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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

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Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

When I was a girl, I often visited my godmother, Mrs. Bretton, in the old town of Bretton. Her house was large, quiet, and full of comfort. The rooms were wide, the furniture stood in good order, and the windows looked down on a clean, peaceful street. I liked that house very much because nothing in it was wild or noisy. Life there moved slowly, and at that time I was glad of peace.

Mrs. Bretton was a handsome widow with a strong mind and a kind heart. She was not soft in her ways, yet she could be warm when she chose. She had one son, John Graham Bretton. He was a boy of about sixteen, lively, healthy, and very sure of himself. His eyes were bright blue, and his long fair-red hair shone when the sun touched it. I was staying with them one autumn when a letter came that made Mrs. Bretton thoughtful and serious.

The next day I found a small crib in my room and a tiny chest beside it. At dinner I learned why. A little girl was coming to stay in the house. Her name was Paulina Mary Home, though her father called her Polly. Her mother was dead, and her father, Mr. Home, was in poor health and had gone away for a time. Mrs. Bretton had agreed to take care of the child until he could send for her again.

The child arrived on a wet, windy night. A servant carried her in wrapped in a shawl, and at first I saw only a small bundle. Then a little voice said, "Put me down, please, and take off this shawl." When the cloth came away, I saw a tiny girl, neat and pretty, with soft curls and a serious little face. She let Mrs. Bretton warm her by the fire, and when she was asked her name, she said, "Missy. Papa calls me Polly." She spoke with great care, as if every word mattered.

Soon her face changed. When Mrs. Bretton said her father would come back, Polly asked, "Do you know he will?" Then she slipped from Mrs. Bretton's lap and went by herself to a dark corner of the room. There she sat on a stool and cried so quietly that one could hardly hear her. She did not cry like other children. Her

grief was small in sound, but deep in feeling, and that made it harder to watch.

That night she slept in my room, but she did not really sleep. Even in the dark I could hear her trying not to cry. In the morning she was already up, washing and dressing herself with great effort because she wanted to learn how to manage when her nurse was gone. I saw her kneel and pray in silence. When the nurse came in, Polly whispered, “Hush. Speak low, so you do not wake the girl.” She meant me. Then, after asking to be made neat, she stopped at the door and said, “I wish this was papa’s house. I do not know these people.”

For some days she did not grow easier. She obeyed, but she did not settle. She sat alone in corners, looked as if her heart were far away, and at night I sometimes woke and saw her kneeling in bed, praying softly for her father. She seemed too small to feel so much, yet she did. Then one day everything changed in a moment. Mrs. Bretton had set her in the window-seat to watch the street, and suddenly Polly’s dull eyes shone with light. She cried, “It is papa!” and ran from the room like a bird.

We looked out and saw a gentleman lift her in his arms in the street and bring her back to the house. It was Mr. Home. He had not been able to leave England without seeing for himself how his child was living. When he sat down, Polly stood by his knee and asked, “How is Polly’s papa?” He kissed her when she said, “Kiss Polly,” and from that moment she seemed full of quiet joy. She did not make a loud scene. She only stayed close to him, as if being near him was enough.

At tea she would not let anyone else care for him. She placed his chair, took his cup, tried to put in his sugar and cream, and handed him bread with both small hands. It was almost funny, because everything was too big and heavy for her, yet she was so earnest that no one could laugh much. Her father watched her with tired affection and said, “She is my comfort.” I thought her over-busy, but I could see that her love gave him rest.

That same evening Graham came home from school. He looked at the little girl in black and, after some teasing polite words, introduced himself with mock formality. Polly answered him with equal seriousness. He asked if she liked him, and she said, “No.” When he asked why, she said, “I think you are queer. You have

long red hair." Graham was delighted with such honesty. Before she went to bed, he suddenly caught her up in one hand and held her high in the air. Polly was deeply offended. "Put me down!" she cried, and when he obeyed, she left the room in great dignity.

Mr. Home stayed two days. During that time Polly was happy because he was there, and busy because she was sewing a handkerchief for him. Graham, however, soon began to draw her out of herself. He tempted her with pictures, books, and little jokes. One day he offered her a pretty picture of a dog, then threatened to cut it up if she would not come near him. She came, took the picture, and fled to her father's knee without paying the kiss Graham had demanded. When Graham pretended that her little fist had badly hurt him, Polly grew anxious, ran to him, and began to cry. Soon they were playing like friends.

Then Mr. Home had to leave. Before going, he told Polly she must try to be cheerful and wait for the time when they would meet again. She promised she would try. She did not break down while he stood there, but when the door closed behind him, she fell to her knees and cried, "Papa!" I saw then that she could suffer more deeply than many older people. For two days she would take comfort from no one. On the third evening Graham lifted her gently in his arms, and because she was tired and lonely, she let him hold her. She fell asleep against him, and from that time a strange little friendship began.

After that, Polly cared for Graham with all her heart. She carried his tea to his study, chose food for him, and stood beside him while he ate. She seemed to forget herself when he was near. She learned the names of his school friends, listened to his stories, and even copied the ways of people he disliked in order to amuse him. Yet she was not without pride. Once, when Graham had friends to dinner, she went to the door hoping he would let her in. He opened it, laughed, and told her to go away. She was hurt to the heart. After that she would not run after him or ask for his notice. If he wanted her, he must come to her.

Still, on Sundays, when Graham was quiet and sat by the fire, they were often together in peace. He listened while she said hymns or read Bible stories. He corrected her reading, and she was quick to learn because she loved to please him.

Once she put her arms around him and said that if he died, she would go down mourning to the grave. Such words were too strong for a child, but they were true to her nature. She loved with all her force, and that force frightened me a little.

Not long after, a letter came from her father. He was now on the Continent and wanted Polly to join him at once. I told her first, and she answered sharply because the news struck too directly at her heart. Later she heard it confirmed, and all that day she was very still. That evening Graham was busy with his books and did not understand at once that she was going away. She lay quietly at his feet while he studied, and when I took her to bed, she could not sleep. "I cannot live like this," she said. I carried her back for one more good-night. Graham kissed her kindly, but he did not feel what she felt. When she came back, I told her she must not expect too much from him, or he would grow tired of her love.

She listened, asked if she was still his favourite, and was a little comforted when I said yes. Later, in the dark, she asked if I liked Graham. I answered that I liked him only a little and that no one should worship another person too much. She put her hand on her breast and asked whether I had pain there when I thought of leaving him. At last she was too cold and unhappy to stay alone in her crib, so I took her into my bed and held her until she slept. In the moonlight her face looked small, tired, and full of feeling. The next day she left Bretton and went to her father, trembling, but still trying to govern herself.

Part 2

A few weeks after Polly left Bretton, I left it too. At that time I did not know that I would never see those quiet streets again. I went back to the relatives with whom I was then living, and many years passed. I will not pretend that those years were bright. There was struggle in them, loss in them, and a long inward battle that I told to no one.

In time I lost touch with Mrs. Bretton. Other people stood between us and broke our connection. I also heard that much of the money kept for Graham had been lost, and that he and his mother had gone to London. So there was no one to

whom I could turn. I had to depend on myself, whether I felt ready for that or not.

At that time a lady named Miss Marchmont sent for me. She was rich, but she had been a cripple for twenty years and hardly ever left her rooms upstairs. Her old companion was about to be married, and Miss Marchmont wanted someone to take that place. She warned me at once that the life would be narrow and hard. I looked at her, then at myself in the glass in my black dress, and saw a pale, tired young woman with hollow eyes, but I still believed that life remained in me.

I did not accept at once, yet I returned the next day, and the next after that. Slowly I came to know Miss Marchmont better. She could be sharp and demanding, but she was not false. Even when she scolded, she did it more like a troubled mother than a cruel mistress. Before long I saw that I could respect her, and then I agreed to stay.

My whole world became two hot rooms and one suffering woman. I waited on her, read to her, soothed her pain, and learned to care for her deeply. I forgot fields, roads, sky, and free air beyond the dim windows of the sickroom. Strange as it may sound, I might have gone on in that life for many years. It was narrow, but it gave me duty, and duty gave me rest.

Then one February night everything changed. I had put Miss Marchmont to bed and was sitting by the fire sewing when the wind began to cry at the windows in a way that troubled me. I had heard such a sound before, and I feared it. Near midnight the storm suddenly stopped, the air turned cold, and the stars shone sharply outside. When I turned back from the window, I found Miss Marchmont awake and looking at me with bright, unusual eyes.

She said she felt strong, young, and strangely clear in mind. Then she began to speak of her youth and of the one man she had ever loved, a man named Frank. Long ago, she told me, they had been to marry. One Christmas Eve she dressed and waited for him, certain that he would come, and at last she heard his horse. But when she ran out into the winter night, she found not a happy meeting but a terrible sight. Frank had been thrown and badly hurt, and he was dying.

He was carried inside, and she stayed with him until the end. He had strength to hold her and speak her name, and before morning came, he died. For thirty

years she had lived after that blow. She said that grief had not made her gentle or holy, only lonely and wounded, and yet that night she felt nearer to peace than ever before. At last she told me to go to bed, saying she would rest well, and in the morning I found that she was dead.

Once more I was alone. Miss Marchmont's heir paid me my wages, and I found that I possessed fifteen pounds. That was not nothing, yet it was not safety either. A week later I would have to leave the house, and I had nowhere to go. In that difficulty I visited Mrs. Barrett, an old servant who had once been my nurse and was now housekeeper in a large house nearby.

She could comfort me better than advise me, yet that visit changed my course. When I left her, evening had come, and I had to walk two miles alone under a cold sky. In the north I saw the strange light of the Aurora Borealis, moving across the darkness like something from another world. Under that sky a bold thought entered my mind. It said, "Leave this place. Go out into the world." When I asked where, one answer rose before me at once: London.

The next day I returned to Mrs. Barrett and told her my plan. She did not laugh at me or call me foolish. While we were speaking, a young married lady came in with her children and a foreign nurse, and I learned by chance that Englishwomen sometimes found places in families abroad. I kept that fact in my mind. Mrs. Barrett also gave me the address of an old inn in London which my uncles had used in former years, and with that little help I set out.

London was only fifty miles away, but to me it felt much farther. I arrived on a wet February night, tired, cold, and confused. Everything seemed strange, from the voices outside the coach to the proud little chambermaid at the inn. When at last I was alone in my room, the weight of my position fell on me all at once, and I wept bitterly. Yet even then I did not wish to go back. Beneath the tears there remained one strong feeling that it was better to move forward than to retreat.

The next morning was the first of March. When I opened the curtain, I saw the dome of St. Paul's above the fog, and something in me rose with the sight of it. I dressed quickly, went down to breakfast, and spoke with an elderly waiter who had known my uncles years before. Once he understood who I was, he became

kind and useful. Encouraged by that small success, I went out alone into London.

That day I lived more deeply than I had lived for years. I walked in quiet streets, entered a bookshop, bought a small book I could hardly afford, went into St. Paul's, and climbed to the dome. From there I looked out over the city, the river, the bridges, and the far buildings under the pale spring sky. Later I wandered through the busy streets and felt the force of London all around me. The city did not frighten me then. It excited me and made me feel, for the first time, that life might still open before me.

When I came back to the inn, I ate, rested a little, and then made my decision. I had heard enough from the foreign nurse and had seen enough of my own situation to know that I must try a harder road. That very evening I asked the waiter about ships for the Continent, and he told me that if I meant to go, I must take my berth at once. So I paid my bill, took a coach to the river, and found myself in darkness among rough watermen who fought over me, my trunk, and my fare.

At last I stepped into a boat, was rowed down the black river, and reached the packet called the Vivid. A loud, handsome stewardess showed me my berth with little kindness, but I cared only that I was on board and could lie down. In the morning the other passengers arrived. Among them was a pretty, foolish, talkative girl named Ginevra Fanshawe. She spoke easily, knew little, and thought much of style, admirers, and comfort, yet she was lively enough to amuse me for a time.

We talked on deck as the ship crossed the Channel. She told me she was going to school at Villette, hated lessons, and made friends wherever she went. When she asked where I was going, I told her that beyond Boue-Marine I did not know. I also told her that I meant to earn my living. She stared at me as if that were a sad and strange plan, then went below to be sick as soon as the sea grew rough.

I too became very sick later, though before that I had felt almost happy in the sea air. By night the voyage had turned dark and harsh. The ship rolled, furniture had to be tied down, and Ginevra complained without mercy. At last, near midnight, we reached the foreign port. Friends came to meet the rich passengers, and Ginevra was led away at once, while I stood alone again in a strange country.

Still, I did not stop to pity myself. I asked the stewardess to direct me to a quiet inn, and she found a man to guide me there. At first I tried to pay him with English money, not knowing it was useless here, and even that small mistake reminded me how unprepared I was. Yet I got into the inn, gained a room, and at last shut the door on the night, the sea, and my exhaustion. I could rest for a few hours, though I knew that in the morning the real struggle would begin.

Part 3

I woke the next morning stronger in body and clearer in mind. My first fear was for my trunk, and soon a rough customs man came and demanded my keys. He took them with little politeness, but my trunk did at least seem to be safe for the moment. After that I had to go down into the hotel and find breakfast for myself. I did so with hesitation, because I was still in a strange country and knew almost nothing of its ways.

In daylight I saw that the inn was really a large hotel. Its stairs were of marble, its ceiling was high, and its walls were painted in a grand style. Yet the small room given to me had been poor and narrow. I understood then that servants judge a guest very quickly. They had looked at me once and known that I was of no importance and had little money.

I entered the coffee-room with a beating heart. Many men were breakfasting there, but not one woman. I sat alone at a small table and tried to eat, though I felt uncertain and almost miserable. No one stared at me much, and that gave me courage. When breakfast was over, however, I had to ask myself where I should go next.

One thought came at once. Ginevra had once spoken of Madame Beck in Villette and had said that perhaps an English governess was wanted there. I knew neither the woman nor the address, but I had nothing better to hold. So I asked about the road to Villette, found a seat in the diligence, and set out with that weak hope before me. It was a poor plan, but for me it was enough.

The road was flat, wet, and dull, with canals, willows, gray sky, and fields that

seemed to have no life in them. Still, my mind was strangely active, and I enjoyed the journey in spite of the rain. At the same time anxiety stayed close to me. I could not forget that when night came, I would arrive in a city where no one knew me. That thought lay in wait beneath every lighter feeling.

