

Hope Anthony

Sophy of Kravonia: A Novel



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INTRODUCTION

The following narrative falls naturally into three divisions, corresponding to distinct and clearly marked periods of Sophy's life. Of the first and second – her childhood at Morptingham and her sojourn in Paris – the records are fragmentary, and tradition does little to supplement them. As regards Morptingham, the loss is small. The annals of a little maid-servant may be left in vagueness without much loss. Enough remains to show both the manner of child Sophy was and how it fell out that she spread her wings and left the Essex village far behind her. It is a different affair when we come to the French period. The years spent in and near Paris, in the care and under the roof of Lady Margaret Duddington, were of crucial moment in Sophy's development. They changed her from what she had been and made her what she was to be. Without Paris, Kravonia, still extraordinary, would have been impossible.

Yet the surviving history of Paris and the life there is scanty. Only a sketch is possible. A record existed – and a fairly full one – in the Julia Robins correspondence; that we know from Miss Robins herself. But the letters written from Paris by Sophy to her lifelong friend have, with some few exceptions, perished. Miss Robins accounts for this – and in view of her careful preservation of later correspondence, her apology must be accepted – by the fact that during these years – from 1866 to 1870 – she was constantly travelling from town to town and from lodging to lodging, as a member of various theatrical companies; this nomadic existence did not promote the careful and methodical storage of her letters. It may, of course, be added that no such obvious interest attached to these records as gathered round Sophy's doings after she had exchanged Paris and the Rue de Grenelle for Slavna and the Castle of Praslok.

When this migration has been effected, the historian is on much firmer ground; he is even embarrassed sometimes by the abundance of material of varying value. Apart from public records and general memory (both carefully consulted on the spot), the two main sources flow from Sophy's own hand. They are the Robins correspondence and the diary. Nearly to the end the letters are very constant, very full, very instructive; but they are composed with an obvious view to the tastes and interests of their recipient, and by no means always devote most space to what now seems of greatest interest. In one point, however, Miss Robins's tastes prove of real service. This lady, who rose to a respectable, if not a high, position as a Shakespearian actress, was much devoted to the study of costume, and Sophy, aware of this hobby, never omits to tell her with minute care what she herself wore on every occasion, what the other ladies wore, and what were the uniforms, military or civil, in which the men were arrayed. Trivial, perhaps, yet of great value in picturing the scenes!

In her letters Sophy is also copious in depicting places, houses, and landscapes – matters on which the diary is naturally not so full. So that, in spite of their great faults, the letters form a valuable supplement to the diary. Yet what faults – nay, what crimes! Sophy had learned to talk French perfectly and to write it fairly well. She had not learned to write English well or even decently; the letters are, in fact, a charnel-house of murdered grammar and broken-backed sentences. Still there emerge from it all a shrewdness and a rural vigor and raciness which show that the child of the little Essex farm-house survived in the writer.

But for this Kravonian period – the great period – the diary is the thing. Yet it is one of the most unconscientious diaries ever written. It is full of gaps; it is often posted up very unpunctually; it is sometimes exasperatingly obscure – there may be some intention in that; she could not tell into what hands it might fall. But it covers most of the ground; it begins almost with Sophy's arrival in

Slavna, and the last entry records her discovery of Lord Dunstanbury's presence in Kravonia. It is written for the most part in French, and she wrote French, as has been said, decently – nay, even forcibly, though not with elegance; yet she frequently relapses into English – often of a very colloquial order: this happens mostly under the influence of anger or some other strong emotion. And she is dramatic – that must be allowed to her. She concentrates her attention on what she conceives (nor is her instinct far out) to be her great scenes; she gives (or purports to give) a verbatim report of critical conversations, and it is only just to say that she allows her interlocutors fair play. She has candor – and that, working with the dramatic sense in her, forbids her to warp the scene. In the earlier parts of the story she shows keen appreciation of its lighter aspects; as times grow graver, her records, too, change in mood, working up to the tense excitement, the keen struggle, the burning emotions of her last days in Kravonia. Yet even then she always finds time for a laugh and a touch of gayety.

When Sophy herself ceases to be our guide, Lord Dunstanbury's notes become the main authority. They are supplemented by the recollection of Mr. Basil Williamson, now practising his profession of surgery in Australia; and this narrative is also indebted to Colonel Markart, sometime secretary to General Stenovics, for much important information which, as emanating from the enemy's camp, was not accessible to Sophy or her informants. The contributions of other actors in the drama, too numerous to mention here, will be easily identified in their place in the story.

A word seems desirable on one other subject, and no mean one; for it is certain that Sophy's physical gifts were a powerful ally to her ambition, her strong will, and her courage; it is certain, too, that she did not shrink from making the most of this reinforcement to her powers. All the authorities named above – not excepting Sophy herself – have plenty to say on the topic, and from their descriptions a portrait of her may be attempted. Of actual pictures one only exists – in the possession of the present Lord Dunstanbury, who succeeded his father – Sophy's Earl – a few years ago. It is a pastel, drawn just before she left Paris – and, to be frank, it is something of a disappointment; the taste of the 'sixties is betrayed in a simper which sits on the lips but is alien to the character of them. Still the outline and the color are there.

Her hair was very dark, long, and thick; her nose straight and fine, her lips firm and a trifle full. Her complexion was ordinarily very pale, and she did not flush save under considerable agitation of mind or exertion of body. She was above the middle height, finely formed, and slender. It was sometimes, indeed, objected that her shape was too masculine – the shoulders a trifle too square and the hips too small for a woman. These are, after all, matters of taste; she would not have been thought amiss in ancient Athens. All witnesses agree in describing her charm as lying largely in movement, in vivacity, in a sense of suppressed force trying to break out, or (as Mr. Williamson puts it) of "tremendous driving power."

The personality seems to stand out fairly distinct from these descriptions, and we need the less regret that a second picture, known to have been painted soon after her arrival in Kravonia, has perished either through carelessness or (more probably) by deliberate destruction; there were many in Kravonia not too anxious that even a counterfeit presentment of the famous "Red Star" and its wearer should survive. It would carry its memories and its reproach.

"The Red Star!" The name appears first in a letter of the Paris period – one of the few which are in existence. Its invention is attributed by Sophy to her friend the Marquis de Savres (of whom we shall hear again). He himself used it often. But of the thing we hear very early – and go on hearing from time to time. Sophy at first calls it "my mark," but she speedily adopts Monsieur le Marquis's more poetical term, and by that description it is known throughout her subsequent career. The polite artist of the 'sixties shirked it altogether by giving a half-profile view of his subject, thus not showing the left cheek where the "star" was situated.

It was, in fact, a small birth-mark, placed just below the cheek-bone, almost round, yet with a slightly indented outline. No doubt a lover (and M. de Savres was one) found warrant enough for his phrase. At ordinary times it was a very pale red in color, but (unlike the rest of her face) it was very

rapidly sensitive to any change of mood or temper; in moments of excitement the shade deepened greatly, and (as Colonel Markart says in his hyperbolic strain) "it glowed like angry Venus." Without going quite that length, we are bound to allow that it was, at these moments, a conspicuous and striking mark, and such it clearly appeared to the eyes of all who saw it. "La dame à l'étoile rouge," says the Marquis. "The Red-starred Witch," said the less courteous and more hostile citizens and soldiers of Kravonia. Sophy herself appears proud of it, though she feigns to consider it a blemish. Very probably it was one of those peculiarities which become so closely associated and identified with the personality to which they belong as at once to heighten the love of friends and to attract an increased dislike or hatred from those already disposed or committed to enmity. At any rate, for good or evil, it is as "Red Star" that the name of Sophy lives to-day in the cities and mountains of Kravonia.

So much in preface; now to the story. Little historical importance can be claimed for it. But amateurs of the picturesque, if yet there be such in this business-like world, may care to follow Sophy from Morpingham to Paris, to share her flight from the doomed city, to be with her in the Street of the Fountain, at venerable Praslok, on Volseni's crumbling wall, by the banks of the swift-flowing Krath at dawn of day – to taste something of the spirit that filled, to feel something of the love that moved, the heart of Sophy Grouch of Morpingham, in the county of Essex. Still, sometimes Romance beckons back her ancient votaries.

PART I

MORPINGHAM

I

ENOCH GROUCH'S DAUGHTER

Grouch! That is the name – and in the interest of euphony it is impossible not to regret the fact. Some say it should be spelled "Groutch," which would not at all mend matters, though it makes the pronunciation clear beyond doubt – the word must rhyme with "crouch" and "couch." Well might Lady Meg Duddington swear it was the ugliest name she had ever heard in her life! Sophy was not of a very different opinion, as will be shown by-and-by. She was Grouch on both sides – unmixed and unredeemed. For Enoch Grouch married his uncle's daughter Sally, and begat, as his first child, Sophy. Two other children were born to him, but they died in early infancy. Mrs. Grouch did not long survive the death of her little ones; she was herself laid in Morpingham church-yard when Sophy was no more than five years old. The child was left to the sole care of her father, a man who had married late for his class – indeed, late for any class – and was already well on in middle age. He held a very small farm, lying about half a mile behind the church. Probably he made a hard living of it, for the only servant in his household was a slip of a girl of fifteen, who had, presumably, both to cook and scrub for him and to look after the infant Sophy. Nothing is remembered of him in Morpingham. Perhaps there was nothing to remember – nothing that marked him off from thousands like him; perhaps the story of his death, which lives in the village traditions, blotted out the inconspicuous record of his laborious life.

Morpingham lies within twenty-five miles of London, but for all that it is a sequestered and primitive village. It contained, at this time at least, but three houses with pretensions to gentility – the Hall, the Rectory, and a smaller house across the village street, facing the Rectory. At the end of the street stood the Hall in its grounds. This was a handsome, red-brick house, set in a spacious garden. Along one side of the garden there ran a deep ditch, and on the other side of the ditch, between it and a large meadow, was a path which led to the church. Thus the church stood behind the Hall grounds; and again, as has been said, beyond the church was Enoch Grouch's modest farm, held of Mr. Brownlow, the owner of the Hall. The church path was the favorite resort of the villagers, and deservedly, for it was shaded and beautified by a fine double row of old elms, forming a stately avenue to the humble little house of worship.

On an autumn evening in the year 1855 Enoch Grouch was returning from the village, where he had been to buy tobacco. His little girl was with him. It was wild weather. A gale had been blowing for full twenty-four hours, and in the previous night a mighty bough had been snapped from one of the great elms and had fallen with a crash. It lay now right across the path. As they went to the village, her father had indulged Sophy with a ride on the bough, and she begged a renewal of the treat on their homeward journey. The farmer was a kind man – more kind than wise, as it proved, on this occasion. He set the child astraddle on the thick end of the bough, then went to the other end, which was much slenderer. Probably his object was to try to shake the bough and please his small tyrant with the imitation of a see-saw. The fallen bough suggested no danger to his slow-moving mind. He leaned down towards the bough with out-stretched hands – Sophy, no doubt, watching his doings with excited interest – while the wind raged and revelled among the great branches over their heads.

Enoch tried to move the bough, but failed; in order to make another effort, he fell on his knees and bent his back over it.

At this moment there came a loud crash – heard in the Rectory grounds and in the dining-room at Woodbine Cottage, the small house opposite.

"There's another tree gone!" cried Basil Williamson, the Rector's second son, who was giving his retriever an evening run.

He raced through the Rectory gate, across the road, and into the avenue.

A second later the garden gate of Woodbine Cottage opened, and Julia, the ten-years-old daughter of a widow named Robins who lived there, came out at full speed. Seeing Basil just ahead of her, she called out: "Did you hear?"

He knew her voice – they were playmates – and answered without looking back: "Yes. Isn't it fun? Keep outside the trees – keep well in the meadow!"

"Stuff!" she shouted, laughing. "They don't fall every minute, silly!"

Running as they exchanged these words, they soon came to where the bough – or, rather, the two boughs – had fallen. A tragic sight met their eyes. The second bough had caught the unlucky farmer just on the nape of his neck, and had driven him down, face forward, onto the first. He lay with his neck close pinned between the two, and his arms spread out over the undermost. His face was bad to look at; he was quite dead, and apparently death must have been instantaneous. Sobered and appalled, the boy and girl stood looking from the terrible sight to each other's faces.

"Is he dead?" Julia whispered.

"I expect so," the boy answered. Neither of them had seen death before.

The next moment he raised his voice and shouted: "Help, help!" then laid hold of the upper bough and strove with all his might to raise it. The girl gave a shriller cry for assistance and then lent a hand to his efforts. But between them they could not move the great log.

Up to now neither of them had perceived Sophy.

