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THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWNE

CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED

Perhaps it was that Father Gallaher was more than usually moved when he saw the shy, sweet-faced girl standing before the font with the half-starved and poorly clad infant in her arms; if so, mayhap he besought Heaven with greater earnestness for a blessing on that baby's head, or it may have been that the little god-mother's prayers were of weight,—certain it was that John Ryan's life was singularly blest, and many there were who afterwards affirmed that the youth must have carried his white garment unspotted before the judgment-seat of God.

Then the pleasure of taking clothes and dressing the little child; it was difficult to tell which was the proudar of the two, nurse or mother, as she held the baby up for inspection in its nice clean garments, and heard it crow with pleasure as if well content and satisfied at the change of events. How awkward she was at first, however; how hot and cold she went by turns, for each day the baby grew stronger, and would kick and scream on its nurse's knee as she washed it, and often the poor mother lurched forward in alarm, lest her darling should fall off Marie's lap and be injured fatally. But all these fears wore gradually away as the girl grew more accustomed to her work, and she found that tiny John was winning for himself a warm place in her heart.

How often it happens when the heart has grown sick with hope deferred, expectations unrealized, when we have almost persuaded ourselves it is useless to hope any longer, and have bravely endeavored to make the sacrifice Heaven seems to demand of us as heroically as we can,—that then, and not till then, the very thing we have so longed and yearned for presents itself unexpectantly to us, and our hearts are flooded with such a depth of joy and gratitude, much truer and more real than we should have felt had our prayers and tears been instantly answered. So it was with Marie; she had risen earlier than usual one morning, in order to be able to visit her little protégé in good time, and was returning home, leisurely sauntering down one of the lovely roads of which there are so many in the outskirts of Dublin, when to her infinite joy she saw the figure of her brother coming hastily to meet her, whilst high above his head he held two letters, which she guessed rightly were for her. Dropping the bunch of wild-flowers which she had gathered, she bounded forward to meet him.

"I knew you were anxious to get them," he said, "and fearing you might spend the day with your god-child, I hastened to bring them to you."

"Thanks, thanks, a thousand times, Louis! One is from Beatrice, and, O Louis, one is from the Convent at last!" She fondled and kissed the latter as she spoke, and pressed it to her heart. Now she would learn the reason of their long, long silence. She made no attempt to open them, and they walked on in silence until Louis asked—

"Have you written to Madge yet?"

"Indeed I have, and am expecting an answer from her every day; but Louis," she added, looking earnestly at him, and shaking her head seriously, "I do believe she has some heavy and private trouble, for often I saw her crying bitterly over her mother's letters, though she never said a word."

"Then all the greater reason why you should write often to her and befriend her," he replied almost sharply; and with an expression of infinite pity he muttered to himself, "Poor girl!" Then reaching the Park, he turned abruptly away.

Marie rushed into her room, bolted the door after her, flung her hat upon a chair, and sank in a low sitting posture on the prie-dieu at Our Lady's feet; then tearing the envelope open, she drew forth a long thick letter, closely written, and kissed it again and again. A tiny note, neatly folded, fell out of the larger one, and this she picked up carefully and opened; it was in the firm neat handwriting of Lady Abbess, and ran as follows:

"My Dearest Child,—Though yet barely able to sit up, I must hasten to explain to you, dear Marie, the cause of our apparent neglect. Almost immediately after you left us, we entered upon a retreat of seven days, at the end of which time I was seized with an attack of gastric fever. In fact, so ill was I,—that all correspondence was ordered to be kept strictly from me, and thus it was that poor little Marie's letters, amongst many others, remained unanswered. How are you, my dear child? In the tone of your last letter—now some weeks old—I can almost detect a vein of discontent and melancholy. Why is this, I wonder? Surely, my darling, you have not so soon forgotten all I told you upon the last evening we spoke solemnly together. Such a warm, kind heart as yours, Marie, should be 'all things to all people' for God's sake. Let all who come near you feel your sweet and gentle influence (you can do it if you choose;) be to those around you what you were to your companions at school—always kind, forbearing, and considerate; and for the future cease to plan. Leave it entirely in God's hands—wishful and anxious only to do His holy will. After all, dear child, believe me your life is far easier and your cross much lighter than that of many another whose names I could mention. Courage, then, little one, shoulder your disappointments bravely, and remember it was the earnest wish of your friends and relations that you should not enter the religious life until you have seen a little of the world—in which I heartily coincide. So do not let me be dissappointed in you; let me hear of you helping, aiding, cheering and comforting all around you—for you know well enough when to rebuke and when to encourage, and in doing this, you will be thrice blessed, thrice happy. My hand is still too feeble to write much, but my heart and prayers are with and for all my dear ones. Perhaps 'the United Kingdom,' my 'three English girls,' as the children call you, own more than their fair share of my affection and regard.

