

# THE SISTERS

## CHAPTER XIV. IN THE WOMB OF FATE.

On the Thursday immediately preceding the opening of the exhibition they did not go to the library as usual, nor to Gungler's for their lunch. Like a number of other people, their habits were deranged and themselves demoralized by anticipation of the impending festival. They stayed at home to make themselves new bonnets for the occasion, and took a cold dinner while at their work, and two of them did not stir outside their rooms from morn till dewy eve for so much as a glance into Myrtle street from the balcony.

But in the afternoon it was found that half a yard more of ribbon was required to complete the last of the bonnets, and Patty volunteered to "run into town" to fetch it. At about 4 o'clock she set off alone by way of an adjoining road which was an omnibus route, intending to expend threepence, for once, in the purchase of a little precious treat, but every omnibus was full, and she had to walk the whole way. The pavements were crowded with hurrying folk, who jostled and obstructed her. Collis street, when she turned into it seemed riotous with abnormal life, and she went from shop to shop and could not get waited on until the usual closing hour was past, and the evening beginning to grow dark. Then she got what she wanted, and set off home by way of the Gardens, feeling a little daunted by the noise and bustle of the streets, and fancying she would be secure when once those green alleys, always so peaceful, were reached. But to-night even the gardens were infested by the spirit of unrest and enterprise that pervaded the city. The quiet walks were not quiet now, and the sense of her belated isolation in the growing dusk seemed more formidable here instead of less. For hardly had she passed through the gates into the Treasury enclosure than she was conscious of being watched and peered at by strange men, who appeared to swarm all over the place; and by the time she had reached the Gardens nearer home the appalling fact was forced upon her that a tobacco-scented individual was dogging her steps, as if with an intention of accosting her. She was bold, but her imagination was easily wrought upon; and the formless danger, of a kind in which she was totally inexperienced, gave a shock to her nerves. So that when presently, as she hurriedly pattered on, hearing the heavier tread and an occasional artificial cough behind her, she suddenly saw a still more expeditious pedestrian hastening by, and recognized Paul's light figure and active gait, the words seemed to utter themselves without conscious effort of hers—"Mr. Brion—oh, Mr. Brion, is that you?"

He stopped at the first sound of her voice, looked back and saw the man behind her, and comprehended the situation immediately. Without speaking, he stepped to her side and offered his arm, which she took for his happy moment, when the delightful sense of his protection was too strong for her, and then—reacting violently from that mood—released it. "I—I am mortified with myself for being such a fool," she said angrily; "but really that person did frighten me. I don't know what is the matter with Melbourne to-night—I suppose it is the exhibition." And she went on to explain how she came to be abroad alone at that hour, and to explain away, as she hoped, her apparent satisfaction in meeting him. "It seems to promise for a fine day, does it not?" she concluded airily, looking up at the sky.

Paul Brion put his hands in his pockets. He was mortified, too. When he spoke, it was with icy composure. "Are you going to the opening?" "Yes," said Patty. "Of course we are." "With your swell friends, I suppose?" "Whom do you mean by our swell friends? Mrs. Duff-Scott is not in Melbourne, I believe—if you allude to her. But she is not swell. The only swell person we know is Mrs. Aarons, and she is not our friend."

He allowed the allusion to Mrs. Aarons to pass. "Well, I hope you will have good seats," he said, moodily. "It will be a disgusting crush and scramble, I expect." "Seats? Oh, we are not going to have seats," said Patty. "We are going to mingle with the common herd, and look on at the civic functions, humbly, from the outside. We are not swell"—dwelling upon the adjective with a malicious enjoyment of the suspicion that he had not meant to use it—"and we like to be independent."

"O yes, I know you do. But you'll find the Rights of Woman not much good to you to-morrow there on the foot without an escort, if you go how you propose to take care of yourselves?" "We are going," said Patty, "to start very early indeed, and to take up a certain advantageous position that we have already selected before the streets fill. We shall have a little elevation above the heads of the crowd, and a wall at our backs, and—the three of us together—we shall see the procession beautifully, and be quite safe and comfortable."

