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THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWN

CHAPTER XII.

The snow lay long and deep that winter upon the hills and in the valleys surrounding Baron Court, whilst an almost deathlike stillness pervaded the grand old home itself. Curling yellow smoke issued slowly from but few chimneys, and those were chiefly connected with apartments at the back of the Court. The heavy portico doors were securely barred and bolted, and every window darkened by strong shutters or blinds. The terraces and flower-beds were covered with snow, and the laurels and shrubs bent helplessly beneath its weight. The fine old trees stretched their dark, stiff, and leafless branches aloft, and looked like tall silent ghosts in the cold, dim, and misty air.

Now and again a few pigeons flew swiftly around the deserted pile of buildings, and sweeping down, alighted upon the massive roof; but they did not linger, and quickly darted away in search of warmth and shelter. Little half-starved birds, looking like balls of feathers, hopped feebly from bough to twig, and pecked greedily at the red berries which still hung upon the extremities of the barest branches. Not a human footprint broke the pure, white, and even surface of snow which covered the smooth green turf in front of Baron Court that Christmas Day. Only Leo seemed to resist, and as he followed John Ryder from stable to coach-house, and bayed with delight in deep tones, he rolled his shaggy body over and over again on the frozen snow.

People said the Earl had done wisely not to risk the severity of an English winter, and no doubt he had; but, as often occurred in these times, a severe winter was followed by a delightfully warm summer, and even by an early spring, and such was the case this year.

About the middle of March a permanent and sudden change took place in the atmosphere and appearance of things in general. The wind abruptly swerved round to warmer quarters, and the bright spring sun, shining forth, rapidly dispersed every vestige of frost, and brought to light the early snow which had lain for so long in hidden and sheltered places from the piercing wind by the friendly snow.

The caw of the rooks sounded cheerful and happy as they once more selected their mates, and set to work vigorously to clear out and rebuild their old nests in the tall elm-trees.

The birds sang and twittered gaily, and seemed to revel in the bright prospect before them; men moved busily amongst the garden and flower-beds, destroying rubbish every trace of winter. Lattice casements in the newly grown ivy towers were thrown wide open, shutters were removed from the long-closed windows, and the bright spring air swept through the apartments, and displayed to view the warm glow of firelight within.

Still May had almost elapsed before the family returned to the Court, and when they did, it was upon a lovely evening towards the end of the month. Word had been forwarded that John should meet them with the old coach and family coach, and as it drew up at the fine entrance the first to spring lightly out of it was Lady Beatrice. The servants and attendants stood in readiness to receive and welcome them; but Beatrice—under pretence of meeting Leo, whose joyful bark she heard within—dashed with a few kind words of greeting past them all, and sank on a secluded seat at the farthest end of the hall.

She could not endure to witness the looks of sorrow and concern which she felt convinced would be depicted on the faces of the dependants when they saw how wasted and ill their master looked. "People of that class," mused the girl impatiently, whilst she crouched low over the head of her favorite as it nestled in her lap—"people of that class never seem to comprehend that, no matter how ill we may appear, it does not follow that we shall not recover!" The hearty cries of welcome which resounded in her ears renewed her courage, and she rose bravely to meet and greet her father in his own home once more. Standing on tiptoe, she silently threw her arms around his neck and hid her face upon his shoulder. "He must recover," were the ever-ready words which rose to her mind; but not for worlds would she have allowed the bystanders to suspect or observe the hot tears which rushed to her eyes as she held that now fragile man in that close embrace.

"After all home is the sweetest spot on earth, my Bartie," he said tenderly; "it will require a great deal to induce me to leave it again."

"You will soon recover here, dear old father. I shall be better able to nurse you at home than in a hotel, and before the summer is over you must be quite strong again."

He made no reply, but gently released himself from the clasp of her young arms, and shook his head somewhat sadly.

"God knows best; may His will be done," was his inward prayer, "and may He teach my darling resignation."

