



CHAPTER 1

It was a warm June afternoon, and the blossoming orchard was humming with bees, as Mrs Rachel Lynde sat by her window, knitting a quilt.

The window looked out over the road that crossed the hollow and wound up the hill beyond. Anyone who came in or out of the little town of Avonlea had to pass along that road – and Rachel’s sharp eyes did not miss a single one of them.

In the field nearby, Rachel’s husband was sowing turnip seed. Their neighbour, Matthew Cuthbert, ought to have been doing the same thing. Yet here he was driving by in the middle of the afternoon, wearing his best clothes! Where in the world could he be going?

If it had been anyone else, Rachel would have been able to guess. But Matthew was the shyest man alive and hardly ever left Green Gables, the farm where he lived with his sister, Marilla. She put down her knitting. “I won’t know a minute’s peace until I find out where he’s gone,” she decided.

Green Gables stood on the very edge of the woods. It was no wonder Matthew and Marilla were odd, living away here all by themselves, Rachel thought as she walked the lane. After all, trees weren’t much company.



As she sailed into the farmhouse kitchen, Rachel saw that the supper table was laid with three places. Well now, Marilla and Matthew must be expecting a guest! But the dishes were everyday ones, and there was only one kind of cake, so it could not be a very special visitor. It was a puzzle, sure enough!

Marilla Cuthbert had been expecting her. A tall, brisk woman, all angles, she had known the sight of Matthew driving by would be too much for her neighbour's curiosity.

"Is everything all right?" asked Rachel. "I saw Matthew go past and thought he might be going to fetch the doctor."

"He's gone to Bright River," said Marilla. "We're adopting a boy to help with the farm, and he's arriving tonight."

If Marilla had said that Matthew had gone to meet a kangaroo from Australia, Rachel could not have been more astonished. "A boy! You're adopting a boy!" she repeated.



“Yes, Mrs Spencer arranged it,” said Marilla. “We plan to give him a good home and schooling.”

“What put such a notion in your head?” gasped Rachel. “Marilla, this is mighty foolish. You’re bringing a child into your home and you don’t know a thing about him!”

“That’s as maybe,” said Marilla calmly, “but Matthew is terrible set on it, and it’s so seldom he sets his mind on anything.”

“Well, I hope it will turn out all right,” said Rachel – in a tone that made it quite clear she thought it wouldn’t.



At the same moment, Matthew Cuthbert was hurrying on to the station platform at Bright River. There was no one to be seen except for a girl sitting by herself. Matthew went quickly past her to find the stationmaster.

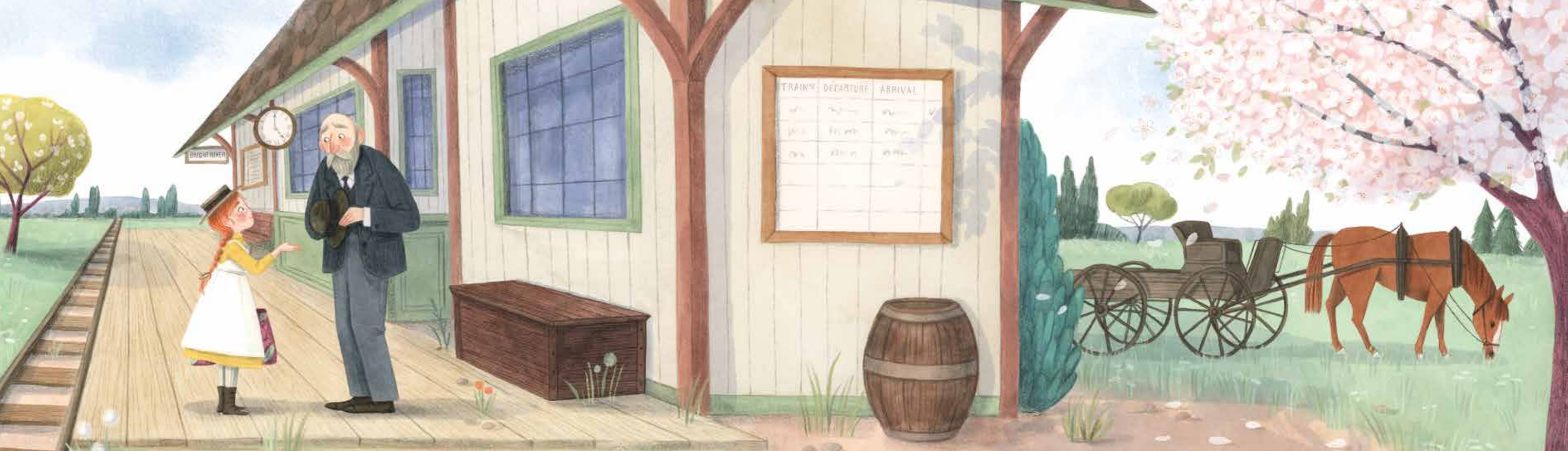
“The train has already been and gone,” the stationmaster told him. “But there’s your passenger waiting for you.”

