***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 20***

### ***A Good Imagination Gone Wrong***

***Summary:***

* The chapter opens by describing a beautiful spring where the kids of Avonlea have a grand ol' time picking flowers. Anne tells Marilla all about their escapades, and also mentions that it's the year anniversary of her coming to Green Gables.
* Marilla tells Anne to go to the Barry house to ask for an apron pattern for Diana's mother.
* Anne asks if she can go in the morning. It turns out she and Diana have been pretending that the wood between their homes is haunted. Anne says she doesn't believe her imaginings in the daylight, but it's different when it's dark.
* Marilla decides to "cure" Anne of letting her imagination go too wild, and marches her outside, forcing her to walk into the woods.
* Anne walks through the woods, imagining goblins reaching for her the whole time. It doesn't help that that woods is already pretty creepy, with wailing wind and bats flying around.
* On her walk back, Anne closes her eyes the whole time.
* Anne tells Marilla that she'll be happy with commonplace places after this.

***Synopsis:***

Spring returns to Green Gables, bringing Anne’s favorite ornaments of nature—flowers. She tells Marilla stories about exploring nature with her school friends. On the day of her anniversary of arriving at Green Gables, Anne takes considerable care with her chores. Marilla leaves Anne in charge of the house because of a headache. In the evening, Marilla asks Anne to go to Mrs. Barry to get an apron pattern. Anne asks Marilla if she may delay the trip until morning. She explains that she and Diana, tired of their commonplace surroundings, have begun to pretend that the woods between their houses are haunted. But Marilla, always trying to rid Anne of the nonsense in her head, sends her on the errand. Anne returns from the Barrys’ house out of breath from running and trembling with fear.

***Critical Study(Ch 17-20):***

The anniversary of Anne’s arrival at Green Gables corresponds with signs of Anne’s development as a young woman and a full member of Avonlea society. Anne digests her old experiences and uses them to improve herself, a process central to a child’s development into adolescence and adulthood. In an instance of Anne’s increasing maturity, she manages for the first time to make a heartfelt, effective apology. In contrast to her overblown apologies to Mrs. Rachel and Marilla in past chapters, Anne’s apology to Aunt Josephine, in Chapter 19, is delicate, sincere, and immediately successful. She has learned to curb her temper and put her eloquence to good use.

Anne applies old lessons to new situations not only when making apologies but also when saving Minnie May. Although Anne disliked caring for Mrs. Hammond’s twins, she is able to use the knowledge she gained in the Hammond household to save Minnie May’s life. Previously, Anne’s unorthodox background and unusual behavior have made her the town laughingstock, but in these chapters respectable people like the doctor compliment her for learning from

Anne and Gilbert’s rivalry grows increasingly heated. Anne is “as intense in her hatreds as in her loves,” an intensity apparent in her enduring hatred for Gilbert. She will not even speak Gilbert’s name, as if trying to deny his existence altogether. When Mr. Phillips writes their names on the board in Chapter 17, the image of Anne’s name underneath that of her enemy suggests both a flirtation between the two of them and her failure to best him in school, and Anne cringes at the sight. However, just as Anne’s unorthodox manner of speaking wins her the approval of Aunt Josephine, her unusual talent for holding a grudge works in her favor in some respects. Because she loathes Gilbert and wants to triumph over him, she works harder in school than she otherwise might, even given her natural love of learning.

Anne displays her fanciful and unshakable imagination yet again in pretending with Diana that the woods between their houses are haunted. There is nothing scary about these woods, but Anne simply decides that she wants them to evoke a particular emotional reaction. Because she believes so strongly in this fantasy, she actually alters her perception of reality. Though she herself has created the idea that the woods are scary, she nevertheless comes home nervous with fright. This ability to get lost in fantasy and think creatively about the world differentiates Anne from Marilla, who initially cannot even fathom that Anne could be useful at Green Gables.

***Brief Summary:***

Spring begins and Anne is entranced by the beautiful flowers blooming in Avonlea. Soon, it is June, and Anne asks Marilla one night if she knows what it is the anniversary of. Marilla doesn’t remember, so Anne tells her: it has been one year since Anne came to Green Gables. Marilla does not make a big fuss over this, but the narratpr notes that Marilla “sometimes wondered how she could have lived before Anne came” (p. 205).

