

SETTING: *Various locations in the hamlet of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island, 1878 including the Cuthbert house, known as Green Gables, its surrounding farm, the railroad depot, and the schoolhouse.*

AT RISE: *A bench upstage represents the Railroad Depot in Avonlea. Music under that shifts into the sound of an approaching locomotive train. STATION MASTER enters, pulls his pocket watch out of his vest and consults it. The train hisses to a halt.*

STATIONMASTER

(Calling off)

All off for Avonlea! All off for Avonlea!

(ANNE SHIRLEY enters, carrying a carpetbag.)

ANNE

Excuse me, sir. Is this Avonlea, Prince Edward Island?

STATIONMASTER

It is, miss.

ANNE

I'm here. I'm really here. Every once in a while, on the train ride, a horrible feeling would come over me and I'd be so afraid it was all a dream. But it's not a dream. I'm really here in Avonlea. Isn't that the most lyrical name? It sounds just like a line of music. Oh, my goodness – look at that big wild cherry tree, there in the bend of the road!

(She points off.)

I've never seen one so friendly-looking. I noticed on the train ride over that Prince Edward Island is full of trees and I can't wait to make their acquaintance, each and every one!

STATIONMASTER

Is there someone supposed to meet your train, child?

ANNE

Yes, sir. Mr. Matthew Cuthbert is coming for me.

STATIONMASTER

Matthew Cuthbert? From Green Gables?

ANNE

Yes, sir. I am a poor orphan going to live with Matthew and his sister, Marilla... Only I don't see anyone here. You don't suppose he's been here and gone already, do you? Or maybe something prevented him from making the journey? Why, I imagine his horse has gone lame – or perhaps he was stricken with a deadly case of smallpox...

STATIONMASTER

Nonsense, girl! The train arrived half an hour early, is all. Matthew will be here by and by. You just take a seat inside the depot.

(He points off.)

ANNE

No, thank you. I would much rather sit outside. There's much more scope for the imagination.

STATIONMASTER

Suit yourself.

(ANNE crosses to the bench upstage and sits, her back to the audience. STATIONMASTER shakes his head.)

A child like that living at Green Gables...

(MARILLA enters opposite, carrying a broom, as the scene shifts to the porch at Green Gables.)

I hope Marilla Cuthbert knows what she's doing.

(STATIONMASTER exits as MARILLA begins sweeping. After a moment...)

RACHEL (O.S.)

Yoo-hoo! Marilla!

(MARILLA stops sweeping and looks up. RACHEL LYNDE enters opposite and waves.)

RACHEL

Marilla!

MARILLA

Good afternoon, Rachel. What brings you to Green Gables today?

RACHEL

I saw Matthew driving to town in the buggy. I was looking out my parlor window, minding my own business, when I saw him drive past... He was wearing a suit, Marilla.

MARILLA

Yes.

RACHEL

When Matthew goes to town he generally takes the wagon – and he *never* wears a suit.

(Beat. MARILLA begins sweeping again.)

Marilla Cuthbert! Don't keep me in suspense! Why did Matthew go to town wearing a suit? Did he go to fetch the doctor? You're not having one of your headaches, are you? How do you feel?

MARILLA

I feel fine. How are you?

RACHEL

Marilla!

MARILLA

Very well, Rachel Lynde – if you *must* know – Matthew went to the railroad depot. We are getting a boy from the orphanage in Nova Scotia and he's coming in on the afternoon train.

RACHEL

You and Matthew – adopting an orphan boy? What on earth put such a notion in your head?

MARILLA

Mrs. Spencer was up here one day and said she was going to get a girl from the orphanage in Hopetown. So Matthew and I talked it over and we decided we'd like to get a boy to help around the farm. Matthew's getting up in years and his heart troubles him a good deal. We sent word to Mrs. Spencer to bring us a boy about thirteen or so.

RACHEL

Marilla, you know I pride myself on speaking my mind, so I'll tell you plain – you're doing a mighty risky thing, bringing a strange child into your home. Why, only last week Mrs. Blewett told me about an adopted boy who set fire to the house at night – set it *on purpose*, Marilla – and nearly burnt the family to a crisp!

MARILLA

If I had to live with Mrs. Blewett, I might do the same.

RACHEL

Marilla!

MARILLA

I don't deny that I've had some qualms myself, but Matthew was terrible set on it and it's so seldom that he sets his mind on anything...