Next on the scene was Mr. Brownlow, the master of the Hall. He had been in his greenhouse and heard the crash of the bough. Of that he took no heed – nothing could be done save heave a sigh over the damage to his cherished elms. But when the cries for help reached his ears, with praiseworthy promptitude he rushed out straight across his lawn, and (though he was elderly and stout) dropped into the ditch, clambered out of it, and came where the dead man and the children were. As he passed the drawing-room windows, he called out to his wife: "Somebody's hurt, I'm afraid"; and she, after a moment's conference with the butler, followed her husband, but, not being able to manage the ditch, went round by the road and up the avenue, the servant coming with her. When these two arrived, the Squire's help had availed to release the farmer from the deadly grip of the two boughs, and he lay now on his back on the path.

"He's dead, poor fellow," said Mr. Brownlow.

"It's Enoch Grouch!" said the butler, giving a shudder as he looked at the farmer's face. Julia Robins sobbed, and the boy Basil looked up at the Squire's face with grave eyes.

"I'll get a hurdle, sir," said the butler. His master nodded, and he ran off.

Something moved on the path – about a yard from the thick end of the lower bough.

"Look there!" cried Julia Robins. A little wail followed. With an exclamation, Mrs. Brownlow darted to the spot. The child lay there with a cut on her forehead. Apparently the impact of the second bough had caused the end of the first to fly upward; Sophy had been jerked from her seat into the air, and had fallen back on the path, striking her head on a stone. Mrs. Brownlow picked her up, wiped the blood from her brow, and saw that the injury was slight. Sophy began to cry softly, and Mrs. Brownlow soothed her.

"It's his little girl," said Julia Robins. "The little girl with the mark on her cheek, please, Mrs. Brownlow."

"Poor little thing! Poor little thing!" Mrs. Brownlow murmured; she knew that death had robbed the child of her only relative and protector.

The butler now came back with a hurdle and two men, and Enoch Grouch's body was taken into the saddle-room at the Hall. Mrs. Brownlow followed the procession, Sophy still in her arms. At the end of the avenue she spoke to the boy and girl:

"Go home, Basil; tell your father, and ask him to come to the Hall. Good-night, Julia. Tell your mother – and don't cry any more. The poor man is with God, and I sha'n't let this mite come to harm." She was a childless woman, with a motherly heart, and as she spoke she kissed Sophy's wounded forehead. Then she went into the Hall grounds, and the boy and girl were left together in the road. Basil shook his fist at the avenue of elms – his favorite playground.

"Hang those beastly trees!" he cried. "I'd cut them all down if I was Mr. Brownlow."

"I must go and tell mother," said Julia. "And you'd better go, too."

"Yes," he assented, but lingered for a moment, still looking at the trees as though reluctantly fascinated by them.

"Mother always said something would happen to that little girl," said Julia, with a grave and important look in her eyes.

"Why?" the boy asked, brusquely.

"Because of that mark – that mark she's got on her cheek."

"What rot!" he said, but he looked at his companion uneasily. The event of the evening had stirred the superstitious fears seldom hard to stir in children.

"People don't have those marks for nothing – so mother says." Other people, no wiser, said the same thing later.

"Rot!" Basil muttered again. "Oh, well, I must go."

She glanced at him timidly. "Just come as far as our door with me. I'm afraid."

"Afraid!" He smiled scornfully. "All right!"

He walked with her to the door of Woodbine Cottage, and waited till it closed behind her, performing the escort with a bold and lordly air. Left alone in the fast-darkening night, with nobody in sight, with no sound save the ceaseless voice of the angry wind essaying new mischief in the tops of the elm-trees, he stood for a moment listening fearfully. Then he laid his sturdy legs to the ground and fled for home, looking neither to right nor left till he reached the hospitable light of his father's study. The lad had been brave in face of the visible horror; fear struck him in the moment of Julia's talk about the mark on the child's cheek. Scornful and furious at himself, yet he was mysteriously afraid.

II

THE COOK AND THE CATECHISM

Sophy Grouch had gone to lay a bunch of flowers on her father's grave. From the first Mrs. Brownlow had taught her this pious rite, and Mrs. Brownlow's deputy, the gardener's wife (in whose cottage Sophy lived), had seen to its punctual performance every week. Things went by law and rule at the Hall, for the Squire was a man of active mind and ample leisure. His household code was a marvel of intricacy and minuteness. Sophy's coming and staying had developed a multitude of new clauses, under whose benevolent yet strict operation her youthful mind had been trained in the way in which Mr. Brownlow was of opinion that it should go.

Sophy's face, then, wore a grave and responsible air as she returned with steps of decorous slowness from the sacred precincts. Yet the outer manner was automatic – the result of seven years' practice. Within, her mind was busy: the day was one of mark in her life; she had been told her destined future, and was wondering how she would like it.

Her approach was perceived by a tall and pretty girl who lay in the meadow-grass (and munched a blade of it) which bordered the path under the elm-trees.

"What a demure little witch she looks!" laughed Julia Robins, who was much in the mood for laughter that day, greeting with responsive gleam of the eyes the sunlight which fell in speckles of radiance through the leaves above. It was a summer day, and summer was in her heart, too; yet not for the common cause with young maidens; it was no nonsense about love-making – lofty ambition was in the case to-day.

"Sophy Grouch! Sophy Grouch!" she cried, in a high, merry voice.

Sophy raised her eyes, but her steps did not quicken. With the same measured paces of her lanky, lean, little legs, she came up to where Julia lay.

"Why don't you say just 'Sophy'?" she asked. "I'm the only Sophy in the village."

"Sophy Grouch! Sophy Grouch!" Julia repeated, teasingly.

The mark on Sophy's left cheek grew redder. Julia laughed mockingly. Sophy looked down on her, still very grave.

"You do look pretty to-day," she observed – "and happy."

"Yes, yes! So I tease you, don't I? But I like to see you hang out your danger-signal."

She held out her arms to the little girl. Sophy came and kissed her, then sat down beside her.

"Forgive?"

"Yes," said Sophy. "Do you think it's a very awful name?"

"Oh, you'll change it some day," smiled Julia, speaking more truth than she knew. "Listen! Mother's consented, consented, consented! I'm to go and live with Uncle Edward in London – London, Sophy! – and learn elocution – "

"Learn what?"

"E-lo-cu-tion – which means how to talk so that people can hear you ever so far off – "

"To shout?"

"No. Don't be stupid. To – to be heard plainly without shouting. To be heard in a theatre! Did you ever see a theatre?"

"No. Only a circus. I haven't seen much."

"And then – the stage! I'm to be an actress! Fancy mother consenting at last! An actress instead of a governess! Isn't it glorious?" She paused a moment, then added, with a self-conscious laugh: "Basil's awfully angry, though."

"Why should he be angry?" asked Sophy. Her own anger was gone; she was plucking daisies and sticking them here and there in her friend's golden hair. They were great friends, this pair, and Sophy was very proud of the friendship. Julia was grown up, the beauty of the village, and – a lady! Now Sophy was by no means any one of these things.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand," laughed Julia, with a blush.

"Does he want to keep company with you – and won't you do it?"

"Only servants keep company, Sophy."

"Oh!" said Sophy, obviously making a mental note of the information.

"But he's very silly about it. I've just said 'Good-bye,' to him – you know he goes up to Cambridge to-morrow? – and he did say a lot of silly things." She suddenly caught hold of Sophy and kissed her half a dozen times. "It's a wonderful thing that's happened. I'm so tremendously happy!" She set her little friend free with a last kiss and a playful pinch.

Neither caress nor pinch disturbed Sophy's composure. She sat down on the grass.

"Something's happened to me, too, to-day," she announced.

"Has it, Tots? What is it?" asked Julia, smiling indulgently; the great events in other lives are thus sufficiently acknowledged.

"I've left school, and I'm going to leave Mrs. James's and go and live at the Hall, and be taught to help cook; and when I'm grown up I'm going to be cook." She spoke slowly and weightily, her eyes fixed on Julia's face.

"Well, I call it a shame!" cried Julia, in generous indignation. "Oh, of course it would be all right if they'd treated you properly – I mean, as if they'd meant that from the beginning. But they haven't. You've lived with Mrs. James, I know; but you've been in and out of the Hall all the time, having tea in the drawing-room, and fruit at dessert, and – and so on. And you look like a little lady, and talk like one – almost. I think it's a shame not to give you a better chance. Cook!"

"Don't you think it might be rather nice to be a cook – a good cook?"

"No, I don't," answered the budding Mrs. Siddons, decisively.

"People always talk a great deal about the cook," pleaded Sophy. "Mr. and Mrs. Brownlow are always talking about the cook – and the Rector talks about his cook, too – not always very kindly, though."

"No, it's a shame – and I don't believe it'll happen."

"Yes, it will. Mrs. Brownlow settled it to-day."

"There are other people in the world besides Mrs. Brownlow."

Sophy was not exactly surprised at this dictum, but evidently it gave her thought. Her long-delayed "Yes" showed that as plainly as her "Oh" had, a little while before, marked her appreciation of the social limits of "keeping company." "But she can settle it all the same," she persisted.

"For the time she can," Julia admitted. "Oh, I wonder what'll be my first part, Tots!" She threw her pretty head back on the grass, closing her eyes; a smile of radiant anticipation hovered about her lips. The little girl rose and stood looking at her friend – the friend of whom she was so proud.

"You'll look very, very pretty," she said, with sober gravity.

Julia's smile broadened, but her lips remained shut. Sophy looked at her for a moment longer, and, without formal farewell, resumed her progress down the avenue. It was hard on tea-time, and Mrs. James was a stickler for punctuality.

Yet Sophy's march was interrupted once more. A tall young man sat swinging his legs on the gate that led from the avenue into the road. The sturdy boy who had run home in terror on the night Enoch Grouch died had grown into a tall, good-looking young fellow; he was clad in what is nowadays called a "blazer" and check-trousers, and smoked a large meerschaum pipe. His expression was gloomy; the gate was shut – and he was on the top of it. Sophy approached him with some signs of nervousness. When he saw her, he glared at her moodily.

"You can't come through," he said, firmly.

"Please, Mr. Basil, I must, I shall be late for tea."

"I won't let you through. There!"

Sophy looked despairful. "May I climb over?"

"No," said Basil, firmly; but a smile began to twitch about his lips.

Quick now, as ever, to see the joint in a man's armor, Sophy smiled too.

"If you'd let me through, I'd give you a kiss," she said, offering the only thing she had to give in all the world.

"You would, would you? But I hate kisses. In fact, I hate girls all round – big and little."

"You don't hate Julia, do you?"

"Yes, worst of all."

"Oh!" said Sophy – once more the recording, registering "Oh!" – because Julia had given quite another impression, and Sophy sought to reconcile these opposites.

The young man jumped down from the gate, with a healthy laugh at himself and at her, caught her up in his arms, and gave her a smacking kiss.

"That's toll," he said. "Now you can go through, missy."

"Thank you, Mr. Basil. It's not very hard to get through, is it?"

He set her down with a laugh, a laugh with a note of surprise in it; her last words had sounded odd from a child. But Sophy's eyes were quite grave; she was probably recording the practical value of a kiss.

"You shall tell me whether you think the same about that in a few years' time," he said, laughing again.

"When I'm grown up?" she asked, with a slow, puzzled smile.

"Perhaps," said he, assuming gravity anew.

"And cook?" she asked, with a curiously interrogative air – anxious apparently to see what he, in his turn, would think of her destiny.

"Cook? You're going to be a cook?"

"The cook," she amended. "The cook at the Hall."

"I'll come and eat your dinners." He laughed, yet looked a trifle compassionate. Sophy's quick eyes tracked his feelings.

"You don't think it's nice to be a cook, either?" she asked.

"Oh yes, splendid! The cook's a sort of queen," said he.

"The cook a sort of queen? Is she?" Sophy's eyes were profoundly thoughtful.

"And I should be very proud to kiss a queen – a sort of queen. Because I shall be only a poor sawbones."

"Sawbones?"

"A surgeon – a doctor, you know – with a red lamp, like Dr. Seaton at Brentwood."

She looked at him for a moment. "Are you really going away?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes, for a bit – to-morrow."

Sophy's manner expanded into a calm graciousness. "I'm very sorry," she said.

"Thank you."

"You amuse me."

"The deuce I do!" laughed Basil Williamson.

She raised her eyes slowly to his. "You'll be friends, anyhow, won't you?"

"To cook or queen," he said – and heartiness shone through his raillery.

Sophy nodded her head gravely, sealing the bargain. A bargain it was.

"Now I must go and have tea, and then say my catechism," said she.

The young fellow – his thoughts were sad – wanted the child to linger.

"Learning your catechism? Where have you got to?"

"I've got to say my 'Duty towards my Neighbor' to Mrs. James after tea."

"Your 'Duty towards your Neighbor' – that's rather difficult, isn't it?"

"It's very long," said Sophy, resignedly.

"Do you know it?"

"I think so. Oh, Mr. Basil, would you mind hearing me? Because if I can say it to you, I can say it to her, you know."

"All right, fire away."

A sudden doubt smote Sophy. "But do you know it yourself?" she asked.

"Yes, rather, I know it."

She would not take his word. "Then you say the first half, and I'll say the second."