“The girl?” said Matthew. “But it’s a boy I’ve come for!”

The stationmaster shrugged and walked off. Matthew wished very much that Marilla was here to take charge of things. Whatever was he to do now?

Nervously, he shuffled towards the girl. She looked about eleven years old and was wearing a very ugly dress of yellowish-white wincey. Beneath a faded brown sailor hat were two long braids of red hair. As he approached, she sprang forward and held out her hand.

“Are you Mr Matthew Cuthbert of Green Gables? I’d just made up my mind that if you didn’t come, I’d sleep in that wild cherry tree tonight.



Don't you think it would be lovely to sleep in a cherry tree, all white in the moonshine? But I'm very glad you've come. It seems so wonderful I'm going to live with you and belong to you. I've never belonged to anybody before!"

Matthew didn't know what to say. All he could think was to take her home and let Marilla explain.

"I'm sorry I was late," he said shyly. "Come along – the horse is in the yard."

He lifted her shabby carpet bag into the buggy and helped her to climb in. As they set off down the road to Avonlea, she began to talk.

"This is the bloomiest place I ever saw!" she exclaimed, her green-grey eyes wide. "Look at that tree – it's like a bride in a beautiful white dress!"

One day I hope I shall have a beautiful dress with puffed sleeves. I've never had a pretty dress in my life – but I can always imagine that I'm dressed gorgeously." She paused for a moment, gazing out at farms and woods, meadows and orchards. "I just love this place already and I'm so glad I'm going to live here. But these red roads are funny. What makes them red?"

"Well now," said Matthew, scratching his head. "I dunno."

"It will be something to find out," said the girl. "Isn't it splendid to think of all the things there are to find out? It makes me feel glad to be alive – it's such an interesting world! But am I talking too much? People are always telling me I do."

But Matthew, to his surprise, was enjoying himself. “You can talk as much as you like.”

