***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 2***

### ***Matthew Cuthbert is Surprised***

***Summary:***

* As Matthew drives to the train station at Bright River, readers learn about his shyness. Which is pretty extreme. He's afraid of all women who aren't Marilla and Mrs. Rachel Lynde because he feels like they're secretly laughing at them.
* There's no one at the station except a little girl. Matthew figures he must be early until the stationmaster tells him the train came already and Mrs. Spencer left that orphan girl for him.
* Did we mention that Matthew's also afraid of little girls? He approaches the girl. She's thin, freckled, expressive, and waiting with a carpetbag.
* Luckily for Matthew, she talks first. And instead of introducing herself, she informs Matthew that if he hadn't come she would have climbed the wild cherry tree in the distance and spent the night there.
* Matthew decides to take the girl home and let Marilla explain that there's been a mistake.
* Because the girl's extremely chatty, we get to see the drive home through her eyes. Or rather, mouth. Things she talks about: how she hated the orphan asylum, how she wishes she was better looking, how she loves fine clothes.
* To his own surprise, Matthew finds himself liking her. He tells her she can talk as much as she likes. So she goes on to tell him how she wishes her hair wasn't red.
* When they reach a road arched over with apple trees called The Avenue, the girl falls silent. When she speaks again, she explains that she got a thrill from the beauty of the place. When Matthew tells her its name, she doesn't like it and decides to call it "The White Way of Delight" instead.
* Her re-naming doesn't stop there. When they pass their neighbor's pond, she decides to call it "The Lake of Shining Waters."
* As they get close, she correctly guesses which house is Green Gables, saying it just feels like home. Awkward. Cue a very guilty Matthew.

***Synopsis:***

Matthew Cuthbert travels by horse and buggy to retrieve the "boy" orphan from the train station of a neighboring town. Along the way, we learn of Matthew's painful shyness and discomfort around girls and women (save his sister and Mrs. Lynde), and watch with sympathy as it dawns on Matthew that through doings not of his understanding, that is exactly who he has found waiting for him on the station platform. Unsure of what to do, Matthew resolves to take the little orphan girl home to Green Gables, leaving Marilla with the unpleasant task of deciding the girl's fate. As Matthew Cuthbert, at 60 years of age a gentle and awkward man, drives the girl to Green Gables he is charmed by the girl's precocious and florid chatter. A great romantic, the orphan girl delights in the beauty of her surroundings. Anne renames The 'Avenue,' a scenic stretch of road arched over by apple trees, the "White Way of Delight." A pond becomes the "Lake of Shining Waters." Matthew's young charge is already tantalized by the prospect of friendship with a neighboring girl as they approach Green Gables, the home she so longs for: "'However, it is real, and we're nearly home.' With a sigh of rapture, she relapsed into silence."

In Chapter 2, we meet the timid, docile Matthew who is charmed and perplexed by the young girl in his company. The orphan girl, soon to be known to readers as Anne Shirley, is an emotional and distracted romantic who sets her heart on a proper home. The reader is soon treated to Anne's beguiling imagination, a retreat from the harsh upbringing she has had to navigate as a child. Her upbringing is perhaps reflected in her self-image, one distorted by her disdain for the red tresses that adorn her freckled face and in her unflattering description of the asylum's natural surroundings (in sharp contrast to her effusive descriptions of Green Gables).

***Critical Study:***

Matthew enjoys his quiet ride to the train station, except for the moments when he passes women and must nod at them. All women scare him, except for Marilla, who we learn is his sister, and Mrs. Rachel. He always feels like women are laughing at him. Arriving at the station, he sees no sign of the train and nobody on the platform except for a little girl and the stationmaster. Shyly avoiding the girl’s eyes, he asks the stationmaster whether Mrs. Spencer has arrived with his orphan, and the stationmaster says that she has and that the delivery is waiting at the end of the platform.

A girl of about eleven years is sitting on a pile of shingles. She carries only a faded carpetbag as luggage and wears an ill-fitting, ugly dress and a faded hat, out of which snake two thick braids of red hair. Her face suggests spirit and vivacity: her big eyes change from green to gray depending on the light, and her mouth is large and expressive. Afraid of the social ordeal ahead, Matthew approaches the girl, who spares him from having to introduce himself. She confidently holds out her hand to him and starts talking. Words spill out of her mouth at a pace that shocks the quiet Matthew. She explains that while she waited, she imagined an alternate plan for the evening in case Matthew did not come for her. She would have climbed a nearby wild cherry tree and slept among the blooms and moonshine, imagining she was sleeping in marble halls. Although Matthew is surprised that a girl, rather than the boy he expected, sits before him, he decides to take her to Green Gables for the night and let Marilla tell the girl they will not be able to keep her.

