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A surprise for the Cuthberts

Matthew Cuthbert lived with his sister Marilla on their farm on Prince Edward Island in Canada. Their farmhouse, Green Gables, was just outside the little village of Avonlea. Matthew was nearly sixty and had a long brown beard. His sister was five years younger. They were both tall and thin, with dark hair. Everybody in Avonlea knew that the Cuthberts were quiet people who worked very hard on their farm.

One afternoon Matthew drove the horse and cart to the station. 'Has the five-thirty train arrived yet?' he asked the station-master.



One afternoon Matthew drove the horse and cart to the station.

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'Yes,' the man replied. 'And there's a passenger who's waiting for you. A little girl.'

'A little girl?' asked Matthew. 'But I've come for a boy! The children's home is sending us one of their orphan boys. We're going to adopt him, you see, and he's going to help me with the farm work.'

'Well, perhaps the children's home didn't have any boys, so they sent you a girl,' answered the station-master carelessly. 'Here she is.'

Matthew turned shyly to speak to the child. She was about eleven, with long red hair in two plaits. Her face was small, white and thin, with a lot of freckles, and she had large grey-green eyes. She was wearing an old brown hat and a dress which was too small for her.

'Are you Mr Cuthbert of Green Gables?' she asked excitedly in a high, sweet voice. 'I'm very happy to come and live with you, and belong to you. I've never belonged to anyone, you see. The people at the children's home were very kind, but it's not very exciting to live in a place like that, is it?'

Matthew felt sorry for the child. How could he tell her that it was all a mistake? But he couldn't just leave her at the station. He decided to take her home with him. Marilla could explain the mistake to her.

He was surprised that he enjoyed the journey home. He was a quiet, shy man, and he didn't like talking

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'They sent you a girl,' said the station-master.

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himself. But today, he only had to listen, because the little girl talked and talked and talked. She told him all about herself while they drove along.

'My parents died when I was a baby, you know, and for the last three years I've had to work for my food. I've lived with three different families and looked after their children. So I've always been poor, and I haven't got any nice dresses! But I just imagine that I'm wearing the most beautiful blue dress, and a big hat with flowers on, and blue shoes, and then I'm happy! Do you imagine things sometimes?'

'Well, I . . . I . . . not often,' said Matthew.



'I just imagine that I'm wearing the most beautiful blue dress.'

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They were now driving past some very old apple trees next to the road. The trees were full of sweet-smelling, snowy-white flowers. The little girl looked at them.

'Aren't the trees beautiful?' she said happily. 'But am I talking too much? Please tell me. I *can* stop if necessary, you know.'

Matthew smiled at her. 'You go on talking,' he answered. 'I like listening to you.'

When they arrived at Green Gables, Marilla came to the door to meet them. But when she saw the little girl, she cried in surprise, 'Matthew, who's that? Where's the boy?'

'The children's home has made a mistake,' he said unhappily, 'and sent a girl, not a boy.'

The child was listening carefully. Suddenly she put her head in her hands and began to cry.

'You – you don't want me!' she sobbed. 'Oh – oh! You don't want me because I'm not a boy!'

'Now, now, don't cry,' said Marilla kindly.

'Don't you understand? Oh! This is the worst thing that's happened to me in all my life!'

'Well, you can stay here, just for tonight,' said Marilla. 'Now, what's your name?'

The child stopped crying. 'Will you please call me Cordelia?' she asked.

'Call you Cordelia? Is that your name?'

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'Well, no, it isn't, but it's a very beautiful name, isn't it? I like to imagine my name is Cordelia, because my real name is Anne Shirley – and that's not a very interesting name, is it?'

Shake

Marilla shook her head. 'The child has too much imagination,' she thought.



'Well, you can stay here, just for tonight,' said Marilla.

Later, when Anne was in bed, Marilla said to her brother, 'She must go back to the children's home tomorrow.'

'Marilla, don't you think . . . ' began Matthew. 'She's a nice little thing, you know.'

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'Matthew Cuthbert, are you telling me that you want to keep her?' asked Marilla crossly.

Matthew looked uncomfortable. 'Well, she's clever, and interesting, and—'

'But we don't need a girl!'

'But perhaps she needs us,' Matthew replied, surprisingly quickly for him. 'She's had a very unhappy life up to now, Marilla. She can help you in the house. I can get a boy from the village to help me on the farm. What do you think?'

Marilla thought for a long time. 'All right,' she said in the end, 'I agree. The poor child can stay. I'll look after her.'

Matthew smiled happily. 'Be as good and kind to her as you can, Marilla. I think she needs a lot of love.'

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At Green Gables

And so the next morning Marilla said, 'Well, Anne, Matthew and I have decided to keep you, only if you're a good girl, of course. Why, child, what's the matter?'

'I'm crying,' sobbed Anne, 'because I'm very happy! It's beautiful here! People say I'm very bad, but I'll try very hard to be good. Oh, thank you! Thank you!'