"I bless you, dear child, with my heart. Pray often, then, for—Yours most devotedly in J. C.,

"MARIE DE VALOIS, Lady Abbess."

Over and yet over again Marie read this letter. She seemed to hear the firm tones, to feel the warm clasp of Lady Abbess's hand as she did so. How thankful she felt now for having had the courage to embrace this very life of labour and love before the receipt of this letter. "You are right," she said aloud. "Your words are perfectly true, dear Lady Abbess. I am happier now—so much happier, for I feel that the blessing of God is upon me." Then came dear Mother Agatha's letter, overflowing with love and kindness for her little favourite, bidding her to be bright and happy, and look forward to the future; telling her of the flowers that bloomed in her old pupil's garden, and how she culled the sweetest blossoms and placed them in the Lady Chapel at Our Lady's feet, so that the memory of her darling child might always be fresh and green in Mary's heart; of how two fresh young novices had arrived, both of whom were known to Marie; of how happy Isabel was, and how gentle and good she was becoming. All this and much more did Mother Agatha say, and long her little pupil sat dreaming and enjoying to her heart's content this budget of love from those she loved so well. She had almost forgotten that there was still another letter unopened—another treat untasted. "Dear Bertie!" she exclaimed, seizing the letter, which had fallen to the floor,—"to think I could be so thoughtless!"

She opened the envelope carefully, so that the dainty seal, with coat-of arms and crest, remained uninjured; then taking out three sheets of thin paper, filled to the full—nay, even crossed—in Bertie's handwriting, settled herself comfortably once more for another good read. It was the letter which Beatrice wrote at the request of her father, and contained the inquiries concerning Miss Blake; it also bore an earlier date, and should have been delivered some time before, but by one of those unaccountable accidents which will occur, do what we will, it had lain perdu for a fortnight and suddenly came to light. The letter was full of fun and frolic, of warm expressions of attachment and vows of eternal friendship, and ended by saying: "We had arranged that you and dear Madge were to spend Christmas with us, but the doctor says that father must go to Naples or Rome for the winter months, and we are all going also. I am delighted at the prospect. Will not Percy and I explore ruins, and study art and architecture! You shall hear about our doings, and on our return must pay us a long visit, my little darling Marie."

She folded her letters carefully, and felt that her reward had come when she least expected it, and she thanked God fervently for having given her strength to make her little sacrifice ere He rewarded the recompense. Only one thing preyed upon her mind; to whom did Lady Abbess especially allude when she said, "Your lot in life is far easier and your cross far lighter than that of many another whose names I could mention?" Marie thought and thought. Was poor Madge, with her unassuming ways, her quiet but natural reticence, was she one of the many suffering ones? "God forbid!" and yet she sighed, "I fear so much she is, poor uncomplaining Madge! I will write to her again, and pray for her."

CHAPTER X.

And what of poor Madge? How fared it with her all this time? We must travel back to the night when she and her tall, severe-looking travelling companion arrived at Edinburgh station.

"No. 50 George Street," said Mary sharply to the driver; and as the cab rattled over the rough pavement Madge, never a good traveller, crouched in the farthest corner of it, feeling tired, faint, sick, and lonely; yet she never spoke, only strove and struggled hard to stop the internal throbbing of her heart, which warned her she was drawing near to that spot which she must look upon as "Home." "Home without Willie!" how drear and hollow it sounded!

The vehicle turned down a quiet, dull street, and presently stopped before the door of a very ordinary-looking house, at each side of which there were many more exactly resembling itself in colour and height. "Not here!" gasped Madge, and involuntarily she seized the door, as if to prevent its being opened. "Oh, not here!" and she turned even paler than before.