We reached Villette only after dark. The streets were hard, rough, and shining with rain. At the bureau where the diligence stopped, I waited quietly for my trunk to be brought down, but at last I saw that it was not there. Worse still, I could not explain my trouble in spoken French. I touched the conductor's arm and tried with signs to ask my question, but he misunderstood me at once.

Then an English voice spoke near me. A young gentleman asked what my trunk was like, and I described it to him, even to the green ribbon tied on it. He questioned the conductor sharply and returned to tell me the truth. My trunk had been left behind at Boue-Marine because the coach had been too full, and it would not arrive for another day or two. My money was safe in my purse, but I now stood in Villette with no luggage, no friends, and no knowledge of the city.

The gentleman saw my trouble and spoke kindly. He asked whether I had any friends there, and I had to say no. Then he wrote the address of a quiet inn on a piece of paper and offered to walk with me part of the way, because it was too dark for a woman to cross the park alone. I trusted him at once. There was something open and honorable in his face and voice, and I followed him without fear through the wet darkness.

When we had crossed the park, he gave me clear directions and said good-night. I thanked him and went on alone. Soon, however, two men came after me and spoke with rude boldness. They kept pace with me for some distance, and I was badly frightened. At last they turned away when other men appeared, but by then I had lost the way and no longer knew where the steps to the lower street were.

I searched as best I could and at last went down a worn old flight of steps, thinking it must be the right one. But no inn stood below. I wandered on, weak with tiredness, until I saw a lamp burning over the door of a large house. On its brass plate I read the words "Pensionnat de Demoiselles" and the name "Madame

Beck." The moment I saw that name, I stopped. I did not reason long. I simply rang the bell and waited.

A servant led me first into a clean but strange kitchen and then into a small inner room, where supper was brought to me. I ate gratefully, because I was hungry and beyond pride. Later Madame Beck herself came and took me upstairs. We passed through narrow sleeping rooms that had once been nuns' cells, and through a dark oratory where a pale crucifix hung on the wall. At last she led me into a room where three children slept, while a coarse woman sat nearby in a drunken sleep with a bottle and glass at her elbow.

Madame Beck did not scold the woman or make any noise. She simply showed me the fourth bed and left me there for the night. I prayed in thankfulness, because I had been strangely guided and unexpectedly sheltered. Yet in the middle of the night I woke and found Madame Beck standing in the room in her white nightdress. She moved from bed to bed, then came to mine and studied me as if I were an object under careful examination.

Pretending to sleep, I saw her go through my clothes, my purse, my memorandum-book, and even the small lock of Miss Marchmont's gray hair that I kept with me. She counted my money and examined my keys with special care. For a moment she even took the keys into her own room and brought them back only after making wax impressions of them. Her face gave nothing away while she did all this. I understood then that I was in a house where nothing was left unwatched.

The next morning I learned more. The drunken woman was Mrs. Sweeny, an Irish nursery governess who had come under false claims and had kept her place mainly by means of fine clothes and a grand shawl. Once Madame Beck knew that I had arrived to replace her, the matter was settled very quickly. A policeman was called, Mrs. Sweeny and her belongings were removed, the room was cleaned, and before breakfast all sign of her had disappeared. Madame Beck had not raised her voice once.

Around noon I was summoned to help dress Madame Beck, though that duty did not remain mine. I saw then that she was a woman of middle height, neat, firm,

calm, and well put together in every way. Her eye was watchful, her mouth rather hard, and her whole face seemed made for rule. Yet she was not merely harsh. She managed a large school with great skill, gave the girls good food, enough sleep, fresh air, and easy lessons, and kept the whole house in working order. Her true method, however, was watchfulness. She listened, inspected, questioned, and knew more than anyone expected. From the first, I saw that "surveillance" was the law of Madame Beck's world, and that I had now entered it.

Part 4

In Madame Beck's house, my place soon became more settled. I was not important there, but I was useful, and usefulness is a kind of safety. I taught English, helped where I was needed, and learned how the days moved from bell to bell. There was little warmth in that life, yet there was order, and for a time order was enough. Still, among all the girls, one soon drew my eye more than the rest.

This was Ginevra Fanshawe, the same light, pretty, foolish girl I had met on the packet boat. At school she was as idle and vain as she had been at sea, and perhaps even more amusing. She did not love study, but she loved dress, admiration, comfort, sweet food, and any talk that turned on beauty or marriage. She often made free use of me, borrowed from me, laughed at me, and gave me strange names, yet I was never wholly out of patience with her. There was something so open in her selfishness that one could see her clearly and judge her without much trouble.

She had beauty of the easy kind that wins attention without effort. Her skin was bright, her hair fair and rich, and her whole person seemed made to catch the eye in a room full of people. She knew this very well and never forgot it. If she entered a class, a garden, or a church, she wanted at once to know who had noticed her. She could complain of poverty in one breath and boast of conquest in the next, and she saw no shame in the change.

Towards me she was half careless, half familiar. We quarreled often, but our

quarrels did not last long. She liked to take what was useful from those near her, and I, in spite of myself, often let her do so. At breakfast she would get from me part of my roll; on walks she would contrive that we should share what drink there was; in talk she expected me to listen, advise, and sometimes admire. I never much admired, but I did listen, and from her I learned a good deal about the lighter, emptier side of life in Villette.

Before long I heard much of a gentleman whom she called by a foolish pet name. She could never leave a person with his proper name if a lighter one could be invented, and this habit pleased her vanity because it made the whole world seem part of her little game. When she spoke of this gentleman, she mixed complaint with triumph. He was attentive, she said; he was useful; he admired her properly; and yet she wanted more excitement than his devotion gave her. Even before I knew the whole truth, I saw that she valued admiration less for the heart behind it than for the pleasure of possessing it.

The school doctor came and went as needed, and at first I did not look at him closely. But one day, when he spoke and turned his head, I felt a shock of recognition. The man was no stranger. He was Graham Bretton, now grown into Dr. John. His features were older, his voice deeper, his manner more formed, but the old look remained in the eye, the mouth, the sudden smile, and the easy self-command. I knew him almost at once.

He did not know me. That did not surprise me. I had become quieter, paler, and less noticeable than the Lucy Snowe who had once moved through Mrs. Bretton's house. Besides, he saw me now only as one of the teachers in a foreign school. So I made no sign. I let him stand before me as Dr. John, while in my own mind I still called him Graham Bretton.

Some might think this silence strange, but to me it was natural. I had no wish to step forward and say, "See, I am an old friend." It would have meant little to him, and I did not choose to ask for what he had not thought to give. There was a kind of power in keeping my secret. He stood in clear light before me, while I remained in shade, and in that position I felt safer. So I waited and watched.

Dr. John was kind at the school, as kindness had always come easily to him.

He spoke cheerfully to Madame Beck, treated the girls with pleasant good sense, and never seemed burdened by his own profession or importance. He brought health into a room with him, not by medicine only, but by his manner. Even those who were foolish around him, and there were several, felt encouraged by his presence. I could see why many would like him, and why Ginevra, in her own shallow way, was glad to have him among her admirers.

Yet her feeling was not love. It was amusement, vanity, and the wish to be served. She could speak of him one moment as if he were her chosen knight, and the next as if he were merely one more offering laid before her beauty. She liked bouquets, pretty objects, homage, and the look of jealousy in a man better than she liked the man himself. This was already plain to me, though Dr. John did not yet fully believe it. He still found in her more innocence and softness than truly existed there.

I watched these things quietly. Watching had become a habit with me, and in that house one learned it quickly. Often Ginevra would chatter to me about Dr. John, asking what he had said, whether he looked grave, whether he admired her still, whether some rival had crossed her path. I answered as little as possible. I neither wished to help her coquetry nor to expose my own knowledge too soon. So I let her speak, and I kept my thoughts to myself.

There was, however, one difficulty in this position. To hear Graham speak near me and not answer him as of old; to see in his face the boy I had known and not let even a sign of recognition pass between us; to remember Bretton while standing in the Rue Fossette—this was not always easy. The past and present touched each other too sharply. Yet I had chosen silence, and each day that passed made it harder to break it. Because I had said nothing at first, I said nothing again.

Matters remained thus until chance, not design, began to move them. Dr. John came often enough that his visits no longer seemed unusual. Madame Beck trusted him as school doctor and found him agreeable besides. The girls expected him, Ginevra prepared for him, and I learned to hear his step without visible emotion. But inwardly I was never quite unmoved. The old connection, though hidden, had life in it still.

If he sometimes looked at me with passing curiosity, it went no farther. He heard me called Miss Lucy, but he never heard the name Snowe, and the thought that I might be the child from Bretton did not come into his mind. To him I was simply one more quiet woman, useful in a school, not worth close study. That fact did not wound me as much as perhaps it should have done. I had expected no more. Still, expectation is one thing, and feeling another.

Thus this part of my life in Villette took its shape. Outwardly I was only a teacher doing her duty in Madame Beck's ordered house. Inwardly I had recovered, under a new name, one thread from my old life. Ginevra played with admiration as if hearts were toys. Dr. John moved near me, kind and unconscious. And I, knowing him while he did not know me, stood aside and let the story go on.

Part 5

Summer came, and with it great heat. Georgette, the youngest of Madame Beck's children, fell ill with fever. The other two children were quickly sent away to their grandmother in the country, and for a time the sick child was left mostly in my care. Madame Beck moved in and out, busy as always, yet I saw that she was uneasy. Now that real medical help was needed, Dr. John came again and again to the Rue Fossette.

Georgette clung to me with a sweetness that touched me deeply. In that house open affection was rare, and the little girl's trust felt like a small gift. I sat beside her bed, gave her drink, soothed her restlessness, and waited for the doctor. He came at last with his usual quick, healthy step, and the whole room seemed lighter when he entered. Even illness looked less dark while he was there.

Yet I soon saw that more than illness was moving under that roof. Madame Beck watched Dr. John with unusual care. She spoke of his health, of his pale looks, of his need for rest, and she turned to me for agreement, though she had rarely treated me as a person whose opinion mattered. When he went away, her bright manner dropped from her like a mask. She looked in the glass, saw a white

hair, and pulled it out with a kind of pain and anger that made me understand her better than before.

My thoughts then moved from Madame to Rosine, the pretty portress. She was young, neat, lively, and bold in manner. Nothing in her seemed rare or deep, yet she too appeared to have some strange place in the little web that was forming around Dr. John. I passed her cabinet more than once, wondering what power there could be in such a girl. I felt half amused, half troubled, and wholly uncertain what to think.

One evening, while Georgette was still ill, I remained with the child until very late. Madame was absent, and the house felt unusually still. When Dr. John came, Rosine stood by with the freedom common to servants in Villette and listened to all that passed. She asked at once not only about the child, but about a box he had recovered on another night. Her bold question said aloud what I myself had wanted to ask but had not dared.

He answered her quietly. He had found the box, he said, because he had been attending a little patient in the boys' college nearby and had seen it dropped from a window. So there had been no romance in the matter, no secret understanding with Rosine, and no hidden story of the sort she would have liked. She made a face at this disappointment, and he laughed good-naturedly at her. That laugh, easy and warm, showed again how naturally kind he was.

Still, the mystery of the box did not leave my mind. Behind Madame Beck's house lay a garden enclosed by walls and full of old shadows. There was a story that the place had once belonged to a convent and that a nun had been buried alive there for breaking her vows. I had already seen enough in that house to feel the power of such a tale. The garden, with its trees, its alleys, and its old stillness, easily fed uneasy thoughts.

One evening I was in that garden at twilight when something small fell from above among the leaves. It proved to be a little casket, and with it lay a bouquet and a note. I understood at once that some secret traffic had been carried on between the college and the house, though I did not yet know how much or by whom. The thing had dropped into my hands by chance, and chance had made me

keeper of another person's hidden business. I did not like that position.

Before long Dr. John himself appeared in the garden. He had come to recover the casket, and it was plain that he knew more of the affair than I did. I told him plainly that if none of Madame Beck's pupils were involved, I wanted no part in it. I offered him the box, the flowers, and the note, and was ready to forget the whole matter as soon as possible. He took them, and I was relieved to be rid of them.

In the middle of this exchange he suddenly pointed through the branches. There was Madame Beck, wrapped in shawl and dressing-gown, moving softly through the garden like a cat on the hunt. She had not surprised him. On the contrary, he escaped with astonishing lightness and speed, while Rosine helped him by opening and shutting the right door at the right moment. I could have slipped away as well, but I chose not to run. I stayed where I was and waited to meet Madame openly.

She did not scold me. That was her cleverness. She came near with smiles, spoke of the beauty of the night air, and asked me to walk with her as if she had come out for pleasure only. She even leaned on my shoulder with friendly ease when we went back in. Her softness was more suspicious than any sharp word would have been. I knew very well that she had seen enough to set her thoughts at work.

Lying awake later, I thought how impossible it was to hide anything long in Madame Beck's house. A thrown casket, a step in the alley, a moving branch, a whisper under a window—she would gather signs from all of them. She might not act at once, but she watched, joined one clue to another, and kept her knowledge close until it could serve her. In that school there were no true walls against her eyes. One might possess a secret for an hour, but not for much longer.

So this small adventure left more behind it than a trinket and a note. It showed me again that Dr. John moved through the Rue Fossette under more than one gaze. Rosine could joke with him, Madame Beck could watch him, and I, though outwardly silent and detached, could not help observing him too. The house, the garden, the old nun's legend, the hidden messages, and Madame's quiet pursuit

all seemed parts of one enclosed world. I lived in that world now, and each day I understood a little more of its shadows.

Part 6

After the business of the casket, the garden no longer felt safe to me in the old way. I still loved its trees and paths, yet I no longer believed in their privacy. Every branch seemed to hide an eye, and every wall seemed able to carry a message. So on the next windy evening I stayed indoors with my German book while the boarders gathered in the refectory for their evening study and the long, heavy religious reading which Madame liked to impose on them.

During this time Dr. John had another private talk with me. He spoke as if there were in the house some very pure and delicate person who needed protection from foolish or rude attention coming from outside. I could not help being a little amused, because his language was so warm and ideal, and because I had no clear idea whom he meant. He wished me to watch over this unknown "angel," and I had just begun to promise him help when an accident spoiled the whole confidence.

The accident was small, but it was enough. Madame Beck, who had quietly come home and had been listening at her own chamber-door, suddenly sneezed. In a moment she stepped forward, composed, smiling, and full of easy talk, as if she had only just entered and had heard nothing at all. Dr. John was driven back into silence, and I had to leave them together. I laughed inwardly at the skill of Madame, though I also saw again how impossible it was to keep any secret long under her roof.

