

THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWN

CHAPTER XXIV.—CONTINUED

A group had collected around her, but they fell back a little as the new-comer quietly but determinedly forced their way closer to the musician.

The two old school friends gazed with affectionate but wondering surprise at the tall, slender figure of their dear old companion, and exchanged looks fraught with wonder and admiration at each other.

Louis, his heart in his eyes, alone saw no alteration in her, save that she seemed to have grown only more delicate, tender, and beautiful than when he last saw her.

The last line was reached, the last sweet notes lingered and vibrated but in the ears of the audience, when suddenly loud and hearty bursts of applause arose upon every side.

Had she expected all this, or was it but the sudden reaction of joy that overpowered her? It was difficult for the bystanders to understand and realize at first. All they saw was, that for a few brief seconds the poor governess struggled as though endeavoring to subdue some violent and powerful emotion, whilst Lady Beatrice firmly but tenderly supported her, and Marie whispered words of loving comfort in her ear.

"O Bertie! O Marie! is it true?" she gasped at last; "or shall I wake and find it all but one of those dreadful, feverish dreams?"

"No, no, dear! It is all true this time," said her old companions, as they kissed her. "We have found you at last, and do not mean that you shall leave us again," said Bertie.

"No more lonely strife and sorrow for our poor old Madge!" "God bless you all!" answered Madge, unable to say more; for her eyes fell upon the eager and happy face of Louis, who could do nothing, say nothing, but hold her hand in a tight, warm clasp, his bright eyes speaking volumes for him.

Now in that brilliant assembly were many kind hearts and generous, who, long before the song had ceased, had bent not only with admiration, but with true sympathy for the unassuming young governess, and felt it a great shame that one so sweet and gifted should occupy so lowly a position in life.

"How very strange!" he remarked, ruminating himself upon the comfortable lounge. "It was better than any play I ever saw—all so real, so genuine. And she is such a splendidly fine girl too! Now that her friends have discovered her, I'll guarantee she does not remain a miss much longer. Her singing, too, it is positively divine."

"The lady started. 'What is it you are raving about so ridiculously she inquired angrily; for she was piqued to think that he should have left her for so paltry a reason, and much more to hear him speak so rapturously of anyone.' 'Surely,' she asked, drawing herself up, 'you do not bestow all this eulogium upon my governess?'"

"Upon her and none other, I do assure you," and he recounted simply but truthfully all that had occurred so lately.

"Look, there she is!" he exclaimed. "By heavens, but isn't she splendid!"

Lady Linsdale's spiteful nature was roused to its full height, and, with a scornful sneer upon her already plain features, she withdrew her figure farther into the recess, and with clenched hands she watched with indignation the picture before her. She had always felt painfully the girl's superiority, and had taken a mean pleasure in humbling her.

full and overflowing with great and unexpected joy. How the other two managed to enlighten Madge, or how she contrived to tell them so much of her past and present history, with so short a space of time, may be perfectly intelligible to a girl, but would be, I feel certain a mystery for ever to the slower intellect of man.

However, certain it was that when they rose, and at the gentlemen's urgent persuasion walked towards the ball-room, they had grasped the absolute position of things, and decided that on the morrow Madge was to leave for ever the service of Lady Linsdale and go as a companion to Lady Beatrice de Woodville, that young lady assuring her as a solemn fact, that since Percy had left her, and Regie and Marie contrived to be interesting only to each other, she felt at times extremely lonely, and Madge's companionship was just what she yearned for.

Poor Scotland's heart beat high at the bright prospect before her. She might well look proud and happy as she passed her late employer, and reaching the ball-room, was at once seized by the impatient Louis, who, from the first day he met her, vowed to win for her a home, and be, if possible, something nearer to her than the dear brother of whom she told him such moving stories.

And she? Well, it was not to be expected that she, who had so few friends, and who had always shrunk from exposing her sorrows to others should have undervalued or been entirely indifferent to all the thoughtful and kind messages that, through Marie's letters, he had never failed to send her. She had learnt to associate Louis Blake's name with all that was most kind, tender, and manly. So through the remainder of the evening, though many another partner sought her, she danced better and felt happiest with Marie's brother.

Beatrice had taken it upon herself to make all the necessary arrangements with Lady Linsdale, and decided to drive on the following day and remove Madge to their own residence, to all of which that lady yielded a very ready consent; for being of a mean disposition, she felt how easily Miss Fitz Allan could now injure her, if she chose to do so, by informing her friends of her many acts of harshness and unkindness.