"The man's right," replied Mary, as she glanced up quickly at the number, which stood out conspicuously on the fan-light over the door, and pushing firmly past the girl, said abruptly, "Step out, miss, I will see to your box." The poor girl, feeling half mystified and dazed—for the weary journey had upset her much, and sitting so long silently brooding, had wrought her to a great state of excitement—crept out of the musty old cab, and then stood waiting with fast-beating heart on the doorstep, feeling sure all this must be a terrible dream. A strange feeling of faintness and helplessness stole over her as she thought of her lady mother dwelling in such a dull place, and she pressed her hand to her temples as if to recall her scattered senses and ease the throbbing pain there. The man had just succeeded in lifting the box from the roof of the cab, when the house-door opened quickly and a delicate white hand drew the trembling girl gently in. It was not yet dark enough to enable the rather feeble light suspended in the hall to display the surrounding objects to their greatest advantage; but Madge felt loving arms clasped around her, warm kisses upon her cheek, and heard whispered words of tender love, all as though in a dream—but the strain and journey had been too much for her—and she sank with a stifled cry of pain to the ground.

"My poor, poor darling!" said the mother anxiously, as she endeavoured to support the girl's drooping form.

"Ah, I guessed, I feared it would be too much for her! Go, Mary, and bring something to revive her."

"O mother, mother!" gasped Madge faintly, "I am tired and weary. I don't know what ails me!" and she burst into a flood of bitter tears.

"Weep on, my child, it will relieve you;" and all the while the mother stood supporting her weeping daughter, and gently smoothing back the curly chestnut hair, stood over her patiently and courageously, as though her own heart had no burden of its own to bear, no living, gnawing sorrow which slowly but surely was draining her life's blood away; yes, there she stood, as though to console and support others was her first and only care. Mary seemed touched with pity, and her hard face bore a kindly expression as she handed her mistress a glass containing some restorative, and bending down, said proudly; "Poor bairn! she be a brave girl, for she's been awful sick the whole way, and never once grumbled. I watched her but thought I'd best say nothing."

Madge's hat had fallen off, and heavy sobs shook her frame, whilst the mother fondled the head resting upon her, and soothed the flushed and burning cheek with her cool white hand.

"You are better now, my pet," said Mrs. FitzAllan cheerfully, as she forced back her own feelings and wiped the girl's tearful eyes.

"Let me look at my little daughter, my only child! Ah, dear one! you will never know what it is to me to look upon you once more!"

There was a ring of subdued agony in the mother's voice, which vibrated strangely in the daughter's heart. She gulped her sobs down bravely, and with one supreme effort rose to her feet, and throwing her arms fondly round her mother's neck, exclaimed: "How cruel of me to be so cowardly, and you so good and brave! Oh, how fragile and thin you look, poor little mother!"

"Never mind me, dearest, but come and have some food, that is what you need the most;" and the brave-hearted lady supported her precious charge into a commonplace but decently furnished apartment, which served as a dining room, where upon the table was spread a light but homely supper. They sat down side by side, and every now and again their hands sought each other's in a warm clasp, or the mother's arms lingered fondly round her daughter's waist, whilst her eyes eagerly noted every expression that flitted across her face, and drank in every word she uttered, as though to gaze upon her and listen to her voice were rapture to her heart. She barely tasted food herself, merely toyed with it; and Madge would have been distressed had she known that the excitement caused by the thought of seeing her again, the fear, the dread of what her daughter's feelings might suffer on her arrival at No. 50, had so worked upon her own vivid imagination as to entirely destroy her appetite, and prevent her from doing little more than break her fast that day.

Mrs. FitzAllan was about the middle height, but slightly built; her features were refined and classical, and her dark pencilled brows and long eyelashes stood out conspicuously on her pale, fair skin. Her hair was still dark, glossy, and wavy, but so plainly and neatly dressed that it showed off to great advantage her well-formed head. Her dark-gray eyes often wore a look of anxiety and dread; and there were lines about her forehead which told of care and trouble, and which aged the sweet face that otherwise looked so young and belied the forty-five summers that had passed over it. She had never worn anything but black since her boy's death, and she never meant to do so again; it best became the sea of sorrows through which she was passing, poor brave heart! The supper over, Mary entered and removed everything from the table, whilst Madge placed her mother in as comfortable a chair as she could find, and drawing a low stool to her side, seated herself upon it, and rested her weary head beside her.

