***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 37***

### ***The Reaper whose name is Death***

***Summary:***

Marilla sees Matthew’s gray, sad face and calls to him sharply. At that moment, Anne sees him collapse at the threshold of Green Gables. Marilla and Anne try to revive him, but he dies instantly of a shock-induced heart attack. The shock came from reading a notice that Abbey Bank, where the Cuthberts keep all their money, has failed. For the first time, Matthew becomes the center of Avonlea’s attention as friends visit and run errands for Marilla and Anne. Marilla grieves with impassioned sobs, but Anne cannot muster tears that first day and suffers from a dull inner ache. Marilla hears her weeping in the middle of the night and goes to comfort her. In a rare moment of spoken affection, Marilla tells Anne that despite her own harsh ways, she loves Anne and cannot imagine life without her.

When the pain of Matthew’s death becomes less immediate, Anne finds herself enjoying her friends’ company and life at Green Gables. Feeling guilty, she confesses to Mrs. Allan that she is thrilled by life but feels she should not be happy because of Matthew’s death. Mrs. Allan tells her that Matthew would want her to be happy. She muses to Anne that in the autumn Marilla will be terribly lonely at Green Gables. Sitting together at Green Gables, Marilla and Anne reminisce about the ridiculous incidents of Anne’s childhood. Marilla comments on how attractive and grown-up Gilbert Blythe looked at church the previous Sunday. She reveals that she and Gilbert’s father, John Blythe, courted when they were young, but after a fight she was too stubborn to forgive him and she lost him, much to her regret.

***Synopsis:***

* It doesn't take long for this chapter to live up to its title. Matthew collapses the next morning and he's dead before the doctor arrives.
* Everyone visits Green Gables that day. Anne feels strangely achey but can't cry. Diana offers to sleep with Anne but Anne says no.
* Anne wakes up in the middle of the night and cries. Marilla comes into her room and they cry together. Marilla says that even though she was stricter with Anne than Matthew, she loves her just as much.
* After the funeral, everyone returns to their routine. Whenever Anne has moments of smiles and laughter, she feels guilty.
* Marilla tells Anne she's going to see the doctor about her eyes, and eventually, their talk turns to the subject of Gilbert Blythe.
* It's not what you think—Marilla doesn't know about the Anne/Gilbert rivalry. Apparently Marilla used to be courted by Gilbert's father, but they got into a fight and Marilla was too proud to forgive him. She's always wished that she had.

## *Significance:*

One day, Matthew falls down suddenly. Marilla and Anne try to rouse Matthew as their hired man goes to get the doctor. However, Mrs. Rachel Lynde arrives at the house first; after taking Matthew’s pulse, she says he is dead. When the doctor arrives, he confirms that Matthew has died and says it was likely an instantaneous death due to a sudden shock. They discover that the shock was the newspaper, which said that the bank where all of Marilla and Matthew’s money was kept had failed.

Neighbors come to the house all day to grieve Matthew and comfort Marilla and Anne. When night comes, the only ones who remain at the house are Marilla, Anne, the Barrys, and Mrs. Rachel Lynde. Diana offers to sleep with Anne, but Anne says she prefers to be alone so that she can try to realize that Matthew is really gone. Anne has not cried all day, but once she is alone, she thinks of Matthew saying he was proud of her and she begins to weep. Marilla hears Anne weeping and comes in to comfort her. Anne asks what they will do without Matthew, and Marilla responds that they have each other. Additionally, Marilla tells Anne that she loves her as if she were her own flesh and blood.

Matthew’s funeral is held two days later, and after that, Marilla and Anne try to carry on with life at Green Gables. Anne feels ashamed when she begins to find pleasure in things like flowers and visiting with Diana, but [Mrs. Allan](https://www.gradesaver.com/anne-of-green-gables/study-guide/character-list#mrs-allan) reassures her that Matthew would like to know that she is enjoying life. When Anne departs from Mrs. Allan’s house, Mrs. Allan tells her that Marilla will be lonely when Anne goes away to college. When Anne gets home, Marilla tells her that she will go to have her eyes checked the next day. They talk amicably about Anne being grown-up and about what the other students in Anne’s class will do next with their lives, and then Marilla tells Anne something that shocks her: she once dated Gilbert’s father. Marilla says that they broke up because they had a quarrel and both were too stubborn to make up.