RACHEL

And then there was another time when an orphan put strychnine in the well – only in that case, it was a girl.

MARILLA

Well, we're not getting a girl!

RACHEL

I should hope not. Imagine your brother Matthew, shy as he is, trying to make conversation with a girl. It would positively do him in!

MARILLA

Yes, well... If you'll excuse me, Rachel.

(She starts sweeping again.)

RACHEL

Very well – I'll be on my way. But I'll be back to meet this orphan boy for myself!

(RACHEL exits. MARILLA exits opposite. Music under as the scene shifts to the Railroad Depot. The music fades as we hear the clip-clop of hooves and then a voice call "Whoa." MATTHEW CUTHBERT enters and looks around. After a moment, STATIONMASTER enters.)

STATIONMASTER

Afternoon, Matthew. Here to pick up a passenger?

MATTHEW

That's right.

STATIONMASTER

(Pointing to ANNE)

Your girl is waiting right over there.

MATTHEW

Girl? But it's a boy I've come for!

STATIONMASTER

I daresay she'll be able to explain. She's got a tongue of her own, that one. Go on, Matthew. She won't bite.

(MATTHEW takes a few steps towards ANNE then tries to turn back, but ANNE has spied him and crosses to him.)

ANNE

You must be Mr. Matthew Cuthbert of Green Gables. I'm very glad to see you. I was beginning to think you weren't coming for me, so I had made up my mind to spend the night in that wild cherry tree, there in the bend. Wouldn't it be wonderful to sleep in a cherry tree all white and shimmery in the moonshine...?

(MATTHEW stares at her then turns to the STATIONMASTER. STATIONMASTER merely smiles. MATTHEW turns back to ANNE.)

MATTHEW

I'm...I'm sorry I was late. I'll just... go fetch the buggy.

(He turns to leave. STATIONMASTER stops him.)

STATIONMASTER

I'll fetch it for you, Matthew. You stay here and get acquainted.

(STATIONMASTER exits. Beat.)

ANNE

I'm very glad you've come, even if it would have been nice to sleep in a wild cherry tree.

(STATIONMASTER enters with a bench – “the buggy” – and sets it down. He bows to ANNE, then gestures to the buggy.)

STATIONMASTER

Your carriage awaits.

(He helps ANNE to her seat. He then hands the “reins” to MATTHEW.)

Matthew.

(MATTHEW takes the reins, sits next to ANNE then clucks to the horse. The sound of plodding hooves. ANNE waves to STATIONMASTER who waves back then exits, taking the upstage bench with him. The scene shifts to the road to Green Gables.)

ANNE

We've got to drive a long piece, haven't we? I'm glad because I love driving. Oh, it seems so wonderful that I'm going to live with you and belong to you. I've never belonged to anybody before. I don't suppose you ever were an orphan in an orphanage, but it's an awful place to live. There is so little scope for imagination in an orphanage. But here, on this island...

(She takes in her surroundings, then hooks her arm through Matthew's.)

I've always heard that Prince Edward Island is the prettiest place in the world, and I used to imagine I was living here, but I never really expected I would. It's delightful when your imaginations come true, isn't it?

(ANNE turns to MATTHEW expectantly. MATTHEW, who has no idea what "imagination" is, says nothing.)

Am I talking too much? People are always telling me I do. Would you rather I didn't talk? If you say so I'll stop. I *can* stop when I make up my mind to it.

MATTHEW

You can talk as much as you like. I don't mind.

ANNE

I'm so glad. I know you and I are going to get along fine together. Just now I feel nearly perfectly happy. I can't feel exactly perfectly happy because, well... what color would you call this?

(She holds up one of her red braids.)

MATTHEW

It's red, ain't it?

ANNE

Yes, it's red. Now you see why I can't be perfectly happy. I can imagine that I have a beautiful rose leaf complexion and lovely violet eyes – but I cannot imagine my red hair away. It is my lifelong sorrow. I read of a girl once in a novel who had a lifelong sorrow, but it wasn't red hair. Her hair was pure gold and she wore a dress with puffed sleeves. Have you ever imagined what it must feel like to wear a dress with puffed sleeves?

MATTHEW

Well now, no I haven't.

ANNE

I have – often... Oh, Mr. Cuthbert! Look at all these trees covered in apple blossoms! What is this place?

MATTHEW

We call it the Avenue. It is kind a pretty, ain't it?