Soon after this, Georgette was sent into the country now that she was well again, and I felt her loss more than I expected. The child had given me a little true affection, and without her I was poorer in spirit. The other teachers could not replace her. I tried, in turn, to know them better, but one was coarse and selfish, another polished outside and rotten within, and the third cared for money with a greed almost ugly to see. Thus I remained, by choice and by nature, separate from

them all.

Meanwhile the great day of Madame Beck's yearly fête drew near. There was always a collection for a present to be offered to her, though she pretended not to know of it. The programme was full: the gift itself, a collation in the garden, a dramatic performance, dancing, and supper. The chief burden of the play fell on M. Paul Emanuel, who directed the rehearsals and demanded life, feeling, and force from his young actresses. They often disappointed him, and when a serious play failed under his teaching, he broke it off and replaced it with a short comic piece that they could manage more easily.

Even before I knew him well, M. Paul made a strong impression on me. He was dark, sharp, restless, and full of command. He could be rude, impatient, and fierce, yet there was power in him, and no falseness. During the days before the fête he seemed to be everywhere at once, giving orders, changing plans, correcting tones, arranging the stage, and driving everyone forward by sheer force of will. All the house moved under his hand.

The day before the fête was almost a holiday in itself. The schoolrooms were cleared, cleaned, decorated, and partly turned into stage, dressing-room, and ball-room. I did not share much in the bustle. I escaped, as far as I could, to the garden and spent long hours there alone, glad of warmth, trees, and silence. Once or twice I passed through the rooms and saw the eager preparations, Ginevra among the busiest, bright with vanity and delight.

At last the great day came, hot and cloudless from morning to evening. The whole house seemed to breathe holiday freedom. Girls came down to breakfast in curl-papers and wrappers, talking of their evening dress and hardly pretending to work. The hairdresser arrived early, and from that time the confusion only increased. I kept apart as much as I could, thinking I should remain a quiet spectator to the end.

I was mistaken. At the last moment M. Paul found that one part in the little vaudeville must be filled, and he chose me. I resisted, but resistance was useless against him when once his mind was fixed. He would not have me dressed as a nun, and he would not let me escape the stage altogether; instead he made me

keep my own dress, adding only a small vest, collar, cravat, little coat, hat, and gloves, so that I might appear as a young gentleman. When I came out ready, he looked me over and called me "M. Lucien," telling me to have courage and self-command.

The curtain rose, and I had the first words to speak. At first I was frightened, not so much by the audience as by the sound of my own voice. But once the voice found its proper tone, the fear passed. I forgot the room and the crowd and thought only of the character and of M. Paul listening in the side-scenes. Ginevra acted well, for the role suited her perfectly: she had only to coquette between two suitors, and this was little more than her natural manner improved and set in order.

My own role was that of the sincere lover, and while I played it I began to put into it more feeling than M. Paul had intended. I looked toward Dr. John and took from his face something that stirred me and changed the part. I no longer acted coldly to oblige another person. I acted with warmth and personal will, as if I wished to rival and outdo the man I watched. Ginevra answered this spirit readily, and together we half altered the tone of the piece, so that M. Paul protested between the acts that what we were doing might be finer than the model, but was not faithful to it.

When the play ended, and ended successfully, M. Paul changed at once. The harsh manager disappeared, and in his place stood a lively, social, grateful man who thanked us all and announced that he meant to dance with each in turn. I refused as best I could, saying I did not dance, and for once I managed to escape him. I had acted enough for one evening. My wish then was not for more notice, but for quiet and retreat.

Later I moved away from the brighter part of the fête and found myself outside in the public pleasure-ground, where lights, music, and late-night movement still continued. There, to my surprise, I discovered that Madame Beck herself was present with her little daughter, dressed not for convent-like retirement but for worldly enjoyment. Several gentlemen stood near her, and she seemed cheerful, fresh, and entirely at home in that scene. I understood then what gossip had only suggested before: Madame could play the strict guardian within the Rue Fossette,

yet outside it she took care to enjoy life in her own prudent way.

That discovery amused me, but it did not wholly lighten my mind. The fête had shown me too much. It had shown me my own hidden power in acting, a power I did not trust. It had shown me M. Paul's force, his command, and his strange kindness after severity. It had also shown me Dr. John as part of a brighter world of charm, spectatorship, and feeling from which I still stood apart. So when the night thinned, the music died, and the streets grew quiet again, I turned homeward not unhappy, but thoughtful, carrying more than one new disturbance in my heart.

Part 7

After the fête and the little season of excitement around it, the school turned back to hard work. Examinations were near, and everyone had to prepare for them. I had a heavy task, for I had to teach English to many pupils who found both the language and its sounds very difficult. M. Paul took charge of almost everything else with his usual force and jealousy of control. He did not like to leave even one part of the public display in another person's hands, and he could not hide that he disliked my necessary place in the English examination. Yet on the evening before that day he softened, offered me friendship, and helped me through the work as he had promised.

The examinations passed well enough, and then the school broke up. That was the true beginning of my misery. Madame Beck went away to the sea with her children. The other teachers left for their homes. The professors disappeared. M. Paul himself went to Rome. In that huge house only three beings remained: a servant, a poor half-idiot pupil whose stepmother would not have her back, and myself. Once the noise of work and company fell away, I understood how little strength remained in me.

The days of that long vacation seemed endless. The rooms were too large, the passages too still, the garden too empty. I had lived for many months on duty, effort, and inward restraint, and now the support of labor was taken from me. I

felt my spirits sinking lower each day. I could not look forward with hope, because the future showed me nothing clear, nothing warm, nothing promised. Many times I thought of life as a desert without water or shade, and I believed that for some people, myself among them, suffering was simply the shape appointed for earthly existence.

The poor pupil left with me brought its own burden. She was helpless, silent, twisted in body and mind, and at moments seemed less like a girl than like some unhappy creature not fully human. I had to watch her closely, feed her, tend her, and never leave her alone. These duties were unpleasant and tiring, yet they were not the sharpest part of my trial. The true pain was inward. Even when I had strength to do what was needed, my heart remained sick and empty.

At last her aunt came and took her away. I was then free to walk out, and I began to wander far beyond the city. I went past the gates, along roads, through fields, near farmhouses and graveyards, under the late summer sky, as if movement itself might quiet me. But walking did not heal me. I returned each evening as lonely as before, and my thoughts grew strained and feverish. I began even to imagine Ginevra as a heroine guarded by true love, and when I caught myself building such foolish dreams out of another person's light nature, I knew my mind was no longer in health.

Then illness came in earnest. I took to my bed, and for many days I lay in a fever of nerves and blood while storms broke over the city. Sleep almost wholly left me. When at last it came once, it came in terror, bringing a dream so dreadful that when I woke I thought I had stood close to eternity and had been refused even the comfort of the dead who had once loved me. I could not pray beyond a few broken words. Goton, the servant, urged me to call a doctor, but I refused, thinking no doctor could touch what was wrong in me.

One evening, too weak for wisdom and too desperate for caution, I rose, dressed, and left the house. The empty dormitory had become unbearable to me. I wanted air, movement, any sign that the world still held life outside those walls. On the way I heard church bells and went into a Catholic church where the evening service had just ended. Some who stayed behind remained to confess, and

when a woman near me told me softly to go forward, I obeyed almost without thinking. There, kneeling at the confessional, I began not with the usual form but with the words, “Father, I am a Protestant.”

The priest was an elderly Frenchman, grave and kind. He did not seem shocked so much as puzzled. I told him, in outline, that I was alone, ill, and sinking under a weight of sorrow and inward distress. He asked whether I had committed some crime, and when I said no, he listened more calmly. He could not give me the counsel that would have suited one of his own faith, yet the mere act of speaking brought me relief. Before I left, he told me to come to his house the next morning and said, with real compassion, that Protestantism seemed to him too cold and dry for a nature like mine. However little I agreed, I felt grateful for his human kindness.

I left the church less oppressed than when I had entered it, but I was still weak and confused. The storm had risen again, and I lost my way among old streets I did not know well. Rain and hail drove into my face. I tried to reach shelter, but the cold and weakness overcame me before I could gain it. I remember a great building near me, the dark violence of the weather, and the strange wish that I had wings to ride the gale instead of resisting it. Then everything turned black, and I fell.

When I came back to myself, I lay not on stone steps but in a pleasant room with blue furniture, bright firelight, and familiar objects from long ago. At first I thought I was delirious, for every chair, screen, cup, and ornament seemed drawn out of my childhood at Bretton. Then in the next room I found still more signs: the little green chair, the looking-glass, the cushion I had once worked with my own hands, and at last the portrait of young Graham over the bed. When I whispered his name, a voice beside me answered, and I turned to see Mrs. Bretton herself. She was older, stronger, still erect and full of life, but she was certainly my godmother.

She told me only what I needed at first and would say no more until I was stronger. I ate a little, slept again, and toward evening begged to come downstairs. She let me lean on her arm and led me into the blue drawing-room, where tea

stood ready exactly as in former years. The familiar comfort of that room, the lamp, the fire, the silver urn, and the old domestic order moved me more deeply than I showed. I knew that Graham was expected, and I waited in a kind of quiet agitation which I tried hard to govern.

Soon he came in from the wild night, strong, cheerful, and quite master of the house. He greeted me kindly as a patient and spoke as Dr. John, not yet as Graham Bretton of old. When tea was over, however, Mrs. Bretton studied me, then asked her son whom I resembled. He could not tell. I saw that the moment had come, and I ended the little mystery myself. I said that he and I had last parted in St. Ann's Street years before, and that though I had recognized him long ago, he had never once guessed that Miss Lucy in the Rue Fossette was Lucy Snowe. Then Mrs. Bretton kissed me, Graham stared in open surprise, and the old tie between us was restored.

After that we spoke of the years between then and now. I told them enough of my lonely struggle to make them understand how I had come to be there. They told me also of losses, changes, and of Graham's success in his profession. He had taken this small country house outside Villette for his mother's health, and that explained why the old Bretton furniture had appeared to me like ghosts. At last, when the hour grew late, he sent me kindly to bed. I obeyed and lay down feeling that I still had friends in the world. Yet even in that comfort I feared my own heart, and I prayed not to cling too fondly to this recovered kindness, though before sleep came, I could not keep back my tears.

Part 8

After I went back to the Rue Fossette, I did not at once fall into peace. The return to ordinary school life felt poorer after the comfort of Mrs. Bretton's house. Then one day a letter came from my godmother. It was lively, warm, and full of her old force. She told me to be ready on Thursday, my half-holiday, because a carriage would take me to La Terrasse, and she added that I might meet an old acquaintance there. That letter did me great good. It did not make me joyful, but

it steadied me and gave me something to look toward.

So on the appointed day I went out to La Terrasse. The house stood in a quiet place, and from the first it had an air different from the Rue Fossette. It felt open, English, and domestic. There was less rule there, less watchfulness, and more honest ease. Mrs. Bretton received me with real affection, and before long I learned who the "old acquaintance" was. It was Count de Bassompierre, the father of little Polly, and with him was Paulina herself, now grown into a young lady.

Paulina was no longer the tiny, strange child I had known at Bretton, yet she was still herself. She was small, delicate, fair, and very quiet in manner, but now her quietness had grace and self-command in it. Her old deep feeling had not gone. It had only become more hidden and more refined. She moved softly, spoke gently, and seemed to live in close affection with her father, watching him with loving care and managing him by tenderness rather than force.

At breakfast I saw old habits return in a new form. Paulina begged the Count to stay at home because the weather was wild, and while she spoke she prepared his breakfast with her own hands and watched whether he obeyed her wishes. Mrs. Bretton laughed and reminded us how the child Polly had once begged marmalade for Graham at Bretton. The Count answered in the same playful tone, and for a little while the years between then and now seemed to disappear. In that house, memory did not lie dead. It moved quietly beside the present.

During this talk the Count asked where I was placed in life, and I answered plainly that I was a teacher at Madame Beck's school. I was glad to say it clearly. I did not wish to be taken for something finer or easier than I was. Neither the Count nor Paulina changed toward me when they understood my position, and that simple kindness pleased me more than loud praise would have done. Still, the moment had weight for me, because it joined my past and my present in one room.

I also had time to watch Paulina and Graham together. Their manner was not like that of careless young people. There was restraint in it, but not coldness. A word, a glance, the meeting of their fingers, or the slight turning of one face toward the other said enough. In the evening, when the Count came back and Paulina led him to his chair with soft little praises, Graham remained apart for a

while and said very little. Yet his eye followed her needle and golden thimble as if he could not help looking. That silence told its own story.

These days at La Terrasse were peaceful on the surface, but not empty. I felt myself more at home there with each hour. Mrs. Bretton's talk, the Count's good sense, Paulina's quiet devotion, and Graham's coming and going made a complete domestic picture. I could take pleasure in it even when a little pain went with the pleasure. For Lucy Snowe was not made of stone, whatever calm face she sometimes wore.

During the first days of my stay, Graham kept one subject away from us. I knew very well what it was. Whenever he looked grave, or paced the room, or sat near me in silence, I expected Ginevra's name to come. At last he began. He did not speak directly at first, but asked whether "my friend" was travelling in the south of France. By "my friend," of course, he meant Ginevra Fanshawe.

He then asked question after question. Did I receive letters from her? Had I seen her writing? Was it as pretty as her person? Was there anything she did badly? In every question one could hear his admiration. He still wished to think her bright, simple, graceful, and almost innocent. I answered quietly, but I did not help his dream more than I had to. My knowledge of Ginevra was too plain for that.

At last he asked when I thought she would come back, and then I told him I must explain something to him. I said, in effect, that his doubts of Ginevra's future choice made little sense, because he had already covered her with gifts. Flowers, delicate presents, and even ornaments of real cost had gone from his hands to hers. To doubt her, after all this, was almost to insult the very bargain she seemed willing to accept. These words struck him sharply, because they turned his romantic feeling into plain fact.

He tried to stop me, but I went on. That was my fault. I pressed the matter too hard and spoke with more fire than wisdom. He flushed, cut angrily at my silk with my own scissors, and defended both himself and Ginevra. What pained him was not only that I had seen through the case, but that I had named it so clearly. I had touched his pride, and he did not hide that he was hurt.

Yet the quarrel did not last. When the first pain had gone, he saw that I had

spoken not from malice, but from honest concern. He forgave me, and more than forgave me. After that misunderstanding he was in some ways kinder to me than before. A slight cold barrier, which had always stood between us, seemed to melt. He talked with less ceremony, trusted me more freely, and accepted that I wished him well even when I contradicted him. Thus our quarrel, though unpleasant, brought a truer friendship after it.