"I am so grateful to you, Mary, for undertaking that long journey in my stead, and hope it has not overtired you."

"It's not me that would complain of weariness in doing anything for you, my lady," answered Mary, drawing her figure to its full height, and eyeing her mistress with dignified respect over a loaf of bread which she held in her hand—"it's not for me to complain of discomfort or aught else in that line, but may the Lord be praised for sparing my life and bringing me safe in health and limb out of that wicked invention which flies through the air screeching and howling! well, not like a—hangelic spirit, but like something the very hopposite of it, and from the motion of which me legs is still all of a tremble. Why in the name of fortune folks can't be content to travel respectably, as their betters used to do afore 'em, is more than I can make out. But, good Lor', I've seen enough of the worjd the last forty eight hours to last my life. There's little room in it left for decent folks now. But, turning towards Madge with a look of pleasure, she asked, "who's she like, me lady?"

Mrs. FitzAllan had always been "Little Lady" by courtesy at her own home; the servants had always called her so, and Mary kept up the title now.

"I have scarcely had a good look at her yet, Mary; and she is feeling so tired, poor child, that it is difficult to say whom she resembles the most."

"Wait until you see her looking bright and bonnie as I did, and you will see my dear old master's eyes looking straight out of hers!"

"Really? why, I shall love her all the better for that!"

"And so do I!" said the woman, as if to herself; but compressing her hard lips together and nodding her head vigorously, she clutched the bread-plate tighter and disappeared.

"You are in luck, dear; Mary was devoted to poor gran'pa. He always told me I should find her worth some day, and he was right: I have. She is invaluable to me. Before I knew her thoroughly, I thought her speech so abrupt and her manners most objectionable; but though I believe much of it arises from her independent Yorkshire spirit, yet a great deal of it is assumed to hide her real feelings, and she is as true as steel. Some day I will tell you how it came about that she is with me now,"

"Will—" (Madge had almost said the magic word "Willie")—"we—I—always used to be afraid of her. I remember how angry she would be when we upset the bedrooms or ran about the house with dirty feet, or played hide-and-seek on wet days in and out of the old towers and passages. But once she was so kind: I fell and hurt myself; she thought I had fainted, but I felt her pick me up so gently, and I do believe she kissed and fondled me—at any rate, she put me carefully to bed, and would allow no one to come near me but herself. She told me tales and tried to make me forget my pain and fright until you came home at night."

"She is altogether a curious compound. When all things run smoothly she finds very much to doubt and be dissatisfied with; but when trials and troubles fall thick and fast, then Mary stands staunch and immovable, and almost seems to take a fierce pleasure in combating and dealing with them, and never by word or look will she condescend to acknowledge that she is overpowered or crushed by them. I owe her much; she has been a tower of strength to me, and I trust her implicitly."

How the mother enjoyed that evening, to have some of her very own to fondle and love once more! The thousands of questions she had to ask about Lady Abbess and the dear old Convent — that was dearer now to her than any spot on earth—the only home she ever cared to see again. Often her dark eyes filled with tears, and her sensitive hands twitched nervously, as she listened to Madge's animated description of scenes she could picture so vividly; and often still, as the girl related the kind words and acts of her oldest and best loved friend on earth, "Marie de Valois," the grateful tears rolled silently down that mother's face, though she contrived to hide them from her daughter's sight. It was not until all sound of noise had died away outside, and the night was far advanced, that Madge timidly asked: "Mother, where is father?"

Poor mother! she had been so lost in the happy memory of her girlhood days—so carried away by all that Madge had been telling her, as almost to fancy she was a child herself again; when this question suddenly recalled her to the present once more.

Seated as she was, Madge did not observe the flush of pain which overspread the poor wife's face, but she detected the tremor in her voice as she answered:

"Your father is from home, darling. I expect him back in a few days."

Her father's movements had always been clouded in mystery to her, so Madge asked no more questions.

"If mother had wished to talk to me of father, or tell me why we are here, and a hundred more sad things I am dying to know, she would have done so," thought the girl. "It is enough for me to have made her happy for a few hours—the rest will follow soon enough."