ANNE

Pretty? *Pretty* doesn't seem the right word to use. Nor beautiful, either. They don't go far enough.

(She looks back at the disappearing trees.)

They shouldn't call that lovely place the Avenue. There's no meaning in a name like that. I shall call it... the White Way of Delight. Oh! Look, over there – what's that called?

(She points off. MATTHEW looks.)

MATTHEW

That's Barry's pond.

ANNE

Oh, I don't like that name either. I shall call it... the Lake of Shining Waters. Yes, that's the right name for it. I know because saying it gave me a thrill.

MATTHEW

(Pulling up on the reins)

Whoa.

(He points off. MARILLA enters c as the scene shifts to Green Gables.)

Green Gables.

ANNE

It looks just as I imagined. It looks like home. I'm finally home.

(ANNE and MATTHEW hop out of the buggy and cross to MARILLA. MATTHEW clears his throat. MARILLA looks up – and is surprised.)

MARILLA

Matthew Cuthbert, who is this?

(MATTHEW realizes he never asked ANNE her name.)

MATTHEW

Uh... it's a girl.

MARILLA

I can see that. Where's the boy?

MATTHEW

There wasn't any. There was only her. So I brought her home. She couldn't be left there, no matter where the mistake had come in.

MARILLA

Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish! This is what comes from sending word instead of going ourselves.

ANNE

You don't want me? You don't want me because I'm not a boy? Nobody ever did want me. I might have known it was all too beautiful to be true.

MARILLA

Now, there's no need to carry on so. It's not your fault.

ANNE

This is the most tragical thing that has ever happened to me.

MARILLA

What's your name?

ANNE

Will you please call me Cordelia?

MARILLA

Call you Cordelia? Is that your name?

ANNE

No, not exactly, but I would love to be called Cordelia.

MARILLA

I don't understand.

ANNE

Cordelia is a perfectly elegant name.

MARILLA

What is your name, child?

ANNE

Anne Shirley. Plain, old unromantic Anne Shirley.

MARILLA

Fiddlesticks! Anne Shirley is a good, sensible name. You've no need to be ashamed of it.

ANNE

Oh, I'm not ashamed. But if you're going to call me Anne, would you please be sure to spell it with an "e."

MARILLA

What difference does it make how it's spelled?

ANNE

It makes *such* a difference. A-n-n looks dreadful but Anne with an "e" is quite distinguished.

MARILLA

Very well then, Anne with an "e," can you tell me how you were brought instead of a boy?

ANNE

If I was very beautiful and had nut brown hair, would you keep me?

MARILLA

No. We have no use for a girl. Well, we'll have to put you somewhere tonight. You can stay in the east gable – the room at the top of the stairs. Run along and put your things away then come down for supper. You must be hungry.

ANNE

Not really. I can never eat when I'm in the depths of despair.

MARILLA

The depths of despair?

ANNE

Can you eat that way?

MARILLA

I've never been that way.

ANNE

Can't you even imagine you're in the depths of despair?

MARILLA

No, I cannot. Now run along.

(ANNE exits into the house. MARILLA turns to MATTHEW.)

MARILLA (cont.)

After supper, I'll send word to Mrs. Spencer that she made a mistake. I'll tell her to come by in the morning and take that girl back to the orphanage. It's the only way.

MATTHEW

I suppose.

MARILLA

You *suppose*? Don't you know it?

MATTHEW

She's a real nice little thing, Marilla. It'd be a pity to send her back when she's so set on staying here.

MARILLA

Matthew Cuthbert! I believe that child has bewitched you. I can see plain as plain you want to keep her.

MATTHEW

I could hire a boy from town to help me – and she'd be company for you.

MARILLA

I'm not suffering for company. Matthew, think a moment – we know nothing about this child. Nothing about her family, her past...

MATTHEW

You could ask her.

MARILLA

I'll do nothing of the sort! What would be the point? She's no good for us!

MATTHEW

Well, we might be of some good to her.

(Music under as MARILLA exits into the house. MATTHEW picks up the "buggy" and exits opposite. The lights fade as the music shifts to the sound of morning – a crowing rooster, etc. Lights come back up. It is the next day. ANNE runs out and takes it all in, trying to memorize each bush and tree. After a moment, MARILLA enters.)

MARILLA

What are you doing out here, child? Mrs. Spencer will be along at any moment.