He humored her – it was hard not to – she looked so small and seemed so capable. He began – and tripped for a moment over "'To love, honor, and succor my father and mother.'" The child had no chance there. But Sophy's eyes were calm. He ended, "'teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters.' Now go on," he said.

"'To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters; to hurt nobody by word nor deed; to be true and just in all my dealing; to bear no malice nor hatred in my heart; to keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering; to keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity [the young man smiled for an instant – that sounded pathetic]; not to covet nor desire other men's goods, but to learn and labor truly to get mine own living and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call me.'"

"Wrong!" said Basil. "Go down two!"

"Wrong?" she cried, indignantly disbelieving.

"Wrong!"

"It's not! That's what Mrs. James taught me."

"Perhaps – it's not in the prayer-book. Go and look."

"You tell me first!"

"And to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me." His eyes were set on her with an amused interest.

She stood silent for a moment. "Sure?" she asked then.

"Positive," said he.

"Oh!" said Sophy, for the third time. She stood there a moment longer. Then she smiled at him. "I shall go and look. Good-bye."

Basil broke into a laugh. "Good-bye, missy," he said. "You'll find I'm right."

"If I do, I'll tell you," she answered him, generously, as she turned away.

His smile lasted while he watched her. When she was gone his grievance revived, his gloom returned. He trudged home with never a glance back at the avenue where Julia was. Yet even now the thought of the child crossed his mind; that funny mark of hers had turned redder when he corrected her rendering of the catechism.

Sophy walked into Mrs. James's kitchen. "Please may I read through my 'Duty' before I say it?" she asked.

Permission accorded with some surprise – for hitherto the teaching had been by word of mouth – she got the prayer-book down from its shelf and conned her lesson. After tea she repeated it correctly. Mrs. James noticed no difference.

III BEAUTIFUL JULIA – AND MY LORD

"It seemed somehow impossible, me going to be cook there all my days." So writes Sophy at a later date in regard to her life at Morptingham Hall. To many of us in our youth it has seemed impossible that we should pass all our days in the humdrum occupations and the mediocre positions in which we have in fact spent them. Young ambitions are chronicled only when they have been fulfilled – unless where a born autobiographer makes fame out of his failures. But Sophy had a double portion of original restlessness – this much the records of Morptingham years, scanty as they are, render plain. Circumstances made much play with her, but she was never merely the sport of chance or of circumstances. She was always waiting, even always expecting, ready to take her chance, with arm out-stretched to seize Occasion by the forelock. She co-operated eagerly with Fate and made herself a partner with Opportunity, and she was quick to blame the other members of the firm for any lack of activity or forwardness. "You can't catch the train unless you're at the station – and take care your watch isn't slow," she writes somewhere in the diary. The moral of the reflection is as obvious as its form; it is obvious, too, that a traveller so scrupulous to be in time would suffer proportionate annoyance if the train were late.

The immediate result of this disposition of hers was unhappy, and it is not hard to sympathize with the feelings of the Brownlows. Their benevolence was ample, but it was not unconscious; their benefits, which were very great, appeared to them exhaustive, not only above what Sophy might expect, but also beyond what she could imagine. They had picked her up from the road-side and set her on the way to that sort of kingdom with the prospect of which Basil Williamson had tried to console her. The Squire was an estimable man, but one of small mind; he moved among the little – the contented lord of a pin-point of the earth. Mrs. Brownlow was a profoundly pious woman, to whom content was a high duty, to be won by the performance of other duties. If the Squire detected

in the girl signs of ingratitude to himself, his wife laid equal blame on a rebellion against Heaven. Sophy knew – if not then, yet on looking back – what they felt; her references to them are charged with a remorse whose playful expression (obstinately touched with scorn as it is) does not hide its sincerity. She soon perceived, anyhow, that she was getting a bad character; she, the cook *in posse*, was at open war with Mrs. Smilker, the cook *in esse*; though, to be sure, "Smilker" might have done something to reconcile her to "Grouch!"

Mrs. Brownlow naturally ranged herself on the side of constituted authority, of the superior rank in the domestic hierarchy. Moreover, it is likely that Mrs. Smilker was right in nine cases out of ten, at all events; Sophy recognized that probability in after-life; none the less, she allows herself more than once to speak of "that beast of a Smilker." Mere rectitude as such never appealed to her; that comes out in another rather instructive comment, which she makes on Mrs. Brownlow herself, "Me being what I was, and she what she was, though I was grateful to her, and always shall be, I couldn't love her; and what hit me hardest was that she didn't wonder at it, and, in my opinion, wasn't very sorry either – not in her heart, you know. Me not loving her made what she was doing for me all the finer, you see."

Perhaps these flashes of insight should not be turned on our benefactors, but the extract serves to show another side of Sophy – one which in fairness to her must not be ignored. Not only was restlessness unsatisfied, and young ambitions starved; the emotions were not fed either, or at least were presented with a diet too homely for Sophy's taste. For the greater part of this time she had no friends outside the Hall to turn to. Julia Robins was pursuing her training in London, and, later, her profession in the country. Basil Williamson, who "amused" her, was at Cambridge, and afterwards at his hospital; a glimpse of him she may have caught now and then, but they had no further talk. Very probably he sought no opportunity; Sophy had passed from the infants' school to the scullery; she had grown from a child into a big girl. If prudent Basil kept these transformations in view, none can blame him – he was the son of the Rector of the parish. So, when bidden to the Hall, he ate the potatoes Sophy had peeled, but recked no more of the hand that peeled them. In the main the child was, no doubt, a solitary creature.

So much is what scientific men and historians call "reconstruction" – a hazardous process – at least when you are dealing with human beings. It has been kept within the strict limits of legitimate inference, and accordingly yields meagre results. The return of Julia Robins enables us to put many more of the stones – or bones, or whatever they may be called – in their appropriate places.

It is the summer of 1865 – and Julia is very gorgeous. Three years had passed over her head; her training had been completed a twelvemonth before, and she had been on her first tour. She had come home "to rest" – and to look out for a new engagement. She wore a blue hat with a white feather, a blue skirt, and a red "Garibaldi" shirt; her fair hair was dressed in the latest fashion. The sensation she made in Morptingham needs no record. But her head was not turned; nobody was ever less of a snob than Julia Robins, no friendship ever more independent of the ups and downs of life, on one side or the other, than that which united her and Sophy Grouch. She opened communications with the Hall scullery immediately. And – "Sophy was as much of a darling as ever" – is her warm-hearted verdict.

The Hall was not accessible to Julia, nor Woodbine Lodge to Mrs. Brownlow's little cook-girl. But the Squire's coachman had been at the station when Julia's train came in: her arrival would be known in the Hall kitchen, if not up-stairs. On the morrow she went into the avenue of old elms about twelve o'clock, conjecturing that her friend might have a few free moments about that hour – an oasis between the labors of the morning and the claims of luncheon. Standing there under the trees in all her finery – not very expensive finery, no doubt, yet fresh and indisputably gay – she called her old mocking challenge – "Sophy Grouch! Sophy Grouch!"

Sophy was watching. Her head rose from the other side of the ditch. She was down in a moment, up again, and in her friend's arms. "It's like a puff of fresh air," she whispered, as she kissed her, and then, drawing away, looked her over. Sophy was tall beyond her years, and her head was nearly on a

level with Julia's. She was in her short print gown, with her kitchen apron on; her sleeves rolled up, her face red from the fire, her hands too, no doubt, red from washing vegetables and dishes. "She looked like Cinderella in the first act of a pantomime," is Miss Robins's professional comment – colored, perhaps, also by subsequent events.

"You're beautiful!" cried Sophy. "Oh, that shirt – I love red!" And so on for some time, no doubt. "Tell me about it; tell me everything about it," she urged. "It's the next best thing, you know."

Miss Robins recounted her adventures: they would not seem very dazzling at this distance. Sophy heard them with ardent eyes; they availed to color the mark on her cheek to a rosy tint. "That's being alive," she said, with a deep-drawn sigh.

Julia patted her hand consolingly. "But I'm twenty!" she reminded her friend. "Think how young you are!"

"Young or old's much the same in the kitchen," Sophy grumbled.

Linking arms, they walked up the avenue. The Rector was approaching from the church. Sophy tried to draw her arm away. Julia held it tight. The Rector came up, lifted his hat – and, maybe, his brows. But he stopped and said a few pleasant words to Julia. He had never pretended to approve of this stage career, but Julia had now passed beyond his jurisdiction. He was courteous to her as to any lady. Official position betrayed itself only as he was taking leave – and only in regard to Sophy Grouch.

"Ah, you keep up old friendships," he said – with a rather forced approval. "Please don't unsettle the little one's mind, though. She has to work – haven't you, Sophy? Good-bye, Miss Robins."

Sophy's mark was ruddy indeed as the Rector went on his blameless way, and Julia was squeezing her friend's arm very hard. But Sophy said nothing, except to murmur – just once – "The little one!" Julia smiled at the tone.

They turned and walked back towards the road. Now silence reigned; Julia was understanding, pitying, wondering whether a little reasonable remonstrance would be accepted by her fiery and very unreasonable little friend; scullery-maids must not arraign social institutions nor quarrel with the way of the world. But she decided to say nothing – the mark still glowed. It was to glow more before that day was out.

They came near to the gates. Julia felt a sudden pressure on her arm.

"Look!" whispered Sophy, her eyes lighting up again in interest.

A young man rode up the approach to the Hall lodge. His mare was a beauty; he sat her well. He was perfectly dressed for the exercise. His features were clear-cut and handsome. There was as fine an air of breeding about him as about the splendid Newfoundland dog which ran behind him.

Julia looked as she was bidden. "He's handsome," she said. "Why – " she laughed low – "I believe I know who it is – I think I've seen him somewhere."

"Have you?" Sophy's question was breathless.

"Yes, I know! When we were at York! He was one of the officers there; he was in a box. Sophy, it's the Earl of Dunstanbury!"

Sophy did not speak. She looked. The young man – he could be hardly more than twenty – came on. Sophy suddenly hid behind her friend ("To save my pride, not her own," generous Julia explains – Sophy herself advances no such excuse), but she could see. She saw the rider's eye rest on Julia; did it rest in recognition? It almost seemed so; yet there was doubt. Julia blushed, but she forbore from smiling or from seeking to rouse his memory. Yet she was proud if he remembered her face from across the footlights. The young man, too – being but a young man – blushed a little as he gave the pretty girl by the gate such a glance as discreetly told her that he was of the same mind as herself about her looks. These silent interchanges of opinion on such matters are pleasant diversions as one plods the highway.

He was gone. Julia sighed in satisfied vanity. Sophy awoke to stern realities.

"Gracious!" she cried. "He must have come to lunch! They'll want a salad! You'll be here tomorrow – do!" And she was off, up the drive, and round to her own regions at the back of the house.

"I believe his Lordship did remember my face," thought Julia as she wandered back to Woodbine Cottage.

But Sophy washed lettuces in her scullery – which, save for its base purposes, was a pleasant, airy apartment, looking out on a path that ran between yew hedges and led round from the lawn to the offices of the house. Diligently she washed, as Mrs. Smilker had taught her (whether rightly or not is nothing to the purpose here), but how many miles away was her mind? So far away from lettuces that it seemed in no way strange to look up and see Lord Dunstanbury and his dog on the path outside the window at which she had been performing her task. He began hastily:

"Oh, I say, I've been seeing my mare get her feed, and – er – do you think you could be so good as to find a bone and some water for Lorenzo?"

"Lorenzo?" she said.

"My dog, you know." He pointed to the handsome beast, which wagged an expectant tail.

"Why do you call him that?"

Dunstanbury smiled. "Because he's magnificent. I dare say you never heard of Lorenzo the Magnificent?"

"No. Who was he?"

"A Duke – Duke of Florence – in Italy." He had begun to watch her face, and seemed not impatient for the bone.

"Florence? Italy?" The lettuce dropped from her hands; she wiped her hands slowly on her apron.

"Do you think you could get me one?"

"Yes, I'll get it."

She went to the back of the room and chose a bone.

"Will this do?" she asked, holding it out through the window.

"Too much meat."

"Oh!" She went and got another. "This one all right?"

"Capital! Do you mind if I stay and see him eat it?"

"No."

"Here, Lorenzo! And thank the lady!"

Lorenzo directed three sharp barks at Sophy and fell to. Sophy filled and brought out a bowl of water. Lord Dunstanbury had lighted a cigar. But he was watching Sophy. A new light broke on him suddenly.

"I say, were you the other girl behind the gate?"

"I didn't mean you to see me."

"I only caught a glimpse of you. I remember your friend, though."

"She remembered you, too."

"I don't know her name, though."

"Julia Robins."

"Ah, yes – is it? He's about polished off that bone, hasn't he? Is she – er – a great friend of yours?"

His manner was perhaps a little at fault; the slightest note of chaff had crept into it; and the slightest was enough to put Sophy's quills up.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Why not? Every reason why she should be," he answered with his lips. His eyes answered more, but he refrained his tongue. He was scrupulously a gentleman – more so perhaps than, had sexes and places been reversed, Sophy herself would have been. But his eyes told her. "Only," he went on, "if so, why did you hide?"