There was not much alteration in the appearance of the Countess; perhaps a trifle less of hauteur and pride in her carriage and bearing, and a degree or two more of gentleness in her voice, as she answered the kind and respectful inquiries of her domestics. Certain it was that in her handsome face there was a new expression of calmness and patience which gave hopes of more thought and consideration for others. Reginald was still abroad with his regiment, nor had he seen his family since they perished in the autumn previously. As for Percy, the eye of beauty could detect little change in him—the same bright, good-natured boy as of old; his face was more sunburnt, and the smallest possible fringe of silky brown hair adorned his upper lip. He had not yet encountered anyone who to his mind could compare with his sister in either mental or bodily accomplishments, and he was still her faithful friend and confidant.

A quiet and holy calm seemed to fall upon the heart of Beatrice that night—such as she had not felt for months—as she and her father sat together in the cosy and comfortable library. His arm-chair was drawn up to the cheerful fire, and she, seated upon a lower one—her little feet upon the fender—reclined gracefully near him.

During the past few months she has grown a little in stature, and her figure is a trifle fuller and more perfect. The early but warm Italian sun had given to her face the faintest possible tinge of olive, which well became her rich, soft skin, and deepened the look of health upon her beautiful young face. She has not resided abroad all these months without becoming aware that her face possesses more than ordinary beauty, and that her manners are charming and graceful, and that women in general will be apt to fear and often envy her; but, to do her justice, Beatrice had dwelt little upon such matters.

Another subject, far dearer to her than aught concerning herself, occupies and preys upon her mind, even against her will, and that is the ever failing health of her father. The more hopeless his case grows, the more determinately does she resist her sense of it. Her father, of she does not die, and leave her so young, just on the very verge of life as it were, now when she most needs and can best enjoy him.

"O God!" she inwardly moans, "Thou dost demand too much; I cannot yield him to Thee." She seemed to forget the almost numberless gifts and blessings otherwise bestowed upon her; to lose sight entirely of the warning words of Lady Abbess, "God has given you much, my child; He will ask much in return; than give generously." Had she done so, how much of sorrow and self-reproach would have been spared her. As it was, a bitter feeling of repining and murmuring against God was gradually taking possession of her heart, and consequently she began to feel cold and hard towards Him. The old warm devotion of her school girl days was every month becoming less and less real. She had striven hard whilst abroad, by diligent application to the study of art and history, to stills and deaden altogether the strong voice of conscience within her, which bade her resign herself and her father into the hands of God, and not shape nor seek to arrange her life according to her own desires; and so she struggled on, ever secretly and inwardly striving against the will and decree of Heaven.

Small wonder, then, that though she visited Rome and many of the principal towns in the south of Italy, each of which was teeming with sacred monuments and memories of God's saints; though she carefully traversed the labyrinth of the Catacombs with Percy, and stood on the very ground where so many of the glorious martyrs had shed their blood; though she visited the tombs of the apostles, and knelt with her parents at the feet of Christ's Vicar to receive his benediction—yet in spite of all this, and much more, as she nourished that feeling of rebellion in her heart, these things neither rejoiced nor gladdened her soul, as once they would have done. Even when she and her brother knelt, he as usual wept in deep and silent prayer, and listened to and drank in to their soul's content the triumphant altitudes of Beate, as they rolled, vibrated, and echoed through the vast vaults and arches of the great St. Peter's, even then she fought hard, and sought to still that secret power within her which bade her yield every thing to God, even what she most loved and prized, and seek to retain nothing, not even her own voice, the reward for so doing, she had deadened and smothered it, hoping she had crushed it for ever. She was young, and life lay like a bright and beautiful dream before her; she longed to plunge into its tempting pleasures, and yearned to pick up its wondrous golden threads, and weave for herself a life of noble but romantic happiness.

The freight played upon and lit up the pale white features of the Earl, distinctly revealing every now and then the sad havoc disease had wrought upon his once stout and stalwart frame. Slowly but surely consumption was doing its fatal work. There was almost a cavity at each side of his once broad temples; and the kind brown eyes, always large and full, shone with an unwonted lustre in their hollow sockets. The hand which was crossed that of his daughter's was even thinner and more transparent

than before. Still, like the generality of invalids suffering under a slow form of the same disease, he was buoyed up with hopes for himself, and often thought he might yet recover.

"Do you know, Bartie, I feel so well tonight; the journey has not over tired me, and the sight of home has made me almost a different being."

