***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 27***

### ***Vanity and Vexation of Spirits***

***Summary:***

* Marilla walks home from a ladies' meeting, happy that she'll be going home to tea and a roaring fire now that Anne's in her life. When she gets home, Anne isn't there and nothing is started.
* Marilla isn't scared. She's annoyed. She preps tea and rants to Matthew.
* Later, she goes to Anne's room to find Anne hiding out in her bed.
* Anne's reluctant to emerge at first but eventually shows Marilla her hair. Which is green.
* Apparently, a peddler came to the house and sold Anne a dye that he said would be raven black. In other words, Anne got played.
* Marilla tries to wash the dye out, but it sticks. So Marilla cuts Anne's hair, very close to her head.
* Anne realizes she's been vain about her hair, despite its red color. She vows to stop caring about her looks from now on.

***Synopsis:***

One evening in late April, Marilla walks home feeling uplifted and lighthearted, though she does not realize that the sights of spring are the cause of her joy. She happily anticipates the warm fire and tea that Anne should have prepared for her at home. When she reaches Green Gables, Marilla finds the table bare and Anne nowhere to be found. She complains to Matthew that Anne has disobeyed her order to stay at home and prepare the meal. Her anger turns to concern when suppertime comes and there is still no sign of Anne. Marilla goes upstairs to get a candle from Anne’s room and finds her lying facedown on her bed, moaning that she is too ugly to be seen. It turns out that Anne has dyed her hair with disastrous results. She bought hair dye from a traveling peddler who claimed the dye would turn her hair raven black. The dye turned her hair green, and the only solution is for Marilla to crop it to an unfashionably short length. At first Anne weeps at the sight of herself in the mirror, but she then decides to look at her unattractive reflection to remind herself of the folly of vanity.

***Significance:***Spring comes to Avonlea once again and even Marilla finds herself getting excited as she walks home from an Aid meeting. She thinks happily that it is so much nicer to come home to Anne than to an empty house, but when she arrives at home, she sees Anne is nowhere to be found. Marilla waits until dark for Anne to come home, but Anne does not. Then, when Marilla goes to Anne’s room to get a candle, she finds Anne lying face down in bed in despair. It turns out that Anne tried to dye her hair black with dye bought from a traveling salesman, but it turned her hair green instead. Marilla tries scrubbing Anne’s hair, but the dye won’t come out. Marilla decides that they will have to cut Anne’s hair entirely down to the scalp.

When Anne goes back to school with her hair cut off, it causes quite a sensation, but nobody guesses that it was cut off due to her dying it green. Anne tells Marilla about it when she gets home—but then, she asks Marilla if she should talk less because she knows Marilla had a headache earlier. Marilla says that she feels fine now but that her headaches have been getting worse and worse.

***Critical Study:***

When Marilla gets home from a meeting on an April afternoon, she looks forward to having tea in front of a crackling fire. Both tea and fire will have been prepared by Anne, who has been home from school for a couple of hours. Marilla reflects on what a welcome change it is to come home to a comfortable kitchen instead of a dark and empty one. She's disappointed and annoyed to find the kitchen fire out and no sign of Anne. Assuming Anne is still playing with Diana somewhere, Marilla grimly begins making up the fire.

When Anne hasn't shown up after an hour or so, Marilla takes a candle up to her bedroom—where she's astonished to find Anne lying face down on her bed. "Go away and don't look at me," Anne says into her pillow. Of course Marilla demands an explanation, and Anne gets off the bed. "Look at my hair," she whispers. Her formerly red hair is green. While Marilla was out, Anne dyed it, thinking "it was worth while to be a little wicked to get rid of red hair."

A peddler came by Green Gables earlier that afternoon. Anne has been told never to let a peddler in, so she went out to look at his wares. One item was a bottle of hair dye "warranted to dye any hair a beautiful raven black." She bought it, took it upstairs to her room, applied the whole bottle, and has "been repenting ever since."

The peddler was at least telling the truth when he promised the dye wouldn't wash out. No amount of shampooing takes the green away. After a week with no results, Marilla declares the only thing to do is cut off Anne's hair to the roots. When the deed is done, Anne vows never to look at herself in a mirror again. She turns the glass to the wall—and then turns it back around. As penance, she says, she'll look at herself every time she comes into the room. This is her punishment for giving in to vanity. Anne's schoolmates are predictably started when she comes in on Monday, but Anne tries to be patient. "I mean to devote all my energies to being good after this," she promises Marilla, who has had another one of her headaches.

Marilla is right: Anne has a knack for getting into scrapes, or—as it would now be explained—making bad choices. It's a sign of how much she hates her hair that she takes such desperate measures in this chapter. Many so-called black dyes are actually a very dark green, and it's suitable wild-spirited Anne should have green hair. Still this is a disaster for her.

In *Anne of Green Gables*, as in many novels of the period, women's hair is a symbol of their characters. When Marilla is introduced, readers learn that her gray-streaked hair "was always twisted up in a hard little knot"—like her heart—"with two wire hairpins stuck aggressively through it." Marilla's hair-pinned knot is a clue to her repressed and ungenerous personality.

Poor Anne's personality matches the red-headed stereotype—she's hot-tempered and impetuous. But her hair is also the red of the sandstone roads on Prince Edward Island. Anne notices these roads as soon as she arrives on Prince Edward Island; she asks both Mrs. Spencer and Matthew what makes the color, but neither adult can tell her. (Iron oxide is the cause.) Anne is as closely bound to the island as those roads. But only after she's dyed her hair does she realize she was vain about it, knowing even despite its color "it was so long and thick and curly." She's too young to realize even if the dye *had* turned her hair raven black, it would not have suited her.