Anne rarely pauses from her chatter during the ride to Green Gables. Through her monologue, she reveals a vivid imagination and a thirst for beauty, along with a tendency to criticize herself, especially her red hair. She repeatedly remarks on the beauty of the landscape and exclaims that calling Avonlea her home is a dream come true. She compares the lush trees of Avonlea to the scrawny saplings at the orphanage, and although she loves the new landscape, she expresses sympathy for the undernourished orphanage trees, with which she feels a sense of camaraderie. Arriving at the Cuthbert place, Anne gushes that Green Gables feels like home, a home more beautiful and perfect than any she could have imagined.

***Critical Analysis:***

Matthew Cuthbert enjoys the ride to the train station, except for when he comes across women and has to nod at them—he is extremely shy around women besides his sister Marilla and Mrs. Rachel. When Matthew reaches the station, there is no train there and nobody on the platform except a young girl. Matthew asks the stationmaster when the train will be arriving; the stationmaster responds that the train has already come and that the little girl was dropped off for him. Matthew says that he was supposed to be picking up an orphan boy, and the stationmaster says that he had better talk to the girl about what happened. Matthew is very scared to talk to the girl, but he walks over to her anyway. She is wearing ugly and ill-fitting clothing and has bright red hair in two braids. Her face is thin, white, and freckled, with large gray-green eyes.

The girl realizes that Matthew is there to take her home and greets him maturely, if quite verbosely. She tells Matthew that she was vividly imagining what she would do if he didn’t come to pick her up. Matthew decides he must take the child home for the night since it is late and she has nowhere else to go. He offers to carry her bag for her, but the girl responds that she would rather carry it herself because “I’ve got all my worldly goods in it, but it isn’t heavy” (p. 18). On the way to Matthew’s buggy, the girl talks nonstop. She tells him how much she likes driving and how she is looking forward to having a home and belonging to someone after four months in the orphan asylum. When they begin driving back to Green Gables, the girl is quiet for a while, and then she begins to chatter again. She is highly imaginative and interested in nature and beauty. Matthew lets the girl carry the conversation by herself, for the most part, responding briefly when she asks him questions. However, the narrator notes that “Matthew, much to his own surprise, was enjoying himself” (p. 21). The girl expresses that she is glad to talk to someone who doesn’t tell her to talk less or not to use big words. The girl changes the subject to her red hair, saying it is something that causes her great distress and that she cannot even escape by using her imagination. She is distracted from this conversation by the beauty of nature yet again, which causes her to exclaim and then fall into rapturous silence.

When the girl finally has the ability to speak again, she tells Matthew that the avenue they are driving down should be called the White Way of Delight. She informs him that she likes to make up beautiful, fitting names for people and places. As they get close to Green Gables, the girl asks about the name of a pond and finds out that it is called Barry’s Pond after the family that lives beside it. Matthew informs her that the family has a little girl named Diana who is eleven, the age of the orphan girl. The girl is scared to go over a bridge in the buggy, but she faces her fears by closing her eyes. When they approach the top of a hill overlooking much of Avonlea, the girl says she will guess which house is Green Gables. She guesses correctly and says that she was able to do so because “as soon as I saw it I felt it was home” (p. 29). Matthew is uneasy with the girl’s declarations of happiness at having a home, knowing that they plan to send her back to the orphan asylum and get a boy to replace her. He thinks to himself that he is glad Marilla will be the one to break the news to the girl. Matthew and the girl arrive at Green Gables and walk into the house.

***Significance:***

[Matthew Cuthbert](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Matthew_Cuthbert) and the "sorrel mare" drive quietly toward the railroad station, enjoying the drive except when he has to nod a greeting to women he passes. He's always afraid women are secretly laughing at him.

The station platform is deserted except for a tense-looking little girl sitting on a pile of shingles. The stationmaster explains the child has been dropped off for Matthew, who is shocked: he was expecting a boy. The stationmaster can't explain the mistake and leaves Matthew to cope on his own.