"I knew it would," answered the girl, in a transport of hope and delight; and as she spoke she glided from her chair on to her knees beside him and nestled as of old her pretty head upon his shoulder. "All this travelling has been too much for you. The summer is before us, and we will pass a quiet one in our own English home, and I will nurse you so carefully and make you get well and strong again."

"Alas, my child!" he replied, gazing with a look of unspoken fondness upon the sweet young face raised towards him—"alas, my Bartie, it does not rest with you to restore me to health, and you know it."

"I can do much towards it, at any rate," was the defiant reply, with a toss of the little head, "and I shall do so; you must get better."

They were soon joined by Lady de Woodville and Percy, and all drawing their chairs around the fire, the evening passed rapidly and pleasantly as they discussed hopes and projects for the future. Beatrice, being in one of her bright and witty moods, recounted sights and scenes that she had witnessed abroad, and sprightly touched up the anecdotes with so much that was pathetic or comic as the case might be, that she contrived to entertain her small audience and keep it amused until late that night.

Nevertheless a serious confab was taking place in the housekeeper's room that same evening. A select party consisting of Jane the head-housemaid, Webster the butler, and John Ryder the coachman, met casually in Mrs. Thomas's private room, and were discussing a subject which lay very near to all their hearts.

"Oh, but he looks bad!" observed Jane, addressing Mrs. Thomas. "What's your opinion, ma'am?"

"God help him!" responded that worthy woman sadly, "for it's little the best of us can do to aid him now. He's going, slowly it may be, but surely."

"You are right," said Webster seriously. "I knew you would be shocked when you saw him again. It beats me to think what his family can be about not to see that he is dying upon his feet. Mr. Brooks the valet tells me that he coughs dreadfully at nights. I don't think all this travelling and knocking about has done him a bit of good, though I will say we saw a great deal and had no bad time of it for all that."

"Ah me!" sighed the old coachman, as he used his handkerchief freely, for tears were slowly coursing down either down his ruddy cheeks, or into his eyes, when he buried our late Earl after that sad accident in the hunting-field, that I should live to see his son carried to his grave. He's been a good and a kind master. Lord Reginald is not quite his style."

"He's fine and handsome, though. Yet if he gets a proud lady for his wife, things for us will be changed indeed," remarked Jane, "and folks do say that he admires the eldest Miss Watkin."

"Out upon them then for a foolish lot of gossipers," burst in Mrs. Thomas scornfully. "A fine young gentleman like our Lord Reginald Grantham, the head of the De Woodville family, ally himself with such an upstart, a common knight's daughter, as this Miss Watkin is. Trust me he'll do no such thing; you may make your mind easy on that score." And Mrs. Thomas nodded her head emphatically until her cap ribbons were quite unsettled.

"No, he'll not marry her," assented the gentleman gravely.

"It will be difficult to suit him with a wife," said Webster. "I fancy," he continued, "that her ladyship frets a good deal on the quiet, and she's growing more pious, all which facts prove to me that she knows more about her husband's health than she pretends to do. She'd not relish resigning her reign here, I'll warrant. But as for our young lady, she won't hear that her father is ill."

"Poor little bird!" and it was John who spoke; "it will go hard with her if he dies. You see she was always his favourite; and no wonder, she's full of the prettiest ways, and words. It seems but yesterday since I carried her in my arms and taught her to ride her little pony, and now she's a grown-up beauty, ready to come out and be married herself. How time does fly, to be sure."

"Well, let us all do our best for the poor master as long as we can," said Mrs. Thomas earnestly. "Whilst there's life there's hope. Unless he gets a severe cold he may linger for some time yet. This I know for a fact; the doctor once told me as much. His lungs were injured by that bullet he received in his chest during the war; that was the original cause of the mischief, and he was predisposed to consumption, I believe."

"Well, then, we'll try and keep him alive as long as we can," they agreed, "not only for his own sake, but for our own as well."

No need to linger over the summer which followed. So far as the weather was concerned, it was almost more than one could expect from a changeable climate like ours; but owing to the delicate state of the

Earl's health, and his seeming desire for quiet and rest, there were no festivities whatever, and only the usual amount of callers, and they came and went quietly enough.

