battle-field, sees dimly, as in the sky, a meeting between himself and his family.

"I am sure that while we sat on the levee and Mammy talked to me of papa's coming, I used to picture it all against the sunset sky. Just look at it now. Was anything ever more gorgeous and at the same time so tender? One could easily imagine almost any miracle's happening over there in the west.

"Yes, I know the skies of Italy, and they're no better. They are bluer and pinker, perhaps, in a more paintable way; but when the sun sets across the Mississippi, especially when we have their dreamy cloud effects, it goes down with variation and splendor unmatched anywhere, I do believe. But," she added with a Frenchy shrug, "you know I am only a river child, and everything belonging to the old muddy stream is dear to me.

"I beg your pardon—what did you ask?" This to a very young man

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who colored after he had spoken. "Did we ever recover—? Oh, no. Their bodies went with the waters they loved—and it was better so. Certainly, papa used every effort. I hope the current carried them to the sea. She would have liked to have it so, I am sure, dear, dear Mammy Hannah!

"Oh, yes. The little monument on Brake Island is only 'in memory,' as its inscription says."

This was rather thoughtful talk for a girl scarcely eighteen, but Agnes had ever been thoughtful, and by common inheritance—from her mother and her father.

As the scene shifted, and conversation passed to lighter things, and her laughter rippled again as a child's, its range was sometimes startling. It was as brilliant as a waterfall seen in the sun, and often while her fond father watched her, as now, he wondered if, perchance, her laughter might not be prophetic of a great career for which eyes

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less devoted than his perceived her eminently fitted.

It is beyond the province of this tale of the river to follow Agnes Le Duc through life. Some day, possibly, her story may be fully told; but perhaps a foreshadowing of her future, in one phase of it at least, may be discerned in an intimation let fall by one of the passengers who sat with his companions at a card-table in the fore cabin. At least, they had spent the day there, stopping not even for dinner, and now they were moving away. As they found seats out on the guards, he was saying:

“‘*Rich!*’ Well, I would say so! He own all doze plantation around de town of Waterproof, and de strange part is *he paid twice for some of dem!* Of co’sse he could not do such a so-foolish t’ing except he made dat *invention*. W’en you *begin* to collec’ so much on every one of anyt’ing dat fill a want, *you get rich, sure!*”

“No matter if it jus’ *one picayune*—

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w’en dey sell enough. Dey say you can make sugar so quick by dat *machine* he *invent*—it is like conjuring—a sort of hoodoo!”

“Yes,” said his companion, an American, “so I understand; and there is no man I would rather see rich than Harold Le Duc. His marriage, so soon after the recovery of his child, surprised some of us, but no doubt it was a good thing.”

“A good t’ing! It was *magnificent!* If he is one of de finest men in Louisiana, she is equal to him. Dat remark dat he married only for a mudder for his child—dat’s all in my heye! I am sure he was in love to her one year, maybe two, *befo’ dat—mais*, I am not sure he would have asked any woman to marry him. He had not de courage. For him love was past—and he was afraid of it. *Mais* de chil’ she wake him up again! Oh, it is a good t’ing, *sure!* An’ de strange part, she t’ought she wou’n’ never love again, jus’ de same as him—until—”

“Until what?”

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"Well, *until he spoke!* Until w'at you t'ink?"

"Not'ing. I t'ought *maybe* it was somet'ing unusual."

"Well, an' is dat not somet'ing unusual—w'en a widow is *sure* she will not love again? Dey often *t'ink* so, *mais* she was *absolutely sure!* You see, her first husband he was one hero; he fell on de same battle-field wid gallant 'Jeb' Stuart—from a stray shot w'en de fighting was over, carrying dat poor *imbecile*, Philippe Delmaire, off de fiel', biccuse he was yelling so, wid dat one li'l' toe he los'! A good fellow, yas, *mais no account!* Yas, he drank himself to deat', all on account for de loss of dat toe, so he say. Excuses dey are cheap, yas. If it was not his toe it would have been somet'ing else. You know, his figure, it was really perfection, no *mistake*, an' to lose perfection, even in so small a matter as one toe—it prey on his mind. Tell de trut', I used to feel sorry for him, an'—an'—w'en he always would touch his glass an' drink dat