"Well, I hope you won't find yourself mistaken," he replied. "A few minutes later Patty burst into the room where her sisters were sitting, placidly occupied with their bonnet-making, her eyes shining with excitement. "Elizabeth, Elizabeth," she cried breathlessly, "Paul Brion is going to ask you to let him be our escort to-morrow. But you won't—oh, you won't—have him, will you?"

"No, dear," said Elizabeth, serenely; "not if you would rather not. Why should we? It will be broad daylight, when there can be no harm in our being out without an escort. We shall be much happier by ourselves."

"Much happier than with him," added Patty, sharply.

And they went on with their preparations for the great day that had been so long desired, little thinking what it was to bring forth.

CHAPTER XV.  
ELIZABETH FINDS A FRIEND.

They had an early breakfast, dressed themselves with great care in their best frocks and the new bonnets, and, each carrying an umbrella, set forth with a cheerful resolve to see what was to be seen of the ceremonies of the day, blissfully ignorant of the nature of their under-

taking. Paul Brion, out of bed betimes, heard their voices and the click of their feet, and stepped into his balcony to see them start. He took note of the pretty costumes, that had a gala air about them, and of the fresh and striking beauty of at least two of the three sweet faces; and he groaned to think of such women being hustled and battered, helplessly, in the fierce crush of a solid street crowd. But they had no fear whatever for themselves. However, they had not gone far before they perceived that the idea of securing a good position early in the day had occurred to a great many people besides themselves. Even sleepy Myrtle Street was awake and active, and the adjoining road, when they turned into it, was teeming with holiday life. They took their favorite route through the Fitzroy and Treasury Gardens, and found those sylvan glades alive with traffic; and by the time they got into Spring street the crowd had thickened to an extent that embarrassed their progress and made it devious and slow. And they had scarcely passed the Treasury buildings when Eleanor, who had been suffering from a slight sore throat, began to cough and shiver, and aroused the maternal anxiety of her careful elder sister. "O, my dear," said Elizabeth, coming to an abrupt standstill on the pavement, "have you nothing but that wisp of muslin round your neck? And the day so cold—don't you look like rain! It will never do for you to stand about for hours in this unless you have the chance of getting wet, we must run home again and fix you up. And I think it would be wiser if we were all to change our things and put on our old bonnets."

"Now, look here, Elizabeth," said Patty, with strong emphasis; "you see that street, don't you?"—and she pointed down the main thoroughfare of the city, which was already gorged with people throughout its length. "You see that, and that?"—and she indicated the swarming road ahead of them and the populous valley in the crowd now, what will there be in half an hour's time? And we couldn't do it in half an hour. Let us make Nelly tie up her throat in our three pocket-handkerchiefs, and push on and get our places. Otherwise we shall be out of it altogether—we shall see nothing."

But the gentle Elizabeth was obtuse on some occasions, and this was one of them. Eleanor was chilled with the cold, and it was not to be thought of that she should run the risk of an illness from imprudent exposure—no, not for all the exhibitions in the world. So they compromised the case by deciding that Patty and Eleanor should "run" home together, while the elder sister awaited their return, keeping possession of a little post of vantage on the Treasury steps—where they would be able to see the procession, if not the Exhibition—in case the crowd should be too great by-and-by to allow of their getting farther.

"Well, make yourself as big as you can," said Patty, resignedly. "And, whatever you do," implored Eleanor, "don't stir an inch from where you are until we come back, lest we should lose you."

Upon which they set off in hot haste to Myrtle street. Elizabeth, when they were gone, saw with alarm the rapid growth of the crowd around her. It filled up the street in all directions, and condensed into a solid mass on the Treasury steps, very soon absorbing the modest amount of space that she had hoped to reserve for her sisters. In much less than half an hour she was so hopelessly wedged in her place that, tall and stonily as she was, she was almost lifted off her feet; and there was no prospect of restoring communications with Patty and Eleanor until the show was over. In a fever of anxiety, to part from them, she kept her eyes turned towards the gate of the Gardens, whence she expected them to emerge; and then she saw, presently, the figure of their good genius and deliverer from all dilemmas, Paul Brion, fighting his way towards her. The little man pursued an energetic course through the crowd, which almost covered him, hurling himself along with a velocity that was out of all proportion to his bulk; and from time to time she saw his quick eyes flashing over other people's shoulders, and that he was looking eagerly in all directions. It seemed hopeless to expect him to distinguish her in the sea of faces around him, but he did. Sunk in the human tide that rose in the street above the level of his head, he made desperately for a footing on a higher plane, and in so doing caught sight of her and battled his way to her side. "Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed, in a tone of relief. "I have been so anxious about you. But where is Miss Patty? Where are your sisters?"

