***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 38***

### ***The Bend in the Road***

***Summary:***

Marilla goes to town to see a visiting eye doctor and returns with bad news: she must give up reading, sewing, and crying, or else she will go blind. That night, Anne reflects on all that has happened since her return from Queen’s Academy. She decides that she will stay at Green Gables to take care of Marilla rather than accept the Avery Scholarship, and once her mind is set, she finds comfort in her path of duty. A few days later, Anne learns that Marilla is considering selling Green Gables, since she will be unable to maintain it alone. Anne tells Marilla that she will stay at Green Gables and teach at a school called Carmody, since the Avonlea school post has already been assigned to Gilbert. Later, Mrs. Rachel informs her that Gilbert has gone to the Avonlea trustees and asked that the Avonlea post be given to Anne so that she can be closer to Marilla—a sacrifice that means Gilbert must teach at White Sands and pay for boarding. Anne is elated, knowing that she can live at home, comfort Marilla, and see Diana often. When she runs into Gilbert later, she breaks their tradition of silence to thank him for his generosity. She extends her hand, which he takes eagerly, and they begin the close friendship they have both wanted.

### ***Analysis—Chapters 37–38***

Anne struggles to understand Matthew’s death, her first real experience with losing a loved one. She has had experiences with death before: her biological parents died when she was a baby, and both of her foster fathers died. But Anne does not remember her parents or their deaths and was not close to her foster parents. Up until now, she has romanticized death and created stories about lovers and tragic endings; death has not been real for her, but a topic of fantasy. Now that Matthew is gone, Anne understands what it is to lose someone she loves, and she grieves. Although at first Anne cannot reconcile her feelings of grief with her continued pleasure in life, she eventually comes to accept these apparently contradictory feelings as part of a natural response to tragedy. Coming to understand death marks another step on Anne’s path to adulthood.

The death of Matthew and the decay of Marilla’s health cause Anne and Marilla to reverse roles. Anne’s adulthood begins with her decision to take care of the woman who has taken care of her since Anne was a child. As a young girl, Anne and her friends define adulthood as the age when a girl may have a beau or wear her hair up. Now, Anne understands that adulthood involves not superficialities but the assumption of responsibilities.

Anne’s willingness to begin a friendship with Gilbert also marks her maturity. Although Marilla does not moralize to Anne, she tells her a story that makes a clear point: she lost the man she loved, John Blythe, because of her Anne-like stubbornness, and years of loneliness and regret ensued. The fact that Marilla tells Anne this story illustrates the trust Marilla places in Anne. Marilla is a reserved, usually unemotional woman, but she manages to tell this painful story to Anne because she loves her so much. The story also suggests that Marilla now sees Anne not as a child but as a woman and a confidante who will understand delicate matters. Finally, it explains some of Marilla’s behavior. She is not sexless and cold, as she first appears; rather, she lives in the same town with the man she loved and lost and must bear her regrets and loneliness with fortitude that sometimes looks like ice. Because Anne understands the implications of the story and because she feels real gratitude for Gilbert’s sacrifice, she finds it in herself to forgive him.

***Synopsis:***

* Anne finds Marilla with her head buried in her hands. Marilla has just found out that if she doesn't give up all eye-straining work she'll be blind in six months. She doesn't see the point of not working if she's going to be alone.
* A few days later, Marilla decides to sell Green Gables.
* Anne won't let her. She's made a decision of her own: to decline the scholarship. She's taken a teaching position a few towns over, so she can help Marilla. She'll drive to the school each day and board there on weeknights in the winter.
* Marilla knows she should argue but she's too grateful.
* A few days later, Mrs. Lynde tells Anne that Gilbert's given up his application for the Avonlea school so Anne can teach there and stay with Marilla.
* Anne runs into Gilbert while walking home from the graveyard. She thanks Gilbert for the school and admits that she's always regretted not forgiving him. They stay out talking for a half hour.
* Anne returns to her room in Green Gables. Even though her path has changed, she looks out the window and still sees possibility.