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favorite toast, 'To my big toe!' well, dere was somet'ing pitiful in it. I used to drink it wid him. It was no harm, an' he had always good wine, poor fellow. *Mais to t'ink of Paul de La Rose dying for him!* It make me mad, yet w'en I t'ink so, I am almos' sorry to reflect I have drunk to his toe! Bah—a valu'ble man—to die like dat! W'at you say? Yas, da's true. It makes not *how* de soldier fall—de glory is de same. Well, any'ow, if he could have picked out a successor, he could not have done better dan yo'ng Le Duc—sure! W'at you say? 'Ow is he bought doze plantation twice?' Well, dis way: W'en he had to take dem on mortgage, an' dey were sold at de door of de courthouse—bidding against him, understand—no rainy-day sale—he paid *double*—I mean to say he paid so much as de mortagage *again*. Not in every case, *mais* in many—to widows. I know two cousin of mine, he paid dem so. I ricollec' dey tol' me dat he was de mos' remembering man to look out

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for dem, an' de mos' forgetting to sen' de bills.

"Oh, yas. An' his daughter, dey say she is in love to her stepmother—an' she is jus' so foolish about de chil'—an' wid good reason. She had never children — an' she is proud for dat daughter, an' jealous, too, of dose Yankee rillation. Still, she invite dem to come every year, so the chil' can stay — an' now, would you believe it? Dey are come to be great friends, *mais*, of co'se, her father sends her every year at Boston to her grandmother. Dey all want her, an' no wonder. If she was one mud fence, I suppose it would be all de same, *mais* you know, she is *one great beauty!* I say one gr-r-r-reat beauty! Wh! An' w'en I whistle so 'wh!' I mean w'at I say. You see me so, I am one ol' man, now—pas' forty—an' rich in children, an' not bad-looking children, neither; *mais* I would walk, me, all de way from de barracks up to Bou-ligny, *an' back*, just to see her pass in de street an' smile on me. You take

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my word, *if* she is not snapped up by some school-boy, she can marry *any-ting—a coronet!* An' I know somet'ing about women—not to brag."

"If you are so anxious to see dat young lady, Felix," said another, "you don't need to walk so far. She is, at dis moment, wid her father an' her stepmudder, on dis trip."

"*Wat!* w'at you say? Well, wait. I di'n' inten', me, to dress for de ladies' cabin to-night, *mais* w'en I have my supper I will put on my Sunday t'ings—jus' to go an' sit down in de cabin w'ere—I—can—look—at *innocent—beauty!* It pleasure me, yas, to see some t'ing like dat. *Maybe* I am not all good, *mais* I am not all given over for bad so long I can enjoy a rose-vine all in pink, or a fair yo'ng girl more beautiful yet.

"I tell you, my friends, I was sitting, week before las', at my 'ouse on Esplanade Street, on de back gallerie, w'ere de vines is t'ick, an' dey were, as you might say, honey-suckling de bees

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—an' de perfume from my night-bloom-in' jasmine filled my nose. It was in de evening, an' de moon on de blue sky was like a map of de city, jus' a silver crescent, an' close by, one li'l star, shining, as de children say, 'like a diamond in de sky,' an' I tell you—I tell you—

“Well, I tell you, *I wished I had been a good man all my life!*”

His friends laughed gaily at this.

“You don' say!” laughed one. “Well, you fooled us, any'ow! I was holding my breat'. I t'ought somet'ing was getting ready to happen!”