"Oh, Mr. Brion," she responded, "you always seem to turn up to help us as soon as we get into trouble, and I am so thankful to see you! The girls had to go home for a moment, and were to meet me here, and I don't know what will become of them in this crowd."

"Which way were they to come?" he inquired eagerly. "By the Gardens. But the gates are completely blocked." "I will go and find them," he said. "Don't be anxious about them. They will be in there—they will be all right. You will come, too, won't you? I think I can manage to get you through."

"I can't," she replied. "I promised I would not stir from this place, and I must not, in case they should be in the street, or we should miss them."

"The boy stood on the burning deck," he quoted, with a laugh. He could afford a little jest, though she was so serious, for he was happy in the conviction that the girls had been unable to reach the street, that he should find them disconsolate in the gardens, and compel Miss Patty to feel, if not to acknowledge, that he was of some use and comfort to her after all. "But I hate to leave you here," he added, glaring upon her uncomfortable but inoffensive neighbors, "all alone by yourself."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Elizabeth, cheerfully. "If you can only find Patty and Nelly, and be so good as to take care of them, I shall be all right."

And so, with apparent reluctance, but the utmost real alacrity, he left her, flinging himself from the steps into the crowd like a swimmer diving into the sea, and she saw him disappear with an easy mind.

But long before the Queen's representative made his appearance upon the scene, Elizabeth had ceased to see or care for the great spectacle that she had been so anxious to witness. Moment by moment the crowd about her grew more dense and dogged, more pitilessly indifferent to the comfort of one another, more evidently minded that the fittest should survive in the fight for existence on the treasury steps. Rough men pushed her forward and backward, and from side to side, treading on her feet, and tearing the stitches of her gown, and knocking her bonnet awry, until that she got, and the keen consciousness of the indignity of her position. She could hardly breathe for the pressure around her, though the breath of all sorts of unpleasant people was freely poured into her face. She would have struggled away and gone home—convinced of the comforting fact that Patty and Eleanor were safely out of it in Paul Brion's protection—but she could not stir an inch by her own volition. When she did stir it was by some violent propelling power in another person, and this was exercised presently in such a way as to completely overbalance her. A sudden wave of movement broke against a stout woman standing immediately behind her, and the stout woman, quite unintentionally, pushed her to the shoulder of the step, and flung her upon the larrikin who had been standing in the crowd, and she found herself in a position to make conversation, which was less embarrassing to her than silence. He remarked that he was fond of crowds himself—found them intensely interesting—and spoke of Thackeray's paper on the crowd that went to see the man hanged (which she had never meant. He had lately seen the crowd at the opening of the Trocadero Palace, and that which celebrated the completion of Cologne Cathedral; facts which proclaimed him a "globe-trotter" and now arrived in Melbourne. The few words in which he described the festival at Cologne fired her imagination, fed so long upon dreams of foreign travel, and made her forget for the moment that he was not an old acquaintance.

"It was at about this hour of the day," he said, "and I stood with the throng in the last stone on the top of the cross on one of the towers more than six hundred years after the foundation stone was laid. The people were wild with joy and hung out their flags all over the place. One old fellow came up to me and wanted to kiss me—he thought I must be as overcome as he was."

"And were you not impressed?" "Of course I was. It was very pathetic," he replied, gently. And she thought "pathetic" an odd word to use. Why pathetic? She did not like to ask him. Then he made the further curious statement that this crowd was the tamest he had ever seen.

"I don't call it tame," she said, with a laugh, as the yells of the larrikin and his fellows rent the air around them. He responded to her laugh with a pleasant smile, and his voice was friendly when he spoke again. "But I am quite delighted with it, unimpressive as it is. It is composed of people who are not wanting anything. I don't know that I was ever in a crowd of that sort before. I feel, for once, that I can breathe in peace."