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'Now stop crying, child,' said Marilla a little crossly, 'and listen. We're going to adopt you, and send you to school after the summer holidays.'

Anne stopped crying. 'Can I call you Aunt Marilla? I've never had any family at all, so I'd really like to have an aunt. We could imagine that you're my mother's sister.'

'*I* couldn't,' answered Marilla firmly.

'Don't you imagine things?' asked Anne, surprised.

'No, I don't,' Marilla replied. 'I do my housework, and look after Matthew, and go to church on Sunday. There's no time for imagining things in this house. Just remember that, Anne.'

Anne was silent for a few minutes. Then she said, 'Marilla, do you think I'll find a best friend in Avonlea? Someone who really understands me and knows all my secrets. I've always wanted a friend like that.'

'Our friends, the Barrys, have a daughter called Diana, who's eleven, like you. But if you want to play with her, you'll have to be very good. Mrs Barry is very careful about Diana's friends.'

'Diana! What a beautiful name!' said Anne excitedly. 'Her hair isn't red, is it? I hope it isn't.' She looked sadly at her red plaits. 'I hate *my* hair.'

'Diana has dark hair. She's a good, clever girl. Try to be like her, Anne.'

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When the two girls met, they knew at once that they would be good friends. They often played together, in the fields, or by the river, or in the garden. In the morning Anne helped Marilla with the housework. Then in the afternoon she played with Diana, or talked happily to Matthew while he worked on the farm. She soon knew and loved every flower, tree, and animal at Green Gables.



In the morning Anne helped Marilla with the housework.

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The Cuthberts had another friend, Mrs Rachel Lynde. She liked to know everything that was happening in and around Avonlea. She was very interested in the Cuthberts' little orphan girl, so one day she visited Marilla.

'I was very surprised to hear about the child,' she told Marilla. 'So you and Matthew have adopted her!'

'I'm surprised myself,' answered Marilla with a smile. 'But she's a clever little thing, you know. And she's always dancing, or singing, or laughing.'

Mrs Lynde shook her head sadly. 'What a mistake, Marilla! You've never had any children yourself, so how can you look after her?'

Just then Anne ran in from the garden. She stopped suddenly when she saw a stranger in the kitchen. Mrs Lynde looked at the thin little girl in the short dress, with her freckled face and red hair.

'Isn't she thin, Marilla?' she said. 'Just look at those freckles! And hair as red as carrots!'

Anne's face went red. She ran up to Mrs Lynde.

'I hate you!' she shouted angrily. 'I hate you! You're a horrible, fat old woman!' And she ran upstairs.

'Oh dear, oh dear!' said Mrs Lynde. 'What a terrible child! You'll not have an easy time with her, Marilla.'

'You were rude to her, Rachel,' Marilla replied, before she could stop herself.

'Well!' said Mrs Lynde. She got up and walked to the

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door. 'I think this orphan is more important to you than I am. When I think how long we've been friends . . . You'll have trouble with her, I can tell you. Well, I'm sorry for you, that's all. Goodbye.'

Marilla went upstairs to Anne's room. The child was lying on her narrow bed, sobbing loudly.

'You mustn't get angry like that, Anne. Mrs Lynde is my friend, and you were very rude to her.'



Anne was lying on her narrow bed, sobbing loudly.

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'*She* was rude to *me*!' said Anne. 'She said I was thin and freckled and red-haired. It was very unkind!'

'I understand how you feel,' said Marilla. 'But you must go to her and tell her you're sorry.'

'I can never do that,' said Anne firmly.

'Then you must stay in your room and think about it. You can come out when you agree to say that you're sorry.'

Anne stayed in her room all the next day. Downstairs the house was very quiet without her. That evening, while Marilla was busy in the garden, Matthew went up to Anne's room. The child was sitting sadly by the window.

'Anne,' he said shyly, 'why don't you say you're sorry? Then you can come down, and we can all be happy.'

'I *am* sorry now,' said Anne. 'I was very angry yesterday! But do you really want me to . . . '

'Yes, do, please. It's lonely downstairs without you. But don't tell Marilla I've talked to you.'

Marilla was pleased to hear that Anne was sorry. Later that evening, when she and Anne were in Mrs Lynde's warm kitchen, Anne suddenly fell on her knees.

'Oh Mrs Lynde,' cried the little girl, 'I'm very sorry. I can't tell you how sorry I am, so you must just imagine it. I *am* a bad girl! But please say you will forgive me. I'll be sad all my life if you don't!'

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Anne suddenly fell on her knees.

'She's enjoying herself!' thought Marilla, watching Anne's face. 'She doesn't look sorry at all, but happy and excited!'

But Mrs Lynde said kindly, 'Of course I forgive you.' And later she said to Marilla, 'Perhaps you're right to keep her. She's a strange little thing, but I think I like her.'

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