

**SYNOPSIS****VILLETTE**

Villette opens with an account by Lucy Snowe of her stay at the house of the Brettons. The tenor of this household is disturbed by the arrival of a small child named Polly Home, who at first misses her widowed father, but finds compensation in the presence of John Bretton (Graham Bretton), the cheerfully extrovert son of Lucy's godmother, Mrs. Bretton. Lucy plays only as a spectator's part in narrating this event.

Lucy Snowe then has to separate from Brettons because they move to other town. She has a new godmother, Miss. Marchmont, an elderly spinster whose lover had died in an accident just before the wedding; and then on Miss Marchmont's death, Lucy suddenly decides to go to Brussels. Lucy's voyage to Brussels and the misfortune that she meets are described in detail which even in these days of easy travel abroad arouse a sympathetic chord from the traveler. On her arrival in Brussels, after temporarily losing her trunk she is rescued by a kindly fellow Englishman, loses her way again, meets two insulting Belgians, and eventually by a stroke of good fortune arrives at the school of Madame Beck, at which one of her fellow travelers on the boat to Belgium, Ginevra Fanshawe, is her pupil. The slight acquaintance with Ginevra gives Lucy sufficient courage to ask for a post with Madame Beck; it so happens that Madame Beck is dissatisfied with the drunken Irish lady

whose job it is to teach English to her children, and after seeking the advice of her cousin, Paul Emanuel, Madame Beck employs Lucy, though she makes doubly sure by carefully examining her belongings while Lucy pretends to be asleep.

Lucy is soon promoted to being a regular teacher at the school. She comes into contact again with Ginevra Fanshawe, who boasts to her about her two lovers: Colonel de Hamal and "Isidore". The latter is eventually revealed to be Doctor John, a physician who has come to attend the Beck children when they are ill. Dr. John regularly appearance at the school make Lucy initially suspect that there a love affair between him and Madame Beck and then after a curious incident in which Lucy sees two letters dropped from a window of the adjacent boys' school she thinks he is in love with Rosine, the fortress. The truth is eventually revealed when Lucy is persuaded by Paul Emanuel to take a man's part in play on Madame Beck's birthday; and plying opposite Ginevra Fanshawe, she notices that her smile and glances are directed towards Dr. John. After these excitements the school breaks up for the long vacation, during which Lucy is seized by a dreadful depression. Wandering through Brussels in this state she visits a Roman Catholic confessional and on coming out of it collapses. Recovering from her faint she discovers herself among the familiar furniture of the Bretton household; it turns out to be John Bretton who has rescued her, and, as Lucy confesses she

has realized, John Bretton is no other than Dr. John who is also the person rescuing Lucy on her first arrival in Brussels.

Lucy stays some time with the Brettons at their house, La Terrasse, and discusses Ginevra with John Bretton. She visits an art gallery, and is struck by a portrait of Cleopatra; Paul Emanuel, Alfred de Hamal, and Dr. John all react to this picture in different ways. The Brettons and Lucy also go to a concert, where Paul Emanuel is shocked again by Lucy's appearance in a pink dress, and Dr. John learns the true worth of Ginevra when he sees her sneering at his mother. Term then begins and Lucy is unhappy to leave the Brettons, but Dr. John sends her a kind letter, which she takes up into the garret to read, and there sees the figure of the nun whose ghost is supposed to haunt the school. Dr. John, who happens to be visiting Lucy, reassures her, restores her letter, which in her panic she has lost, and continues to write to her. He also takes her to the theatre to see the famous actress, Vashti, whose impassioned acting moves and horrifies Lucy, though it hardly affects the cool Dr. John. Fire breaks out at the theatre; there is a slight panic, and Dr. John is able to rescue a young girl, who turns out eventually to be Polly Home. But this revelation does not come for several weeks, during which Lucy receives letters from Dr. John: Ginevra explains that the girl rescued is the daughter of her uncle, the Count de Bassompierre, and it is a Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre that this girl introduces herself to Lucy when she is eventually invited by Mrs. Bretton to La Terrasse.