Not so, indeed. Shallow and empty-minded herself, she knew little, and understood less, of the depth and kindness of the nature she had sought to crush and wound, but which had never yet stooped to aught so base or low as to revenge a fallen foe.

With a radiant face the happy girl kissed her friends good night, and their was neither languor nor weariness in her step as she mounted lightly the grand staircase, never pausing or hesitating as she reached the door of her own tiny room. Arrived there she threw herself upon her knees, and kissing reverently her crucifix, poured forth the deep feelings of her happy heart in genuine love and thankfulness to Heaven. Ay, even for all the sorrows of her past dark life she was grateful, for had they not been instrumental in teaching her how to enjoy and value aright the unpeppable joys of the present?

World she ever have been able to believe or trust the sincerity of her friend's love, had she not been in her present position? Ah! it proved to her that they loved her for herself alone.

She rose from her knees; but her mind was too full, her brain too restless and excited for sleep, so she paced the narrow confines of her apartment, then stood still and paced again. "Is it possible," she thought, "that I am the real Madge Fitz Allan once more? that now I may laugh and joke again, and bark as of old in the sunshine of my old friends' love? I feel they mean kindly by me. How sweet Louis Blake spoke to me!" and the tell-tale color reddened her cheek.

"Can it be that dear Lady Abbess's words are being verified at last? 'When you least expect it, my child, the dark clouds will roll away, and the sun will shine more brightly than ever?'"

"Dear, dear grandpa! I must look upon your kind face once more, and tell you, whisper to you, all the sweet joys and hopes that fill your little Madge's heart. Sweet mother!" she continued, bowing her head. "I seem to feel your blessing upon me now. From you I learned how to endure sorrow. Teach me how to be humble in my joy. And poor faithful Mary, how you will rejoice to hear of your bairn's good fortune! I will send you a letter at once, and you shall bring dear grandpapa's picture with you. I shall be allowed to hang it in some place of honor now. As for you, my little Marie! why, I need to look upon you as a hidden saint, and you take to all this grandeur and worldliness as to the manner born. But, Bertie, my dear, high spirited Bertie, so humble, and yet so great, generous, and noble-minded! It is you that move me to such wonder and admiration. What a grand and beautiful nature is yours! Heaven might well select and choose you as its own." And so her mind ran on from one happy subject to another, until the clock upon the stairs chimed four, when she suddenly remembered all that lay before her that day.

and flowery terrace of Baron Court. Much regarding Madge's future life had occurred during those few peaceful weeks; much that had gladdened her heart and filled it with great and new joy, and restored to her eyes the sweet, tranquil light of old.

The day following the eventful night at Lady Linsdale's, Louis had penned these few lines to auntie; "Dearest auntie, rejoice with me, for I have found her. Oh, pray with me that I may win her!" And he succeeded.

During her late hard life of obscurity and poverty, the kind messages of Marie's brother had ever been a secret cause of great joy to Madge; his bright boyish face a silent happy memory. So when they met again, and she found him so true and chivalrous, and learned how manfully he had striven and worked to earn for her a home; when he told her, with the love-light in his eyes, how, from the first day he met her, he had loved her, and was determined with God's help to win her; of how dear auntie was longing to welcome her as a daughter—when he pleaded these, why the heart of Madge was filled with great love and gratitude towards him, and she willingly confided not only her hand but her heart to his keeping, rejoicing inwardly to think how together they would strive to save money and build up the old home to its pristine grandeur.

The Countess alone had been taciturn, almost silent, regarding the new joy of the young people. She had acquiesced in a coldly satisfied manner to both engagements; for, truth to tell, it was gall and worm-wood to her to observe all this billow and cooling, and feel that her own lovely daughter was the one to stand unclaimed by any intended husband. This fact rankled in her mind, and caused bitter feelings to grow in her heart towards her daughter.

"Why had she Mowbray left without declaring himself?" Had she but guessed the real state of affairs—had she but heard Beatrice implore Lady Edith with tears in her eyes to bid her brother spare them more; to urge further sorrow; to go away and forget her, for she could never, never be his bride—no, nor the bride of any man—had she but seen the girls cling to each other, and heard their words of love and sorrow—they would both have come in for a very unfair share of the lady's scorn and indignation. But of these facts she was so far totally ignorant. On the evening above mentioned, then, the lovers walked on, at the same time contriving in a wonderfully astute manner to keep out of each other's way.

"Dearest darling, I have something so urgent to ask of you—a request to make for which I long so much, that, dreading a refusal, I almost fear to ask it."

"Dearest Louis, it surely must be something very unreasonable or impossible, that I should not grant it at once. Say what it is, dear," she said sweetly.