"Come, my darling, you have made me so happy with your merry chatter that I have forgotten how tired you must be. It is getting very late," she added, rising, "come to bed, little one; we will have all tomorrow in which to continue our talk."

Madge was decidedly the taller and the heavier of the two, but by dint of a little squeezing and manoeuvring they managed to mount the rather dark and narrow staircase arm in-arm.

"This is your room, dear child, it is only separated from mine by this tiny dressing-room;" and they entered a small, neat apartment, scrupulously clean. Evidently Mary had had a hand here. There was a snow-white look about everything. The white hangings on the bed, the table covers, the muslin which hung around the dressing-table, the window curtains, all were dazzling white; but the carpet was old and threadbare, the best part of it had been swept away years ago; whilst the colored dimity on the chairs was faded and worn.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE YEARS OF FATHER JOHN

Mary Madigan was leaving for Australia, and a "white wake" always preceded a leave taking, just as a "black wake" preceded a burial. Into the white wake there entered laughter and tears; somewhat like a spring day it was, when the wind runs high and sunshine follows on the heels of shadow.

As a sort of preliminary to it all came Mary's trunk out from Limerick, which caused Mrs. Madigan and her two girls to weep softly, just as if the trunk were a coffin. One should not blame them either, since often the sea made the separation as complete as the grassy mound in the graveyard. Then as they folded and put in some little keepsake they wept anew.

Mary was to depart Tuesday morning at 6 o'clock. The Saturday previous she went to confession, and received Holy Communion at the first Mass on Sunday. How sweet and pure she looked as she knelt at the railing, the Bread of Life in her heart! Small wonder it was that half the parish was heavy-hearted to see her going from the dear land of settled quiet to the strange faraway land of unrest and adventure! And you could hardly blame the boys, kneeling over near the holy water font, if they stole a glance at her while she prayed below the great window to the south through which the sun came that morning. Mary went into the sacristy after Mass, which explained why Father John was late visiting "classes."

"Father, I came to say good-bye," said Mary simply.

"And Mary, I wish it was 'I'm glad to be home again' you were saying instead."

"Thank you Father John, and I wish it, too. Indeed, 'tis I would like to stay at home, if I could."

"Ah, Mary, you're all going, all going till in a few years only the sick and the old will remain. You are one of my girls—as good as Ruth amid the sheaves; ah, yes, it catches at the heart to see you go! The fields are green here, and heaven is blue and every stream has sunlight and song! No, doubt, Mary, you're going because you wish to better yourself; and I wish to God I could do something to keep you and all our boys and girls at home! But no. The rivers run idly to the sea and turn no mill wheels; a million hands are waiting to serve, but greedily capital affords no service. And so you must go like the rest. But promise me, Mary—'tis the last time we'll ever meet here and therefore I ask all the more anxiously—promise me, you'll never turn back on your faith, the faith that alone can save. Will you promise?"

"Father, I will always be true to that: always—with the help of God!"

"Ah, with the help of God. And promise me you'll never forget your race, the race of saints and dreamers and bards and kings."

"I won't forget; I promise you that I won't."

The girl caught some of the priest's emotion for she spoke as if pronouncing a vow.

"God bless and keep you, Mary! May the voyage be calm and may the years be many that follow; many, yes—and full of peace!"

Mary knelt down and Father John gave her his blessing. They shook hands and she went away.

The priest stood at the sacristy door, folded his arms, and looked across the flat country to the Balladan hills. The sun was upon them that morning and a blue mist circled their base.

"I believe the wild longing for El Dorado, for the land of the bush and the land of the prairie, has so taken hold of our people they would not stay here now for any inducement their country might offer."

At "classes" that morning, he asked little Mollie O'Neill:

"And what will you do, Mollie, when you're grown up?"

"I'll go to New York to my aunt," answered Mollie.

"Even the children hear the Siren," said Father John to Mr. Sullivan; but none of us understood what he meant.

"Well, they had the white wake at Madigan's at which Mary was, as they say," "the observed of all observers," like the bride at a wedding. Jim Donnelly was down from Progue's Point with his flute and Anna Gronan had her new melodeon. Jim played a dhrag till he became tired and then Anna took up the music where Jim quit. There were three "full sets," an "orange and green," an "eight hand" reel, a "jig," a "hornpipe," and the "blackbird" by Jim Ahern.