Father Gregory, however, was a constant caller. Like every one else who knew the Earl, he was greatly attached to him, and regretted deeply that the disease seemed now hopelessly established. But what really filled him with grief and dissatisfaction was the altered manner of Beatrice. "If God takes my father, then do I feel as if my heart would be steeled against him," were the words he had heard her utter, and Father Gregory was much concerned about her. She rarely visited the chapel now. Faith was the faithful Percy who, alone and unassisted, adorned the altar for Benediction, and kept it decked with choicest flowers on Our Lady's feast; and often he prayed, oh how fervently, that God would touch and soften with the sweetest balm of resignation the heart of his dearly loved but willful sister. Nor was the change in Beatrice unnoticed by her father, who instinctively read his child's heart aright. It grieved him terribly to witness it, especially as with Faith was the faithful Percy who, already made the sacrifice of his life into the hands of God, and on his part awaited the end with calmness and peace.

As the autumn advanced, and October with its usual winds and rain followed, the Earl cast about in his mind for some means of rousing or diverting his darling's heart. True, Reginald was expected about the end of November, and was to make a long stay at home; but that of itself would be insufficient to rouse the girl thoroughly. "She must have life, companionship, something to take her out of herself, and turn her thoughts to healthier subjects than an ailing and dozing old father," mused the invalid. Whereupon a consultation was held with the Countess and Percy, the result being that it was decided high festivities should be held at the Court that Christmas.

"You must allow me to have my own way this time at least," pleaded the Earl. "I long to see my child her old self again. She is now eighteen, and must come out this Christmas. We will give a famous ball in honor of the event, and the doors of the Court shall be thrown open to hospitality and rejoicings once more. Why should I not see my only daughter in her proper sphere just once before—before I leave you all?"

"Oh, do not speak of it, I entreat you!" cried the Countess, overcome by emotion, and covering her face with her hands, the elegant fingers of which were adorned with brilliantly flashing and costly rings.

"God is good, my dear. How often have you not told me so yourself?"

"Yes, yes, dear!" he replied, as, touched by her grief, he rose feebly and kissed her forehead. "It is good, and we will not meet our troubles half way. So let us be joyful this festive season at least. No one can succeed so well in making the Court look gay and cheerful, no one can better organize or entertain than my wife," he said proudly; "and Reginald will be here too," he added, knowing he was touching a tender chord.

"You shall have your own way upon one condition, and that is that you promise solemnly to leave the management of all details to me, and thus trouble yourself about nothing."

"I give you my word upon that, Florrie," he laughingly replied. "I can fully rely upon you to do all things well and wisely—never fear, my dear. What do you say, Percy?"

"That I have one very important suggestion to make, and it is this—why cannot Marie Blake be invited to spend her long-promised visit? I always notice that Bartie seems more at her old self whenever she receives a letter from her little friend."

"Capitally thought of my boy. Of course she shall come. That is the very thing our girl most needs—companionship with some one of her own age and sex. How stupid of us not to think of it sooner. I will write at once and ask her aunt, in memory of days gone by, to allow her niece to come and make a long stay with us. But here comes Bartie herself, and she shall tell us how she approves of our plan."

As he spoke, Beatrice advanced slowly into the room. She was dressed in a dark crimson dress, simply but elegantly made, and finished at the neck and sleeves by rich lace. She stood for a second or two, a slight frown upon her young brow, as though endeavoring to discover why she had been the subject of conversation; then observing the look of cheerfulness upon her father's countenance, she danced lightly across the room and was at his side instantly. "So here you all are," she said with mock dignity. "I have searched everywhere for you. Mother's bonnet was the last place I thought of. Come, confess what state secrets you have been plotting in my absence. Pray divulge them instantly. I am dying to know."

Then the Countess related the purport of their late conversation—that at a ball, given with all due pomp and state, she was to make her entrance into society that Christmas morn. How the walls of the old Court were to resound once more with fun and festivities in the true old English style; and, above all, that little Marie Blake was to be invited to make a long stay with them. As her mother proceeded, the girl's eyes enlarged and sparkled with anticipation and pleasure.