The little girl Matthew confronts is about 11, redheaded, and dressed in a skimpy dress made of "wincey" (a blend of linen and wool). A closer observer than Matthew might notice the girl is also beautiful in an unusual way, as "no commonplace soul inhabited the body of this stray woman-child." The girl greets Matthew with such enthusiasm he can't bring himself to say he was expecting to pick up a boy. He'll take her home and get Marilla to explain the mistake.

During the eight-mile ride home, the still-unnamed little girl chatters nonstop while Matthew listens in confused silence. Though her manner is cheerful, it's clear she has suffered in both her earlier life and four-month stay at the orphanage. She has used her vivid imagination and natural curiosity to carry her over the hardest times. As she comments to Matthew, "Isn't it splendid to think of all the things there are to find out about?"

To his surprise Matthew finds himself enjoying this odd little girl, though he finds her flow of words hard to follow. He listens almost dizzily as she bemoans her red hair and freckles, renames local attractions to make them more interesting, and correctly guesses which house is Green Gables. "Oh, it seems as if I must be in a dream," she says rapturously, "but it IS real and we're nearly home." Matthew dreads seeing the girl's reaction when she learns the truth.

Modern readers may be surprised at the amount of description [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) uses. At times the author's lush language seems like an interruption to the narrative. But lyrical description is a trademark of Montgomery's and bears close reading. Often the narrator personifies the landscape as female. A wild plum is like "a white-clad girl tip-toeing to her own reflection," and Anne herself compares another wild plum to a bride. Birches are "slim," a description Montgomery will often use to describe Anne.

Montgomery also uses quasi-religious imagery to render scenery and its effect on Anne. A "painted sunset sky shone like a great rose window," and seeing it, Anne leans back in the buggy, "her thin hands clasped before her, her face lifted rapturously." When Montgomery paints a picture, the language she uses reflects the way Anne would see it.

An important element in this book is the close relationship between Anne and Matthew. Later Anne will refer to Matthew as a "kindred spirit," a term she uses for people she sees as soul mates. There's little in [Chapter 2](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/chapter-2-summary/) to suggest Anne and Matthew have much in common. She is hyperverbal and desperate to connect with other people; he shuns strangers, especially women, and clearly doesn't understand Anne yet. When she's struck dumb by the sight of the Avenue, Matthew attributes her silence to hunger and fatigue, "the only reason he could think of." Indeed the two hardly seem like kindred spirits—kindred spirits being a bond between Anne and others with whom she connects closely.

But Anne and Matthew are linked by a bond of loneliness. Self-aware Anne knows she's longing to be part of a family. Matthew has never realized his isolation troubles him, but his abrupt decision to adopt a child indicates at some level he also yearns for family life. Anne and Matthew couldn't be more different, but their literal longing for "kin" makes them "kindred."

Although Anne's chatter is charming, it's sometimes almost too fanciful to bear. When she renames the Avenue "the White Way of Delight" and Barry's pond the "Lake of Shining Waters," readers may cringe inwardly. Did children ever talk this way, even in 1908? Does Anne have any friends her own age? Probably not. As she'll later tell Marilla, Anne's childhood has been spent mostly taking care of other people's babies in exchange for room and board, and she's lived in the orphanage for only four months. Being deprived of a peer group means she hasn't had much chance to listen to the ordinary speech of other children; her life as a glorified servant has meant there was no one to listen to her. It's no wonder Anne talks almost obsessively when she gets a chance, her romanticized language coming from her reading and vivid imagination. Nonetheless it fits Anne and her imaginative fantasies.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert), an awkward man with shoulder-length gray hair and a full beard, drives his buggy to Bright River. He enjoys the trip, except for the moments when he passes ladies and must nod to them in greeting—Matthew is terribly self-conscious around women, except for Marilla and [Mrs. Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde). When he reaches the train station, he sees nobody except for a girl sitting on a pile of shingles and looking intently at him. When he questions the stationmaster, Matthew learns that the little girl has been dropped off for him. Matthew is shocked, baffled, and unsure what to do.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Matthew, like Marilla, is set in his ways and doesn’t venture away from home very often. He’s especially unprepared for what awaits him at the train station. The story’s first conflict is established—who is the girl, and why has she been unexpectedly sent to the Cuthberts, disrupting their plan to adopt a boy?