Anne has put up with so many comments about her hair not even Marilla can be too angry with her. Besides she's doubly punished: first when her hair turns green and next when her head has to be shingled. It would seem the peddler is really the person to blame, but he's long gone. No doubt he knows when it's best not to stick around.

[Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) was fond of her own hair, which was an inoffensive brown. A couple of years before she began work on *Anne of Green Gables*, she noticed she had several gray hairs. The discovery made her cry all night.

***Critical Analysis:***

Discovering that Anne has not readied tea for Matthew, Marilla is in a state of much irritation, thinking Anne disobedient. To her dismay, Marilla finds Anne in the east gable, face buried deep into her pillows. Rising, at Marilla's insistence, Anne's source of despair is ever apparent in the green tint of her hair. Looking affright, Anne explains a peddler was by that afternoon and promised the dye he sold would turn her a raven black. Learning of the peddler's plight to bring his wife and children from Germany, Anne was moved to buy the black dye with her chicken money. After a week, it is decided that the locks must be shorn, a most unromantic circumstance for one to lose her hair, in Anne's estimation. Anne quickly comes to terms with her close shaven crop, seeing it as just penance for her vanity and a trial in her quest for goodness. As she prattles on, Anne worries she is tiring Marilla, who answers that she does not mind the chatter so much (her way of saying she is glad to hear it), but that her head aches.

Anne faces the vexation of youth: vanity. Ever striving for goodness equal to Mrs. Allan's, Anne embraces her newly cropped hair as penance to that end. The appearance of the peddler, a German Jew trying to bring his family from Germany, is a rare moment of the realities of the outside world intruding on bucolic Avonlea. The persistence of Marilla's headaches is a shadow in Anne's sunny life much closer to home.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) walks home from an Aid meeting one spring evening feeling content and looking forward to the warm fire and tea awaiting her at Green Gables. When she arrives, however, she finds the kitchen cold, with no fire or meal. Annoyed, she starts preparing it herself, figuring [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) is off writing stories or wasting time with Diana. [Mrs. Allan](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-allan) might say that Anne is “the brightest and sweetest child,” but Marilla still thinks Anne’s head is too full of “nonsense.” Even so, she never thought Anne would be neglectful of her duties like this.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Though she’s grown more trusting and appreciative of Anne’s place at Green Gables, Marilla still tends to be excessively strict with Anne, a bit too ready to assume Anne is being irresponsible when there might be another explanation.

***Summary Part 2:***

At suppertime, there’s still no sign of [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley). When [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) goes upstairs to borrow Anne’s candle, she’s surprised to find Anne herself, huddled despairingly in bed. Anne begs Marilla to go away, but Marilla insists on knowing what’s wrong, so Anne finally gets out of bed and tells Marilla to look at her hair. Lifting the candle, Marilla sees that Anne’s [red hair](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/symbols/red-hair) has turned an ugly, dull green. As they go downstairs, Marilla gets the story out of Anne: she dyed her hair, fully knowing it was a “wicked” thing to do. She’d been told it would turn “a beautiful raven black.”

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***Summary Part 3:***[Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) admits that a peddler had stopped by the house that afternoon and touched her heart with his story of trying to earn enough money to bring his wife and children to Canada from Germany. She noticed the hair dye among his offerings, and the peddler promised it wouldn’t wash out. He sold it to Anne for 50 cents. She used up the whole bottle immediately, but as soon as the saw the color of her hair, she repented her actions. [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) says she hopes Anne sees where her vanity has brought her.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Anne’s softheartedness, gullibility, and vanity have combined to bring about the hair-dying catastrophe. She’s so desperate for a solution to her greatest sorrow (the color of her hair), that she’s willing to try anything—even if it’s a sketchy solution that backfires terribly.

***Summary Part 4:***[Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) scrubs her hair vigorously, but the dye doesn’t wash off. She says she’ll never live down this mishap—it’s worse than the liniment cake, the raspberry cordial, or yelling at [Mrs. Lynde](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde), because it makes her look disreputable. After a week of daily washings, [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) concludes that there’s no hope but to cut Anne’s hair. Anne laments this “unromantic affliction”; at least girls in books lose their hair from fevers or cut it off to sell for charity.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Though Anne’s past catastrophes have often involved simple mistakes or split-second reactions, the hair-dying incident puts Anne’s vanity on display for everyone to see, making the whole thing feel even more shameful. Even Anne’s romantic imagination can’t redeem this scenario.

***Summary Part 5:***When the haircut is finished, [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley)’s new look isn’t flattering. At first she turns her mirror to the wall, but then she decides she needs to see her reflection regularly as a reminder of how vain she was. She now realizes that despite her hatred of her [red hair](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/symbols/red-hair), she was nevertheless vain about its length and thickness and curl. When she returns to school, nobody can guess the reason for Anne’s haircut, and she even bears [Josie Pye](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters)’s insults patiently. She has decided to put all her energy into being good from now on and to stop worrying about being beautiful.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Anne discovers that her vanity ran deeper than she ever suspected—she actually liked certain things about her hair, despite its color. It’s only after ruining its color that she discovers this truth and has to face it daily by looking at her unflattering haircut. This latest mistake, like her previous ones, makes Anne face and overcome yet another shortcoming.