"Well," he began, in a hesitating manner, "you know that Marie is to be married next month. What shall we do without her? There will be no one to nurse or attend to the house and poor auntie."

Madge colored deeply; she guessed his meaning now, but he continued earnestly. "You know also that, unlike Reginald, I have neither a luxurious home nor great wealth to offer to my sweet little bride; but you can never know the love and pride wherewith I love and hope still to earn for her. There is enough and to spare even now for both auntie and us to live upon, darling," he urged, clasping her hands tightly in his, and looking at her downcast eyes. "Why not let me be a double wedding, my own Madge? Why should we wait? The little home is ready! It needs but the presence of my sweet wife to make it a little heaven on earth. Will she not come and take her place at once? Speak, dearest, and say yes!"

"O Louis, it seems so soon! What would auntie—what would everyone say?"

"Auntie would rejoice, for she knows how dearly I love you, and have loved you for years, and my happiness is hers. As for others, your friends would be pleased. What matters it what others may say or think, my darling?"

"You have startled me a little, dearest, answered the girl, looking up at him tenderly but timidly. "There are so many things to consider. I will think it over. If only my dear mother had been here to consult with me, how sweet it would have been!"

"Dear little suffering heart!" he said, folding her tenderly in his arms, "let me console you, and atone for all that bitter past."

"Not altogether bitter, my Louis. There is much of real joy in it upon you for support, and it is sweet to be able to cheer and comfort them."

"It is, dearest; hence the reason I wish and long for you to comfort me so much."

She laughed her answer in a low merry laugh. "Madge! Madge!" called the playful voice of Bertie. "Oh dear! she asked loudly, 'where is that girl? I declare if she is not worse than Marie now. A pretty companion to me, forsooth! Madge! where are you, dear?'"

garden walk. "I am so sorry," she said, when the two of them reached Bertie's side. "But the evening was so fine, we thought—"

"Oh yes!" interrupted the little tease; "you thought, no doubt, that the moon was shining, and that the nightingales were singing, but look and listen! No such thing is happening. Never mind, I will be usual for you, dear; but seriously, Madge, will you come and sing to us? I have spoken to mother, and she is so dreadfully angry with me. She will not hear of my entering a convent. I thought that if you, accidentally as it were, sang some of poor father's favorite songs and airs, that might help to calm and soothe her. Certainly they would give me courage, and God knows I need it sorely enough at times."

"Dear Bertie, I am so sorry for you! Marie and I feared this," and Beatrice felt the loving protection that the taller girl would find extend towards her as she folded her arms around her in a close, warm clasp.

As they entered the lofty and handsome drawing-room, Reginald arose, and drawing his sister aside, whispered kindly. "I owe you much, and shall feel very severely to mother. I will not have you so wounded and hurt. It is neither fair nor just."

She sighed rather sadly as she answered. "I suppose it must be so. Poor mother, she is so dreadfully disappointed in me!"

"She ought to be proud of you, dear!" he said, kissing her. "But keep up your heart; I will speak for you."

It was twilight, and a lovely evening. Madge was still singing, in a low, plaintive voice, old songs and ballads, which required no music. Everyone and everything was very still. The minds and thoughts of her listeners were not altogether in the present. Old scenes were being enacted, in which dear departed forms and faces took prominent parts. Sweet memories of their kind words and deeds were conjured up as the familiar strains fell upon their ears. While some were busily engrossed building fine castles in the air for the future. The windows were thrown wide open, for the air was balmy and sweet, when dimly at first, but each instant growing more and more distinct, came the sound of carriage wheels—an unwelcome sound to everyone just then. It was so pleasant to sit in the gloaming listening to sweet music, brooding over the past, and planning numbers for the future. All the less joyously, yet nearer and nearer, drew the unwelcome sound of the vehicle, until it actually stopped in front of the Court.

"A visitor surely," sighed Reginald, rising wearily from his snug seat at Marie's side. He had just been thinking how beautiful would a large painting of his little wife look when hung side by side with one of his own in the vast picture gallery of the Court.

Beatrice remained seated, for her heart was full and her eyes were moist. "How very long it felt since she had sung those self same songs to her dear father!"

"They heard the carriage door open, and a voice which made Madge start, exclaim, 'So this be Baron Court! Well, a mighty fine spot it is, too!'"

"Why, it is Mary!" cried Madge excitedly; "poor soul, what can have brought her here?"

"Do go and meet her," said Bertie, "and be sure to bring her in to see us; we should so enjoy seeing her again. I just want someone like her to cheer me up."