"Oh, I wish I could feel so!" she cried. The carriages, in their slow progress, were now turning at the top of Collins street, and the hubbub around them had reached its height. "It will soon be over now," he murmured encouragingly. "Yes," she replied. In a few minutes the crush would lessen, and he and she would part. That was what they thought, to the exclusion of all interest in the passing spectacle. Even as she spoke the passion and confusion that had made a solitude for their quiet intercourse sensibly subsided. The tail of the procession was well in sight; the heavy crowd on the Treasury steps was swaying and breaking like a huge wave upon the street; the larrikin was gone. It resumed the conventional attitude, and for Elizabeth to remember that he was a total stranger to her.

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"You had better take my arm," he said, as she hastily disengaged herself before it was safe to do so, and was immediately caught in the eddy that was setting strongly in the direction of the Exhibition. "If you don't mind waiting here for a few minutes longer, you will be able to get home comfortably."

She struggled back to his side, and took his arm, and waited; but they did not talk any more. They watched the disintegration and dispersion of the great mass that they stood in ease and freedom almost alone upon that coigne of vantage which had been won with so much difficulty—two rather imposing figures, if anyone had cared to notice them. Then she withdrew her hand, and said, with a little stiff bow and a bright and becoming color in her face—"Thank you."

"Don't mention it," he replied, with perfect gravity. "I am very happy to have been of any service to you."

Still they did not move from where they stood. "Don't you want to see the rest of it?" she asked timidly. "Do you?" he responded, looking at her with a smile. "O dear no, thank you! I have had quite enough, and I am very anxious to find my sisters."

"Then allow me to be your escort until you are clear of the streets." He did not put it as a request, and he began to descend the steps before she could make up her mind how to answer him. So she found herself walking beside him along the footpath and through the gardens, wondering who he was, and how she could politely dismiss him. Now and then she snatched a sidelong glance at him, and noted his great stature and the easy dignity with which he carried himself, and transferred one by one the striking features of his countenance to her faithful memory. He made a powerful impression upon her. Thinking of him, she had almost forgotten how anxious she was to find her sisters until, with a start, she suddenly caught sight of them sitting comfortably on a bench in an alley of the Fitzroy Gardens, Eleanor and Patty side by side, and Paul

him, she drew her feet back another inch or two; upon which the right arm as well as the left was firmly folded round her. And the pressure of those two arms stretched like iron bars to defend her from harm, the throbbing of his heart upon her shoulder, the sound of his deep-breathed breathing in her ear—no consideration of the involuntary and unromantic necessity of the situation could calm the tremulous excitement communicated to her by these things. Oh, how hideous, how simply insupportable it would have been, had she been cast upon his! As it was, it was all right. He said he feared she was terribly uncomfortable, but, though she did not contradict him, she soul that she had never been more comfortable. To be cared for and protected was a new sensation, and though she had had to bear anxious responsibilities for herself and others, she had no natural vocation for independence. Many a time since have they spoken of this first half hour with pride, boasting of how they trusted each other at sight, needing no proofs from experience were but a man and woman, and not gods. "I took you to my heart the first moment I saw you," he said. "And I knew, even as soon as that, that it was my own place," she calmly replied. Whereas good luck, and not their own wisdom, justified them.

He spoke to her with studied coldness while necessarily holding her embraced, as it were, to protect her from the crowd; at the same time he put himself to some trouble to make conversation, which was less embarrassing to her than silence. He remarked that he was fond of crowds himself—found them intensely interesting—and spoke of Thackeray's paper on the crowd that went to see the man hanged (which she had never meant. He had lately seen the crowd at the opening of the Trocadero Palace, and that which celebrated the completion of Cologne Cathedral; facts which proclaimed him a "globe-trotter" and now arrived in Melbourne. The few words in which he described the festival at Cologne fired her imagination, fed so long upon dreams of foreign travel, and made her forget for the moment that he was not an old acquaintance.

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Brion on the other side of Eleanor. She sprang up as soon as they saw her coming, with gestures of eager welcome. "Ah!" said Elizabeth, her face flaming with an entirely unnecessary blush, "there are my sisters. I—I am all right now. I need not trouble you any further. Thank you very much."

She paused and so did he. She bent her head without lifting her eyes, and he took off his hat to her with profound respect. And so they parted—for a little while.

CHAPTER XVII.  
AFTERNOON TEA.