That bit of chaff did not anger Sophy. But it went home to a different purpose – far deeper, far truer home than the young man had meant. Not the mark only reddened – even the cheeks flushed. She said no word. With a fling-out of her arms – a gesture strangely, prophetically foreign as it seemed to him in after-days – she exhibited herself – the print frock, the soiled apron, the bare arms, red hands, the ugly knot of her hair, the scrap of cap she wore. For a moment her lips quivered, while the mark – the Red Star of future days and future fame – grew redder still.

The only sound was of Lorenzo's worrying the last tough scrap of bone. The lad, gentleman as he was, was good flesh and blood, too – and the blood was moving. He felt a little tightness in his throat; he was new to it. New, too, was Sophy Grouch to what his eyes said to her, but she took it with head erect and a glance steadily levelled at his.

"Yes," he said. "But I shouldn't have looked at any of that – and I shouldn't have looked at her either."

Brightly the mark glowed; subtly the eyes glowed. There was silence again.

Almost a start marked Dunstanbury's awakening. "Come, Lorenzo!" he cried; he raised his hat and turned away, followed by his dog, Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Sophy took up her lettuces and carried them into the kitchen.

"There you are, at last! And what's put you in a temper now?" asked Mrs. Smilker. She had learned the signs of the mark.

Sophy smiled. "It's not temper this time, Mrs. Smilker. I – I'm very happy to-day," she said. "Oh, I do hope the salad will be good!"

For he who was to eat of the salad – had he not forgotten print frock and soiled apron, bare arms, red hands, ugly knot, and execrable cap? He would not have looked at them – no, nor at beautiful many-tinted Julia Robins in her pride! He had forgotten all these to look at the stained cheek and the eyes of subtle glow. She had glanced in the mirror of love and sipped from the cup of power.

Such was her first meeting with Lord Dunstanbury. If it were ever forgotten, it was not Dunstanbury who forgot.

The day had wrought much in her eyes; it had wrought more than she dreamed of. Her foot was near the ladder now, though she could not yet see the lowest rung.

IV FATE'S WAY – OR LADY MEG'S

The scene is at Hazleby, Lord Dunstanbury's Essex seat. His lordship is striking the top off his breakfast egg.

"I say, Cousin Meg, old Brownlow's got a deuced pretty kitchen-maid."

"There you go! There you go! Just like your father, and your grandfather, and all of them! If the English people had any spirit, they'd have swept the Dunstanburys and all the wicked Whig gang into the sea long ago."

"Before you could turn round they'd have bought it up, enclosed it, and won an election by opening it to ships at a small fee on Sundays," said Mr. Pindar.

"Why are Whigs worse than Tories?" inquired Mr. Pikes, with an air of patient inquiry.

"The will of Heaven, I suppose," sniffed Lady Margaret Duddington.

"To display Divine Omnipotence in that line," suggested Mr. Pindar.

"A deuced pretty girl!" said Dunstanbury, in reflective tones. He was doing his best to reproduce the impression he had received at Morpington Hall, but obviously with no great success.

"On some pretext, frivolous though it be, let us drive over and see this miracle," Pindar suggested.

"How could we better employ this last day of our visit? You'll drive us over, Percival?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Pindar," said the young man, resolute in wisdom. "I'll send you over, if you like."

"I'll come with you," said Pikes. "But how account for ourselves? Old Brownlow is unknown to us."

"If Percival had been going, I'd have had nothing to do with it, but I don't mind taking you two old sillies," said Lady Margaret. "I wanted to pay a call on Elizabeth Brownlow anyhow. We were at school together once. But I won't guarantee you a sight of the kitchen-maid."

"It's a pretty drive – for this part of the country," observed Dunstanbury.

"It may well become your favorite road," smiled Mr. Pindar, benevolently.

"And since Lady Meg goes with us, it's already ours," added Mr. Pikes, gallantly.

So they used to go on – for hours at a time, as Dunstanbury has declared – both at Hazleby when they were there, and at Lady Meg's house in Berkeley Square, where they almost always were. They were pleased to consider themselves politicians – Pikes a Whig, twenty years behind date, Pindar a Tory, two hundred. It was all an affectation – assumed for the purpose, but with the very doubtful result of amusing Lady Meg. To Dunstanbury the two old waifs – for waifs of the sea of society they were, for all that each had a sufficient income to his name and a reputable life behind him – were sheerly tiresome – and there seems little ground to differ from his opinion. But they were old family friends, and he endured with his usual graciousness.

Their patroness – they would hardly have gibed at the word – was a more notable person. Lady Meg – the world generally, and Sophy always, spoke of her by that style, and we may take the same liberty – was only child of the great Earl of Dunstanbury. The title and estates passed to his grandnephew, but half a million or so of money came to her. She took the money, but vowed, with an outspoken thankfulness, that from the Dunstanbury family she had taken nothing else. If the boast were true, there must have been a powerful strain of eccentricity and perversity derived from elsewhere. All the Dunstanbury blood was Whig; Lady Meg counted the country ruined in 1688. Even Dunstanbury had been a man of sensibility; Lady Meg declared war on emotion – especially on the greatest of all emotions. The Dunstanbury attitude in thought had always been free, even tending to the materialistic; Lady Meg would believe in anything – so long as she couldn't see it. A queer woman, choosing to go to war with the world and infinitely enjoying the gratuitous conflict which she had herself provoked! With half a million pounds and the Duddington blood one can afford these recondite luxuries – and to have a Pindar and a Pikes before whom to exhibit their rare flavor. She was aggressive, capricious, hard to live with. Fancies instead of purposes, whims instead of interests, and not, as it seems, much affection for anybody – she makes rather a melancholy picture; but in her time she made a bit of a figure, too.

The air of the household was stormy that day at Morpington – an incentive to the expedition, not a deterrent, for Lady Meg, had she known it. Sophy was in sore disgrace – accused, tried, and convicted of insubordination and unseemly demeanor towards Mrs. Smilker. The truth seems to be that this good woman (Rest her soul! She has a neat tombstone in Morpington church-yard) loved – like many another good creature – good ale sometimes a trifle too well; and the orders she gave when ale had been plentiful did not always consort with her less-mellow injunctions. In no vulgar directness, but with a sarcasm which Mrs. Smilker felt without understanding, Sophy would point out these inconsistencies. Angered and humiliated, fearful too, perhaps, that her subordinate would let the secret out, Mrs. Smilker made haste to have the first word with the powers; and against the word of the cook the word of the cook-maid weighed as naught. After smaller troubles of this origin there had come a sort of crisis to-day. The longest of long lectures had been read to Sophy by mistress and repeated (slightly condensed) by master; then she was sent away to think it over; an abject apology to outraged Mrs. Smilker must be forthcoming, or banishment was the decree. Informed of this ultimatum, Sophy went out and hung about the avenue, hoping for Julia to appear. Soon Julia came

and heard the story. She had indignation in readiness, and – what was more to the purpose – a plan. Soon Sophy's eyes grew bright.

Into this storm-tossed house came Lady Meg and her spaniels. This unkind name, derived at first from the size and shape of Mr. Pindar's ears (they were large, and hung over at the top), had been stretched to include Mr. Pikes also, with small loss of propriety. Both gentlemen were low of stature, plump of figure, hairy on the face; both followed obediently at the heels of commanding Lady Meg. The amenities of the luncheon-table opened hearts. Very soon the tale of Sophy's iniquities was revealed; incidentally, and unavoidably if Sophy's heinous fault were to appear in its true measure, the tally of the Brownlows' benevolence was reckoned. But Mrs. Brownlow won small comfort from Lady Meg: she got a stiff touch of the truth.

"Ran in and out of the drawing-room!" she said. "Did she? The truth is, Lizzie, you've spoiled her, and now you're angry with her for being spoiled."

"What is she now, Mrs. Brownlow?" asked Pindar, with a sly intention. Was this Percival's deuced pretty girl?

"She works in the kitchen, Mr. Pindar."

"The girl!" his eyes signalled to Mr. Pikes. "Let Lady Meg see her," he urged, insinuatingly. "She has a wonderful way with girls."

"I don't want to see her; and I know your game, Pindar," said Lady Meg.

"I'm afraid she must go," sighed Mrs. Brownlow. Her husband said, more robustly, that such an event would be a good riddance – a saying repeated, with the rest of the conversation, by the butler (one William Byles, still living) to the gratified ears of Mrs. Smilker in the kitchen.

"But I'm not easy about her future. She's an odd child, and looks it."

"Pretty?" This from Mr. Pindar.

"Well, I don't know. Striking-looking, you'd rather say, perhaps, Mr. Pindar."

"Let her go her own way. We've talked quite enough about her." Lady Meg sounded decisive – and not a little bored.

"And then" – Mrs. Brownlow made bold to go on for a moment – "such a funny mark! Many people wouldn't like it, I'm sure."

Lady Meg turned sharply on her. "Mark? What do you mean? What mark?"

"A mark on her face, you know. A round, red mark –"

"Big as a threepenny bit, pretty nearly," said the Squire.

"Where?"

"On her cheek."

"Where is the girl?" asked Lady Meg. Her whole demeanor had changed, her bored air had vanished. "She seemed fair excited," Mr. Byles reports. Then she turned to the said Byles: "Find out where that girl is, and let me know. Don't tell her anything about it. I'll go to her."

"But let me send for her –" began the Squire, courteously.

"No, give me my own way. I don't want her frightened."

The Squire gave the orders she desired, and the last Mr. Byles heard as he left the room was from Lady Meg:

"Marks like that always mean something – eh, Pindar?"

No doubt Mr. Pindar agreed, but his reply is lost.

The girls in the avenue had made their plan. Sophy would not bow her head to Mrs. Smilker, nor longer eat the bread of benevolence embittered by servitude. She would go with Julia; she, too, would tread the boards – if only she could get her feet on them; and when did any girl seriously doubt her ability to do that? The pair were gay and laughing, when suddenly through the gate came Lady Meg and the spaniels – Lady Meg ahead as usual, and with a purposeful air.

"Who are they?" cried Sophy.

Hazleby is but twelve miles from Morpington. Julia had been over to see the big house, and had sighted Lady Meg in the garden.

"It's Lady Margaret Duddington," she whispered, rather in a fright. There was time for no more. Lady Meg was upon them. Sophy was identified by her dress, and, to Lady Meg's devouring eyes, by the mark.

"You're the girl who's been behaving so badly?" she said.

Seeing no profit in arguing the merits, Sophy answered "Yes."

At this point Julia observed one old gentleman nudge the other and whisper something; it is morally certain that Pindar whispered to Pikes: "Percival's girl!"

"You seem to like your own way. What are you going to do? Say you're sorry?"

"No. I'm not sorry. I'm going away."

"Come here, girl, let me look at you."

Sophy obeyed, walking up to Lady Meg and fixing her eyes on her face. She was interested, not frightened, as it seemed. Lady Meg looked long at her.

"Going away? Where to?"

Julia spoke up. "She's coming with me, please, Lady Margaret." Julia, it would seem, was a little frightened.

"Who are you?"

"Julia Robins. My mother lives there." She pointed to Woodbine Cottage. "I – I'm on the stage –"

"Lord help you!" remarked Lady Meg, disconcertingly.

"Not at all!" protested Julia, her meaning plain, her expression of it faulty. "And I – I'm going to help her to – to get an engagement. We're friends."

"What's she going to do with that on the stage?" Lady Meg's forefinger almost touched the mark.

"Oh, that's all right, Lady Margaret. Just a little cold cream and powder –"

"Nasty stuff!" said Lady Meg.

A pause followed, Lady Meg still studying Sophy's face. Then, without turning round, she made a remark obviously addressed to the gentlemen behind her:

"I expect this is Percival's young person."

"Without a doubt," said Pikes.

"And Percival was right about her, too," said Pindar.

"Think so? I ain't sure yet," said Lady Meg. "And at any rate I don't care twopence about that. But –" A long pause marked a renewed scrutiny. "Your name's Sophy, isn't it?"

"Yes." Sophy hesitated, then forced out the words: "Sophy Grouch."

"Grouch?"

"I said Grouch."

"Humph! Well, Sophy, don't go on the stage. It's a poor affair, the stage, begging Miss Julia's pardon – I'm sure she'll do admirably at it. But a poor affair it is. There's not much to be said for the real thing – but it's a deal better than the stage, Sophy."

"The real thing?" Julia saw Sophy's eyes grow thoughtful.

"The world – places – London – Paris – men and women – Lord help them! Come with me, and I'll show you all that."

"What shall I do if I come with you?"

"Do? Eat and drink, and waste time and money, like the rest of us. Eh, Pindar?"

"Of course," said Mr. Pindar, with a placid smile.

"I sha'n't be a – a servant again?"

"Everybody in my house is a slave, I'm told, but you won't be more of a slave than the rest."

"Will you have me taught?"