Madge arose. She was looking very flushed and sweet; the white dress and black sash threw out the delicate tints of her brilliant complexion and as she crossed the beautiful hall, Mary's sharp eyes spotted her, and the next instant she was caught and folded in those strong, faithful arms.

"My bairn! my own bonnie bairn!" cried the woman, in an ecstasy of delight. "Ay, you little know how good the Lord has been to you! How I thank Him for having spared me to come and tell you on't! You shall be as fine a lady as any of 'em again—that you shall, my pet! You've got your rights at last. I always felt you would."

"Sorely my old Mary has lost her reason, has she not?" said Madge, stroking playfully the hard brown cheeks. "This grand place is not mine. I am but staying here."

"I know that, dearie! but it's just the sort of place that should be yours. Lor', but it's fine!" she said, turning round and admiring the massive pillars and lofty space above. "I'll thank you to be careful with that there package!" she cried sharply, recognizing her old enemy Simpson, who was dragging lustily at a large flat packing case which lay on top of the cab. "Lift it gently, please, it's precious."

Countess, somewhat softened by the familiar strains of music, had joined the young people, and was pleased that any break should occur to stimulate or change the rather flagging conversation. Mary's entrance therefore brought smiles to every face. She walked into the centre of the room with a firm, unflinching step, and then turning, made a separate, respectful, but stiff bow to each person present, commencing with the Countess and ending with the Earl. But he, Louis, and the young ladies, led by Beatrice, rose and shook the faithful old servant heartily by the hand, and bade her a warm welcome.

"Don't fluster me! pray don't fluster me! there's good children, till I've said me say, and then you may do what you will."

She looked the facsimile of what she was that night nearly five years ago at the London Hotel—apparently the self same black dress, bonnet, shawl, and even cloth gloves; she flounced umbrella alone was missing; that was left in the hall.

"Now where is the young gentleman that has won my young lady? Ah, I see! It's him with the laughing eyes and curly hair. I guessed as much. I remember you well, sir," she continued. "And so you really be going to marry Miss Madge, sir, because you love her for her own sweet self alone, even though she may not have a penny-piece to call hers, are you?"

"Yes, and proud I am to win her," cried Louis, walking towards Madge and putting his arm around her to show full possession.

"And you may well be proud, sir, for I can tell you she comes of a noble stock. But mind you, sir, Miss Fitz Allan is going a pauper to no man, for it's my pleasurable duty to inform you and her, that she's come in for her lawful rights at last, and is at this moment a wealthy heiress."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE RE-CREATION OF DAVID FRANCIS

Georgina Pell Curtis, in the Magnificent. It had been a comparatively mild winter in the far Northwest but there had been frost the day before Christmas Eve, followed by a light fall of snow, which now shone far over the glittering plain, touched here and there by a rosy reflection of the sun. Westward the great ball of fire was setting behind Chief Mountain, which towered far above the lesser peaks of Mt. Henry, Pappoose, Bearhead, Saganaw and Bass Mountain, for was it not on Chief Mountain, a bold, gray, perpendicular peak with an oblong summit that the Great Spirit dwelt when He made the world? So the Indians said, and it passing stranger stopped to question this old Indian legend it was only necessary to point to the names of the lesser mountains to prove that Chief Mountain had antedated the Creation. The Great Spirit, recognizing the needs of man whom He sent down the mountain from the seat of His wisdom, had named the surrounding three things for man's comfort and well-being, with Bass Mountain where they might live.

And indeed on this Christmas Eve Jean Baptiste, aged seven, was standing high up on a crest of Bass Mountain where stood the rude shack that he called home. With one hand shading his eyes he was gazing down on the glittering plain below and on the gray old frontier fort, owned and controlled by the United States Government. Jean Baptiste's back was toward the west. He was looking far away toward the east where, on the broad plains, though out of sight, was the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. A year ago he had spent his Christmas there. It was a never-to-be-forgotten time of midnight Mass in the chapel, built of logs and red-oiled of spruce and pine and the scent of melting wax. His father, a rough frontier trapper of French parentage, had been there, and his mother, who had been a girl from the Indian Reservation, brought up and educated by the Sisters.

And what a grand time there had been next day, with a Christmas tree, and games in which the young Indian men and boys had taken part! This year Jean was older, oh! very much older, seven and a half, and Father Andre since then had prepared him for his first Communion which was to be tomorrow. And yet here he stood on Bass Mountain, fully ten miles from the Reservation, and with no way of getting there unless his father returned home in time, which now seemed improbable, to take him on his sled. It was a clock and in eight hours Father Andre would be standing at the foot of the altar, vested for the midnight Mass—eight hours, and it was unthinkable that he, Jean Baptiste, should not be present! A surge of emotion welled up in the heart of the little boy—the courage of the trapper, the resolution and endurance of the Indian and, mingled with this call of the blood, was the divine mysticism and faith of the Catholic, common to every age and race of the faith. Go to the midnight Mass he must. He could not disappoint Father Andre. Ten miles was a long way, but he had his own small sled and his faithful dog, Wolf. With them the trip must be made.