From then on I had to hear still more about Ginevra, because he continued to speak of her often. I listened, and I tried to be patient, though patience cost me something. At the same time, another truth was quietly growing clearer before me. While Graham wasted warm feeling on a vain girl, a better and deeper love stood near him in silence. It was not loud, not showy, and not foolish. It had grown slowly from old roots. And whether he yet fully knew it or not, Paulina’s heart was waiting there.

Part 9

My stay at La Terrasse was lengthened for another two weeks because Mrs. Bretton and her son judged that I was not yet strong enough to return to the Rue Fossette. I accepted the delay gladly, though I tried not to show how much it pleased me. During that time Madame Beck herself came out to pay a formal visit. She praised the house, the room, my recovered health, and above all Dr. John, with a brightness so lively that she seemed made of smiles and compliments. Yet when I followed her to the carriage and looked once more into her face, all the sparkle had gone. She sat there cold, grave, and thoughtful, as if the smiling woman of a moment before had been a mere outer dress.

This visit amused Dr. John greatly. He laughed over Madame’s fine speeches and repeated them with excellent skill, for he had a natural gift for light mockery when he was at ease. In such hours he was delightful company. He could be cheerful without coarseness, lively without effort, and kind without seeming to work at kindness. Only one subject spoiled that freedom: when Miss Fanshawe came into his thoughts, his ease changed, and something less healthy entered his

mood.

As my strength returned, I went out more often, and one morning I found myself in an art gallery. The room held one huge painting set in the place of honor, with its own bench and open space before it, as if everyone must kneel to it in admiration. This famous work was called Cleopatra. I did not admire it. To me it seemed too large, too rich, too lazy, too dressed and yet not dressed enough, too proud of itself, and too full of useless show. I thought the flowers, gold cups, and ornaments prettily painted, but the whole work struck me as noisy and false. Much smaller paintings beneath it, of fruit, flowers, nests, and quiet natural things, pleased me far more.

While I was looking at those modest pictures, I felt a light touch on my shoulder. It was Dr. John. He had found me there and was amused that I had left the grand canvas for the little still-life studies below. We talked of art, or rather he talked and I answered. He liked brightness, grace, smoothness, and beauty that could be enjoyed at once. I preferred what seemed truer, quieter, and less anxious to impress. Neither of us converted the other. Yet our difference itself gave a kind of pleasure, because we could speak freely.

Not long after, others joined us, and among them were the Count and Paulina. In that setting I could watch more closely than before how much had changed between her and Graham. He was no longer merely kind to her as to a child, nor was she merely reverent as she had once been. Something more equal had begun. Their talk still bore traces of old recollections, and he drew from memory many tiny details of Bretton days, but beneath memory there now moved another current, slower and more serious. I saw it, though neither openly named it.

Paulina herself sometimes spoke to me of Graham with a frankness that cost me pain. She wondered at the exactness of his memory, at the care with which he recalled small gestures, words, and looks from their childhood. Once she asked whether I admired him as she did. I answered sharply enough to silence her, for I could not bear to hear too much of a happiness in which I had no share. That was not generous, but it was human. Still, even while I checked her speech, I knew the feeling on her side was no childish dream. It had grown with her and become finer

as she became finer.

The next great event was a public concert, one of those brilliant evenings by which Villette loved to celebrate itself. We were to go in a party from La Terrasse. There was dressing, delay, small household confusions, and at last the setting out. I went because I was asked, not because my heart desired crowds. Yet once there, I could not deny the beauty of the sight. The place blazed with lamps; equipages rolled by; fine dresses moved under the light; music rose and fell; and all around us the city seemed resolved to be festive until morning.

In such a scene Ginevra would naturally have shone, and indeed she did shine in her own manner, light, vain, and pleased to be looked at. But she no longer held the center of my interest. My eye went more often to Graham and Paulina. In the bright crowd their relation showed itself not in foolish display, but in harmony. They needed no extravagant speeches. A meeting of eyes, a shared tone, a natural quietness when near each other, these were enough. The charm of it offended me a little because it was so real. The shallow passion born of mere beauty was one thing. This other feeling, which had grown out of years, memory, respect, and inward fitness, was something much stronger.

At one point I turned from the brighter company and looked upon them from a distance under the trees. Then I understood with painful clearness that if this deeper love lived and prospered, I must stand outside it and be content to witness, not to share. Yet I could not hate it. It was too true for hatred. I suffered from it, but even through suffering I recognized its rightness. What grieved me was not that Paulina loved Graham, but that she had found the place beside him which could never be mine.

As the night advanced, the concert ended and the crowd slowly thinned. The park lost some of its noise, and beyond the lamps the moon recovered her power over the sky. Mrs. Bretton, cheerful as ever, declared herself not tired in the least, though Graham insisted that for the good of us all we must go home. He laughed at her, she laughed at him, and in that easy family spirit there was a comfort which for a little while lightened my own mind. We made our way through the confusion, found the carriage, and started back to La Terrasse through the cold darkness.

The drive home proved longer than it should have been because the coachman lost the road, having made himself less fit than a coachman should be. We sat warm inside while the carriage rolled on and on through unfamiliar dark country, until at last Mrs. Bretton declared that her house must surely stand at the end of the world. Graham then looked out, understood the mistake, stopped the carriage, climbed to the box, and took the reins himself. It was like him to do so quickly and without fuss. Soon we were safely moving in the right direction again.

When we reached home, supper and fire were waiting for us, and the winter dawn was almost near before we separated for bed. I remember taking off my dress with easier feelings than those with which I had put it on. Outwardly the evening had been bright and successful. Inwardly it had taught me something I could not unlearn. Beauty might still dazzle Dr. John for a time, and vanity might still play her tricks in the person of Ginevra, but deeper forces were already at work. Paulina's quiet, faithful love had begun to meet an answer. I saw that answer only in glimpses, but glimpses were enough. And because they were enough, they hurt.

Part 10

Yet only three more days remained before I had to leave La Terrasse and return to the Rue Fossette. I counted those days almost hour by hour. Mrs. Bretton tried to keep me longer, and Graham was willing enough to help her, but I wanted the parting over. It is sometimes easier to bear pain once than to wait for it many times. So at last, on a wet dark evening, Dr. John drove me back to Madame Beck's door.

The sight of that door brought back my first arrival in Villette. The lamp shone on the wet stones just as it had done on the night when I first stood there alone and afraid. Graham rang, Rosine opened, and I asked him not to come in; but he stepped for a moment into the bright entrance hall. He saw that I was near tears, though I tried to hide it. He spoke with his usual kindness and said that his mother and he would not forget me.

Then, just before he left, he added that perhaps he would write to me now and

then, only cheerful nonsense, as he called it. I thanked him, but I said he must not trouble himself. Still, the promise entered my heart at once. When the heavy door closed behind him, I felt the blow of separation sharply, and I knew the easier days were over. I went at once through the needed forms of greeting Madame Beck and the others, because ceremony was easier than thought.

That night, when I was alone, I asked myself whether he would truly write. Reason answered at once that if he wrote at all, it might be only once, out of passing kindness, and that it would be madness to build hope on such a thing. My heart resisted, but my mind knew the warning was just. I argued with myself long in the dark dormitory, trying to force my feelings into order. Yet there are times when stern good sense cannot wholly rule us, and a little hope will live even under rebuke.

The next morning I rose before the school and sat alone near the stove in the refectory. I had been crying without knowing it, and when I looked up I saw M. Paul Emanuel's eyes fixed on me through the little window beside the stove. A moment later he entered. He told me at once that I looked sad and rebellious, and then, with that strange power he had of mixing mockery and truth, he said I looked like a young wild animal newly caught and not yet tamed. I did not answer him.

He stayed, sat down near me, and tried in his own way to make me speak. He guessed rightly that I was grieving over parting from friends, but his questions irritated me, and his curiosity seemed almost an insult. At last I begged him to leave me alone. My voice broke, my head fell on my arms, and I wept bitterly there at the table. He sat still for a little while and then went away. Oddly enough, those tears did me good.

By breakfast time I was outwardly calm again, and there I found Ginevra returned from her travels, fuller, brighter, prettier, and more vain than ever. She stretched out her hand to me at once and began her old selfish chatter. As usual, she wanted what was useful to herself, part of my breakfast, part of my attention, and all the news that concerned Dr. John. Her health, spirits, and beauty had clearly grown stronger during her absence. She looked made for pleasure and for easy triumph.

Later, when she burst into my classroom, she questioned me eagerly about the concert night and about Graham. She wanted to know whether he had suffered from jealousy, whether he had been deeply moved by seeing her with de Hamal, and whether he had gone home half mad with pain. I answered her with pure invention. I described him as wild with grief, refusing supper, tossing in bed, and calling for her in despair. She believed every word and was delighted. She wanted not love, but proof of power.

I let the game go on for a while because I knew the truth was very different. Dr. John had not gone home in despair. He had driven back comfortably, eaten well, and slept like a healthy man. To set this against her eager vanity gave me a certain grim pleasure. Yet even while I laughed at her folly, I was less angry with her than before. It is easier to bear a shallow nature when one fully sees its shallowness.

A fortnight passed. School work closed round me again, and life became dull in its usual way. Then one evening at last the promised letter came. I kept it sealed all day because I wanted to open it in complete privacy, and privacy was the rarest thing in Madame Beck's house. After dinner and after study had begun, I borrowed a candle from Goton and tried first the dormitory, then the classrooms, but everywhere I found disturbance, people, dust, or sweeping. At last I took a key, climbed to the old garret high above the house, and hid myself there with my letter.

The garret was black, cold, and full of old things, but I did not care. I wrapped a shawl round me, set the candle on a broken chest, and opened the letter. It was long, and it was kind. To anyone else it might have seemed no more than a good-natured letter from a cheerful friend, but to me it was a gift of great price. He wrote of the days at La Terrasse, of places we had seen, of things we had said, and, best of all, he seemed to write not only from duty to me, but with real pleasure in writing. For that one little space of time I was perfectly happy.

Then, in the middle of that happiness, something moved in the room. I heard a soft step. I looked up, and in the dimness I saw a figure black and white, with straight dark dress and a white-veiled head, standing in the middle of the garret.

Call it dream, fear, illness, or whatever you please, I know what I saw. It looked like a nun. I cried out and fled. I ran down to Madame Beck's sitting-room and told them all that something was in the garret and that they must come up and see.

When we reached the place again, the candle was out, the room was dark, and my letter was gone. I forgot the nun at once and could think only of that loss. I searched the floor in distress, crying for my letter like a foolish creature. Then a voice beside me asked whether it was his letter I had lost. Only then did I understand that the second gentleman in Madame Beck's room had been Dr. John himself, come there to see old Madame Kint. He led me downstairs to a warm room and tried with the greatest kindness to comfort me, promising twenty letters for the one lost.

At last he drew the letter from his own pocket. He had found it on the floor in the garret and had hidden it, I think, partly to tease me and partly to test how much it meant to me. I was too glad to get it back to scold him. He asked why I valued it so much, and I could only say that I had very few letters to care for. Then, because he saw that my terror had not wholly passed, he urged me to tell him exactly what I had seen in the garret. I did so, though I made him promise not to laugh and not to repeat my story.

He listened more seriously than I expected. When I had finished, he said he believed it was a case of nerves, a spectral illusion born from inward strain and loneliness. He told me that happiness was the cure and a cheerful mind the best guard against such visions. I answered that happiness was not a thing one could simply grow at will. He then declared, half laughing and half in earnest, that at least he himself was well rid of melancholy now, for Ginevra Fanshawe no longer ruled him. He said that stage of feeling was over and that if he loved again, he would demand love for love and passion for passion.

Those words stayed with me after he left. They told me that the old foolish worship of Ginevra had weakened in him, though I could not yet see where his deeper feeling might turn. As for the nun, the letter, and the strange fright of the garret, the house searched and found little. Madame Beck advised silence, and I obeyed. So the matter dropped outwardly. But inwardly it did not drop. I was left

to wonder whether I had seen something from the world outside me, or something born only from my own troubled mind.

Part 11

After the night of the theatre and the strange fright in the garret, a new change came over my life for a time. Graham's letters continued. There were five of them in all, and because they came from him, they seemed to me full of warmth, comfort, and living kindness. I know very well that if I had read them years later with a cooler mind, I might have found them only good, cheerful, friendly letters. But at that time they seemed far richer than that, and I answered them first with all my heart, and then, after tearing up those true answers, with shorter and safer ones that Reason allowed me to send.

I did not live on letters alone. Graham visited me, took me out once a week to La Terrasse, and openly declared that his purpose was to keep the nun away. He treated the whole matter as if it were partly a medical case and partly a personal battle in which he meant to win. I believe he was sincere in both feelings. He thought my mind troubled, my nerves strained, and my imagination too ready to fill darkness with forms. He also disliked the very idea of that white-veiled watcher and would gladly have driven her off by force if force could have touched such a creature.

Then one evening in early December he came in evening dress and announced that his mother had sent her carriage for me. There was to be a great actress at the theatre, and Mrs. Bretton, prevented from going herself, had said at once, "Take Lucy in my place." I needed no second urging. The name he spoke was famous through Europe, and I wanted deeply to see whether such fame could be justified by reality. So I hurried to dress, though in doing so I had once more to enter the dark upper regions of the house where my fears had already found food.

In the garret I saw again something I could not explain. There was a light where no light should have been, shining near the deep alcove and its old curtain; and while I looked, both light and shape vanished at once into blackness. I had no time

then to search. I snatched my dress and ran downstairs trembling. Graham saw my face in the vestibule and said at once that the old excitement was back, that the nun had crossed my path again. I denied it, because what I had seen was not her, and because I was tired of having every unknown thing explained away as nerves. Still, he remained certain that my agitation proved his case.

The theatre was full from top to bottom. Rank, fashion, wealth, and curiosity had crowded into every part of it. We waited a long time, and when at last the actress appeared, I forgot nearly everything else. She did not seem merely a woman acting before us. She seemed a being possessed by some fearful inward power, proud, broken, furious, resisting pain and fate with every faculty still burning. There was little in her of sweetness or goodness, and nothing of calm beauty. But there was force, terrible force, and it held the whole theatre silent and captive.