“Well—an' ain't dat somet'ing?—w'en a hard ol' sinner like me can see in nature a t'ing sweet an' good an'—*an' resolute himself!*”

“Sure, dat is a great happening; *mais* for such a *beginning*, so dramatic, we expected to see Hamlet—or maybe his father's ghost—or *somet'ing!*”

“I am thinking more of this exceptional beauty”—it was the American who interrupted now—“I am more in-

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terested in her than in the confessions of old sinners like ourselves. I am rather practical, and beauty is only skin-deep—sometimes at least. I should like to take a peep at this rare product of our State. Louisiana's record up to date is hard to beat, in this respect.”

“Well,” slowly remarked the man known throughout as Felix, “I am not telling! If I *knew*, I could not *tell*, and, of co'se, it is all guess-work, *mais* you may believe me or not—” he lowered his voice, suggesting mystery. “I say you can *riffuse* to believe me or not, I was—well, I was not long ago, one day, sitting at de table down at Leon's,—eating an oyster wid a friend of mine, and, looking out of de window, I happened to see, sitting in a tree, *one li'l bird*—jus' one small li'l bird, no bigger dan yo' t'umb.

“I was not t'inking about de bird, mind you. We were jus' talking about anyt'ing in partic'lar—I mean to say not'ing in general. *W'at* is de

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matter wid me to-day? I cannot talk straight — my tongue is all twis'. I say we were speaking of partic'lar t'ings in general, an' he remarked to me, '*Who you t'ink will be de Queen of de Carnival dis coming Mardi Gras?*'

"I was pouring a glass of Château Yquem at de time,— to look after de oysters,— an' I di'n' pay so much attention to w'at he was saying — I can never pour a glass an' speak at de same time. I spill my words or de wine, sure. So it happened dat w'en I put me de bottle down, my eye passed out de window. Oh, hush! No, not my eye, of co'se — I mean my sight. Well, dat li'l' bird it was still waiting in de same place, in de magnolia-tree, an' w'en I looked, it give me one glance, sideways, like a finger on de nose, an' it opened wide its bill, an' just so plain as I am speaking now, *it spoke a name.*" This in still lower voice.

"But I said nothing, immediately. A little wine, for a few glasses, it make me prudent — *up to a certain point*, of

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co'se. *Mais*, direc'ly, I looked at my friend, an' wid w'at you might call an air of *nonchalance*, I repeat to him de name *exac'ly* as it was tol' to me by de li'l' bird in de magnolia-tree. An' wa't you t'ink he said?"

"Oh, go on. W'at he say?"

"You want to know w'at he said? Well, dat I can tell you. He was greatly astonish', an' he whispered to me, '*Who tol' you? You are not in de Pickwick?*'"

"Oh, a little bird tol' me!" I answered him. "*No, I am not in de club.*"

"*But the name? Do tell us!*"

"Oh, no. I cannot. If I *told*, dat would be *telling*, eh?"

"Sure! It is not necessary," said another. "Well, I am pleased, me."

"An' me!"

"I like always to listen w'en you tell somet'ing, Felix. Your story is all right — an' *I believe you*. I always believe any man in de Pickwick Club — *on some subjects!* *Mais*, ol' man, de nex' time you make a story at Leon's

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restaurant, suppose you move off dat magnolia-tree. A bird could stand on de window-sill across de street jus' as well — a real window-sill."

"T'ank you. I am sure a *real* some-t'ing-to-stand-on would be better for a *real bird*. *Mais*, for dis particular bird, I t'ink my magnolia is more suitable. Don't forget de story of de Mongoose!"

"Nobody can get ahead of you, Felix. Well, it is a good t'ing. It is true, her fodder was de King at las' year's Carnival — an' it is lightning striking twice in de same place; an' yet—"

"And yet," the American interrupted, "and yet it will sometimes strike twice in the same place — if the attraction is sufficient. I have a friend who has a summer home in the Tennessee mountains which was twice struck — three times, nearly. That is the house next door got it the third time. And then they began to investigate, and they found the mountain full of iron — iron convertible into gold."

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"Well, and our man of iron, let us hope he may prove always an attraction—for bolts of good fortune!"