Lady Meg looked hard at her. For the first time she smiled, rather grimly. "Yes, I'll have you taught, and I'll show you the Queen of England, and, if you behave yourself, the Emperor of the French – Lord help him!"

"Not unless she behaves herself!" murmured Mr. Pindar.

"Hold your tongue, Pindar! Now, then, what do you say? No, wait a minute; I want you to understand it properly." She became silent for a moment. Julia was thinking her a very rude woman; but, since Mr. Pindar did not mind, who need?

Lady Meg resumed. "I won't make an obligation of you – I mean, I won't be bound to you; and you sha'n't be bound to me. You'll stay with me as long as you like, or as long as I like, as the case may be. If you want to go, put your visiting-card – yes, you'll have one – in an envelope and send it to me. And if I want you to go, I'll put a hundred-pound note in an envelope and send it to you – upon which you'll go, and no reasons given! Is it agreed?"

"It sounds all right," said Sophy.

"Did you always have that mark on your cheek?"

"Yes, always. Father told me so."

"Well, will you come?"

Sophy was torn. The stage was very attractive, and the love she had for Julia Robins held her as though by a cord. But was the stage a poor thing? Was that mysterious "real thing" better? Though even of that this strange woman spoke scornfully. Already there must have been some underground channel of understanding between them; for Sophy knew that Lady Meg was more than interested in her – that she was actually excited about her; and Lady Meg, in her turn, knew that she played a good card when she dangled before Sophy's eyes the Queen of England and the Emperor of the French – though even then came that saving "Lord help him!" to damp an over-ardent expectation.

"Let me speak to Julia," said Sophy. Lady Meg nodded; the girls linked arms and walked apart. Pindar came to Lady Meg's elbow.

"Another whim!" said he, in a low voice. Pikes was looking round the view with a kind of vacant contentment.

"Yes," she said. His lips moved. "I know what you said. You said: 'You old fool!' Pindar."

"Never, on my life, my lady!" They seemed more friends now than patroness and client. Few saw them thus, but Pindar told Dunstanbury, and the old gentleman was no liar.

"Give me one more!" she whispered, plainly excited. "That mark must mean something. It may open a way."

"For her?" he asked, smiling.

"It must for her. It may for me."

"A way where?"

"To knowledge – knowledge of the unknown. They may speak through her!"

"Lady Meg! Lady Meg! And if they don't, the hundred-pound note! It's very cruel."

"Who knows? – who knows, Pindar? Fate has her ways."

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "Not half as amusing as your ladyship's!"

Sophy, twenty yards off, flung her arms round Julia. The embrace was long; it spoke farewell. Lady Meg's eyes brightened. "She's coming with me," she said. Pindar shrugged his shoulders again and fell back to heel. Sophy walked briskly up.

"I'll come, my lady," she said.

"Good. To-morrow afternoon – to London. Mrs. Brownlow has the address. Good-bye." She turned abruptly on her heel and marched off, her retinue following.

Julia came to Sophy.

"We can write," she said. "And she's right. You must be for the real thing, Sophy!"

"My dear, my dear!" murmured Sophy, half in tears. "Yes, we must write." She drew back and stood erect. "It's all very dark," she said. "But I like it. London – and Paris! On the Seine!" Old lessons came back with new import now.

"The Emperor of the French!" Julia mocked – with tears in her eyes.

A sudden thought occurred to Sophy. "What did she mean by 'Percival's young person'? Is his name Percival?"

Julia gave a little cry. "Lord Dunstanbury's? Yes. You've seen him again?"

She drew out the story. It made the sorrow of parting half forgotten.

"You owe this to him, then! How romantic!" was actress Julia's conclusion – in part a true one, no doubt. But Sophy, looking deeper, fingered the Red Star. She had tracked the magnet of Lady Meg's regard, the point of her interest, the pivot of decision for that mind of whims.

V

THE VISION OF "SOMETHING BRIGHT"

With that scene in the avenue of elm-trees at Morpingham there comes a falling of the veil. Letters passed between Sophy and Julia Robins, but they have not been preserved. The diary was not yet begun. Basil Williamson did not move in the same world with Lady Meg and her entourage: Dunstanbury was in Ireland, where his regiment was then stationed. For the next twelve months there is only one glimpse of Sophy – that a passing and accidental one, although not without its significance as throwing a light on Lady Meg's adoption of Sophy (while it lasted it amounted to that), and on the strange use to which she hoped to be able to turn her *protégée*. The reference is, however, tantalizingly vague just where explicitness would have been of curious interest, though hardly of any real importance to a sensible mind.

The reference occurs in a privately printed volume of reminiscences by the late Captain Hans Fleming, R.N., a sailor of some distinction, but better known as a naturalist. Writing in the winter of 1865-66 (he gives no precise date), he describes in a letter a meeting with Lady Meg – whom, it will be noticed, he calls "old Lady Meg," although at that time she was but forty-nine. She had so early in life taken up an attitude of resolute spinsterhood that there was a tendency to exaggerate her years.

"To-day in the park I met old Lady Meg Duddington. It was piercing cold, but the carriage was drawn up under the trees. The poor spaniels on the opposite seat were shivering! She stopped me and was, for her, very gracious; she only 'Lord-helped-me' twice in the whole conversation. She was full of her ghosts and spirits, her seers and witches. She has got hold of an entirely new prophetess, a certain woman who calls herself Madame Mantis and knows all the secrets of the future, both this side the grave and the other. Beside Lady Meg sat a remarkably striking girl, to whom she introduced me, but I didn't catch the name. I gathered that this girl (who had an odd mark on one cheek, almost like a pale pink wafer) was, in old Meg's mad mind, anyhow, mixed up with the prophetess – as medium, or subject, or inspiration, or something of that kind – I don't understand that nonsense, and don't want to. But when I looked sceptical (and old Pindar chuckled – or it may have been his teeth chattering with the cold), Meg nodded her head at the girl and said: 'She'll tell you a different tale some day: if you meet her in five years' time, perhaps.' I don't know what the old lady meant; I suppose the girl did, but she looked absolutely indifferent, and, indeed, bored. One can't help being amused, but, seriously, it's rather sad for a man who was brought up in the reverence of Lord Dunstanbury to see his only daughter – a clever woman, too, naturally – devoting herself to such childish stuff."

Such is the passage; it is fair to add that most of the Captain's book is of more general interest. As he implies, he had had a long acquaintance with the Dunstanbury family, and took a particular interest in anything that related to it. Nevertheless, what he says has its place here; it fits in with and explains Lady Meg's excited and mystical exclamation to Mr. Pindar at Morpingham, "They may speak through her!" Apparently "they" had spoken – to what effect we cannot even conjecture,

unless an explanation be found in a letter of the Kravonian period in which Sophy says to Julia: "You remember that saying of Mantis's when we were in London – the one about how she saw something hanging in the air over my head – something bright." That is all she says – and "something bright" leaves the matter very vague. A sword – a crown – the nimbus of a saint: imagination might play untrammelled. Still some prophecy was made; Lady Meg built on it, and Sophy (for all her apparent indifference) remembered it, and in after-days thought it worthy of recall. That is as far as we can go; and with that passing glimpse, Sophy Grouch (of course the mention of the wafer-like mark puts her identity beyond question) passes out of sight for the time; indeed, as Sophy Grouch, in the position in which we have seen her and in the name under which we have known her, she passes out of sight forever.

PART II

PARIS

I

PHAROS, MANTIS, AND CO

Lady Meg left London for Paris towards the end of 1865 or the beginning of 1866, but we hear nothing of her doings until the early summer of 1868. The veil lifts then (so far as it ever lifts from before the face of the Paris period), and shows us the establishment in the Rue de Grenelle. A queer picture it is in many ways; it gives reason to think that the state of mind to which Lady Meg had now come is but mildly described as eccentricity.

The eminent Lord Dunstanbury, Lady Meg's father, had been one of that set of English Whigs and Liberals who were much at home in Paris in the days of the July Monarchy. Among his friends was a certain Marquis de Savres, the head of an old French family of Royalist principles. This gentleman had, however, accepted the throne of Louis Philippe and the political principles and leadership of Guizot. Between him and Lord Dunstanbury there arose a close intimacy, and Lady Meg as a girl had often visited in the Rue de Grenelle. Changed as her views were, and separated as she was from most of her father's coterie in Paris, friendship and intercourse between her and the Savres family had never dropped. The present head of that family was Casimir de Savres, a young man of twenty-eight, an officer of cavalry. Being a bachelor, he preferred to dwell in a small apartment on the other side of the river, and the family house in the Rue de Grenelle stood empty. Under some arrangement (presumably a business one, for Marquis de Savres was by no means rich) Lady Meg occupied the first floor of the roomy old mansion. Here she is found established; with her, besides three French servants and an English coachman (she has for the time apparently shaken off the spaniels), is Mademoiselle Sophie de Gruche, in whose favor Sophy Grouch has effected an unobtrusive disappearance.

This harmless, if somewhat absurd, transformation was carried out with a futile elaboration, smacking of Lady Meg's sardonic perversity rather than of Sophy's directer methods. Sophy would probably have claimed the right to call herself what she pleased, and left the world to account for her name in any way it pleased. Lady Meg must needs fit her up with a story. She was the daughter of a Creole gentleman married to an English wife. Her mother being early left a widow, Sophy had been brought up entirely in England – hence her indifferent acquaintance with French. If this excuse served a purpose at first, at any rate it soon became unnecessary. Sophy's marked talent for languages (she subsequently mastered Kravonian, a very difficult dialect, in the space of a few months) made French a second native tongue to her within a year. But the story was kept up. Perhaps it imposed on nobody; but nobody was rude enough – or interested enough – to question it openly. Sophy herself never refers to it; but she used the name from this time forward on all occasions except when writing to Julia Robins, when she continues to sign "Sophy" as before – a habit which lasts to the end, notwithstanding other changes in her public or official style.

The times were stirring, a prelude to the great storm which was so soon to follow. Paris was full of men who in the next few years were to make or lose fame, to rise with a bound or fall with a crash. Into such society Lady Meg's name, rank, and parentage would have carried her, had she cared to go; she could have shown Sophy the Emperor of the French at close quarters instead of contenting herself with a literal fulfilment of her promise by pointing him out as he drove in the streets. But Lady Meg was rabid against the Empire; her "Lord help him!" – the habitual expression of contempt on her lips

– was never lacking for the Emperor. Her political associates were the ladies of the Faubourg St. – Germain, and there are vague indications that Lady Meg was very busy among them and conceived herself to be engaged in intrigues of vital importance. The cracks in the imposing Imperial structure were visible enough by now, and every hostile party was on the lookout for its chance.

As we all know, perhaps no chance, certainly no power to use a chance, was given to Lady Meg's friends; and we need not repine that ignorance spares us the trouble of dealing with their unfruitful hopes and disappointed schemes. Still the intrigues, the gossip, and the Royalist atmosphere were to Sophy in some sort an introduction to political interests, and no doubt had an influence on her mind. So far as she ever acquired political principles – the existence of such in her mind is, it must be confessed, doubtful – they were the tenets which reigned in the Rue de Grenelle and in the houses of Lady Meg's Royalist allies.

So on one side of Lady Meg are the nobles and their noble ladies sulking and scheming, and on the other – a bizarre contrast – her witch and her wizard, Madame Mantis and Pharos. Where the carcass is, there will the vultures be; should the carcass get up and walk, presumably the vultures would wing an expectant way after it. Madame Mantis – the woman of the prophecy about "something bright" – had followed Lady Meg to Paris, scenting fresh prey. But a more ingenious and powerful scoundrel came on the scene; in association with Mantis – probably very close and not creditable association – is Pharos, *alias* Jean Coulin. In after-days, under the Republic, this personage got himself into trouble, and was tried at Lille for obtaining no less a sum than one hundred and fifty thousand francs from a rich old Royalist lady who lived in the neighborhood of the town. The rogue got his money under cover of a vaticination that MacMahon would restore the monarchy – a nearer approach to the real than he reached in his dealings with Lady Meg, but not, probably, on that account any the more favorably viewed by his judges.

The President's interrogation of the prisoner, ranging over his whole life, tells us the bulk of what we know of him; but the earliest sketch comes from Sophy herself, in one of the rare letters of this period which have survived. "A dirty, scrubby fellow, with greasy hair and a squint in his eye," she tells Julia Robins. "He wears a black cloak down to his heels, and a gimcrack thing round his neck that he calls his 'periapt' – charm, I suppose he means. Says he can work spells with it; and his precious partner Mantis *kisses it* (Italics are Sophy's) whenever she meets him. Phew! I'd like to give them both a dusting! What do you think? Pharos, as he calls himself, tells Lady Meg he can make the dead speak to her; and she says that isn't it possible that, since they've died themselves and know all about it, they may be able to tell her how not to! Seeing how this suits his book, it isn't Pharos who's going to say 'no,' though he tells her to make a will in case anything happens before he's ready to 'establish communication' – and perhaps they won't tell, after all, but he thinks they will! Now I come into the game! Me being very sympathetic, they're to talk *through me* (Italics again are Sophy's). Did you ever hear of such nonsense? I told Master Pharos that I didn't know whether his ghosts would talk through me, but I didn't need any of their help to pretty well see through him! But Lady Meg's hot on it. I suppose it's what I'm here for, and I must let him try – or pretend to. It's all one to me, and it pleases Lady Meg. Only he and I have nothing else to do with each other! I'll see to that. To tell you the truth, I don't like the look in his eye sometimes – and I don't think Mrs. Mantis would either!"