I wondered then what Graham thought of such an apparition. When I found time to look at him, I saw that he was watching with strong interest, but not with the feeling that ruled me. He was curious, observant, intelligent, but not carried away. The wildness, suffering, and fury of that great tragic figure did not enter him deeply. He judged where I was shaken. When I asked his opinion, he gave it briefly, coolly, and in a way that seemed to weigh the woman more than the artist. His answer taught me again how unlike we were in the secret parts of our minds.

Then, at the blackest point of the tragedy, when the whole house seemed fastened on the stage and even breath was held, there came sudden noise behind the scenes and then the cry of fire. In a moment all order broke. Panic rushed through the theatre, and the crowd pressed with a blind, cruel force dreadful to feel. Yet Graham remained calm. He told me with one look that I was to stand still and trust him, and I obeyed. In that terror his courage was simple, open, and complete.

Before us a young girl was struck down in the crush and disappeared under the feet of the crowd. Graham sprang forward with another gentleman, forced back the pressure, and lifted her out. She was unconscious at first, light as a child in his arms. He told me to keep close to him and not let go, and by steady effort we made

our way out into the freezing night. There the older gentleman spoke as the girl recovered enough to ask for her father, and we learned that Graham was now carrying the daughter of M. de Bassompierre. Her shoulder seemed hurt, and her father asked us to follow his carriage to the Hôtel Crécy.

We went there, entered the great house, and found the girl laid in a chair among servants who could not understand her well. Graham examined the injury and said it was serious, though not beyond his skill. He sent me with the women to her room and asked me to help, because they were clumsy and she must be moved with the greatest gentleness. I undressed her, arranged her in bed, and saw then a person very unlike Ginevra Fanshawe. She was small, pale, delicate, and perfectly cared for in every detail, with a look of refinement and inward life stronger than mere color or outward beauty. Still, at that time I did not know who she truly was.

After that night seven long weeks followed in which I heard nothing from La Terrasse. No visits came, no messages, no letters. I tried to occupy myself with lace-work, German, and heavy books, but all these efforts were like dry food to a starving person. The worst hour of every day was the post-hour. I feared it, waited for it, and suffered from it before and after it came. At night I would take out Graham's five letters and read them by a hidden taper, though by then even they had begun to lose life under too much use, like leaves once gold and now growing thin in the hand.

One evening Ginevra came into our room full of bad temper and told me where she had been. She had visited her uncle de Bassompierre, whom she hated because he gave her little attention. From her complaints I learned that Mrs. Bretton and Graham had been received there warmly, and that the injured girl, now quite recovered, was the Count's daughter. Ginevra called her affected and spoiled, but her bitterness revealed more than her words. She had hoped to be the center of the evening and had found herself passed over. The next morning, while I was suffering through the approach of the post, I found at last a letter on my desk—not from Graham, but from Mrs. Bretton.

That letter set me right in one way, though it could not wholly cheer me. Mrs. Bretton wrote kindly, spoke of her business, of Graham's growing practice, and

of the household life at La Terrasse with her usual strong, cheerful tone. At the end she ordered me to be ready on Thursday, because the carriage would come for me, and added that I might meet an old acquaintance there. So, through a wild snowstorm, I was carried once more to the château. Mrs. Bretton welcomed me with such warmth that the cold seemed to leave my body at once. Then she sent me upstairs to arrange my hair, and in my old little room I found before the glass a slight white figure that turned and smiled when I entered.

At first I knew only that the girl was beautiful in a very delicate way, fair, small, and full of some inward grace stronger than bright color or showy charm. Then she said that I had once taken her into my bed and comforted her in great distress. She told me to go back to Bretton and remember Mr. Home. In a moment all became clear. This was little Polly grown up. She was now Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre. She remembered Bretton in minute detail, even the Sundays with Graham, his patience over her reading, and the old quiet evenings that had meant so much to her. When Mrs. Bretton called us downstairs, we went together, and I carried with me the strange feeling that the past had risen before me again, but not as memory only. It had returned alive, refined, and more beautiful than before.

Part 12

From that time my life in Villette no longer moved in one narrow line. Madame Beck had always treated me with a certain respect, but now that she saw I was invited not only to La Terrasse, but also to the Hôtel Crécy, her respect rose into a kind of distinction. She liked connections that reflected credit on her house, and she was well pleased that one of her teachers should be received in good society. Thus I was allowed to go out often, and with less question than before.

These visits changed much in my outward life, but they changed still more within. I saw Graham often, and I saw Paulina often. To see either one of them alone would have been easier than to see them together. Yet together they were most often before me, and what I had first guessed now grew each day more plain.

Paulina's feeling was no childish fancy, and Graham's attention was no longer careless kindness given to an old playmate.

Paulina herself, though quiet, gave many small signs of her inward state. She watched for her father's return with loving patience, and she watched for Graham too, though in a more guarded way. She no longer ran to him as a child would have done. Her manner had dignity in it now, and even when her fingers touched his for a moment, the contact was light and controlled. Yet all the while her heart was awake, listening under that stillness.

In those winter evenings at La Terrasse, the picture often repeated itself. Mr. Home and Mrs. Bretton would carry on a long, rich talk full of old recollections, while Paulina sat near with her work and her bright thimble moving in the lamplight. Graham, when tired from his day's labor, would say little, but his eye would follow that little flash of gold in her hand. It was not the gaze of a man merely amused. It was quieter than that, and more serious.

I saw also that Paulina never ceased to belong first to her father. This did not weaken her feeling for Graham. On the contrary, it made it finer. Her love was not light or wandering. It had roots in duty, gratitude, memory, and care. She could still prepare her father's breakfast with tender hands, persuade him to stay at home from the snow, and rule him by affection alone; and then, without noise or display, turn toward Graham with another kind of devotion.

Once, in the midst of such conversation, the Count asked whether he should send his daughter to a good school and mentioned Madame Beck's place. This gave me the chance to speak plainly of my own position. I said without hesitation that I was a teacher there. I was glad to do it. I had no wish to stand in borrowed light. If Count de Bassompierre and his daughter were to think less of me for that truth, better that they should know it fully and at once. They did not change, and I was grateful.

Yet if my outward position stood clear, my inward one did not grow easier. Paulina continued sometimes to speak to me of Graham, though after a time I checked her more sternly than kindness required. She marveled at the strength of his memory, at the exactness with which he remembered little things from Bretton

days, and at the warmth with which those small memories returned when he looked at her. Such words were sweet to her, but to me they were painful. She poured honey, and it reached my ear like fire.

Therefore I forced myself to silence her. I answered strongly and sometimes coldly. I told her, in effect, that I did not look at Graham, that I valued sight too much to risk blindness, and that she would do well to spare me these confidences. She did not fully understand my hardness. Happiness had made her innocent of some forms of suffering. She thought me strange, proud, capricious, perhaps even severe without reason. Still, she obeyed more than once, because her nature, though deep, was gentle.

By this time I could no longer mistake what was happening. Graham's earlier dream about Ginevra had faded. It had been bright, foolish, and shallow, and it had not lasted. Here, before him, stood something entirely different: a small, refined, faithful nature, one which had loved him first as a child, then silently as a girl, and now with the whole collected force of a woman's heart. No vanity moved in Paulina. No coquetry lived in her. She did not play with feeling. She lived by it.

And Graham, whatever he yet said or did not say, had begun to feel the fitness of such love. He was at peace near her in a way he had never been near Ginevra. He remembered her; he trusted her; he softened without losing manliness in her presence. Their relation had no glitter, but it had truth. Watching them, I could not deny that they belonged to each other far more naturally than either belonged to any other person. That truth was just, and because it was just, it cut more deeply.

Then came what I call a burial. No coffin was carried, no grave was opened, no mourning clothes were put on. The thing buried was within me. I had long known that Graham was not mine and never could be mine; but knowledge is one thing and submission another. During these weeks I made myself submit. I forced my reason to stand over feeling and command it down. If a small image of hope had still lived hidden in some fold of my heart, I put it there into the earth and covered it.

This was not done in one hour, nor with tears enough to lighten it much. I

continued to go to La Terrasse, to see them, to speak with composure, and to hold my place as before. Outwardly nothing changed. Inwardly all changed. I ceased to ask even in secret what Graham might one day become to me. I set him where he belonged, on another path, moving toward another companion. That act was bitter, but it was clean.

When the burial was over, I did not become happy. That would be too much to say. But I became somewhat quieter, and perhaps more honest with myself. I had ceased to nourish a pain by feeding it with impossible wishes. The world remained what it was: Madame Beck's school still watched and ruled me; Villette was still foreign; and I was still solitary in essential ways. Yet after this inward funeral I stood on firmer ground, because at last I had given one lost hope its proper grave.

Part 13

The next day proved busier than any of us had expected. It was a holiday in honor of one of the young princes of Labassecour, and the city schools had been called together for public ceremony. Paulina sent a note asking that Ginevra and I come early, so that we might join her party before dinner at the Hôtel Crécy. Thus what had begun as a small domestic plan turned into a larger public occasion.

While Ginevra and I were dressing, she broke into laughter at the sight of me. My plain black dress offended her sense of display. She said I looked like a very grave little old maid and declared that if I would only dress with some color, I might perhaps be more noticed in the world. I let her talk. She was never more at ease than when she could compare her own bright appearance with another woman's simpler one.

At the public hall the crowd was large, the speeches long, and the whole event full of patriotic noise. M. Paul Emanuel was there as one of the college professors, and when he spoke, he spoke with real force. His audience did not understand all his fire, but they felt enough of it to cheer him warmly at the end. As we passed out, he lifted his hat to me, asked quickly what I thought of his speech, and then was swallowed at once by praise from others.

Count de Bassompierre invited him to dine later at the Hôtel Crécy, but M. Paul would not accept the dinner itself. He had that firm independence which made him unwilling to press into the society of the rich before he chose. He promised, however, to appear in the evening with one of the learned gentlemen who were his friends. That little refusal, quiet as it was, showed more strength of character than many louder actions.

At dinner Ginevra and Paulina were both beautiful, but in very different ways. Ginevra had richer color, fair curls, and the easy bloom that first catches the eye. Paulina, in plain white, looked finer, gentler, and more complete. Her beauty did not shine by brightness alone, but by grace, mind, and a kind of inward life that gave value to every movement and every glance.

She was a little awed at first by the learned men round the table, yet she did not fail among them. She answered modestly, spoke in excellent French, and showed both reading and reflection where Ginevra could offer only quick sounds and shallow chatter. Her father watched her with proud delight. I saw too that Dr. Bretton, coming in late and taking his place quietly, noticed both women at once and measured them more than once through the meal.

Ginevra, once she had him near, brightened at once and talked with all the pretty emptiness natural to her. Graham gave her the attention courtesy required, and no one could have accused him of coldness. Yet I thought I saw that while his eye and ear were occupied, the rest of his nature was not fed. She pleased one part of him still, but not the best part. That better part was waiting elsewhere in the room.

When we passed into the drawing-room, the difference grew plainer. Ginevra soon threw herself on a sofa and called both the speeches and the dinner dull, but the moment the gentlemen were heard approaching, she flew to the piano and struck it with spirit. Dr. Bretton took his place beside her, yet he did not remain inwardly at rest there. Across the room Paulina sat near the hearth, and round her gathered several thoughtful Frenchmen, charmed by her sweetness, tact, and intelligence.

I listened, and I am sure Graham listened too. Paulina spoke not loudly, but

with such truth and grace that even her silence seemed full of meaning. He stood apart, but his hearing missed nothing. I knew that the kind of mind revealed in her speech suited him deeply, and that the quiet attraction of her presence worked on him more strongly than Ginevra's brighter arts. He crossed later to my corner, sat beside me, and watched both women with a look that told its own story.

The evening ended badly for Ginevra. She had hoped to charm, to sting, and to reign, and had done none of these things as completely as she wished. In the carriage home she gave way to wild anger against Dr. Bretton, speaking of him with bitter scorn because she had found herself unable either to master or deeply wound him. Her hatred was only wounded vanity in another dress. I bore it for a little while and then turned on her sharply enough to silence her. That scolding was just what she needed, and it calmed her more than softness would have done.

After this, life at the Rue Fossette resumed its usual order, but not wholly its old feeling. I still saw Dr. Bretton, still received his friendly care, and still found small ways of serving him. One of these was the making of a watchguard. I had hoped to finish it quietly and place it in his hands without noise, but he had a way of knowing such things from the first stitch to the last. He liked these little services and showed that he liked them, though always with a good nature which made resentment difficult.

One evening, while I sat at work in the refectory, M. Paul came behind me and asked what I was making. When I answered, "A watchguard," and then admitted that it was for a gentleman, one of my friends, he bent down and spoke in a low, sharp voice close to my ear. He declared that of all women I was the one best able to make herself unpleasant, that I turned good will into discord, and that I was taken in by mere outside show—by height, fine color, and handsome features joined to a great quantity of foolish vanity. He accused me of being airy, perverse, and almost coquettish in my admiration of such qualities.

His words stung because they were unjust in form, yet not wholly blind in instinct. He had seen more than I wished him to see. Under his teasing severity lay jealousy, though I did not yet fully name it so. For the present I only knew that M. Paul's quick black eye had followed my work, had guessed its purpose, and

had chosen to wound me rather than let that purpose pass in silence. Thus the close of this portion of my story left several lines tighter drawn than before: Ginevra weakened, Paulina strengthened, Graham more and more divided from his old fancy, and M. Paul beginning to show that he too watched me in his own restless and troubling way.

Part 14

After the matter of the watchguard, M. Paul and I stood on uncertain ground, half at peace and half ready to quarrel again. Then his fête-day came, and with it one of those customs which mean much in countries where saints' days are closely observed. The little girls of the third division brought him small knots of violets and whispered their good wishes, and all the house seemed ready to honor him except me. I had not forgotten the day, and I had not come empty-handed, but through confusion, interference, and my own want of calmness, I let the proper moment pass. So when morning was far advanced, he had received from me neither flower, word, nor look.

This wounded him more than I had expected. When at last he spoke, he did not hide the pain under politeness. He said that everyone had wished him joy but me, and asked whether my silence had been accidental. I answered honestly that I had known the custom and had been prepared, yet had given nothing in the usual way. On hearing that, he was hurt, but not deceived. He even said that he would rather hear me speak plainly than flatter him with false warmth.

Then he went farther than I had thought he would go. In his eager, sharp manner he accused me of a great mistake in life, of being cool where gratitude was due, and perhaps warm where I ought to be indifferent. He spoke the word "passion" with sudden force, then checked its meaning at once, saying that such a thing belonged to his buried past and not to his present life. Even while he denied any personal claim on me, he plainly demanded better treatment than I had shown him. In his own direct way, he wanted justice, respect, and some visible proof that he was not nothing to me.