Lucy now has two sets of friends, but as she is troubled by the thought that both Madame Beck and Paul Emanuel are reading her letters she buries them under the pear tree in the garden, and again sees the nun. After a public lecture by Paul Emanuel there is a party at the Hotel Crecy at which it becomes obvious that Dr. John has transferred his affection from Ginevra to Paulina. Monsieur Paul Emanuel is at first rude to Lucy, but after apologizes, and she surprised by his sudden change to mildness both on this occasion and later when she accidentally breaks his spectacles. On Monsieur Paul's birthday, Lucy pretends she has no present for him, and is treated to tirade on the perfidy of the English, to which she gives a spirited reply, but on finding him inspecting her desk she makes up her quarrel, and then the reader is treated to a chapter on his virtues as a teacher, although being taught by Monsieur Paul is not without its difficulties, as Lucy discovers when she takes lessons from him. Lucy realizes her love for Dr. John is as buried as her letters and forms ambitions to start a school of her own.

On meeting Paulina, who has been travelling in France, Lucy learns that she is in love with Dr. John. Monsieur takes the school for a picnic in the country, and treats Lucy with the gentle consideration, although in the evening when he comes to the school to ask for her Lucy perversely pretends to have gone to bed. Madame Beck sends Lucy to the old city, where she meets a hideous old lady, Madame Walvarens, and an old priest, Pere Silas. The latter, who happens to be the priest whom Lucy had approached in the confessional,

explains that that he and Madame Walvarens are kept by the charity of Paul Emanuel, who had been in love with Madame Walvaren's granddaughter. Madame Beck laughs at the bad reception Lucy receives from Madame Walvaren, and tells Lucy to forget Paul Emanuel, with his heavy responsibilities. Lucy cannot do this, and the bond between the two is further strengthened when Lucy is examined by two professors who believe that the work Paul Emanuel is exhibiting as Lucy's own was written by himself. The examination goes badly until Lucy realizes that the two professors are the two men who had insulted her on her first arrival in Villette, and writes an essay on "Human Justice" full of passion inspired by this coincidence. However, not only Madame but also the dead weight of Catholicism hinders the love between Lucy and Paul, whereas the love affair between John Bretton and Paulina prospers; after initial objections, Paulina's father gives his consent to their marriage, and Lucy unveils their happy future life.

Madame Beck announces Monsieur Paul's impending departure to the West Indies, and tries to prevent Lucy from saying goodbye to him, but Lucy speaks harshly to her, accusing her as being a dog in the manger. A sleeping draught, which Lucy takes, does not work, and she walks out into the night to find Villette in full festival. She sees the de Bassompierre and the Brettons, the Becks, Pere Silas and Madame Walvarens. She overhears the conversation of the latter party. There is a talk of Justine Mary, the name of Monsieur Paul's former love, but the Justine Mary who arrives is just an ordinary Belgian girl.

There is a talk of her impending marriage to one of the party, and Lucy thinks that this must be Monsieur Paul himself, especially because when he arrives he engage a brilliant banter with Justine Mary and announces that he has deffered his departure for a fortnight until he has completed a certain piece of business. Lucy leaves, sees a carriage from the which someone waves to her, and on arriving back at the school thinks she sees the nun, but this turns out to be bolster dressed in a long black stole.

In the morning it revealed that Ginevra Fanshawe has eloped with Colonel de Hamal; it was she who had waved to Lucy, and it was de Hamal who had used the nun as a convenient disguise. Ginevra's future life is briefly summarized, Colonel de Hamal is not an ideal husband, but Ginevra, an excellent portrait of trivial selfishness, manages to survive fairly well. Lucy still waits in suspense for some words from Monsieur Paul, hoping that her conjecture on the night of the festival have proved false. Her hopes are not in vain, for Monsieur Paul appears, speaks abruptly to Madame Beck, and takes Lucy for a walk. On the walk he reveals to her that the business which had caused him to defer his departure had been the setting up a school for Lucy, which he shows to her. He also reveals his love to Lucy: "Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth" (503).

Monsieur Paul departs. Lucy's school succeeds, and after three years Monsieur Paul is ready to return; in an ambiguous ending which hints at his death by shipwreck.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**