## *Significance:*

Marilla comes home in a dejected state from having her eyes checked. The oculist told her that she could go blind in as little as six months; to keep her vision for longer than that, she would have to give up reading and sewing. Anne tries to get Marilla’s hopes up about maintaining her vision and reducing her headaches, but Marilla says she won’t have anything to live for if she can’t read or sew. When Marilla goes to sleep, Anne goes up to her bedroom and cries. She looks out her window and thinks about how much things have changed since she came home from Queen’s; the narrator observes that “before she went to bed there was a smile on her face and peace in her heart” (p. 377).

A few days later, Anne sees Marilla talking to a man from a nearby town. When Anne asks who the man is, Marilla responds that she was discussing selling Green Gables to him. Anne tells Marilla that she shouldn’t sell Green Gables because she will stay at home with Marilla instead of going to Redmond College. Anne has already applied to teach at the Avonlea school as well as a school in a nearby town. She expects not to teach in Avonlea since Gilbert will be teaching there, but she says she will stay at Green Gables every night during the warm seasons and will come back on the weekends during winters. Marilla doesn’t want Anne to sacrifice her scholarship and ambitions, but Anne says that she has merely changed her ambitions.

There is gossip throughout Avonlea about Anne’s decision to give up her scholarship. Many people think she is foolish to give it up, though Mrs. Rachel Lynde says it was foolish for a woman to think of receiving so much education in the first place. Anne assures Mrs. Rachel that she will still receive just as much education by studying all the same topics at home. Anne tells Mrs. Rachel that she will be teaching in a nearby town, and Mrs. Rachel informs her that she will actually be teaching in Avonlea because Gilbert told the school trustees to hire Anne instead.

The next evening, Anne runs into Gilbert on her way back from visiting Matthew’s grave. Anne thanks Gilbert, and Gilbert eagerly asks if they can be friends now after so many years of stubbornness. Anne tells Gilbert that she forgave him long ago. They stand together talking for half an hour, which Marilla notices and comments on when Anne comes back to Green Gables. The book ends with Anne sitting at her bedroom window feeling content that her life is full of aspirations, friendship, and dreams.

This section of the book shows just how special Anne is. Not only is she one of the brightest students at the Avonlea school, but she also ties for first place on the entrance exam into Queen's College, which is taken by students from many different towns; on top of that, she goes on to win a scholarship to university, which at least fifty students were competing for. This is especially impressive since Anne had very little formal education before she was eleven. Anne's educational achievements demonstrate a moral of the story: that hard work and healthy rivalry can lead to success, even for people who have faced trauma or other hindrances.

Time passes quickly in this final section of Anne of Green Gables. While the previous thirty chapters have described three years of Anne's life, her entire school year at Queen's passes in just three chapters. These chapters show how adaptable Anne is. She makes new friends, maintains her relationships with Marilla, Matthew, and Diana, and excels at her schoolwork. This is likely another positive coping skill that Anne gained due to her traumatic childhood. Because she moved to multiple houses and towns before age eleven, she had to learn how to make new relationships and find things in life to keep her happy and motivated. This is further evidence of the moral that people who have experienced trauma or difficulties can succeed in life.

Montgomery uses small symbols to show how Anne has changed Marilla and Matthew over the years she has been in their lives. In particular, Marilla's opinions on beauty and vanity have shifted. For example, Montgomery writes, "In her own white room, where Marilla had set a flowering house rose on the window sill, Anne looked about her and drew a long breath of happiness" (p. 362). This contrasts with Marilla's earlier statements that flowers don't belong indoors and Anne's feelings that the bedroom at Green Gables was too plain and bare. Because beauty and nature have always been important to Anne, they have become important to Marilla, too.