I could not deny that he was right in one matter. So I opened my desk, took out the little box I had prepared, and put it into his hand. I told him it had lain ready in my lap that very morning, and that if he had been more patient, St. Pierre less meddling, and I myself calmer, he would have had it at the proper time. He looked at the gift with pleasure at once. Inside was a bright chain of silk and beads, and on the lid were his initials. The thing was small, but it had cost thought, care, and more money than my means easily allowed.

This changed him instantly. The pain went out of his face, and something softer took its place. He asked, with quick curiosity, how I had learned one of his names, and when I answered lightly, he answered in the same tone. From that point the whole morning grew easier. He even called me his "petite sœur," and for a little while I believed that a safer and kinder relation might truly be forming between us.

The fête-day did not end with gifts and classroom ceremony. There was also an outing into the country, carefully planned and managed under M. Paul's rule. We went far enough from Villette that the road back would have been hard for the younger children, but vehicles had been prepared, and all had been arranged beforehand. The day itself was bright and pleasant. It might have been perfect had there not been, from time to time, a little breath of sadness passing across its sunshine.

Through all this M. Paul showed both his strength and his peculiarity. He could order a school feast, a country walk, a lesson, a dance, or a public occasion with equal force. Where others would have left confusion, he made order. Where others would have grown careless, he remained vigilant. Even when Madame Beck admitted young male spectators on school evenings or feast occasions, it was still M. Paul alone who could move freely among the girls, because for all his temper and jealousy he was known to be a man of absolute honor.

Yet the slight cloud over the day returned in the evening. I saw him come out into the garden with Madame Beck, and they walked together for a long time in earnest conversation. She looked amazed, warning, and unwilling; he looked troubled, restless, and bent under some inward pressure. After she went in and left

him alone among the trees, I watched from the classroom and thought that if he had really been my brother, I would have gone to him at once and asked what pain lay on his mind. He seemed to want comfort, and Madame Beck had given him none.

Then all at once he turned and came swiftly toward the place where I sat. His speed, his face, and the suddenness of his movement frightened me. Instead of waiting to meet him, I fled like a coward and hid myself in the oratory. From there I heard him go through room after room, striking doors impatiently and asking, “Where is Mademoiselle Lucie?” Just when I had gathered courage to go out and meet him after all, St. Pierre answered falsely that I was already in bed, and Madame Beck herself intercepted him and sent him away.

I regretted that flight afterwards, because the wish to see him had been stronger in me than the fear. Still, by one of those strange mercies that sometimes visit awkward human beings, the mistake did not bring an open quarrel. He came again that very evening to the study-hour when no one expected him. I was glad to see him and could not help smiling. He sat down close beside me, watched to see whether I would shrink away, and found that I did not. By then I had begun to lose the first impulse of recoil I used once to feel near him.

During that lesson he spoke hardly at all, yet his silence was kind. I moved when I wished, coughed, turned, and even yawned without earning one sharp glance. He seemed indulgent, and the whole of him breathed a quiet friendliness more pleasant than many speeches. When supper came and he rose to go, he only said that he wished me good night and sweet dreams. I slept well after that, and the memory of his few words lasted with me longer than I would have admitted aloud.

Still, it would have been a mistake to think that M. Paul had now become easy. He remained a man of difficult moods, quickly overworked, quickly irritated, and deeply jealous by nature, not only in love, but in mind, judgment, and authority. As I watched him over exercises, frowning because my work contained fewer faults than he almost wished to find, I often thought he resembled Napoleon in miniature. He had the same impatience of resistance, the same readiness for petty

war, and the same refusal to retire with dignity when once engaged. A quarrel of his with Madame Panache showed this clearly enough: instead of letting a dispute die, he threw himself into it with energy, malice, and full delight in battle. Thus the fête-day left us nearer than before, but not secure. I had crossed a threshold with M. Paul, yet I had crossed it into the company of a man at once generous, jealous, honorable, unreasonable, and very far from simple.

Part 15

After the fête-day of M. Paul, another trouble rose in me. I had begun to fear that my letters from Dr. John were not safe in Madame Beck's house. Madame herself had already searched my desk before now, and I could bear that more easily than another thought which now came to me. I guessed that she had spoken of my letters to M. Paul. Some angry, suspicious glance of his had lately made me think so. The idea wounded me deeply, because those letters, however simple they might seem to others, were private and dear to me.

I asked myself where, in that whole strange building, anything could be truly hidden. A drawer would not do. A box would not do. A lock in Madame Beck's house was hardly more than a joke. At last a lonely thought came to me. In the forbidden alley stood the old pear-tree, grey and bare, with a hollow near its root hidden by ivy. I decided that there I would bury not only my letters, but also a part of my grief.

So one dark evening, when study-hour held the house quiet, I took a sealed glass jar, stole into the garden, and went to the tree. I had bought the jar earlier in the city for this very purpose. I put the letters deep into the hollow, covered them with a slate and mortar, spread black earth over all, and carefully drew the ivy back into place. Then I stood beside that hidden place as if beside a grave. It was not only paper I had put out of sight. I meant also to bury the sorrow tied to those letters and to the hope that had grown around them.

The night air had a strange force in it. It did not make me happy, but it made me feel stronger and more ready for battle with life. I thought then that I could not

go on forever in the same position, poor, watched, dependent, and inwardly worn. If another struggle with fortune had to come, I felt more able to meet it than I had felt for some time. Such was the mood in which I returned from the tree and entered once more the prison of the Rue Fossette.

Not long after this, on a summer white night when the city kept holiday far into the dark hours, I could not bear the dormitory and the silent house. The great gate yielded strangely easily to my hand, and I slipped into the street without effort, as if some unseen force had opened the way before me. I thought at first to seek only the quiet of the park, but as I went upward through the streets, music, bells, torches, and movement gathered around me until all Villette seemed one blaze of light and rejoicing.

In the middle of that bright crowd I suddenly saw an open carriage full of known faces. There sat Count de Bassompierre, my godmother, and Paulina Mary, beautiful, young, and happy. The sight struck me sharply. Their peace, elegance, and belonging to each other stood before me like a complete picture from which I was absent. I did not begrudge them that happiness, yet to see it so fully lit before my eyes gave pain. Even while I turned away, I knew I still honored the harmony between Graham and Paulina, though I suffered under it.

Midnight passed, and the crowds began to thin. I left the bright quarter and went back toward the lower, quieter streets, where moonlight had returned and the lamps were dying. The whole city seemed different there, humble, silvered, and almost solemn after the noise of the fête. I was only one street from the Rue Fossette when a carriage rushed by at great speed. In it, I thought I saw something white wave from a window, as if a handkerchief had been raised in signal. I could not tell whether I had really seen it or only imagined it, but the moment stayed in my mind.

The next seven days were days of expectation. I hoped for a letter from Dr. John and feared not to receive one. The post-hour grew painful to me. I dreamed of a letter at night, thought of one in the morning, and looked toward Rosine's cabinet with a restless heart. Reason said I had no right to expect much. Feeling answered that one letter at least must surely come. Such little hopes, when one is

lonely, can govern the whole inner day.

At last, one morning, I saw in Rosine's hand a white envelope sealed with red wax. Even before I could ask a question, M. Paul came rapidly down the corridor. I fled to my class as usual, because if he found me idle, I knew I would get a lecture. The girls were seated, silence was restored, and I took out my work before he entered. He burst in stormily, crossed the room, stopped at my desk, and fixed me with one of his hard suspicious looks. Then, without a soft word, he laid the letter before me.

It was indeed mine. I knew the hand at once. The address was clear and firm, and on the seal were the initials J. G. B. For one moment all my inward pain changed into warmth and life. It was no mere scrap, but a full letter, substantial in my hand, real, answered, arrived. Hope, long strained, had at last taken form. Whatever else might be true, I was not forgotten.

M. Paul had taken the letter from the portress and chosen to deliver it himself. This was like him, meddling, jealous of influences he did not approve, and unable to leave even a private joy wholly untouched. Yet I could not be angry then. My gladness was too strong. I only knew that the letter had come and that the dark waiting of seven days had ended. Even M. Paul's suspicious severity lost some power in the light of that relief.

I did not open it at once before the class. I held it, felt its reality, and let the mere fact of its presence comfort me. In a life starved of simple personal kindness, a letter may become more than paper and ink. It may seem proof that one still exists for another human being. That morning, such proof lay on my desk. The buried jar still slept beneath the old pear-tree, my grief was not dead, Madame Beck still watched, and M. Paul still troubled me with his restless authority. Yet for the moment none of that ruled. The first letter had come, and my heart, however foolishly, was glad.

Part 16

On the first of May we were all ordered to rise at five in the morning, be

dressed by six, and put ourselves under M. Paul Emanuel's command. He meant at last to keep the promise he had made and take us out into the country for breakfast. I reminded myself that when the plan had first been mentioned, I had not exactly been invited; but when I hinted at this old slight, my ear received such a sharp little punishment that I thought it wiser not to argue further. So with the rest I joined the expedition.

The morning was beautiful from the first. Spring had fully opened, and the air was clear, mild, and fresh with young life. We left Villette on foot like a small troop under one active commander. M. Paul had charge of all, yet it did not weigh him down. He seemed made for such work, keeping order, pushing the laggards on, helping the weak, laughing at foolishness, and ruling the whole party with quick decision.

After a good walk we reached the farm where breakfast was to be taken. The place was simple, rural, and pleasant, with orchard ground, green shade, and open country all around. Food appeared in abundance, and the younger girls were soon full of delight. Once the meal had ended, they scattered to games and wandering talk, and for a while the whole scene felt like freedom itself. Even I, who was not easily carried away by schoolgirl pleasure, felt the goodness of the day.

M. Paul did not leave me wholly to myself in this outing. At one point he drew me apart from the others into a quieter place where there was shade and a seat. He gave me a book, Corneille, and asked whether I would not rather stay with him than run about with my companions. I answered that I was content where he was. That answer pleased him more than I had meant to show, and from then on his manner grew very gentle, almost too gentle for my peace.

He then spoke in the tone he sometimes used when seriousness broke through his irony. He asked whether, if I were really his sister, I could be content always with such a brother. He asked whether I should be sorry if he left Villette and went far away. He even named years—two, three, five—and asked whether I would welcome him back after such a separation. To these questions I could not answer lightly. My heart was too full, and when at last he said that he had been hard and demanding with me, I hid my face because it was covered with tears.

He saw my trouble and at once tried to cheer me. He said he would not press me so again, and for the rest of the day he remained full of a grave kindness that touched me deeply. Yet his tenderness had something mournful in it. I would almost rather have had his old sharpness back than this softness which seemed to carry a shadow of parting inside it. Thus even in happiness there breathed some warning of pain.

At noon he gathered his flock together and led us homeward. The distance was long, the road hard and dusty, and the children were too tired to walk it easily; but he had foreseen the difficulty and had arranged vehicles to meet us partway. We were all packed in and carried back in safety to the Rue Fossette. It had been a pleasant day, almost a perfect one, but not wholly. A slight sadness had passed over it once, and that same sadness darkened the evening.

Near sunset I saw M. Paul walking in the garden with Madame Beck. They spoke earnestly for nearly an hour. He looked troubled and restless, while she wore an air of warning and dissuasion, as if trying to stop him from some design. After she went in, leaving him alone under the trees, I watched him from the classroom and thought that he looked like a man who wanted comfort and was getting none. Then suddenly he turned, came quickly toward the room where I sat, and frightened me so much by his speed and expression that instead of meeting him, I fled and hid myself in the oratory.

From there I heard him search the rooms and ask for me by name. I had almost gathered courage to go down and face him, when St. Pierre lied and said I was already in bed. Madame Beck then met him, checked him, and sent him away. I regretted my cowardice at once. I had run because I was frightened, but the truer feeling in me had been a wish to meet him. That contradiction was becoming more common with M. Paul: I feared him and wanted his presence in the same breath.

Soon after came an errand from Madame Beck. She suddenly remembered a message and a gift that must be taken to an old, rich, half-deformed woman named Madame Walravens, who lived in a house called the Place of the Magi. I went there as directed, hardly knowing why the matter had been put into my hands. The house was dark, old, close, and strange. Madame Walravens herself was hard to

please and full of suspicion, yet she accepted the gift and let me into a room where a portrait at once caught my eye.

The portrait was that of a young woman named Justine Marie. While I was looking at it, an old priest appeared and began to speak with me. He proved to be Père Silas, the same priest to whom in my illness I had once opened my heart in the confessional. From him I learned much that startled me. M. Paul, he said, had once loved Justine Marie and loved her still in memory, though she had been dead for twenty years. He had also been the pupil and benefactor of Madame Walravens and of her old servant Agnes. Thus several dark threads, which before had seemed separate, were suddenly drawn together in one knot before me.

I listened carefully, though not without inward resistance. Père Silas praised Rome, discipline, and submission in the usual way, and I let his grand phrases pass by me. What stayed with me was not his doctrine, but his account of M. Paul. To hear of that constancy, of that old love still honored after death, changed something in my view of him. He had often seemed small in trifles, jealous, sharp, and unreasonable; yet here was proof that in deeper matters he could be faithful beyond common measure. I could not admire the saint-worship or the priestly influence, but I could not help honoring the man beneath them.

When I returned through the rain and told Madame Beck what had passed, she laughed at Madame Walravens and spoke with careless contempt of her hatred and jealousy. In her account, the old woman disliked her because she fancied that Madame Beck loved M. Paul. I listened, but I did not accept this light explanation as complete. Too many signs now pointed to hidden relations, old obligations, religious influences, and jealous watchfulness surrounding him on every side. He was not a free man moving simply as he pleased. There were cords tied to his life which I had only just begun to see.

Thus this part of my story closed under a mixed light. The first of May had brought me one of my happiest days with M. Paul, full of spring air, kindness, and words I could not easily forget. Yet almost at once that brightness was crossed by secrecy, interference, old loyalties, and a dead woman's portrait ruling from the wall like a silent claim. I now knew more of M. Paul than before, but what I knew

did not simplify him. It only made him larger, sadder, and more difficult to understand.

Part 17

After my visit to the Place of the Magi, a strange change came over M. Paul. For two days he was cold, checked, and unlike himself. The old quick teasing manner was gone. In its place there was silence, watchfulness, and a reserve that chilled me more than open anger would have done.