As a medium Sophy was a failure. She was antagonistic – purposely antagonistic, said Jean Coulin, attempting to defend himself against the President's suggestion that he had received something like three thousand pounds from Lady Meg and given her not a jot of supernatural information in return. This failure of Sophy's was the first rift between Lady Meg and her. Pharos could have used it against her, and his power was great; but it was not at present his game to eject her from the household. He had other ends in view; and there was no question of the hundred-pound note yet.

It is pleasant to turn to another figure – one which stands out in the meagre records of this time and bears its prominence well. Casimir Marquis de Savres is neither futile nor sordid, neither schemer nor impostor. He was a brave and simple soldier and gentleman, holding his ancestral principles in

his heart, but content to serve his country in evil times until good should come. He was courteous and attentive to Lady Meg, touching her follies with a light hand; and to Sophy he gave his love with an honest and impetuous sincerity, which he masked by a gay humor – lest his lady should be grieved at the havoc she herself had made. His feelings about Pharos, his partner, and his jugglings, need no description. "If you are neither restoring the King nor raising the devil to-morrow, I should like to come to breakfast," he writes in one of his early letters. "O Lady of the Red Star, if it were to restore you to your kingdom in the star whose sign you bear, I would raise the devil himself, all laws of Church and State notwithstanding! I came on Tuesday evening – you were surrounded by most unimpeachable dowagers. Excellent principles and irreproachable French! But, *mon Dieu*, for conversation! I came on Thursday afternoon. Pharos and Mantis held sway, and I dared not look round for fear of my ancestors being there to see me in the Emperor's uniform! Tell me when there will be no ancestors living or dead, nor dowagers nor devils, that I may come and see you. If dear Lady Meg (Laidee Maig!)¹ *should* be pursuing one or the other in other places, yet forbid me not to come. She has whims, we know, but not, thank Heaven, many principles; or, if she has our principles, at least she scorns our etiquette. Moreover, queens make etiquette, and are not ruled by what they make. And Star-Queens are more free and more absolute still. What a long note – all to ask for a breakfast! No, it's to ask for a sight of your eyes – and a volume would not be too long for me to write – though it would be a bad way to make friends with the eyes that had to read it! I believe I go on writing because it seems in some way to keep you with me; and so, if I could write always of you, I would lay down my sword and take up the pen for life. Yet writing to you, though sweet as heaven, is as the lowest hell from which Pharos fetches devils as compared with seeing you. Be kind. Farewell.

"CASIMIR."

To this he adds a postscript, referring apparently to some unrecorded incident: "Yes, the Emperor did ask who it was the other day. I was sure his eye *hit the mark*. I have the information direct."

It is very possible that this direct information pleased Sophy.

Last among the prominent members of the group in which Sophy lived in Paris is Madame Zerkovitch. Her husband was of Russian extraction, his father having settled in Kravonia and become naturalized there. The son was now in Paris as correspondent to one of the principal papers of Slavna. Madame Zerkovitch was by birth a Pole; not a remarkable woman in herself, but important in this history as the effective link between these days and Sophy's life in Kravonia. She was small and thin, with auburn hair and very bright, hazel eyes, with light-colored lashes. An agreeable talker, an accomplished singer, and a kind-hearted woman, she was an acquaintance to be welcomed. Whatever strange notions she harbored about Sophy in after-days, she conceived from the beginning, and never lost, a strong affection for her, and their friendship ripened quickly from their first meeting at Lady Meg's, where Marie Zerkovitch was a frequent visitor, and much interested in Pharos's hocus-pocus.

The occasion was one of the séances where Sophy was to be medium. It was a curious scene. Gaunt Lady Meg, with her eyes strained and eager, superintended the arrangements. "Lord help you!" was plentiful for everybody, even for the prophet Pharos himself when his miracle was behind time. Mantis was there, subterraneously scornful of her unwilling rival; and the rogue Pharos himself, with his oily glibness, his cheap mystery, and his professional jargon. Two or three dowagers and Casimir de Savres – who had to unbuckle his sword and put it outside the door for reasons insufficiently explained – completed the party. In the middle sat Sophy, smiling patiently, but with her white brow wrinkled just a little beneath the arching masses of her dark hair. On her lips the smile persisted all through; the mark was hardly visible. "No more than the slightest pinkness; I didn't notice it till I had

¹ He is apparently mimicking Sophy's mimicking of his pronunciation.

looked at her for full five minutes," says Marie Zerkovitch. This was, no doubt, the normal experience of those who met Sophy first in moments of repose or of depression.

Sophy is to "go off." Pharos makes his passes and goes through the rest of his performance.

"I feel nothing at all – not even sleepy," said Sophy. "Only just tired of staring at monsieur!"

Casimir de Savres laughed; old Lady Meg looked furious; Mantis hid a sickly smile. Down go the lights to a dull gloom – at the prophet's request. More gestures, more whisperings, and then sighs of exhaustion from the energetic wizard.

"Get on, Lord help you!" came testily from Lady Meg. Had Pharos been veritably her idol, she would have kicked him into granting her prayer.

"She won't give me her will – she won't be passive," he protests, almost eliciting a perverse sympathy.

He produced a glittering disk, half as large again as a five-franc piece; it gave forth infinite sparkles through the dark of the room. "Look at that! Look hard – and think of nothing else!" he commanded.

Silence fell on the room. Quick breaths came from eager Lady Meg; otherwise all was still.

"It's working!" whispered the wizard. "The power is working."

Silence again. Then a sudden, overpowering peal of laughter from the medium – hearty, rippling, irrepressible and irresistible.

"Oh, Lady Meg, I feel such a fool – oh, such a fool!" she cried – and her laughter mastered her again.

Irresistible! Marie Zerkovitch joined in Casimir's hearty mirth, Mantis's shrill cackle and the sniggers of the dowagers swelled the chorus. Casimir sprang up and turned up the gas, laughing still. The wizard stood scowling savagely; Lady Meg glared malignantly at her ill-chosen medium and disappointing *protégée*.

"What's the reason for it, Lord help you?" she snarled, with a very nasty look at Pharos.

He saw the danger. His influence was threatened, his patroness's belief in him shaken.

"I don't know," he answered, in apparent humility. "I can't account for it. It happens, so far as I know, only in one case – and Heaven forbid that I should suggest that of mademoiselle."

"What is the case?" snapped Lady Meg, by no means pacified – in fact, still dangerously sceptical.

Pharos made an answer, grave and serious in tone in purpose and effect malignantly nonsensical: "When the person whom it is sought to subject to this particular influence (he touched the pocket where his precious disk now lay) has the Evil Eye."

An appeal to a superstition old as the hills and widespread as the human race – would it ever fail to hit some mark in a company of a dozen? Casimir laughed in hearty contempt, Sophy laughed in mischievous mockery. But two of the dowagers crossed themselves, Lady Meg started and glowered – and little Madame Zerkovitch marked, recorded, and remembered. Her mind was apt soil for seed of that order.

That, in five years' time, five years in jail awaited the ingenious Monsieur Pharos occasions a consoling reflection.

II THE LORD OF YOUTH

Sophy's enemies were at work – and Sophy was careless. Such is the history of the next twelve months. Mantis was installed medium now – and the revelations came. But they came slow, vague, fitful, tantalizing. Something was wrong, Pharos confessed ruefully – what could it be? For surely Lady Meg by her faith (and, it may be added, her liberality) deserved well of the Unseen Powers? He hinted at that Evil Eye again, but without express accusation. Under "the influence" Mantis

would speak of "the malign one"; but Mantis, when awake, thought Mademoiselle de Gruche a charming young lady! It was odd and mysterious. Pharos could make nothing of it; he, too, thought Mademoiselle Sophie – he advanced to that pleasant informality of description – quite ravishing and entirely devoted to Lady Meg, only, unhappily, so irresponsive to the Unseen – a trifle unsympathetic, it might be. But what would you? The young had no need to think of death or the dead. Was it to be expected, then, that Mademoiselle Sophie would be a good subject, or take much interest in the work, great and wonderful though it might be?

The pair of rogues did their work well and quietly – so quietly that nothing of it would be known were it not that they quarrelled later on over the spoils of this and other transactions, and Madame Mantis, in the witness-box at Lille, used her memory and her tongue freely. "The plan now was to get rid of the young lady," she said, plainly. "Pharos feared her power over my lady, and that my lady might leave her all the money. Pharos hated the young lady because she would have nothing to say to him, and told him plainly that she thought him a charlatan. She had courage, yes! But if she would have joined in with him – why, then into the streets with me! I knew that well enough, and Pharos knew I knew it. So I hated her, too, fearing that some day she and he would make up their differences, and I – that for me! Yes, that was how we were, Monsieur le Président." Her lucid exposition elicited a polite compliment from Monsieur le Président – and we also are obliged to her.

But Sophy was heedless. She showed afterwards that she could fight well for what she loved well, and that with her an eager heart made a strong hand. Her heart was not in this fight. The revelation of mad Lady Meg's true motive for taking her up may well have damped a gratitude otherwise becoming in Sophy Grouch transmuted to Sophie de Gruche. Yet the gratitude remained; she fought for Lady Meg – for her sanity and some return of sanity in her proceedings. In so fighting she fought against herself – for Lady Meg was very mad now. For herself she did not fight; her heart and her thoughts were elsewhere. The schemes in the Rue de Grenelle occupied her hardly more than the clash of principles, the efforts of a falling dynasty, the struggles of rising freedom, the stir and seething of the great city and the critical times in which she lived.

For she was young, and the Lord of Youth had come to visit her in his shower of golden promise. The days were marked for her no more by the fawning advances or the spiteful insinuations of Pharos than by the heroics of an uneasy emperor or the ingenious experiments in reconciling contradictions wherein his ministers were engaged. For her the days lived or lived not as she met or failed to meet Casimir de Savres. It was the season of her first love. Yet, with all its joy, the shadow of doubt is over it. It seems not perfect; the delight is in receiving, not in giving; his letters to her, full of reminiscences of their meetings and talks, are shaded with doubt and eloquent of insecurity. She was no more than a girl in years; but in some ways her mind was precociously developed – her ambition was spreading its still growing wings. Casimir's constant tone of deference – almost of adulation – marks in part the man, in part the convention in which he had been bred; but it marks, too, the suppliant: to the last he is the wooer, not the lover, and at the end of his ecstasy lies the risk of despair. For her part she often speaks of him afterwards, and always with the tenderest affection; she never ceased to carry with her wherever she went the bundle of his letters, tied with a scrap of ribbon and inscribed with a date. But there is one reference, worthy of note, to her innermost sentiments towards him, to the true state of her heart as she came to realize it by-and-by. "I loved him, but I hadn't grown into my feelings," she says. Brief and almost accidental as the utterance is, it is full of significance; but its light is thrown back. It is the statement of how she came to know how she had been towards him, not of how in those happy days she seemed to herself to be.

He knew about Grouch; he had been told by a copious superfluity of female friendliness – by Lady Meg, cloaking suspicious malignity under specious penitence; by Madame Mantis with impertinent and intrusive archness; by Marie Zerkovitch in the sheer impossibility of containing within herself any secret which had the bad fortune to be intrusted to her. Sophy's own confession,

made with incredible difficulty – she hated the name so – fell flat and was greeted with a laugh of mockery.

It happened at the *Calvaire* at Fontainebleau, whither they had made a day's and night's excursion, under the escort of Marie Zerkovitch and a student friend of hers from the Quartier Latin. These two they had left behind sipping beer at a restaurant facing the château. On the eminence which commands the white little town dropped amid the old forest, over against the red roofs of the palace vying in richness with the turning leaves, in sight of a view in its own kind unsurpassed, in its own charm unequalled, Sophy broke the brutal truth which was to end the infatuation of the head of a house old as St. Louis.

"It's bad to pronounce, is it?" asked Casimir, smiling and touching her hand. "Ah, well, good or bad, I couldn't pronounce it, so to me it is nothing."

"They'd all say it was terrible – a *mésalliance*."

"I fear only one voice on earth saying that."

"And the fraud I am – *de Gruche*!" She caught his hand tightly. Never before had it occurred to her to defend or to excuse the transparent fiction.

"I know stars fall," he said, with his pretty gravity, not too grave. "I wish that they may rise to their own height again – and I rise with them."

The sun sank behind the horizon. A gentle afterglow of salmon-pink rested over the palace and city; the forest turned to a frame of smoky, brownish black. Casimir waved a hand towards it and laughed merrily.