You who have never seen the Irish dances or have your impressions of them from travesties reproduced on the stage, have no worthy concept of what Irish dances really are. You, whose imagination pictures noise and riotous laughter, the slamming of feet on mud floors and frantic leaping into air thick and foul with tobacco smoke—will you not understand the poise, the rythm and grace. You whose conception of motion is limited to the monotonous waltz and its present-day imitations will probably not sympathize with the more complex, more artistic and exquisitely refined dancers the Celt has evolved and made part of his contribution to the poetry of the world. No wonder the dreamer the lover of long ago, looks back and sighs for them.

"Oh, the days of Kerry dancing,
Oh, for the ring of the piper's tune!"

Well, when there came a pause to the dancing, Jim Ahern called across to Mike Mikeen:

"Yeh, Mikeen; have you e'er a song you could give us?"

"Yerra, where would I get a song I'd like to know? An' if I got one itself, I couldn't get the tune."

"An' why, I'd like to know."

"Well, sure if I was to try to get the tune Father John would hear me where I'd be out in the garden, an' he'd come down an' chase me back to the River Deel to drown my voice."

"Faith, Mikeen," ventured Jim Donnelly, "he might be glad to know you could sing, so he'd sind you up the gallery with the choir."

Well, Mikeen could not be coaxed to sing, and neither could Tom Hackett, who had a "sore throat," nor Jim Hogan, who was "hoarse." Several encouraging voices urged Anna Morgan, but Anna was bashful. So was Kathleen Burns and Margaret Magee. It seemed as if every most promising star must vanish out of the firmament of song when Jack Clancey, the weaver down near Athery, stood up and said:

"If ye don't mind, I'm thinkin' o' givin' ye a stave or two myself."

"That's talkin', Jack!" encouraged Mike Danabar.

To say the truth about Jack Clancey he was not one of the major prophets of song.

"Yeh, he dhrawls a good dale," was Jim Donnelly's whispered comment.

"Yeh, he does; an' he screeches kind o' when he goes up high like."

"Ah, so. But he gets thim started anyhow, so 'tis aequal."

Well, Jack gave a few preliminary coughs for the purpose of clearing his throat, closed his eyes and, while swinging head from side to side like a pendulum sang:

"In Australia's far off shore
There is wealth for us in store
An' pearls an' sparkin' diamonds galore,
But if every grain o' sand
Was a diamond in that land,
I would still love dear old Ireland the more."

"Bravo, Jack," cried Dick Fitz from across the room.

"Courage, Jack, an' rise it!" called John Hartigan.

"Yerra, don't mind thim, Jack but save your voice," Mike's Mikeen advised.

Jack had his own way and his own time. To tell the truth, there was many a stanza that seemed to serve as a fitting conclusion to the song, but Jack went on and on, letting no one into the secret of just when he would finish; so when he did finish everybody was taken by surprise.

"By gor!" whispered Mikeen to Jim Donnelly, while murmurs of approval were heard all around, "by gor! Jack's song reminds me of Father Mahoney of Durragh when he used to preach. He'd say, 'Now, my brethren, let us do this an' let us not do that,' an' thin you'd get ready to kneel down thinkin' he was finishin' up; but whin you'd be sure he was through intirely, he'd begin all over."

"You mustn't be talkin' about the priest, Mikeen," admonished Jim.

"Yeh, who's talkin' about the priest I'd like to know? By gor! a man can't open his mouth to yawn these times but they's say he's talkin' again his neighbor."

Other songs followed Jack Clancy's opening effort—songs of battle, songs of the hearth, songs of love and romance, songs of the homesick heart; then dancing again, and refreshments and subdued convention, and silent weeping in quiet nooks, and at last the sun rising rose red above the horizon just north of Progue's Point.

The neighbors and friends leave the house and walk to Creelabeg station to await the end. Mary Madigan holds in her arms the little mother whom she may not see in this world any more; she kisses the rough, brown face of her father many times; she kisses her brothers and her sisters, whose faces are wet with tears. It is over at last, the sad leave-taking in the cool morning. Then Mary Madigan flings herself on the little couch below the window and sobs, as if her heart must surely break. God help her, and God help all who must bid good-bye to clustering shamrocks and the daisied earth! God help her and God help many

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