## *Analysis:*

"Matthew, are you sick?" cries Marilla. Anne comes down the hall just in time to see Matthew collapse across the threshold. The hired man starts off for the doctor, stopping at Diana's house to ask Mrs. Barry to come over. Mrs. Lynde happens to be visiting, so both women rush to Green Gables. There they find a frenzied Marilla and Anne trying to revive Matthew. Mrs. Lynde tries Matthew's pulse, lays her ear over his heart, and looks up with tears in her eyes. Matthew is dead.

When the doctor arrives, he says Matthew likely died of a shock. The shock is printed in the newspaper Matthew was holding as he came in: Abbey Bank, which holds all the Cuthberts' money, has failed.

[Matthew Cuthbert](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Matthew_Cuthbert), always so shy and self-effacing, now is "a person of central importance." Friends and neighbors throng the house all day. Matthew is put into an open coffin in the parlor, surrounded with flowers Anne has picked for him.

The Barrys and Mrs. Lynde spend that night at Green Gables. Diana gently offers to sleep in Anne's room with her, but Anne wants to be alone, "quite silent and quiet and try to realize it." This is Anne's first "vigil with sorrow," but she can't cry. Finally she falls asleep. When she wakes in the middle of the night, the memory of Matthew's death washes over her, and finally she bursts into anguished tears.

Marilla comes in to comfort her, but Anne begs to be allowed to cry and asks Marilla to stay "for a little while with me ... Oh, Marilla, what will we do without him?" Marilla replies they still have each other. Speaking to Anne out of her heart, Marilla tells the girl she loves her like her own flesh and blood, that she has been Marilla's "joy and comfort" ever since she came to live with them.

Matthew is buried two days later. To Anne's bewildered surprise, life at Green Gables soon returns to normal. Is she being disloyal, she wonders, by continuing to find the world beautiful and interesting? Mrs. Allan reassures her: Matthew likes to know she's happy, adding that Marilla will be very lonely when Anne goes off to college.

Anne returns home and joins Marilla on the front steps. Marilla says she'll be seeing the eye specialist the following day. She'll be "more than thankful" if he can give her glasses that will really help her troubled eyes.

In a pensive mood, Marilla comments on how handsome Gilbert Blythe has become and how much he looks like his father at the same age. "People called [John Blythe] my beau," she says, but the two had a quarrel and she wouldn't forgive him. He never returned to her—"the Blythes were all mighty independent"—and she's always been sorry she didn't forgive him when she had the chance. You can never tell about people from their outsides, Marilla continues. No one remembers her little romance with John Blythe, but it all came back to her when she saw Gilbert in church.

The opening of [Chapter 37](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/chapter-37-summary/) is shockingly effective. In the previous chapter, [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) all but promises Matthew will die soon, but that foreshadowing does nothing to prepare readers for his death at the beginning of the following chapter. Seeing competent Mrs. Lynde with tears in her eyes is startling as well, and this is followed almost immediately by news that Abbey Bank has failed—a terrible blow, but one Anne and Marilla can't take in at that moment.

This chapter's pacing is unusual. Readers may suspect Montgomery has introduced news of the bank for good reason, but the chapter moves along so briskly there's not much time to absorb the news. By evening, Matthew's body has already been laid out for viewing in the parlor—a task that has no doubt been carried out by Mrs. Lynde or other friendly neighbors. Funeral customs of the period mean that the body will remain in the parlor for three days, but Montgomery jumps from the first night of grief straight to the burial without describing the intervening days. This pacing reflects the sense of unreality felt by mourners in the first shock of a death. The story doesn't linger over the burial, either. Montgomery immediately moves things at Green Gables "into their old groove."

Diana is not surprised that Marilla collapses with sorrow shortly after Matthew dies, but she doesn't know what to make of Anne's composure. After all, Anne has cried so often before this. But she is beginning to exchange roles with Marilla here. That Marilla breaks down first makes her seem more vulnerable than Anne for the first time.