So, with no time to lose, he stole past the house where his mother was baking in anticipation of Christmas. Making his way to the shed some distance beyond the house he roused his sleepy dog and quickly harnessed him. Together they stole out to where the sled stood. It was the

work of only a few moments to fasten the dog between the runners. Then as noiselessly as possible, dog and sled and little boy took the rough and narrow road, hardly more than a trail, down the mountain.

That was a never-to-be-forgotten ride, taken in sight of lakes, glaciers, streams and waterfalls, with always the snow-capped mountains in the distance. Far off the child saw Two Medicine River with its stupendous cliffs of red jargellite and green and yellow limestones which added to the wonderful coloring of that Christmas Eve in the far northern region. Tall trees reared their branches on either side of the mountain-trail—spruce, tamarac, arbor, vitex, hemlock and pine. Young as the child was, and intent as he needs must be on his dog and the narrow road they were traversing, he nevertheless, sensed some of the beauty of his surroundings, for had not Father Andre, priest, poet and dreamer, pointed it out to him because he saw in the soft brown eyes of Jean Baptiste a ready understanding of what the Great Spirit had done for that favored region?

Three miles of steady descent, and at last they had left the mountain trail. With a little sigh of relief Jean Baptiste guided his dog out on to the good road that ran across the plain and past the fort, a road packed hard with smoothly frozen snow, which was a whimper of pain from Wolf as he held up a limp paw. Nor did it take the child a moment to see that the dog's paw was broken. The harness and snapped trace he could repair, even though it would take time, for he had stout cord and leather thongs with him, as well as his trusty jack-knife, a present last Christmas from Father Andre.

But Wolf? It would be impossible for the dog to pull the sled any further. What then was to be done? Inside the grime old fort, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon of that Christmas Eve, a man and a woman were standing near a window looking out toward Chief Mountain. Their attitude denoted plainly that they were postponing as long as possible the inevitable saying of a farewell.

The girl, young and beautiful, with a soft, alluring loveliness, was the nineteen-year-old daughter of the middle-aged commandant of the fort, Colonel Trevor. Her companion, six years her senior, tall, handsome, and splendidly built, was Lieutenant David Francis of the Ninth Cavalry, aide de camp to the colonel and hence so often delegated by him to act as his daughter's bodyguard, escort and aide on walks, drives and other expeditions which took them far afield. The almost inevitable result had followed—they were desperately in love.

Looking at the girl for a second time a thoughtful observer would have noted that, joined to the soft lines of youth and beauty, her face had strength and purpose. The lovely mouth was finely cut, the eyes had a steadfast expression, and the firm chin showed both decision and power. And, indeed, she had need of strength for she, a devout Catholic, was now facing the fact that her lover, also a Catholic, not was, as she had supposed, merely careless, but, alas! steeped more or less in unbelief.

At the present time Colonel Trevor was in Washington and during his absence orders had come from the war office that Lieutenant Francis had been transferred to another fort, farther east. He had had ten days' leave before joining his new command, and Christmas Eve saw him about to start for Omaha. It did not need the shock of approaching separation to tell David Francis how deeply he loved the woman now standing by his side, in her eyes a dumb misery and appeal.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck three. There came a tap on the door and an orderly appeared, saluted and waited for the command to speak. "Sergeant Collins and the sled await you, sir," he said.

The door closed again and quickly the young lieutenant got into his coat and buttoned it up. Then he turned to the girl.

"Your decision is final, Sheila?" Her small hands were held tightly together, but her mind did not falter. "It must be as I have told you, David. You know how I love you. You know, too, how much I would give up for you, but I cannot barter or give up my faith, my pearl of great price. Since you have told me that our holy religion is nothing to you, and that if I marry you religion must never be mentioned in our household, you have left no other course open to me."

"But I have also told you that in the practice of your religion you would be free."

"Oh, my dearest," she said, "do you not see what a wall of separation there would be between us? How could we be happy or united if our lives were lived as you have planned?"

He was at the door now, one hand on the knob, ready to depart, and for one lightning-like instant he saw a look on her face like unto that of some triumphant angel. For a moment longer he stood there, then without another backward look he went. Outside he pulled his cap low

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