"Before we were, it was – after we are, it shall be! I sound as old as Scripture! It has seen old masters – and great mistresses! Saving the proprieties, weren't you Montespan or Pompadour?"

"De la Vallière?" she laughed. "Or Maintenon?"

"For good or evil, neither! Do I hurt you?"

"No; you make me think, though," answered Sophy. "Why?"

"They niggled – at virtue or at vice. You don't niggle! Neither did Montespan nor Pompadour."

"And so I am to be – *Marquise de* – ?"

"Higher, higher!" he laughed. "*Madame la Maréchale* – !"

"It is war, then – soon – you think?" She turned to him with a sudden tension.

He pointed a Frenchman's eloquent forefinger to the dark mass of the château, whose chimneys rose now like gloomy interrogation-marks to an unresponsive, darkened sky. "He is there now – the Emperor! Perhaps he walks in his garden by the round pond – thinking, dreaming, balancing."

"Throwing balls in the air, as conjurers do?"

"Yes, my star."

"And if he misses the first?"

"He'll seek applause by the second. And the second, I think, would be war."

"And you would – go?"

"To what other end do I love the Lady of the Red Star – alas! I can't see it – save to bring her glory?"

"That's French," said Sophy, with a laugh. "Wouldn't you rather stay with me and be happy?"

"Who speaks to me?" he cried, springing to his feet. "Not you!"

"No, no," she answered, "I have no fear. What is it, Casimir, that drives us on?"

"Drives us on! You! You, too?"

"It's not a woman's part, is it?"

He caught her round the waist, and she allowed his clasp. But she grew grave, yet smiled again softly.

"If all life were an evening at Fontainebleau – a fine evening at Fontainebleau!" she murmured, in the low clearness which marked her voice.

"Mightn't it be?"

"With war? And with what drives us on?"

He sighed, and his sigh puzzled her.

"Oh, well," she cried, "at least you know I'm Sophy Grouch, and my father was as mean as the man who opens your lodge-gate."

The sky had gone a blue-black. A single star sombrely announced the coming pageant.

"And his daughter high as the hopes that beckon me to my career!"

"You've a wonderful way of talking," smiled Sophy Grouch – simple Essex in contact with Paris at that instant.

"You'll be my wife, Sophie?"

"I don't think Lady Meg will keep me long. Pharos is working hard – so Marie Zerkovitch declares. I should bring you a dot of two thousand five hundred francs!"

"Do you love me?"

The old question rang clear in the still air. Who has not heard it of women – or uttered it of men? Often so easy, sometimes so hard. When all is right save one thing – or when all is wrong save one thing – then it is hard to answer, and may have been hard to ask. With Casimir there was no doubt, save the doubt of the answer. Sophy stood poised on a hesitation. The present seemed perfect. Only an unknown future cried to her through the falling night.

"I'll win glory for you," he cried. "The Emperor will fight!"

"You're no Emperor's man!" she mocked.

"Yes, while he means France. I'm for anybody who means France." For a moment serious, the next he kissed her hand merrily. "Or for anybody who'll give me a wreath, a medal, a toy to bring home to her I love."

"You're very fascinating," Sophy confessed.

It was not the word. Casimir fell from his exaltation. "It's not love, that of yours," said he.

"No – I don't know. You might make it love. Oh, how I talk beyond my rights!"

"Beyond your rights? Impossible! May I go on trying?"

He saw Sophy's smile dimly through the gloom. From it he glanced to the dying gleam of the white houses dropped among the trees, to the dull mass of the ancient home of history and kings. But back he came to the living, elusive, half-seen smile.

"Can you stop?" said Sophy.

He raised his hat from his head and stooped to kiss her hand.

"Nor would nor could," said he – "in the warmth of life or the cold hour of death!"

"No, no – if you die, it's gloriously!" The hour carried her away. "Casimir, I wish I were sure!"

The spirit of his race filled his reply: "You want to be dull?"

"No – I – I – I want you to kiss my cheek."

"May I salute the star?"

"But it's no promise!"

"It's better!"

"My dear, I – I'm very fond of you."

"That's all?"

"Enough for to-night! What's he thinking of down there?"

"The Emperor? I'm not so much as sure he's there, really. Somebody said he had started for St. Cloud this morning."

"Pretend he's there!"

"Then of anything except how many men die for what he wants."

"Or of how many women weep?"

Her reply set a new light to his passion. "You'd weep?" he cried.

"Oh, I suppose so!" The answer was half a laugh, half a sob.

"But not too much! No more than the slightest dimness to the glowing star!"

Sophy laughed in a tremulous key; her body shook. She laid her hands in his. "No more, no more. Surely Marie and the student are bored? Isn't it supper-time? Oh, Casimir, if I were worthy, if I were sure! What's ahead of us? Must we go back? To-night, up here, it all seems so simple! Does he mean war? He down there? And you'll fight!" She looked at him for an instant. He was close to her. She thrust him away from her. "Don't fight thinking of me," she said.

"How otherwise?" he asked.

She tossed her head impatiently. "I don't know – but – but Pharos makes me afraid. He – he says that things I love die."

The young soldier laughed. "That leaves him pretty safe," said he.

She put her arm through his, and they walked down. It had been a night to be forgotten only when all is. Yet she went from him unpledged, and tossed in her bed, asking: "Shall I?" and answered: "I'll decide to-morrow!"

But to-morrow was not at the *Calvaire* nor in the seducing sweetness of the silent trees. When she rose, he was gone – and the student, too. Marie Zerkovitch, inquisitively friendly, flung a fly for news.

"He's as fine a gentleman as Lord Dunstanbury!" cried Sophy Grouch.

"As who?" asked Marie.

Sophy smiled over her smoking coffee. "As the man who first saw me," she said. "But, oh, I'm puzzled!"

Marie Zerkovitch bit her roll.

"Armand was charming," she observed. The student was Armand. He, too, let it be recorded, had made a little love, yet in all seemly ardor.

So ends this glimpse of the happy days.

III

THE NOTE – AND NO REASONS

That feverish month of July – fitting climax to the scorching, arid summer of 1870 – had run full half its course. Madness had stricken the rulers of France; to avoid danger they rushed on destruction. Gay madness spread through the veins of Paris. Perverse always, Lady Meg Duddington chose this moment for coming back to her senses – or at least for abandoning the particular form of insanity to which she had devoted the last five years.

One afternoon she called her witch and her wizard. "You're a pair of quacks, and I've been an old fool," she said, composedly, sitting straight up in her high-backed chair. She flung a couple of thousand-franc notes across the table. "You can go," she ended, with contemptuous brevity. Mantis's evil temper broke out: "She has done this, the malign one!" Pharos was wiser; he had not done badly out of Lady Meg, and madness such as hers is apt to be recurrent. His farewell was gentle, his exit not ungraceful; yet he, too, prayed her to beware of a certain influence. "Stuff! You don't know what you're talking about!" Lady Meg jerked out, and pointed with her finger to the door. "So we went out, and to avoid any trouble we left Paris the same day. But this man here would not give me any of the money, though I had done as much to earn it as he had, or more." So injured Madame Mantis told Monsieur le Président at Lille.

Early on the morning of Sunday, the 17th, having received word through Lady Meg's maid that her presence was not commanded in the Rue de Grenelle, Sophy slipped round to the Rue du Bac and broke in on Marie Zerkovitch, radiant with her great news and imploring her friend to celebrate it by a day in the country.

"It means that dear old Lady Meg will be what she used to be to me!" she cried. "We shall go back to England, I expect, and – I wonder what that will be like!"

Her face grew suddenly thoughtful. Back to England! How would that suit Sophie de Gruche? And what was to happen about Casimir de Savres? The period of her long, sweet indecision was threatened with a forced conclusion.

Marie Zerkovitch was preoccupied against both her friend's joy and her friend's perplexity. Great affairs touched her at home. There would be war, she said, certainly war; to-day the Senate went to St. Cloud to see the Emperor. Zerkovitch had started thither already, on the track of news. The news in the near future would certainly be war, and Zerkovitch would follow the armies, still on the track of news. "He went before, in the war of 'sixty-six," she said, her lips trembling. "And he all but died of fever; that kills the correspondents just as much as the soldiers. Ah, it's so dangerous, Sophie – and so terrible to be left behind alone. I don't know what I shall do! My husband wants me to go home. He doesn't believe the French will win, and he fears trouble for those who stay here." She looked at last at Sophy's clouded face. "Ah, and your Casimir – he will be at the front!"

"Yes, Casimir will be at the front," said Sophy, a ring of excitement hardly suppressed in her voice.

"If he should be killed!" murmured Marie, throwing her arms out in a gesture of lamentation.

"You bird of ill omen! He'll come back covered with glory."

The two spent a quiet day together, Sophy helping Marie in her homely tasks. Zerkovitch's campaigning kit was overhauled – none knew how soon orders for an advance might come – his buttons put on, his thick stockings darned. The hours slipped away in work and talk. At six o'clock they went out and dined at a small restaurant hard by. Things seemed very quiet there. The fat waiter told them with a shrug: "We sha'n't have much noise here to-night – the lads will be over there!" He pointed across the river. "They'll be over there most of the night – on the *grands boulevards*. Because it's war, madame. Oh, yes, it's war!" The two young women sipped their coffee in silence. "As a lad I saw 1830. I was out in the streets in 1851. What shall I see next?" he asked them as he swept his napkin over the marble table-top. If he stayed at his post, he saw many strange things; unnatural fires lit his skies, and before his doors brother shed brother's blood.

The friends parted at half-past seven. Marie hoped her husband would be returning home soon, and with news; Sophy felt herself due in the Rue de Grenelle. She reached the house there a little before eight. The *concierge* was not in his room; she went up-stairs unseen, and passed into the drawing-room. The inner door leading to the room Lady Meg occupied stood open. Sophy called softly, but there was no answer. She walked towards the door and was about to look into the room, thinking that perhaps Lady Meg was asleep, when she heard herself addressed. The Frenchwoman who acted as their cook had come in and stood now on the threshold with a puzzled, distressed look on her face.

"I'm sorry, Mademoiselle Sophie, to tell you, but my lady has gone."

"Gone! Where to?"

"To England, I believe. This morning, after you had gone out, she ordered everything to be packed. It was done. She paid us here off, bidding me alone stay till orders reached me from Monsieur le Marquis. Then she went; only the coachman accompanied her. I think she started for Calais. At least, she is gone."

"She said – said nothing about me?"

"You'll see there's a letter for you on the small table in the window there."

"Oh yes! Thank you."

"Your room is ready for you to-night."

"I've dined. I shall want nothing. Good-night."

Sophy walked over to the little table in the window, and for a few moments stood looking at the envelope which lay there, addressed to her in Lady Meg's sprawling hand. The stately room in the Rue de Grenelle seemed filled with a picture which its walls had never seen; old words re-echoed in Sophy's ears: "If I want you to go, I'll put a hundred-pound note in an envelope and send it to you;

upon which you'll go, and no reasons given! Is it agreed?" As if from a long way off, she heard a servant-girl answer: "It sounds all right." She saw the old elm-trees at Morpingham, and heard the wind murmur in their boughs; Pindar chuckled, and Julia Robins's eyes were wet with tears.

"And no reasons given!" It had sounded all right – before five years of intimacy and a life transformed. It sounded different now. Yet the agreement had been made between the strange lady and the eager girl. Nor were reasons hard to find. They stood out brutally plain. Having sent her prophet to the right about, Lady Meg wanted no more of her medium – her most disappointing medium. "They" would not speak through Sophy; perhaps Lady Meg did not now want them to speak at all.

Sophy tore the envelope right across its breadth and shook out the flimsy paper within. It was folded in four. She did not trouble to open it. Lady Meg was a woman of her word, and here was the hundred-pound note of the Bank of England – "upon which you'll go, and no reasons given!" With a bitter smile she noticed that the note was soiled, the foldings old, the edges black where they were exposed. She had no doubt that all these years Lady Meg had carried it about, so as to be ready for the literal fulfilment of her bond.

"Upon which," said Sophy, "I go."

The bitter smile lasted perhaps a minute more; then the girl flung herself into a chair in a fit of tears as bitter. She had served – or failed to serve – Lady Meg's mad purpose, and she was flung aside. Very likely she had grown hateful – she, the witness of insane whims now past and out of favor. The dismissal might not be unnatural; but, for all their bargain, the manner was inhuman. They had lived and eaten and drunk together for so long. Had there been no touch of affection, no softening of the heart? It seemed not – it seemed not. Sophy wept and wondered. "Oh, that I had never left you, Julia!" she cries in her letter, and no doubt cried now; for Julia had given her a friend's love. If Lady Meg had given her only what one spares for a dog – a kind word before he is banished, a friendly lament at parting!