"A wish that may come true; if reports be correct, he is rapidly turning into gold," said the American. "I am told that he has found salt in immense deposits on his island—and that he has resumed the work begun just before the war—that of opening up the place."

"Oh, yas. 'T is true. Over a hundred t'ousand dollars he has already put in—an' as much more ready to drop. *Mais* it is *fairyland!* An' me, I was t'inking too—sometimes I t'ink a little myself—I was t'inking dat if—I say *if* some-time his daughter would be de Comus Queen, not insinuating anything, you know—no allusion to de bird—w'at a fine house-party dey could have *now*, eh? Dey could invite de royal party, maids of honor, and so fort'—whoever is rich enough to lose so much time—"

"T'ink of sailing up de new canal on de barge—"

"An' under de bridge—"

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"No, not de bridge. He will never touch dat. He has made a new plan, entering another way. Dat span of de bridge he commenced—it is standing beside de beautiful w'ite marble tomb—to hold his family. His wife she is dere, an' de ol' negroes w'at care for his chil'—dey are laying in one corner, wid also a small monument."

"Are you *sure* dey are dere?"

"I have seen de monument, I tell you."

"Well, Harold he was always sentimental, if you will. I suppose dat broken bridge is, as he says—it is history, and he needs to keep it before him, not to be too rash. Maybe so. Who can tell? Two boys in de war, it was enough—if he had stopped to t'ink."

"Yas—*mais* de barge, de Cleopatra; dey say she is be'-u-tiful!"

"Cleopatra! For w'at he di'n' name her somet'ing sensible?"

"Dat is not only sensible—it is diplomatic. You know, w'en a man has only a daughter and a step-wife—*w'at* is de

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matter wid me to-night? You understand me. I say, in—well, in some cases, to *discriminate*, it is enough to drive a man to—"

"Oh, don't say dat, Felix."

"Let me *finish*, will you? I say it is one of dose *indelicate* situations dat drive a man to *dodge*! An' w'en he can dodge into history and romance at once, so much de better! An' *Cleopatra*, it sound well for a barge. An' so, really, *if* de beautiful daughter *should* be de queen an' dey could arrange one house-party—"

"Suppose, Felix, ol' man, you would bring out yo' magnolia-tree once more, you don't t'ink de li'l' bird would come again an' stan' on one limb an' *maybe*—"

"Ah, no. I am sure not. If dey had a grain of salt in dat story, I would try. I would put it on his tail. *Mais*, how can you catch a bird widout salt?"

So idly, playfully, the talk rippled on, ever insensibly flavored with rich romance of life, even as the fitful breeze

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skirting the shores held, in shy suspension, an occasional hint of orange-blossoms or of the Cuban fruits which, heaping the luggers in the slanting sun, laid their gay bouquets of color against the river's breast.

It is many years since the maid Agnes Le Duc, on her way to coronation at the carnival, stood while the sun went down in all her vestal beauty on deck of the *Laurel Hill*, and smiled through tears of tenderness at life as half revealed to her.

Many things are changed since then, and yet the great river flows on, all unheeding.

Laden to their guards, so that their weighty cargoes of cotton and sugar, traveling to mill and to market, are wet with the spray of playful condescension, panting ships of commerce, some flying foreign colors, still salute each other in passing, with ever a word of solicitude as to milady's health.

Old Lady Mississippi, is she high or low in spirits? And will her hand of

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benediction turn to smite and to despoil?

But, whether she be obdurate or kindly, hysterical or melancholy, or so serene as to invite the heavens, life and love and song are hers.

Uniting while she seems to divide, bringing together whom she appears to separate, a raft of logs contributed by her grace affording free passage the length of her realm to whoever will take it, paying no toll, she invites Romance to set sail under the stars in primal simplicity, eschewing the "bridal chambers" of white and gold which lie in the hearts of all the busy steamers, no matter how otherwise prosaic their personalities.

And still, afloat and alongshore, astride a molasses-barrel or throwing dice between the cotton-bales, taking no thought of the morrow, the negro sings:

"Cometh our fount of every blessing!"