When he had turned and left her, Elizabeth faced her sisters with that vivid blush still on her cheeks, and a general appearance of embarrassment that was too novel to escape notice. Patty and Eleanor stared for a moment, and Eleanor laughed. "Who is he?" she inquired, saucily. "I don't know," said Elizabeth. "Where have you been, dear? How have you got on? I have been so anxious about you."

"I have not the least idea, I tell you. Perhaps Mr. Brion knows." "No," said Mr. Brion. "He is a perfect stranger to me."

"He is a new arrival, I suppose," said Elizabeth, stealing a backward glance at her hero, whom the others were watching intently as he walked away. "Yes, he can have but just arrived, for he saw the last stone put to the building of Cologne Cathedral, and that was not more than six or seven weeks ago. He has come to see the exhibition, probably. He seems to be a great traveller."

"Oh," said Eleanor, turning with a grimace to Patty, "here have we been mooning about in the gardens, and she has been seeing everything, and having adventures into the bargain!"

"It is very little I have seen," her elder sister remarked, "and this will tell you the nature of my adventures"—and she showed them a rent in her gown. "I was nearly torn to pieces by the crowd after you left. I am only too thankful you were out of it."

"But we are not at all thankful!" pouted Eleanor. "Are we, Patty?" (Patty was silent, but apparently amiable.) "It is only the stitching that is undone—you can mended little trifles of that sort—not in the least—to have seen the procession, and made the acquaintance of distinguished travellers. Were there many more of them about, do you suppose?"

"O no," replied Elizabeth, promptly. "Only he." "And you managed to find him! Why shouldn't we have found him too—Patty and I? Do tell us his name, Elizabeth, and how you happened on him, and what he has been saying and doing."

"He took care of me, dear—that's all. I was crushed almost into a pulp, and he allowed me to—stand beside him until the worst of it was over."

"How interesting!" ejaculated Eleanor. "And then he talked to you about Cologne Cathedral?" "Yes. But never mind about him. Tell me where Mr. Brion found you, and what you have been doing."

"Oh, we have not been doing anything—far from it. I wish you knew his name, Elizabeth." "But, my dear, I don't. So leave off asking silly questions. I daresay we shall never see or hear of him again."

"Oh, don't you believe it! I'm certain we shall see him again. He will be at the Exhibition some day when we go there—tomorrow, very likely."

"Well, never mind. What are we going to do now?" They consulted with Paul for a few minutes, and he took them where they could get a distant view of the crowds swarming around the exhibition, and hear the confused clamor of the bands—which seemed to gratify the two younger sisters very much, in the absence of more pronounced excitement. They walked about over the great dome, and heard the saluting guns proclaim that the exhibition was open; and then they returned to Myrtle street, with a sense of having had breakfast in the remote past, and of having spent an enormously long morning not unpleasantly upon the whole.

Mrs. McIntyre was standing at her gate when they reached home, and stopped them to ask what they had seen, and how they had enjoyed themselves. She had stayed quietly in the house, and busied herself in the manufacture of meringues and lemon cheese-cakes—having, she explained, superfluous eggs in the larder, and a new lodger coming in; and she evidently prided herself upon her well-spent time. "And if you'll stay, you shall have some." And she opened the gate hospitably. "Now, don't say no, Miss King—don't, Miss Nelly. It's past 11, and I've got a nice outlet and mashed potatoes just coming on the table. Bring them along, Mr. Brion. I'm sure they'll come if you ask them."

(To be Continued)  
—To build and fit up a hansom cab costs about \$250.  
—The Duke of Fife is always measured for his neckties.

"How are you?"  
"Nicely, Thank You."  
"Thank Who?"  
Why the inventor of  
**SCOTT'S**  
**EMULSION**  
Which cured me of CONSUMPTION.  
Give thanks for its discovery. That it does not make you sick when you take it.  
Give thanks. That it is three times as efficacious as the old-fashioned cod liver oil.  
Give thanks. That it is such a wonderful flesh producer.  
Give thanks. That it is the best remedy for Consumption, Scrofula, Bronchitis, Wasting Diseases, Coughs and Colds.  
Be sure you get the genuine in Salmon color wrapper; sold by all Druggists, at 50c. and \$1.00.  
SCOTT & BOWNE, Belleville.