Montgomery foreshadows Matthew's death at multiple points in Anne of Green Gables. First, the narrator says that the reason Marilla and Matthew are taking in an orphan boy is to help Matthew with farm work due to his declining health. Then, Marilla discusses Matthew's heart with both Anne and Mrs. Rachel Lynde. Finally, Montgomery heavily foreshadows Matthew's death at the end of Chapter 26 and the beginning of Chapter 27. Chapter 26 ends, "Anne always remembered the silvery, peaceful beauty and fragrant calm of that night. It was the last night before sorrow touched her life; and no life is ever quite the same again when once that cold, sanctifying touch has been laid upon it" (p. 366). This is followed by the chapter title, "The Reaper Whose Name Is Death" (p. 367). This foreshadowing prepares readers—particularly young readers—to cope with the difficult emotions around a central character dying.

The end of Anne of Green Gables shows that stubbornness can be a negative and positive quality. Anne's stubbornness prevents her from having a positive relationship with Gilbert throughout their time at the Avonlea school and Queen's College. Anne only makes up with Gilbert after hearing a story from Marilla about how stubbornness led her to break up with Gilbert's father as a young girl. However, stubbornness is also shown to be a good quality through Anne's stubbornness about staying home at Green Gables and caring for Marilla. When Marilla is trying to convince Anne to go to university, Anne responds, "You can't prevent me. I'm...'obstinate as a mule' as Mrs. Lynde once told me" (p. 380). In this case, stubbornness is not a matter of hubris, but rather devotion to a moral obligation.

## *Analysis:*

Anne finds a downcast Marilla sitting in the kitchen. Marilla reports the oculist she saw predicts she'll go completely blind within six months unless she stops reading and sewing, along with taking many other precautions. Bitterly Marilla asks what she'll live for now. She also begs Anne not to tell anyone this news.

After Marilla is in bed, Anne goes up to her room. How things have changed in just a few days! But after thinking hard for a while, she goes to bed with a smile. In her thoughts, she "looked her duty courageously in the face and found it a friend."

A few days later Marilla brokenly tells Anne she's going to sell the farm. She can't stay here alone if she can't use her eyes. If she loses her sight, she won't be able to run the house. Every cent of her money is lost. She plans to move in with Mrs. Lynde, and Anne won't have a home to come to for college vacations.

Anne says, "You mustn't sell Green Gables ... I'm not going to Redmond." She's decided not to take the scholarship. She'll get a teaching job nearby so she can stay at home and help Marilla take care of the house. Diana's father is going to rent the Cuthberts' farm, "and we'll be real cozy and happy here together." Marilla protests strenuously, but Anne is firm. She can create her own "little college course," and nothing would be worse than to lose Green Gables. Nobody can love the house more than she and Marilla.

Since the people of Avonlea know nothing about Marilla's eyes, there is plenty of gossip about why Anne is abandoning the scholarship. But Mrs. Allan and Mrs. Lynde are fervent in their praise, though Mrs. Lynde worries Anne will study too hard. Mrs. Lynde has come with some new information: Gilbert Blythe, who was going to teach at Avonlea School, has withdrawn his application and taken a school in White Sands. Anne is stunned. She can't let Gilbert make this sacrifice for her! But Mrs. Lynde says he's already signed a contract at the White Sands school.

The next evening as Anne is walking home from a visit to Matthew's grave, she sees Gilbert walking toward her. He lifts his cap politely but says nothing—until Anne stops and holds out her hand. Blushing, she thanks him for giving up Avonlea School. Gilbert takes her hand eagerly, saying he was happy to be able to help her. "Are we going to be friends after this?" he asks. Anne confesses she forgave him years ago and has "been sorry ever since." Gilbert says happily, "We were born to be good friends, Anne. You've thwarted destiny enough." He too will be keeping up his college studies. They can help each other! And now he'll walk her home.

In the Green Gables kitchen, Marilla wonders whom Anne was talking to at the gate for half an hour. Anne tells her she and Gilbert have made up their quarrel and "have five years' lost conversations to catch up with, Marilla."