At last I found one clue to this new frost. A little religious book had been placed for me, and when I looked at it more closely, I saw the name of Père Silas and also a small pencilled mark showing that it had reached me through M. Paul. Then the whole matter grew clearer. He had clearly spoken to his director of our recent nearness, and that nearness had not been approved.

One evening he came back to the schoolroom while I was at work. Sylvie was with him, and after a while he asked whether I had liked the little book. I answered that it had not moved me at all, and even showed him a dry handkerchief as proof that I had shed no tears over it. He scolded me sharply, but I was almost glad to hear the old sharpness again, because even his blame was easier to bear than his silence.

Then his tone changed. Leaning toward me, he asked what I had thought of him during those two cold days. When I would not answer, he said he hardly knew whether he was my brother or my friend, but that he wished me well and yet must check himself, because others warned him to be careful. The danger, he said, was not in my heart, but in my religion, in that serious Protestant spirit which seemed to him proud, self-reliant, and hard to guide.

I told him that if he truly thought caution wise, he must follow it. Yet I could not leave the matter there. I made him listen while I said plainly that I was no heathen, no enemy to goodness, and no person wishing to trouble his faith. I believed in God, in Christ, and in the Bible, and he did too. If there was a difference between us, it was not on those first truths.

He then told me more than I had expected. Père Silas, it seemed, had watched me closely, had learned that I sometimes went to the French, German, and English Protestant chapels of Villette, and had taken this breadth of habit as proof that I cared deeply for none of them. I answered in my own way that the differences between these churches seemed to me small beside the truths they held in common, and that my final teacher must always be Scripture itself rather than any one sect. That answer did not satisfy him fully, but it quieted him.

Even after this, Rome did not leave me alone. Père Silas, with Madame Beck's consent, began for a time to guide me in spiritual matters. He lent me books, showed me the charitable works of his Church, and tried to draw me by gentleness rather than force. I did not respond as he hoped. I glanced at the books, but the book under my pillow served me better, and no outward kindness could make me surrender the inward rule by which I had long lived.

His third effort was by spectacle. I was taken to great churches, to feast-days, to ceremonies full of lights, processions, robes, incense, and formal splendor. Many people, wiser than I, might have felt awe before such sights. I did not. To me they seemed crowded with ornament and show, more bright than deep, more material than spiritual. I saw the power of the display, but I did not feel its holiness.

At last, after one great public procession in which church pomp and worldly display seemed mixed together, I spoke openly to M. Paul. I told him that the more I saw of such religion, the more firmly I held my own. I said that when sorrow, sin, fear, and death stand before us, I cannot care for fine robes, tapers, and forms. The heart then wants a simpler road to God. When he heard me out, he answered not with anger, but with one quiet sentence that joined us more truly than many arguments could have done: God, he said, loves all who are sincere.

That spirit of agreement brought one of the happiest moments I had yet known with him. He confessed that he too had feared I might weary of him, a man so changeful and difficult in temper. I could then reassure him, and in reassuring him I found a kind of happiness new to me. While he held my hand, he spoke of the nun's portrait in the old house and of the strange figure we had seen before, asking whether I believed any pure spirit would trouble the friendship growing between

us. Before more could be said, Fifine Beck came in and broke the moment short.

Yet even as this friendship grew warmer, another cold hand reached between us. I understood more and more clearly that whatever passed between M. Paul and me did not stay with us alone. It travelled to the confessional. It was examined, judged, and answered from that hidden place. When I looked back on his sudden reserve and on the book sent to me, I could now trace the line plainly enough. It was not only his own mind that had turned cautious. It had been turned.

One wet evening, while these thoughts were still fresh, I sat looking into the garden. Sylvie barked in her glad way, the way she used only for one presence. Then, through the dim alley, I saw a spade working busily near the old pear-tree. I could not yet know all that M. Paul meant to prove or uncover there, but I felt at once that he too was seeking some natural answer to the mystery that had so long haunted the Rue Fossette. Thus our new fraternity did not enter a clear open day. It began under pressure, under suspicion, under religious dispute, and still with the shadow of the nun lying across it.

Part 18

Sunshine did indeed come for Paulina. She had refused to go on writing to Graham until her father openly allowed such a correspondence, and in that refusal she had acted with perfect good sense. But refusal of letters could not keep two people apart who lived so near each other and were drawn together by every better power in both their natures. Graham found ways of visiting the Hôtel Crécy often, and though he and Paulina tried at first to remain guarded, their hearts moved much faster than their forms.

In this new love all that was best in Graham seemed to wake up. With Ginevra his vanity, taste for beauty, and easy pleasure had chiefly been engaged; with Paulina his mind, judgment, finer feeling, and real goodness all came into action together. He talked better with her than he had ever talked before, because she drew from him thoughts worth speaking. She did not set herself to improve him. She simply answered him so truly that he became more thoughtful and more fully

himself in her presence.

Their union was not founded on one charm only. Each liked the other's voice, manner, wit, and way of thinking. Their meanings met quickly, as if the one mind had long been prepared for the other. Graham brought warmth and cheerful strength; Paulina brought delicacy, grace, and a quiet inward richness that opened little by little. In his company she lost much of her guarded reserve and seemed bright with a gentle happiness I had never seen in her before.

They also began to talk freely of old Bretton days. Graham no longer needed help from me to recover the child he had once known. Memory served him well enough. He reminded Paulina of things so small and so exact that she could hardly believe he had kept them all these years: how she once climbed to his knee by means of a stool, how her little hands touched his cheek and hair, how she praised his face, his chin, and even the strange look of his eyes.

When she repeated these recollections to me, they moved her deeply. She said that as a child she had dared freedoms which now seemed impossible, because the grown Graham appeared to her almost sacred in his beauty and manliness. Then, as before, she asked whether I admired him, and again I answered strongly enough to stop her. I told her that I valued my sight too much to risk blindness, and that she must not pour such confidences into my ear. The words were severe, but severity was my only protection.

Still, though I checked her speech, I did not cease to love her. On the contrary, I liked her more the nearer I saw her. Close knowledge showed in her nothing false, nothing light, nothing mean. She was delicate without weakness, refined without affectation, and sincere even in happiness. My regard for her lay deep, though it was not of the demonstrative kind.

One day, when we were alone, she came from her chair and sat down on a stool at my feet, asking in a trembling voice what I really thought of Dr. Bretton's character. I answered that his character stood deservedly high, that he was an excellent son, and that he was humane even to the poorest and lowest. On each favorable word she softly touched my hand as if she were storing up comfort. She had also heard from others that poor hospital patients welcomed him where they

feared harsher surgeons, and she was glad to have her own belief confirmed.

Then, after a pause, she spoke more fully. She said that books often tell us life is full of disappointment and suffering, but that she herself had not been disappointed. She had been sheltered, taught, and cared for by her dear father, and now another blessing had come. In the quietest and simplest way she said the words which were the true sunshine of that chapter: “Graham loves me.” I asked at once whether her father knew.

She told me that Graham had spoken of the Count with deep respect, but did not yet dare to approach him until he had clearer light from Paulina herself. As for her own answer, she had been very careful. She wrote it three times, softening and cooling it each time, until it became, as she said, like a little piece of ice touched with the smallest sweetness. Even in joy she understood that Graham’s taste was fine and that too much warmth at first might not best please him. I praised her instinct and told her she had acted wisely.

She went on to say that Graham had written once more, grateful for her calm reply, but that she had already told him she could not continue such correspondence without her father’s knowledge. Here again I approved her conduct. I advised her to wait, to write no further for the present, and not to manage anything by art or pressure. Time, I said, must do what affection ought not to force. She accepted this counsel, though with some anxiety about whether her father would ever give full consent.

Thus the love between them advanced without noise, without rash display, and with more truth than most young loves ever know. It had memory behind it, esteem within it, and hope before it. Graham’s best powers found nourishment in Paulina, and her whole delicate being opened under his warmer influence. If there was any frost left in her, it no longer ruled her. Sunshine had reached even that quiet and guarded heart.

Watching them, I could not deny the rightness of what was taking shape. They suited each other too well for honest eyes to miss it. Yet what was right for them could still be painful for me. So I stood where I had long stood, outside the circle, observing clearly and feeling quietly. Their happiness ripened, and I, who saw it

best, was one of those least warmed by its light.

Part 19

But sunshine does not remain for all lives. One Thursday morning, when the first class sat ready for literature, the door opened, and instead of M. Paul Emanuel, Madame Beck entered. She stood at his desk, drew her shawl close, and after a pause announced that there would be no lesson, perhaps none for a week. Then she told us the blow itself: M. Paul had received a sudden and urgent call of duty, was preparing for a long voyage, and would leave Europe for an indefinite time. Soon it was said openly that he was bound for the West Indies, to Basseterre in Guadeloupe.

The girls were upset, and some cried. I could not bear those tears. Their grief was shallow, noisy, and easy, while mine had to keep silence. So I made them read English the whole morning, sharply and steadily, and I even mocked the weaker ones until they stopped sobbing. Afterwards, when the room was empty, I kissed one poor child I had treated too harshly, but even then I sent her away quickly, because her tears came nearer to my own than I could safely endure.

During the week that followed, the whole house talked of nothing else. Teachers, pupils, and servants all repeated M. Emanuel's name until I thought the air itself was worn with it. Yet for all that talking, no one seemed to ask the one question that mattered to me: whether he would come and say farewell. Madame Beck spoke loudly of duty, sacrifice, and the great loss the school would suffer in losing him, but she never once looked at me as if I had a right to care. Her indifference was harder to bear than open cruelty.

And why should I not care? During the month before this blow, our relation had changed more than I had dared to confess even to myself. We had settled our religious difference without breaking apart. He had become gentler, more forbearing, more openly kind. He had asked about my future plans and had listened with real interest when I spoke of one day opening a school of my own. We had begun to live in peace, not cold peace, but one warmed by esteem,

affection, and a growing trust.

Once, only ten days before, he had joined me in my alley at dusk, taken my hand, and called me his good little friend and sweet comforter. In his face and voice I had thought I saw something more than friendship or brotherly kindness beginning to wake. Yet just as that thought rose, two figures broke into the twilight beside us: Madame Beck and Père Silas. The priest's face changed at once from soft emotion to church jealousy. Madame saw everything and pretended to see nothing. From that hour I knew that watchful forces stood between him and me.

The final day came. Morning passed, then afternoon, and still he did not appear. The whole school went on with its usual dull order, as if nothing of importance were ending. I felt stifled in that calm. At last, near five o'clock, Madame Beck sent for me to translate an English letter in her room. While I wrote, she quietly shut both doors and even fastened the window, though the day was hot. Then I heard a tread in the vestibule. I stopped writing, rose, and went out. Madame followed close behind me like a shadow.

He was there. He had come after all. The girls stood in a half-circle while he went from one to another, giving each a farewell. I tried to move forward, but Madame Beck stepped before me, enlarged herself, drew his attention to her, and hurried him toward the garden door before I could catch his eye. She knew very well what she was doing. He went away thinking me absent. The bell rang, the room emptied, and I was left alone with a grief I could hardly bear.

Then a little child came to me with a note. M. Paul, she said, had ordered her to seek me all over the house and put it into my hand when she found me. In it he wrote that it had not been his intention to part from me as he had parted from the rest, that he had expected to see me in class, that he was disappointed, and that before he sailed he must still see me alone and speak with me at length. Those few lines brought me new courage. They told me that whatever others planned, his heart had not changed.

So I waited. Evening passed into night, and still I waited. When all the others had gone to bed, I remained alone in the first classroom, walking up and down between the moved desks, weeping only when I was sure no ear could hear me.

Near eleven o'clock Madame Beck entered with her usual composed face and tried to send me away. That night I had no strength left for obedience. I answered her with a violence I had never before used, called her cold, poisonous, and heartless, and accused her of standing between me and the man she herself secretly wanted, not from love, but from selfish interest. She retreated at last, outwardly calm, and left me.

On the next night she did not come herself. Instead Goton brought me a sweet drink, saying it would make me sleep. I drank eagerly because I was burning with thirst, but I soon knew that a drug had been mixed with it. The opiate did not send me into a heavy sleep. It excited me, filled me with restless visions, and made the close hot dormitory impossible to bear. Moonlight called me, the night called me, and I rose, dressed, and found the great door strangely easy to open. Soon I was out in the street under the summer sky.

I first thought of the park as a place of quiet and coolness, but when I reached the upper city, I found Villette blazing with festival light. The whole town was abroad. Music, torches, equipages, and holiday dress filled the streets. In the midst of that brightness I saw an open carriage carrying Count de Bassompierre, Mrs. Bretton, Paulina Mary, and Graham. Paulina was dressed in white and looked radiant with youth and happiness; the light in her face seemed reflected from Graham's own eyes as he looked at her. I followed them, half-hidden in my shawl and hat, into the illuminated park like one moving through a dream.

The park itself had been turned into a place of enchantment, full of lights, false Egyptian shapes, music, and crowds. Yet even there I remained alone, safe because no one noticed me. While wandering deeper among the trees, I came at last upon a quieter space where family groups sat beneath a heavy shade. Then I saw a little girl swinging wildly from a lady's hand, and I knew that child at once. It was Désirée Beck. The lady holding her was Madame Beck herself, fresh, cheerful, and fully dressed for pleasure, though the Rue Fossette ought by then to have held her asleep in bed.

Around her stood several men, and among them I recognized faces that mattered: Père Silas, M. Victor Kint, another of the Emanuel family, and near

them the dreadful old Madame Walravens, rich, harsh, and ugly as a living idol. There, all together, stood the whole hidden circle whose influence I had long suspected but not yet fully understood. The sight did not humble me. They had power, numbers, and secrecy on their side, and I was already under their feet. Yet as I looked at them thus assembled, I felt one hard comfort: I was not dead yet.

Part 20

Hidden under the trees, I stayed close to Madame Walravens and her little circle and at last understood what had been done to M. Paul. The whole matter came down to money and interest. Madame Walravens had an estate in Guadeloupe that might again become rich if an honest and able man managed it well. Père Silas wanted that future wealth to serve the Church, Madame Beck wanted it for worldly advantage, and both knew that M. Paul was the very man who could be trusted with such work. They pressed him together, and Madame Beck also had her own selfish reason for sending him away: she preferred exile for him to the chance that he might stay in Europe and remain attached to a Protestant woman.

As I listened, I saw that Madame Walravens was not patient like the others. She kept asking, “Where is Justine Marie?” and those words struck me like a shock. To my mind that name belonged to the old dead nun and to the dark story tied to M. Paul’s past. Yet no one around her showed surprise. They answered as if she had asked for any ordinary young lady who was expected to join the party.

