

Marilla Cuthbert Is Surprised

by **Lucy Maud Montgomery** from *Anne of Green Gables*

In Anne of Green Gables, Marilla Cuthbert and her brother, Matthew, are getting older. They live on a farm in Canada, and they need some help to work the farm. They have decided to adopt a boy from a local orphanage. Unfortunately, when Matthew goes to the train station to pick up the boy, he finds that the orphanage has sent a young girl. He takes her to the farm to meet his sister.

Marilla came briskly forward as Matthew opened the door. But when her eyes fell on the odd little figure in the stiff, ugly dress, with the long braids of red hair and the eager, luminous eyes, she stopped short in amazement.

“Matthew Cuthbert, who’s that?” she exclaimed. “Where is the boy?”

“There wasn’t any boy,” said Matthew wretchedly. “There was only her.”

He nodded at the child, remembering that he had never even asked her name.

“No boy! But there must have been a boy,” insisted Marilla. “We sent word to Mrs. Spencer to bring a boy.”

“Well, she didn’t. She brought her. I asked the station-master. And I had to bring her home. She couldn’t be left there, no matter where the mistake had come in.”

“Well, this is a pretty piece of business!” exclaimed Marilla.

During this dialogue the child had remained silent, her eyes roving from one to the other, all the animation fading out of her face. Suddenly she seemed to grasp the full meaning of what had been said. Dropping her precious carpet-bag she sprang forward a step and clasped her hands.

“You don’t want me!” she cried. “You don’t want me because I’m not a boy! I might have expected it. Nobody ever did want me. I might have known it was all too beautiful to last. I might have known nobody really did want me. Oh, what shall I do? I’m going to burst into tears!”

Burst into tears she did. Sitting down on a chair by the table, flinging her arms out upon it, and burying her face in them, she proceeded to cry stormily. Marilla and Matthew looked at each other deprecatingly across the stove. Neither of them knew what to say or do. Finally Marilla stepped lamely into the breach.

“Well, well, there’s no need to cry so about it.”

“Yes, there is need!” The child raised her head quickly, revealing a tear-stained face and trembling lips. “You would cry, too, if you were an orphan and had come to a place you thought was going to be home and found that they didn’t want you because you weren’t a boy. Oh, this is the most tragical thing that ever happened to me!”

Something like a reluctant smile, rather rusty from long disuse, mellowed Marilla’s grim expression.

“Well, don’t cry any more. We’re not going to turn you out-of-doors to-night. You’ll have to stay here until we investigate this affair. What’s your name?”

The child hesitated for a moment.

“Will you please call me Cordelia?” she said eagerly.

“Call you Cordelia? Is that your name?”

“No-o-o, it’s not exactly my name, but I would love to be called Cordelia. It’s such a perfectly elegant name.”

“I don’t know what on earth you mean. If Cordelia isn’t your name, what is?”

“Anne Shirley,” reluctantly faltered forth the owner of that name, “but, oh, please do call me Cordelia. It can’t matter much to you what you call me if I’m only going to be here a little while, can it? And Anne is such an unromantic name.”

“Unromantic fiddlesticks!” said the unsympathetic Marilla. “Anne is a real good plain sensible name. You’ve no need to be ashamed of it.”

“Oh, I’m not ashamed of it,” explained Anne, “only I like Cordelia better. I’ve always imagined that my name was Cordelia—at least, I always have of late years. When I was young I used to imagine it was Geraldine, but I like Cordelia better now. But if you call me Anne please call me Anne spelled with an E.”

“What difference does it make how it’s spelled?” asked Marilla with another rusty smile as she picked up the teapot.

“Oh, it makes such a difference. It looks so much nicer. When you hear a name pronounced can’t you always see it in your mind, just as if it was printed out? I can; and A-n-n looks dreadful, but A-n-n-e looks so much more distinguished. If you’ll only call me Anne spelled with an E, I shall try to reconcile myself to not being called Cordelia.”

Questions

1. Why does the author say Marilla's smile is "rusty"?
2. What does *faltered* mean here: "'Anne Shirley,' reluctantly faltered forth the owner of that name"?
3. Do you think Marilla and Matthew will let Anne stay forever? Why or why not?
4. If you were to pick a name for yourself, what would it be? Why?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. flighty
2. fashion
3. superfluous
4. fractious
5. passionately
6. shatter
7. crossly

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “Nancy is a terrible **flighty** thing. I’ve often had to scold her well for her heedlessness.”

- a. scatterbrained b. fast moving c. flying d. talkative

2) “We should have come to you ourselves and not left an important message to be passed along by word of mouth in that **fashion**.”

- a. outfit b. way c. speed d. greeting card

3) “She knew Mrs. Peter Blewett only by sight as a small, shrewish-faced woman without an ounce of **superfluous** flesh on her bones.”

- a. wrinkled b. suntanned c. freckled d. extra

4) “The baby’s awful **fractious**, and I’m clean worn out attending to him.”

- a. happy b. difficult c. whiny d. sleepy

5) “I’d rather go back to the asylum than go to live with her,” said Anne **passionately**.

- a. with feeling b. loudly c. quietly d. sarcastically

6) “Oh, Miss Cuthbert, did you really say that perhaps you would let me stay at Green Gables?” she said, in a breathless whisper, as if speaking aloud might **shatter** the glorious possibility.”

a. break b. ruin c. save d. improve

7) "I think you'd better learn to control that imagination of yours, Anne, if you can't distinguish between what is real and what isn't," said Marilla **crossly**."

a. with arms crossed b. angrily c. happily d. religiously