***Summary Part 2:***

The girl is about 11 years old, wearing a shabby yellowish-gray dress. She wears thick red braids down her back and has big, expressive eyes. As [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) hesitantly approaches, the girl jumps up and asks if he’s Matthew Cuthbert. She explains that if he hadn’t shown up, she was going to sleep in a nearby cherry tree. Seeing her bright eyes, Matthew decides he must take her home and let [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) rectify the mix-up.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The little girl who awaits Matthew is out of the ordinary—bold enough to approach Matthew instead of waiting for him to speak to her, and imaginative enough to hatch a plan (even a dubious one!) in case she’s abandoned for the night. At the same time, Anne’s contingency plan suggests that she’s used to having to fend for herself.

***Summary Part 3:***

The girl chatters cheerfully as they walk towards the buggy. She says that she’s never belonged to anyone before, and that her four months in the asylum were worst of all: there was no “scope for the imagination” there. As [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) drives the buggy away from the station, the girl breaks some blossoms off a tree and says they remind her of a bride. She longs to own a pretty dress of her own someday—she’s never had nice clothes, but she can always imagine that she does.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The orphan girl has never had a home. Yet her interest in “imagination” suggests that imagination serves as a way of coping with difficult circumstances, whether it’s a lonely asylum or a lack of nice clothing. Her ability to pretend is not just a form of escapism, in other words, but a way of helping her face reality more courageously.

***Summary Part 4:***

The girl asks [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) what makes Prince Edward Island’s roads red, and since he doesn’t know the answer, she decides it’s something to find out someday. The world wouldn’t be nearly so interesting, she says, if she knew everything—then there’d be no place for imagination. She offers to stop talking if it’s bothering Matthew, but to his surprise, he doesn’t mind. This girl is different from the timid, “well-bred” children of Avonlea. The girl is glad to keep talking. She’s used to being told that “children should be seen and not heard” and laughed at for using big words.

***Analysis Part 4:***

The girl uses her imagination to help her face the world’s mysteries, making these unknowns interesting instead of threatening. Matthew, normally fearful of girls, likes hearing what this girl has to say, and his welcoming attitude is a novelty for her, too. The Victorian maxim that children should be “seen and not heard”—should stay silent, in other words—has been used to stifle her talkative personality.

***Summary Part 5:***

After [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) tells her some details about Green Gables, the girl says she feels nearly perfectly happy. She can’t be completely happy, she explains, because that’s impossible for anybody with [red hair](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/symbols/red-hair). She can imagine away other details, like her freckles and skinny figure. But her hair is her “lifelong sorrow.”

***Analysis Part 5:***

Imagination has its limits, and this girl’s red hair defies her ability to pretend things are different. Her attitude about her hair also shows her flair for the dramatic—having hair that she considers ugly can’t truly be that bad.

***Summary part 6:***

Suddenly, as they enter the Avenue of Newbridge, the girl is overwhelmed by the canopy of apple blossoms overhead, through which the sunset is visible. She falls silent for about three miles, then tells [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) that it was the first thing she’s ever seen that couldn’t be improved by her imagination—it gave her a “funny ache.” She decides the place ought to be called “the White Way of Delight.” She always renames things or people if their real names aren’t imaginative enough. As they come within view of Barrys’ pond, filled with shifting colors and singing frogs, the girl decides that it ought to be called the Lake of Shining Waters. Matthew points out Orchard Slope, the Barrys’ house, where a little girl of 11, [Diana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/diana-barry), lives.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Besides having an active imagination, the girl is sensitive to natural beauty. Inventing names for things is a way of claiming them for her own—allowing her to lay claim to things she loves despite owning very little. Because the girl assumes she is coming to Green Gables to stay—Matthew having declined to tell her the truth—this is also a way of laying claim to her new home.

***Summary part 7:***

When they come within view of Green Gables, the girl wants to guess which house is theirs for herself, and she correctly picks out the farmstead nestled among the orchards and woods off in the distance. [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) is delighted. She explains that [Mrs. Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) hadn’t described the house, but that she just felt it was home. She’s been pinching herself all day about finally getting to go home. Matthew feels dread, glad that [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) will be the one to break the bad news to the little girl. He can’t bear the thought of this innocent child being disappointed.

***Analysis part 7:***

The girl has an instinctive sense of where home is, and indeed Matthew, having bonded with her, seems to have nearly forgotten that they didn’t intend to adopt a girl in the first place. He already feels affection toward this open-hearted, needy girl, despite the fact that he wasn’t looking for her specifically and wasn’t intending to open his heart to any child.