Soon their loose talk made one thing clear. There was some family plan on foot involving this Justine Marie, some mixture of marriage and money, though at first I could not tell for whom. The hints moved from one gentleman to another, and the tone was light, but the purpose under it was real enough. All the while I waited for the great revelation, half fearing it and half longing to have doubt ended. When at last someone cried, “Here she is,” I felt as if my whole life had stopped for a moment.

The truth, when it came, was not ghostly at all. Justine Marie was no spirit, no

buried nun, and no figure from the old legend. She was a healthy, pretty, well-dressed young girl from Villette, cheerful, well-fed, and full of easy life, with an uncle and aunt beside her. She was called Justine Marie because she had been named after the dead nun, not because she was that nun returned. So one part of the mystery fell at once, though not the most painful part.

For then I saw another figure in that same group, and this time the shock went deeper. M. Paul was there. He had not sailed in the Antigua, as we had been told. He had let that ship go and had taken passage instead in another vessel that would leave two weeks later. The weight that fell from me in that instant was great, yet it brought no clear peace, because I still did not know why he had stayed.

The rest I gathered little by little from their laughter and half-serious teasing. Justine Marie Sauveur was his ward, an heiress, and already privately promised to a young German merchant named Heinrich Mühler. Some of the family would have liked M. Paul himself to marry her and keep the money within their circle, but he did not want that match at all. Still, he was lively with her, grateful to her, and very attentive, because she was helping him in what he called a small piece of business that he wished to settle before leaving Europe. Hearing all this, I suffered again, because jealousy makes even harmless signs look larger than they are.

The next day the whole Rue Fossette was in confusion for another reason. Ginevra Fanshawe had vanished. At matins her place was empty, at breakfast her cup stood untouched, and in bed the maids found only a bolster dressed up to look like a sleeping girl. Madame Beck was truly shaken, less from affection than from the damage done to her house and reputation. I, however, needed very few clues to guess the truth: the soft-opened great door, the racing carriage of the night before, and the white handkerchief waved from its window all pointed one way. It was an elopement.

The Hôtel Crécy already knew enough to confirm it. Ginevra had written vaguely to Paulina of marriage plans, and Count de Bassompierre had begun pursuit, though too late to stop anything. Soon I received from Ginevra herself a long, laughing letter full of explanations. In it she told me plainly that Alfred de

Hamal had been the so-called nun of the attic all along. He had reached the school by climbing from the Athénée wall to the tree above the berceau, then crossing the roof and entering by the half-open skylight of the garret.

That letter solved nearly every old mystery at once. Ginevra said that de Hamal had used the nun's black dress and white veil as a clever disguise, and that she herself had dressed the false figure set beside my bed. She laughed at the fright given both to me and to M. Paul, and she also made clear that the carriage I saw in the narrow street had indeed been theirs. Even in confession she could not speak seriously for long. Everything, even deception, danger, and scandal, became in her hands part of a foolish game.

She also admitted with complete shamelessness that she had partly wanted to wound Paulina and Dr. John by marrying quickly and splendidly before they did. Count de Bassompierre had been angry at first and questioned whether the marriage was even legal while she was still under age, but in the end he moved toward peace. There was talk of a proper second ceremony, a trousseau, and a dowry, though he insisted that de Hamal first promise to give up cards and dice. Ginevra, of course, spoke as if all this trouble only proved her importance.

I saw her again near the end of her honeymoon. She came to Madame Beck blooming, laughing, richly dressed, and delighted with the sound of her new title. De Hamal appeared too, polite, neat, and perfectly ready to excuse all his tricks by pointing to his bride as the source of them. Ginevra smothered me with foolish spirits, showed me her ring, called herself countess again and again, and wanted admiration rather than affection. I gave her little, and she expected little. In that at least we understood each other.

Later she went abroad with her husband, wrote to me from time to time, and remained very much herself. First she wrote only of Alfred and of her own triumphs. Then came a child, then boastings about the child, then complaints, debts, troubles, and calls for help whenever life became inconvenient. Yet she never really bore much alone. Someone always stepped in, paid, arranged, softened, or saved. So she moved through life as she always had, light, noisy, selfish, and on the whole less punished than many better people are.

Part 21

After the discoveries of the park and the clearing up of old secrets, M. Paul and I did not lose each other. On the contrary, we came closer. One day we walked together for a long time outside the busier part of Villette. The day was fine, and though his departure stood near, he tried to speak not only of sorrow, but of plans. He told me again that he expected to be away about three years, and he asked what I meant to do during his absence. He reminded me that I had once spoken of becoming independent and keeping a little school of my own, and he wanted to know whether I still held to that hope.

I answered that I had not given up the idea and that I was saving what money I could for that very purpose. He said then that he did not like leaving me in the Rue Fossette. He feared I would miss him there too much and grow desolate in that narrow, watched life. He also spoke plainly of the danger of letters in such a house. He did not trust the handling of private correspondence there, and on that point I agreed with him at once.

When I declared that if he wrote, I must have his letters and would not let directors or directresses keep them from me, he answered more gently than before and said we would find a way. We had, he said, our own resources. That promise pleased me, because it showed two things at once: that he meant to write, and that he was thinking already how to protect me after he was gone. Even in small matters his care could be deep and practical when his heart was engaged.

During this same walk I asked him a question which had long troubled me. I wanted to know, very plainly, whether my face displeased him. That fear had lain in me for years, and in that hour it pressed on me more strongly than usual. He did not laugh, did not evade, and did not answer with empty politeness. He gave me a short, strong answer that settled the matter for me. After that, whatever the rest of the world might think of my looks, I cared far less than before. It was enough that I knew what I was to him.

As we came back from that long walk, he stopped in a clean, quiet suburb

before a neat little house with a white doorstep. He took a key from his pocket, opened the door without knocking, and led me in. Inside, all was still and orderly. There was a tiny parlor with delicate walls, a bright little carpet, a mirror, flowers in the window, and the look of a place prepared with affectionate care. It was not grand, but it was very pretty, and its prettiness came from good sense and thoughtful arrangement rather than from cost.

He showed me everything slowly. There was a little kitchen, neat and ready for use. Upstairs were two small bedrooms, simple but pleasant. Then at last he opened a larger room with something like ceremony. It was fitted as a classroom, with green benches and desks, a teacher's chair and table, maps on the wall, and flowers in the windows. I asked at once whose school it was, because I had never heard of such a school in that suburb. He said nothing directly. He only handed me a packet of printed notices and let me read them for myself.

On those notices I read the truth. The school was to be a day-school for girls at Number 7, Faubourg Clotilde, and the directress named there was Lucy Snowe. For a little time after that, my mind was in such joyful confusion that I could hardly think or speak. I only asked question after question. Had he done this? Had he furnished the house? Had he printed the papers? Did he truly mean me? He answered little at first, but his pleased silence said enough. Then he told me that while I had thought him cold and absent-minded, he had spent three whole weeks arranging painters, furniture, cleaning, and all the rest for "Lucy and Lucy's little house."

What moved me most was not the gift alone, but the way he had made it. This was not a loose promise, not a burst of feeling, and not a pretty dream. It was real help, planned in detail and carried through in secret. I saw then more clearly than ever the kind of man he was. He might be changeable in temper, jealous in trifles, and hard to understand in some moods, but in action he could be strong, practical, and wonderfully faithful. His silent work for me overwhelmed me more than many spoken declarations could have done.

Afterwards we sat on the little back balcony under the vines, and I served him chocolate, rolls, and fruit. The evening was still and mild, with gardens around us

and open fields beyond. I asked whether Madame Beck or Père Silas knew what he had done, and he answered with quiet pleasure that no one knew but he and I. He had wanted this happiness kept between us alone. He even smiled and said he wished to prove to me that he could in fact keep a secret, since I had often accused him of the opposite.

Then came the practical matters, and again he had thought of everything. The house, he told me, did not belong to him. It belonged to M. Miret, the bookseller who had once kindly helped me in Villette. The rent was moderate, low enough that my savings could cover the first year. He had already spoken to M. Miret, who would send his own daughters as my first pupils, and he had prepared all the figures and details in writing. In this too he was himself: affectionate, but never vague; generous, but exact.

Yet in the middle of all this happiness he named one more future pupil, and that name struck me like a blow. He said that his ward and god-daughter, Justine Marie Sauveur, would also come daily for English lessons and would pay well. At once all the old pain tied to the name "Justine Marie" returned, mixed now with jealousy, memory, and fear. I grew cold and disturbed and even said, in my unreasonable pain, that she must not come into the house. He did not grow angry. He drew his chair near, tried patiently to learn what hurt me, and by degrees led me back from that foolish rebellion.

Then he gave me the peace I most needed. He told me clearly that Justine Marie Sauveur was to him like a daughter and nothing more. He said she had long been promised, with his full consent, to Heinrich Mühler, a wealthy young German merchant, and that although some of his family had wished him to marry her for the sake of her fortune, the idea was wholly hateful to him. On hearing this, my jealousy became shameful in my own eyes, but he did not reject me for it. On the contrary, he seemed almost glad to see that I could feel so deeply for him. Then he said the words which changed all my life: he asked me to take his love, and one day to share his life, and to be dearest to him on earth.

We walked back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight, no longer as uncertain friends, but as two people who had spoken plainly at last. When we reached the

door, the clock struck nine. I remembered then how differently we had once stood there, he seeming harsh and strange to me, and I hidden from his real knowledge. Now all had changed. I knew his worth, his affection, and his purpose, and I preferred him before all others. We parted there. He gave me his promise and his farewell, and the next day he sailed.

Part 22

M. Paul Emanuel was away three years. Strange as it may sound, they were the happiest three years of my life. I had work now, and work with hope in it. I began my little school in the house he had prepared for me, and I labored hard because I felt myself not only working for my own bread, but keeping faith with him. I thought of myself as steward of what he had trusted to me, and I was resolved to make a good return. At first only a few day-pupils came, chiefly daughters of the burghers; then the number rose, and before long a better class of pupils appeared also.

In the middle of the second year, chance helped me in a way I had not expected. A letter came from England with a hundred pounds enclosed. It was sent by Mr. Marchmont, the heir of my poor dead mistress. Some papers found after her death, and some reproach in his own conscience, had moved him at last to do me that justice. I asked no questions. The money had come honestly enough for use, and I used it. With it I took the house next to mine, so that I might enlarge my little undertaking without leaving the very place M. Paul had chosen and where he expected to find me again. Thus my externat became a pensionnat, and that too prospered.

Yet my success did not come from skill alone. If I had been left wholly to myself, I might never have risen so. The true spring of effort lay far away over the sea. At parting he had left me not only help for the present, but a future to work toward. That thought kept me steady. I could not now sink into dull resignation. If labor was heavy, it had meaning; if hours were long, they carried me somewhere. Fear of want no longer gnawed me as before, and small joys, which once would

have passed me by, now had power to please.

Nor was I fed on memory alone. By every ship he wrote to me. He wrote fully, freely, and with no false saving of words or feeling. There was no cold politeness in those letters, no dry duty, and no careful keeping back. He wrote because he liked to write, because he had much to say to me, and because he was faithful, thoughtful, tender, and true. Those letters came like real food and living water. They sustained my spirit better than I can well tell. I was grateful with all my heart, and if ever human constancy deserved gratitude to the end of life, his deserved it.

So the three years passed. They were not idle years, nor light years, nor years of romance without labor. They were years of school accounts, pupils, lessons, housekeeping, small anxieties, and daily effort. Yet through all ran one current of support and expectation. The life around me had shape, and the life before me had promise. I was no longer drifting. I had a place, work, a prospect, and a bond which absence did not weaken.

During that same time, the lives of others also moved onward. Graham Bretton and Paulina Mary went on in the path that had long seemed marked out for them. Their happiness had in it both peace and rightness. I did not need to stand between them now, not even in thought. What had once cost me much to accept had become easy to honor. Some lives are clearly meant for each other, and theirs was such a pair. I could wish them well without effort.

As for Madame Beck, she prospered in her own way. She remained active, capable, watchful, and successful. The world, which often rewards energy whatever its motives may be, gave her no poor return. Père Silas too kept his place safe within the ordered ranks of his Church. He had convictions, discipline, and the support of a great system, and such men are rarely left without standing. Madame Walravens lived on to a great age, grim, rich, and difficult to the last. Thus each continued according to his or her nature. Life did not suddenly turn just because I desired justice.

At length the third year drew to its close, and now every season, every month, every week, seemed a messenger coming before him. When spring opened, I thought, “He will see such flowers when he returns.” When summer ripened, I

thought, “The warm light will welcome him.” When the garden filled and the classrooms stood in full order, I said to myself that all was ready. The very house seemed to wait. Every room he had planned appeared to expect his step. Hope had now grown so real that it was no longer a dream, but a habit of breathing.

Then August came. The date fixed for his return approached. Letters had prepared me for that hour, and all seemed favorable. The sky was fair, the season rich, and the air quiet. Vessels came into harbor one after another. Names were heard, arrivals reported, cargoes spoken of. But still not his. Delay first appeared only a small accident, nothing more than what might happen on any long voyage. I tried to be patient. A few days, I thought, cannot matter after three years.

Then the weather changed. A wind rose, not wild at first, but grave and strong. After that came darker signs. The sea answered. Cloud gathered. Before long the storm had grown into one of those dreadful visitations which seem to seize not only ships and coasts, but the very order of the world. Day after day the wind blew. Night after night it shook the land. Rain fell, waves rose, and far out on the Atlantic there was ruin, struggle, blindness, and death. News came in broken pieces. Men spoke of vessels lost, masts snapped, decks swept, and crews gone. That storm did not spend itself in one brief violence. It raged over seven dark days.

Here I pause. I will say no more. I will not trouble the quiet and kindly heart. I will not describe what was feared, what was said, what was never fully proved. Let those who wish to be sure of happiness imagine that after the storm he reached shore at last, that he came to the little school in the Faubourg Clotilde, crossed the threshold, took me in his arms, and entered on the life we had both awaited. Let them picture union and a long peace. They have a right to that image if they choose it.

But I, Lucy Snowe, keep my own counsel. I had known him, and he had loved me. He had done me good, given me courage, placed independence within my reach, written to me with a full and faithful heart, and made those three years the happiest of my life. That much is certain. Whether more was granted, I leave where the original story leaves it: under cloud, wind, and deep water, with hope not quite extinguished, and with grief not fully spoken. That is the true close. It is

enough.