This was just the programme she herself would have desired. For a few moments she forgot everything but the bright prospect of gaily unfurling before her; then quick as thought a feeling of shame sent the warm blood to her face, and with a look of tender pity, mingled with a motion of self-reproach, she turned to her father.

"But you, you poor suffering one, what will become of you? How can you ever stand all this excitement?" she inquired eagerly, the ready tears starting to her eyes.

"I, child? I feel as if it would do me good. We have been quiet and melancholy all too long. I yearn to see my little pet step into her proper sphere, and then let any one compare with her who dare."

He was silenced by a playful tap on the shoulder from the fan which her ladyship held in her hand, whilst she remarked with apparent carelessness, "I have no doubt but that little Marie Blake will quite outshine Beatrice in many things."

"In all that is noble and good she most undoubtedly will," spoke the girl warmly; and when Percy saw the old look of devotion in her beautiful eyes, he prayed that wardly that his school friend might restore to his sister's heart the peace and joy of old.

"What about Miss FitzAlan?" he inquired. "Is she to be forgotten altogether?"

"Far from it, poor dear Madge. But some dark mystery appears to hang over her of late. She seldom writes, and when she does, poor girl, there is a strain of sadness in her letters. She always writes of the past never of the present."

"Then, perhaps," rejoined the Countess dryly, "we will not include Miss FitzAlan in our invitations this Christmas. She may prefer to be left out."

"No, no! a thousand times no!" said Beatrice, with all her old enthusiasm. "Why should not she have a chance of pleasure as well as any of us? I was her friend at school. I will stand by her now more than ever, when I feel certain all is not well with her."

"Bravo! my little sister—well spoken," cried Percy. "She's a nice girl, is Miss Madge, and I feel sorry for her."

"Certainly, ask her to come and make one of us," urged the Earl kindly. "A little change and excitement may be grateful to the child."

"She is no child!" argued her ladyship, with a sidelong glance at her son; "but much older, I believe, than Beatrice."

"Only by a few months, mother. She is between Marie and me. She looks older than either of us; and as to her connections, you know very little about them, I presume."

"She is well and nobly born. I know that much," retorted Beatrice, excitedly, "and Lady Abbess thought more of her than of any girl in the school. Her mother was Marie de Valois' greatest friend; but Madge was so humble, she never presumed upon Lady Abbess's favor, as she might have done. Every one liked Madge; she was so unselfish and good natured."

The Countess drew herself up with dignity, but said no more. She was not quite satisfied herself as to Madge's present position, but felt sure that time would unravel the mystery, and mentally resolved a plan for so doing.

Beatrice drew the writing materials closer to her father, and whispered mischievously—

"Do not dwell too much upon the forthcoming gala. Marie will be so frightened at the bare thought of so much wicked worldliness, and refuse to trust her soul amongst us, if you do; she is such a holy little creature!"

"Fear not, sweet one. My letter shall be most prudent and judicious."

Upstairs to her cosy boudoir flew Beatrice to write the all important letter. Her pen flew rapidly over the elegant gilt-edged writing-paper—

"Do come, dear Marie. You cannot even gaze too long to see your good little face once more; to hear you upbraid and scold me as you are certain to do; and who knows the effect your good example may have upon me? I tell you, it will be an act of charity to come and stay with me, for, alas!—though I would rather whisper it to you than write it—believe me, dear, I am not the same good Bartie that you knew at dear old St. Benedict's. We are going to have rather gay doings; but that need not disturb your peace of mind at all. You will always be able to trot off to the chapel whenever you wish to, and leave the worldlings to their fate. So have no scruples on that score, dearest, but, like the kind, sweet girl I know you to be, come for my sake, and God will bless you for it. Should you refuse to do so, you will be sorry later. I am writing to poor dear Madge, asking her also to join us, but don't let it be said she is coming; if not, I shall be disappointed, as a change might do her good." Thus wrote Beatrice, and her letter, when finished, was enclosed in one from her father to Miss Elizabeth Blake, couched in such friendly terms, and dwelling not a little on the writer's delicate health and the desire he had to give his daughter pleasure; that knowing the kind heart of the little lady, the Earl had great confidence his request would be granted.