Alone in her room that night, Anne is content. Her future may be less bright now, but "sincere work and worthy aspiration and congenial friendship" will help her down the path. And there's always the bend in the road.

Matthew and Marilla offered Anne a home; now she can help Marilla keep that home: "I'm quite content to be Anne of Green Gables." The steely resolve that sustained Anne during her long quarrel with Gilbert Blythe is being used for a kinder purpose now.

Years after writing Anne of Green Gables, [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) confessed to being sorry she had killed Matthew off. His death, she said, was necessary to bring about Anne's sacrifice. Maidenly sacrifice was fashionable in fiction at that time, and Montgomery liked to give her novels traditional endings.

In her own life Montgomery made a similar choice when she was slightly older than Anne. In 1898 Montgomery's maternal grandfather died. He had left the house not to his wife but to his son, John F. Macneill. Montgomery's grandmother was allowed to live there only for as long as she could maintain the house. Old Mrs. Macneill could not manage on her own, so Montgomery—who had been teaching on the mainland at the time—finished out the term and returned to live with her. It was a disappointing and discouraging time in her life. Perhaps she reimagined this difficult episode when she wrote Anne of Green Gables and gave Anne the tender resolve she herself had lacked. Perhaps, too, she paid homage to her thwarted ambitions when she had Anne declare, "I'm just as ambitious as ever." In any case, readers may be sure there will be a bend in the road.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

The next evening, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) returns from a visit to [**Diana**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/diana-barry)’s and finds [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) sitting at the kitchen table looking depressed. Concerned, she asks what the oculist had to say. Marilla explains that, according to the doctor, if she gives up anything that strains her eyes—like reading, sewing, or crying—and wears special glasses, her eyesight might be saved, and her headaches will go away. But if not, she’ll be blind within six months. After a moment of shock, Anne tells Marilla that there’s still hope. She fixes Marilla tea and sends her off to bed. Anne cries at her window for a while, thinking about how much has changed since her triumphant return from Queen’s. But by the time she goes to sleep, her heart is at peace, as she’s come to terms with her duty.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Now that Marilla is in need, there’s a role reversal—Anne takes charge of comforting her in crisis and considering what her possible blindness might mean for her and Green Gables’ future. In fact, it might change Anne’s future, too. Though she’d arrived home from Queen’s knowing exactly what the future held for her, or believing she did, she now has to rethink everything—a major step in growing up.

***Summary Part 2:***

A few days later, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) sees [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) talking with a man from Carmody in the yard. When she comes inside, there are tears in her eyes. She tells Anne that she’s planning to sell Green Gables. She doesn’t know what else to do: she can’t run the house without her sight, and if Green Gables falls into disrepair, nobody will ever buy it. If she sells the house, at least she’ll have something to live on. She starts to cry.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Marilla’s vision trouble could mean the end of Green Gables. Within a short time of her arrival back home, Anne is faced with the possibility of losing most of what she loved there.

***Summary Part 3:***  
  
 [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) tells [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) she can’t sell Green Gables: Anne is going to decline her Redmond scholarship and stay home. She decided this after Marilla’s oculist appointment. She can’t abandon Marilla after all she’s done for Anne, and she’s made a plan. [**Mr. Barry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) hopes to rent their farm, so they will have all the money they need. And Anne will find a teaching job, probably at Carmody. She and Marilla will live comfortably together, and Anne will make sure Marilla is cared for and that her eyes have a chance to heal.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Anne’s thoughts about the future have changed. She’s been thinking ahead to what she can do to help Marilla and save Green Gables, setting aside the college ambitions she’d brought home with her. Anne’s change of heart suggests that maturity means having the foresight, resilience, and courage to redirect one’s hopes in order to sacrifice for loved ones—much as the Cuthberts did for her.