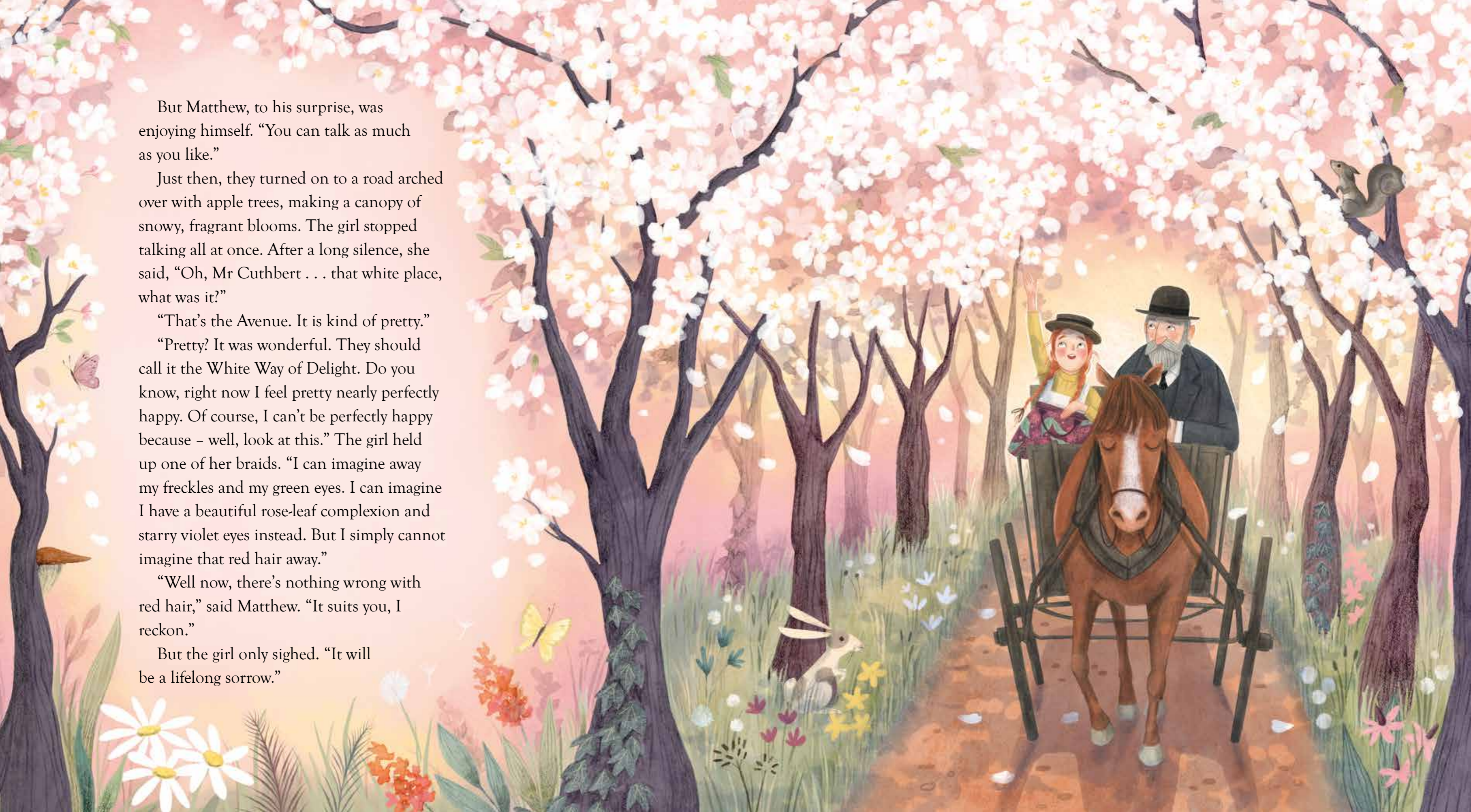
Just then, they turned on to a road arched over with apple trees, making a canopy of snowy, fragrant blooms. The girl stopped talking all at once. After a long silence, she said, “Oh, Mr Cuthbert . . . that white place, what was it?”

“That’s the Avenue. It is kind of pretty.”

“Pretty? It was wonderful. They should call it the White Way of Delight. Do you know, right now I feel pretty nearly perfectly happy. Of course, I can’t be perfectly happy because – well, look at this.” The girl held up one of her braids. “I can imagine away my freckles and my green eyes. I can imagine I have a beautiful rose-leaf complexion and starry violet eyes instead. But I simply cannot imagine that red hair away.”

“Well now, there’s nothing wrong with red hair,” said Matthew. “It suits you, I reckon.”

But the girl only sighed. “It will be a lifelong sorrow.”



They drove by a gleaming pond fringed with shadowy fir trees. "That's Barry's Pond," explained Matthew.

"Barry's Pond?" repeated the girl. "Why, that's far too dull! I shall call it the Lake of Shining Waters."

They crossed a bridge and were reaching the crest of a hill when Matthew said, "We're almost home now."

"Don't tell me which Green Gables is," said the girl eagerly. "Let me guess!" She looked across the valley scattered with snug farmhouses. Her eyes darted from one house to another, before at last they lingered on one away to the left, far back from the road in the twilight of the woods. "That's Green Gables, isn't it?" she whispered, pointing.

"Well now, you've guessed it!" said Matthew, delighted.

She sighed with satisfaction. "Just as soon as I saw it, I felt it was home."

The girl was silent as they drove up the lane, her eyes shining with happiness. But Matthew felt more and more uncomfortable at the thought of the disappointment awaiting her. He was thankful it was Marilla who would have to tell this girl that the home she longed for was not to be hers after all.



Marilla came forward as Matthew opened the door. But when she saw the odd little figure with the long red braids, she stopped short. "Who's that? Where's the boy?" she demanded.

"There wasn't any boy," said Matthew, fingering the edge of his hat. "There was only her."

At once, the girl burst into a storm of tears. "Oh! I should have known it was too beautiful to last!"

"Well, well, there's no need to cry so," said Marilla awkwardly.

"You would cry if you had come to a place you thought would be home and found they didn't want you! This is the most tragical thing that has ever happened to me!"

"Come now," said Marilla. "We're not going to turn you out into the night. What's your name?"

The girl hesitated. "Will you please call me Cordelia?" Seeing Marilla's