TO BE CONTINUED

There is a reality in sorrow that is not in mirth.—Vaughan.

THE HEART OF THE ROSE

He was her brother. The thought gave her the same thrill this morning as it had given her on a morning seventeen years back, when the old family doctor had laid a tiny bundle in her arms and said: "You will have to be his sister and mother both, Elizabeth."

Her twelve years being heavily on her; her little face, stained with the marks of recent tears, took on a warmer glow as she touched the baby's hand. She had unfolded the baby blanket and slipped on his first little clothes. And as she dressed him, she felt a sense of loss; with every fresh garment he seemed to become less of an angel and more of a human being. The same feeling of loss was now in her heart as she folded his great Indian blankets, slipped his photographs into the case which filled the nooks and crevices of his trunk with its bitter longings for home. She lifted a tiny white wool sweater; it brought the memory of a little soft flannel shirt. She buried her face in its folds and murmured in a tearful voice, "why, he is my man brother and I am sending him from home to college."

His foot sounded on the stairway; his clear boyish voice called, "Beth, where are you?"

Before she could answer he entered the room, throwing several bundles onto the bed, he gave a sigh of relief. He tugged impatiently at the strings as he explained: "These are some things the girls made me. It's great to be going away, isn't it? Why I feel just like I was getting out of a cage; I feel like I was going to fly. Say, what is this, anyway?"

He held up a small book, shaped to resemble a bud of a flower. It was made of white color paper and every leaf was fastened to the other leaves by small white cords. On the front was the picture of a baby; on the back was a pair of black kid doll shoes.

"Where did you get it?" his sister asked.

"Rose gave it to me; she told me a long time ago she was making me a book of memories; that I was to open just one page a week. That's my baby picture, all right, but why on earth has she put these doll slippers on the back? And why is it shaped in this funny way? What makes girls such queer creatures, anyway, Beth?"

She laughed, I guess, Floyd, if this is a book of memories, that last is to picture that last great event of your life—your graduation night. Don't you remember how your new patent leathers pinched your feet, so that you limped across the platform after your diploma? It is shaped like a rose-bud, for it is like that. Every week you will open a new petal, and finally, when you come back, Rose will have unfolded a few petals too."

"Well, I am going to unfold every one of these right now. I never could wait that long to see what is in the center. Of course I have a vague idea, but I want to be sure. So in two minutes we will know this mystery."

"No," she said firmly, taking the book from his hand. "What would the book mean to you then, Floyd? Every particle of the pleasure, the expectation, would be gone. It took Rose a long time to make this book and you surely would not destroy its value in a few minutes. She even formed every leaf like a petal so that it would give the pleasure of watching it unfold like a real rose. It is just a symbol of herself—a little bud of promise."

"She's great to think of all that; I like her. Oh, she and Dorothy are going to stop a minute tonight; do! has something for me and I want them to see my things. But I do want to open this book. I guess I will give it to you to keep until I am ready to shut this trunk, so it won't be such a temptation. But let's cut pretty soon; I'm simply starved."

At the supper table he talked incessantly of his departure. One moment he wished that she could go along; and the next he exulted over the idea of being in a house with a crowd of fellows. While he talked a boy came to the door and was dragged in by a ruthless hand. While they talked of hot walls she shyly talked of the "falling out girls." For the most part they talked of the girls. The sister heard new phrases, a new language; she had always used a different one to her. They spoke of girls as "four flashers," as "snobs," as "stiffs," and "stand-patters." Occasionally Floyd stopped in the center of a remark and nodded his head warningly toward his sister, but the talkative John rambled on, speaking in a free and easy way of the girls he had grown up with.

During the last year Floyd had ceased to talk to his sister about his girl friends, and they seldom came to his home. In her presence his comrades talked continually of school, but if he was busy near his could hear them laughing and chatting in tones different from the ones they used when she was there. She had tried in every way she could to attract them to her home, for fear they had come in great crowds. But Floyd did not seem to want them; he preferred going to their homes. At times she wondered if she had been in their way when they had come.

When the two girls came she greeted them warmly; they had belonged to the crowd which had come in the past often for cookies and for help in long, knotty problems. Then, thinking they might

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