Suddenly through the window came a boy's shrill voice: "*Vive la guerre!*"

Sophy sprang to her feet, caught up the dirty note, and thrust it inside her glove. Without delay, seemingly without hesitation, she left the house, passed swiftly along the street, and made for the Pont Royal. She was bound for the other bank and for the Boulevard des Italiens, where Casimir de Savres had his lodging. The stream of traffic set with her. She heeded it not. The streets were full of excited groups, but there was no great tumult yet. Men were eagerly reading the latest editions of the papers. Sophy pushed on till she reached Casimir's house. She was known there. Her coming caused surprise to the *concierge* – it was not the proper thing; but he made no difficulty. He showed her to Casimir's sitting-room, but of Casimir he could give no information, save that he presumed he would return to sleep.

"I must wait – I must see him," she said; and, as the man left her, she went to the window, flung it open wide, and stood there, looking down into the great street.

The lights blazed now. Every seat at every *café* was full. The newspapers did a great trade; a wave of infinite talk, infinite chaff, infinite laughter rose to her ears. A loud-voiced fellow was selling pictures of the King of Prussia – as he looks now, and as he will look! The second sheet never failed of a great success. Bands of lads came by with flags and warlike shouts. Some cheered them, more laughed and chaffed. One broad-faced old man she distinguished in the *café* opposite; he looked glum and sulky and kept arguing to his neighbor, wagging a fat forefinger at him repeatedly; the neighbor shrugged bored shoulders; after all, he had not made the war – it was the Emperor and those gentlemen at St. Cloud! As she watched, the stir grew greater, the bands of marching students more frequent and noisy, "*A Berlin!*" they cried now, amid the same mixture of applause and tolerant amusement. A party of girls paraded down the middle of the street, singing "*J'aime les militaires!*" The applause grew to thunder as they went by, and the laughter broke into one great crackle when the heroines had passed.

She turned away with a start, conscious of a presence in the room. Casimir came quickly across to her, throwing his helmet on the table as he passed. He took her hands. "I know. Lady Meg wrote to me," he said. "And you are here!"

"I have no other home now," she said.

With a light of joy in his eyes he kissed her lips.

"I come to you only when I'm in trouble!" she said, softly.

"It is well," he answered, and drew her with him back to the window.

Together they stood looking down.

"It is war, then?" she asked.

"Without doubt it's war – without doubt," he answered, gravely. "And beyond that no man knows anything."

"And you?" she asked.

He took her hands again, both of hers in his. "My lady of the Red Star!" he murmured, softly.

"And you?"

"You wouldn't have it otherwise?"

"Heaven forbid! God go with you as my heart goes! When do you go?"

"I take the road in an hour for Strasburg. We are to be of MacMahon's corps."

"In an hour?"

"Yes."

"Your preparations – are they made?"

"Yes."

"And you are free?"

"Yes."

"Then you've an hour to make me sure I love you!"

He answered as to a woman of his own stock.

"I have an hour now – and all the campaign," said he.

IV THE PICTURE AND THE STAR

The letter which gives Julia Robins the history of that Sunday – so eventful alike for France and for Sophy – is the last word of hers from Paris. Julia attached importance to it, perhaps for its romantic flavor, perhaps because she fancied that danger threatened her friend. At any rate, she bestowed it with the care she gave to the later letters, and did not expose it to the hazards which destroyed most of its predecessors. It is dated from Marie Zerkovitch's apartment in the Rue du Bac, and it ends: "I shall stay here, whatever happens – unless Casimir tells me to meet him in Berlin!"

The rash comprehensiveness of "whatever happens" was not for times like those, when neither man nor nation knew what fate an hour held; but for three weeks more she abode with Marie Zerkovitch. Marie was much disturbed in her mind. Zerkovitch had begun to send her ominous letters from the front – or as near thereto as he could get; the burden of them was that things looked bad for the French, and that her hold on Paris should be a loose one. He urged her to go home, where he would join her – for a visit at all events, very likely to stay. Marie began to talk of going home in a week or so; but she lingered on for the sake of being nearer the news of the war. So, amid the rumors of unreal victories and the tidings of reverses only too real, if not yet great, the two women waited.

Casimir had found time and opportunity to send Sophy some half-dozen notes (assuming she preserved all she received). On the 5th of August, the eve of Wörth, he wrote at somewhat greater length: "It is night. I am off duty for an hour. I have been in the saddle full twelve hours, and I believe that, except the sentries and the outposts, I am the only man awake. We need to sleep. The Red Star, which shines everywhere for me, shines for all of us over our bivouac to-night. It must be that we

fight to-morrow. Fritz is in front of us, and to-morrow he will come on. The Marshal must stop him and spoil his game; if we don't go forward now, we must go back. And we don't mean going back. It will be the first big clash – and a big one, I think, it will be. Our fellows are in fine heart (I wish their boots were as good!), but those devils over there – well, they can fight, too, and Fritz can get every ounce out of them. I am thinking of glory and of you. Is it not one and the same thing? For, in that hour, I didn't make you sure! I know it. Sophie, I'm hardly sorry for it. It seems sweet to have something left to do. Ah, but you're hard, aren't you? Shall I ever be sure of you? Even though I march into Berlin at the head of a regiment!

"I can say little more – the orderly waits for my letter. Yet I have so much, much more to say. All comes back to me in vivid snatches. I am with you in the old house – or by the *Calvaire* (you remember?); or again by the window; or while we walked back that Sunday night. I hear your voice – the low, full-charged voice. I see your eyes; the star glows anew for me. Adieu! I live for you always so long as I live. If I die, it will be in the thought of you, and they will kill no prouder man than Sophie's lover. To have won your love (ah, by to-morrow night, yes!) and to die for France – would it be ill done for a short life? By my faith, no! I'll make my bow to my ancestors without shame. 'I, too, have done my part, messieurs!' say I, as I sit down with my forefathers. Sophie, adieu! You won't forget? I don't think you can quite forget. Your picture rides with me, your star shines ahead.

"CASIMIR."

He was not wrong. They fought next day. The letter is endorsed "8th August," presumably the date of its receipt. That day came also the news of the disaster. On the 11th the casualty list revealed Casimir de Savres's name. A few lines from a brother officer a day later gave scanty details. In the great charge of French cavalry which marked the closing stages of the battle he had been the first man hit of all his regiment – shot through the heart – and through the picture of Sophy which lay over his heart.

No word comes from Sophy herself. And Madame Zerkovitch is brief: "She showed me the picture. The bullet passed exactly through where that mark on her cheek is. It was fearful; I shuddered; I hoped she didn't see. She seemed quite stunned. But she insisted on coming with me to Kravonia, where I had now determined to go at once. I did not want her to come. I thought no good would come of it. But what could I do? She would not return to England; she could not stay alone in Paris. I was the only friend she had in the world. She asked no more than to travel with me. 'When once I am there, I can look after myself,' she said."

The pair – a little fragment of a great throng, escaping or thrust forth – left Paris together on the 13th or 14th of August, en route for Kravonia. With Sophy went the bullet-pierced picture and the little bundle of letters. She did not forget. With a sore wound in her heart she turned to face a future dark, uncertain, empty of all she had loved. And – had she seen Marie Zerkovitch's shudder? Did she remember again, as she had remembered by the *Calvaire* at Fontainebleau, how Pharos had said that what she loved died? She had bidden Casimir not fight thinking of her. Thinking of her, he had fought and died. All she ever wrote about her departure is one sentence – "I went to Kravonia in sheer despair of the old life; I had to have something new."

Stricken she went forth from the stricken city, where hundreds of men were cutting down the trees beneath whose shade she had often walked and ridden with her lover.

PART III

KRAVONIA

I

THE NAME-DAY OF THE KING

The ancient city of Slavna, for a thousand years or more and under many dynasties the capital of Kravonia, is an island set in a plain. It lies in the broad valley of the Krath, which at this point flows due east. Immediately above the city the river divides into two branches, known as the North and the South rivers; Slavna is clasped in the embrace of these channels. Conditioned by their course, its form is not circular, but pear-shaped, for they bend out in gradual broad curves to their greatest distance from one another, reapproaching quickly after that point is passed till they meet again at the end – or, rather, what was originally the end – of the city to the east; the single reunited river may stand for the stalk of the pear.

In old days the position was a strong one; nowadays it is obviously much less defensible; and those in power had recognized this fact in two ways – first by allocating money for a new and scientific system of fortifications; secondly by destroying almost entirely the ancient and out-of-date walls which had once been the protection of the city. Part of the wall on the north side, indeed, still stood, but where it had escaped ruin it was encumbered and built over with warehouses and wharves; for the North River is the channel of commerce and the medium of trade with the country round about. To the south the wall has been entirely demolished, its site being occupied by a boulevard, onto which faces a line of handsome modern residences – for as the North River is for trade, so the South is for pleasure – and this boulevard has been carried across the stream and on beyond the old limits of the city, and runs for a mile or farther on the right bank of the reunited Krath, forming a delightful and well-shaded promenade where the citizens are accustomed to take their various forms of exercise.

Opposite to it, on the left bank, lies the park attached to the Palace. That building itself, dating from 1820 and regrettably typical of the style of its period, faces the river on the left bank just where the stream takes a broad sweep to the south, giving a rounded margin to the King's pleasure-grounds. Below the Palace there soon comes open country on both banks. The boulevard merges in the main post-road to Volseni and to the mountains which form the eastern frontier of the kingdom. At this date, and for a considerable number of years afterwards, the only railway line in Kravonia did not follow the course of the Krath (which itself afforded facilities for traffic and intercourse), but ran down from the north, having its terminus on the left bank of the North River, whence a carriage-bridge gave access to the city.

To vote money is one thing, to raise it another, and to spend it on the designated objects a third. Not a stone nor a sod of the new forts was yet in place, and Slavna's solitary defence was the ancient castle which stood on the left bank of the river just at the point of bisection, facing the casino and botanical gardens on the opposite bank. Suleiman's Tower, a relic of Turkish rule, is built on a simple plan – a square curtain, with a bastion at each corner, encloses a massive circular tower. The gate faces the North River, and a bridge, which admits of being raised and lowered, connects this outwork with the north wall of the city, which at this point is in good preservation. The fort is roomy; two or three hundred men could find quarters there; and although it is, under modern conditions, of little use against an enemy from without, it occupies a position of considerable strength with regard to the

city itself. It formed at this time the headquarters and residence of the Commandant of the garrison, a post held by the heir to the throne, the Prince of Slavna.

In spite of the flatness of the surrounding country, the appearance of Slavna is not unpicturesque. Time and the hand of man (the people are a color-loving race) have given many tints, soft and bright, to the roofs, gables, and walls of the old quarter in the north town, over which Suleiman's Tower broods with an antique impressiveness. Behind the pleasant residences which border on the southern boulevard lie handsome streets of commercial buildings and shops, these last again glowing with diversified and gaudy colors. In the centre of the city, where, but for its bisection, we may imagine the Krath would have run, a pretty little canal has been made by abstracting water from the river and conducting it through the streets. On either side of this stream a broad road runs. Almost exactly midway through the city the roads broaden and open into the spacious Square of St. Michael, containing the cathedral, the fine old city hall, several good town-houses dating two or three hundred years back, barracks, and the modern but not unsightly Government offices. Through this square and the streets leading to it from west and east there now runs an excellent service of electric cars; but at the date with which we are concerned a crazy fiacre or a crazier omnibus was the only public means of conveyance. Not a few good private equipages were, however, to be seen, for the Kravonians have been from of old lovers of horses. The city has a population bordering on a hundred thousand, and, besides being the principal depot and centre of distribution for a rich pastoral and agricultural country, it transacts a respectable export trade in hides and timber. It was possible for a careful man to grow rich in Slavna, even though he were not a politician nor a Government official.

Two or three years earlier, an enterprising Frenchman of the name of Rousseau had determined to provide Slavna with a first-rate modern hotel and *café*. Nothing could have consorted better with the views of King Alexis Stefanovitch, and Monsieur Rousseau obtained, on very favorable terms, a large site at the southeast end of the city, just where the North and South rivers reunite. Here he built his hostelry and named it *pietatis causâ*, the Hôtel de Paris. A fine terrace ran along the front of the house, abutting on the boulevard and affording a pleasant view of the royal park and the Palace in the distance on the opposite bank.

On this terrace, it being a fine October morning, sat Sophy, drinking a cup of chocolate.

The scene before her, if not quite living up to the name of the hotel, was yet animated enough. A score of handsome carriages drove by, some containing gayly dressed ladies, some officers in smart uniforms. Other officers rode or walked by; civil functionaries, journalists, and a straggling line of onlookers swelled the stream which set towards the Palace. Awakening from a reverie to mark the unwonted stir, Sophy saw the leaders of the informal procession crossing the ornamental iron bridge which spanned the Krath, a quarter of a mile from where she sat, and gave access to the King's demesne on the left bank.

"Right bank – left bank! It sounds like home!" she thought to herself, smiling perhaps rather bitterly. "Home!" Her home now was a single room over a goldsmith's shop, whither she had removed to relieve Marie Zerkovitch from a hospitality too burdensome, as Sophy feared, for her existing resources to sustain.

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