Marilla sends Anne to ask Mrs. Barry for a sewing pattern, and Anne says she doesn’t want to because it is too dark and she is afraid to go through a wood which she has named the Haunted Wood. Anne has made up elaborate fantasies about the Haunted Wood that do not scare her during the day but make her to afraid to go into it at night. Marilla forces Anne to walk through the wood anyway. Anne fears the entire way to the Barry house that she will be grabbed by a goblin. On the way back from the Barry house, Anne keeps her eyes closed while she walks. When Anne returns, she says to Marilla that she won’t imagine so much anymore.

***Critical Analysis:***

It's spring again, and Anne and her friends once more revel in the beauty around them. One June evening—the anniversary of Anne's arrival at Green Gables—Marilla asks Anne to run over to the Barrys' house to borrow an apron pattern. "It's too dark," protests Anne, promising to go to the Barrys' at sunrise the next morning. When Marilla insists she wants the pattern that night, Anne stalls some more before admitting the path to the Barrys' house passes through what she and Diana have begun calling the Haunted Wood.

Anne continues to explain that a few weeks ago, she and Diana started imagining the spruce woods across the bridge are haunted. For their amusement they "have imagined the most harrowing things." The stories the girls have made up are so frightening that although Anne doesn't really believe in ghosts, she can't imagine passing through the Haunted Wood after dark.

Marilla is adamant. This is what happens when Anne falls prey to her own imagination! Walking through the Haunted Wood will be "a lesson and a warning to you." She marches Anne down to the spring and orders her to cross the bridge with no more nonsense. Sobbing, Anne forces herself along the path through the woods, and then races across the field to Diana's house. Mrs. Barry gives her the pattern, and Anne runs home with her eyes closed rather than risk seeing "a white thing." Safely home at last she promises Marilla she'll be satisfied with ordinary places after this.

It's helpful to be reminded a year has passed since Anne came to live with Marilla and Matthew. Anne is still a chatterbox with an overactive imagination, but this chapter shows how much at home she has come to feel. Though her bedroom still looks the same, it's now full of "a new vital, pulsing personality," as if Anne's dreams have "tapestried the bare room with splendid filmy tissues of rainbow and moonshine." It's a bit hard to envision this; [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) would have had an easier time describing some actual changes. But she makes her point.

Another reminder—this one of Marilla's headaches—shows the reader how competent Anne has become and how much she cares for Marilla. She says she wishes "I could have had the headache in your place, Marilla." When Anne asks if Marilla is "sorry you kept me," she obviously knows the answer already, and Montgomery expands on Marilla's typically terse reply by describing what Marilla is actually thinking.

Anne feels it's cruel for Marilla to insist she pass through the Haunted Wood. Though Marilla's tendency to quash Anne's "nonsense" can be deflating, this adventure is one time she's right to do so. She doesn't want Anne believing her own fantasies, especially when they get in the way of her living a normal life. Burning a pie and starching Matthew's handkerchiefs are trivial mistakes Anne makes when she's daydreaming. But frightening herself into being unable to walk through the woods is allowing her imagination too much power.

At the same time, it's sad to see Anne promise to be "contented with commonplace places." Part of Anne's charm is her inability to be tamed and her disdain for convention. She may be less fearful of the woods from now on, but in clipping back her imagination she also loses something important.

Anne's twilight adventure may surprise modern readers. Nowadays it's hard to imagine many 12-year-olds being asked to walk alone through the woods at night without even a flashlight.

***Significance:***

Anne and Diana celebrate the arrival of spring, making wreaths of Mayflowers for their hats. Green Gables is in full bloom, and Anne sits in her east gable room enraptured by the cherry blossoms, unable to study in the evening light. Marilla enters to deliver the girl her school aprons when she is stricken with one of her headaches. Anne aches for Marilla, who tells Anne what a help she has become, despite her many distractions. Anne reminds Marilla that it was one year ago that she came to Green Gables, asking her if she was sorry for it: "No, I can't say I'm sorry," said Marilla, who sometimes wondered how she could have lived before Anne came to Green Gables." Marilla wishes to send Anne to Diana's to borrow an apron pattern, but Anne refuses on account of The Haunted Wood, much to Marilla's dismay. Anne explains that "The Haunted Wood" is the spruce wood over the brook that Diana and herself imagined being haunted; so powerfully that they were now both mightily afraid of it. Marilla orders Anne to run her errand: "I'll cure you of imagining ghosts into places. March, now." Goblins lurking in every shadow, it was a lesson Anne would never forget: "Bitterly did she repent the license she had given to her imagination."