It's a poignant touch that Marilla can only find words to express her love for Anne after Matthew's death. They're words he too would have loved to hear her say. Marilla was also too late to forgive John Blythe, Gilbert's father, when they quarreled as young lovers. The coincidence of Marilla's also being involved with a Blythe may not quite be believable for readers, but Anne needs to learn the story. As she's now seen, death can snatch people away with terrible suddenness. Marilla's faded romance teaches her that it's also possible to lose a loved one through a misunderstanding.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

The next morning, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) comes through the hall with an armful of flowers, hearing [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) speaking anxiously to [**Matthew**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert). When she reaches the door, she sees Matthew, gray-faced, with a newspaper in his hand. Before she or Marilla can reach him, he faints across the threshold. Anne sends the hired man for the doctor, and soon [**Mrs. Lynde**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) arrives to help. She listens to Matthew’s heart and tearfully tells Marilla she doesn’t think there’s anything they can do. Anne looks at Matthew’s still face and sees Mrs. Lynde is right.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Anne’s joyful homecoming is soon followed by tragedy as Matthew dies of a heart attack, changing life at Green Gables and Anne’s hopes for the future suddenly and shockingly. Matthew’s tender affirmation of Anne turns out to have been his last words to her.

***Summary Part 2:***

The doctor determines that [**Matthew**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) probably died painlessly from some great shock. The source of the shock is found to be the news of the Abbey Bank’s failure. All day friends and neighbors visit Green Gables. [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) tucks Matthew’s favorite flowers around his casket, feeling unable to cry. [**Diana**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/diana-barry) offers to spend the night at Green Gables, but Anne feels she needs time alone to try to come to terms with Matthew’s death. [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) has been weeping stormily, in sharp contrast to her lifelong reserve.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Anne struggles to come to terms with her tremendous grief, finding that unlike her younger self, she can’t express her emotions freely. Marilla’s and Anne’s contrasting reactions show how grief can be displayed in unexpected ways.

***Summary Part 3:***  
  
Finally, in the middle of the night, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) wakes up remembering [**Matthew**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert)’s last words to her—“My girl that I’m proud of”—and cries at last. [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) comes in and comforts Anne. She says they’ll help each other now. She knows she’s been strict with Anne in the past, but she wants to tell her while she can: she loves Anne as if she were her own flesh and blood, and she’s been the joy of Marilla’s life since she first came.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The loss of Matthew prompts Marilla to be honest and open with Anne about her love for her, in case Anne has ever been unaware. Her strictness, in its own way, has been an expression of that love. All this time, however, Anne has been a source of joy that Marilla never imagined when she first sought to adopt a child.

***Summary Part 3:***

After [**Matthew**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert)’s funeral, life in Avonlea and Green Gables begins to go back to normal. At first, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) feels almost ashamed to find pleasure and beauty in life again, but [**Mrs. Allan**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-allan) reminds her that Matthew loved to hear Anne laugh, even though it feels “unfaithful” to Matthew to regain interest in life. After visiting Mrs. Allan, Anne walks home slowly and finds [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) sitting on the front steps. Marilla explains that she needs to get her eyes examined by a visiting specialist tomorrow, so she’ll need Anne to look after the place for the day. They laugh together over the memory of some of Anne’s youthful mishaps. Anne ruefully recalls her childish preoccupation with her [**red hair**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/symbols/red-hair) and freckles. The latter are gone, and most people tell Anne that her hair is auburn nowadays.

***Analysis Part 3:***

One of the difficulties of grief is transitioning back into normal life and finding beauty and joy in the areas that have always meant so much to Anne.As they look toward the future and consider Marilla’s health, Anne and Marilla remember some of Anne’s youthful foibles. Now that Anne is grown up, it’s easier to laugh about her old mishaps and to see how she’s grown and matured beyond them.

***Summary Part 4:***

As they talk about the plans of several of [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley)’s friends, the conversation drifts to [**Gilbert Blythe**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/gilbert-blythe), and [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) tells Anne that she once dated Gilbert’s father John. It all ended over a silly, stubborn quarrel—Marilla wouldn’t forgive John for something, and she’s always sort of regretted it.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Marilla’s experience dating John Blythe is surprisingly reminiscent of Anne’s longstanding resentment of Gilbert. Whether or not Marilla knows this to be the case, her words prompt Anne to think about things between her and Gilbert.