***Summary Part 3:***

[**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) is reluctant to let [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) sacrifice for her, but Anne says losing Green Gables would be far more painful for her. She’s made up her mind, and she’s not giving up her ambitions: she’s simply changed them. She wants to be a good teacher, save Marilla’s eyesight, and do some college coursework from home. It’s just a bend in the road, and Anne is determined to make the best of it. Marilla gives in, feeling that Anne has given her new life.

***Summary Part 4:***

Though Anne could feel self-pity about the unexpected direction her life has taken, she chooses instead to reframe her circumstances as merely “a bend in the road”—a new direction for her ambitions in stead of an abandonment of them. She’ll get out of life what she puts into it—an attitude that further demonstrates her maturity.

Summary Part 4:

When rumors of [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley)’s decision circulate in Avonlea, some people think she’s being foolish. [**Mrs. Allan**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-allan) is moved by Anne’s choice, however, and [**Mrs. Lynde**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) is glad Anne’s giving up the foolish idea of college—women don’t need to study Latin and Greek, she huffs. Anne laughs and tells her she’ll be studying in the evenings anyway. Then Mrs. Rachel tells Anne the happy news that Anne is being offered the job at Avonlea school. When [**Gilbert**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/gilbert-blythe) heard about Anne’s situation, he withdrew his application and took a job at White Sands instead. Mrs. Lynde says it’s a big sacrifice for Gilbert, since he’ll have to pay for board and won’t be able to save up for college.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Anne pursues her new ambitions without regard for what others will think, confident in what she’s decided for herself. But the surprises aren’t over—it turns out that Gilbert has been thinking of Anne and deciding to make a sacrifice for her, too.

***Summary Part 5:***

Just then [**Diana**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/diana-barry) flashes her old candle signal from Orchard Slope, so [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) runs over to talk to her. Watching her, [**Mrs. Lynde**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) remarks that there’s still a girlishness about Anne. Marilla retorts that she’s very much a woman in other ways. But Marilla is no longer as brusque and sarcastic as she used to be. That night, Mrs. Lynde tells her husband that Marilla “has got *mellow*. That’s what.”

***Analysis Part 5:***

Though Anne has changed since she first came to Green Gables, Marilla has changed much more. This shows that Matthew was right; the Cuthberts needed Anne as much as Anne needed them.

***Summary Part 6:***  
On her way home from a lingering visit to [**Matthew**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert)’s grave, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) drinks in the beauty of Avonlea. As she passes the Blythe homestead, [**Gilbert**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/gilbert-blythe) comes out of the gate and abruptly stops whistling when he sees Anne. He is about to pass without a word, but Anne, blushing, stops him. She tells Gilbert she appreciates him giving up the Avonlea job for her. He tells her he was happy to do it, and he asks if they can now be friends. Anne tells him she forgave him long ago and apologizes for being so stubborn. Gilbert happily tells her they’re destined to be friends. He walks her home, and they talk at the Green Gables gate for half an hour. When Anne finally comes in, [**Marilla**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) teases her about her long talk with Gilbert—she didn’t know the two were such good friends. Anne says she didn’t realize they talked so long—it felt like just a few minutes. After all, they have five years’ worth of conversation to catch up on.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Gilbert still assumes that Anne will reject him, showing how unselfish his action in giving up the Avonlea job really is—he doesn’t expect any thanks from Anne for it. But when she shows her gratitude and regret for her past treatment of him, a new future opens up for the two of them. Though they describe it as friendship only, Marilla’s teasing suggests that in time, it might ripen into more.

***Summary Part 7:***  
  
That night, [**Anne**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) sits at her window, feeling content as she overlooks Green Gables. Her horizons have narrowed since the beginning of the summer, and yet she trusts her path will be a happy one—she’ll never stop dreaming. And there might yet be another bend in the road.

***Analysis Part 7:***

As Anne overlooks her beloved Green Gables, she is happy—though her ambitions will not be realized in the way she dreamed of, she is where she truly belongs.