As the expression of Marilla's headaches become more intense, Anne shows the depths of her compassion and a maturing, daughterly concern, helping Marilla as best she can. As she grows, we see her being relieved of some of the extravagances of her fertile imagination.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

The “reluctant Canadian spring” finally comes to Green Gables. [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) happily chatters to [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) about a student outing to gather mayflowers. Some students offered each other mayflowers (Anne was offered some, but “rejected them with scorn”), and everyone marched home singing afterward. Soon after, Violet Vale becomes filled with violets. When Anne spends time there, she doesn’t worry “whether Gil—whether anybody” beats her in class, but when she’s in school, she cares more than anything. There are “a lot of different Annes” in her, and she thinks that’s why life is so confusing.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The rejected mayflowers were obviously offered by Gilbert, against whom Anne maintains a steadfast resentment. Anne continues to find joy and room for imagination in nature, while her horizons are also expanding—she’s finding greater satisfaction in academic rivalry and achievement. All these competing emotions and priorities are a part of growing up, and Anne’s character is deepening and becoming more expansive.

***Summary Part 2:***

One evening in June, [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) sits by her gable window, daydreaming. [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) bustles in with some freshly ironed aprons, feeling weary in the aftermath of a headache. Anne expresses sympathy, and Marilla says Anne’s housework was helpful enough today, although it wasn’t necessary to starch [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert)’s handkerchiefs or burn the pie to a crisp. Anne is sorry—she’d meant to stay focused on facts, but she felt “an irresistible temptation” to imagine she was a princess waiting for a knight to rescue her. And she’d meant to be especially good today because it’s the anniversary of her coming to Green Gables, the most important day of her life. Marilla admits that she isn’t sorry that Anne came to Green Gables, while privately thinking that she doesn’t know how she lived before Anne’s arrival.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Though Marilla’s perspective on adopting Anne has shifted—from almost rejecting her for not being “useful” to beginning to accept her for who she is—Anne has become a great help to Marilla over the past year at Green Gables, practically as well as emotionally. And though Marilla can’t help covering up her warmth with a sarcastic edge, she acknowledges to herself that life has changed for the better since Anne became a member of the household.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) asks [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) to go to Orchard Slope to get a sewing pattern from [Mrs. Barry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters), but Anne hesitates, explaining that she can’t walk through “the Haunted Wood”—the spruce wood along the brook. She and [Diana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/diana-barry) imagined it because the idea of a haunted wood is so “romantic.” They’ve imagined that a wailing white lady walks beside the brook at night, and there’s also the ghost of a murdered child, and a headless man. When Marilla insists there is no such thing as ghosts, Anne objects that plenty of respectable and religious people believe in them, but Marilla won’t hear of it.

***Analysis Part 3:***

In contrast to her maturity over the past year, Anne still tends to overindulge her imagination—her vivid imaginings sometimes going overboard and causing her real fear. To Marilla, this is the very worst that Anne’s imagination can do—prevent her from carrying out her responsibilities.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) tells [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) to walk to the Barrys’ through the spruce grove to teach her a lesson. Anne is genuinely terrified and resists, sobbing, as Marilla walks her down to the brook. Finally, though, she stumbles up the path, shrinking from every noise and shadow. By the time she reaches the Barrys’, she has started running so fast she’s out of breath. On the way home with the sewing pattern in hand, she rushes over the bridge with her eyes closed for fear of seeing a ghost. Her teeth chattering, she tells Marilla that from now on, she’ll be content with ordinary places.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Marilla insists on Anne facing her fears. The terrifying experience teaches Anne that indulging her imagination too much can turn familiar places into forbidding obstacles, and she decides that from now on, she won’t let her imagination run rampant in this way.Friendship Theme Icon