***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 5***

### ***Marilla Makes Up Her Mind***

***Summary:***

* When Marilla explains their predicament to Mrs. Spencer, Mrs. Spencer suggests that they give Anne to a woman named Mrs. Blewett, who needs help taking care of her children.
* Marilla's not so sure. Mrs. Blewett has a reputation for being mean and stingy. Her ex-servants have spread stories about her temper. Not a good sign.
* Mrs. Blewett happens to be walking up to the house for a visit. When introduced to Anne, she makes it clear she'd never see Anne as more than a servant, plus makes the creepy comment that "wiry ones are the best." (6.19)
* Marilla sees the look on Anne's face and realizes she'll be haunted by it for the rest of her life if she doesn't step in. She claims she has to talk the situation over with Matthew and takes Anne back home.
* Anne's grateful and says Mrs. Blewett looked like [**a gimlet**](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gimlet). (Not sure that means what you think it means, Anne. Try a gremlin or goblin.) Anyway, Marilla responds by lecturing Anne about respecting her elders.
* Later that evening, Marilla fills Matthew in. Matthew says he wouldn't give a dog he likes to Mrs. Blewett.
* Marilla tells Matthew she's cool with Anne staying, but makes him promise he won't interfere with her parenting methods, which is pretty much a dream for Matthew. He gets to hang out with Anne without doing the hard stuff.
* Marilla decides not to tell Anne until the next day.

***Synopsis:***

Marilla and Anne arrive at Mrs. Spencer’s orphanage and explain the mistake. Mrs. Spencer apologizes and says that the situation will work out for the best anyway. Another woman, Mrs. Peter Blewett, wants to adopt a girl to help with her rambunctious children, so Anne can be handed over to her, allowing the Cuthberts to adopt the boy they originally wanted. This news does not please Marilla, for Mrs. Blewett is known for her nastiness and stinginess, and for driving her servants hard. Marilla feels a twinge of guilt at the thought of relinquishing Anne to her. Mrs. Blewett comes to borrow a recipe from Mrs. Spencer, and her presence terrifies Anne. Marilla takes Anne back to Green Gables, saying she needs time to think about the proposition.

At home, she tells Matthew that she is willing to keep Anne if he agrees not to interfere with her child-rearing methods. Marilla admits to nervousness at the prospect of raising a girl but tells Matthew, “Perhaps an old maid doesn’t know much about bringing up a child, but I guess she knows more than an old bachelor.” Matthew, delighted by Marilla’s decision, asks only that Marilla be good and kind to Anne. Marilla reflects that she has invited a challenge into her life. She cannot quite believe what she is about to do, and she is even more surprised that Matthew, famous for his fear of women, is so adamant about keeping Anne. She decides to wait until the following day to tell Anne of their decision.

***Critical Study:***

Marilla and Anne arrive at Mrs. Spencer’s house, to the surprise of Mrs. Spencer. When asked about the mix-up, Mrs. Spencer says that she was told the Cuthberts wanted a girl by the person who passed along Marilla’s message. Mrs. Spencer tells Marilla that if she doesn’t want to keep Anne, another woman named Mrs. Peter is looking for a young girl to watch her children. Marilla is worried about this idea because she has heard that Mrs. Peter had a terrible temper. Just then, Mrs. Peter approaches Mrs. Spencer’s house. Mrs. Peter asks Anne her name and age and then tells Anne that she can start caring for her fussy baby right away. Marilla sees that Anne looks miserable and tells Mrs. Peter that she will have to take Anne back to Green Gables for at least the evening to discuss the situation with Matthew. Anne’s face brightens when she hears Marilla say this, and when Mrs. Spencer and Mrs. Peter leave the room, Anne tells Marilla that she will do anything to stay at Green Gables.

Marilla and Anne return to Green Gables. Marilla tells Matthew about Anne’s childhood and the offer Mrs. Peter made. Marilla and Matthew decide that Anne can stay with them and Marilla will raise her. Marilla tells Matthew that he must not interfere with Marilla’s methods of raising a child, and Matthew agrees. Marilla decides not to tell Anne about staying at Green Gables until the next day.

***Critical Analysis:***

Mrs. Spencer welcomes Marilla and Anne when they arrive at her house. Marilla explains the mistake that has brought her here. Mrs. Spencer is certain she was told the Cuthberts wanted to adopt a girl, but she assures Marilla the problem has an easy solution. Mrs. Blewett has been hoping to find an orphan girl to help with her large family. Conveniently Mrs. Blewett is driving up the lane that minute, and Mrs. Spencer invites her in.

Marilla is already having doubts about turning Anne over to Mrs. Blewett's "tender mercies," having heard horror stories about the other woman's bad temper and badly behaved children. Anne, too, dreads Mrs. Blewett—a sharp-faced, sharp-eyed woman—the instant she sees her. Mrs. Blewett comments on Anne's wiriness and warns, "I'll expect you to earn your keep, and no mistake about that." She offers to take Anne with her immediately.

Marilla is uncomfortably sure if she hands Anne over, she'll forever regret handing "a sensitive, 'high-strung' child over to such a woman!" She says she and Matthew haven't completely made up their minds what to do about Anne. They need a day to think about the matter, and they'll send Anne to Mrs. Blewett's the following evening if they decide not to keep her. Grumpily Mrs. Blewett agrees.

Transfigured by joy, Anne, in a whisper, asks Marilla if what she heard is true or just a product of her overactive imagination. Marilla answers tartly Anne will need to learn how to control her imagination—but yes, she did hear Marilla correctly. They'll give the matter a day's thought, and perhaps Anne will be allowed to stay at Green Gables.

Back in Avonlea Marilla privately tells Matthew what took place in White Sands. "Since you seem to want her, I suppose I'm willing—or have to be," she says grudgingly. But Matthew must agree to abide by Marilla's "methods." She may not know much about childrearing, but Matthew surely knows even less. Matthew agrees to give Marilla her own way in matters concerning Anne, adding he thinks Anne will be easy to raise if she can be brought to love them. Marilla doubts that but reflects she and Matthew have "decided on the experiment." Now they'll have to wait and see what happens.

In this chapter Anne is treated almost like a piece of property. Marilla is increasingly drawn to the girl, but a mistake was made and Marilla wants it rectified. Kind as Mrs. Spencer may be, it never occurs to her to apologize to Anne for what has happened. And Mrs. Blewett sees Anne not as a lonely child but as an extra pair of hands to help the household.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the concept of children's rights was inconceivable. In 1893, only 15 years before Anne of Green Gables was published, the province of Ontario enacted the Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to and Better Protection of Children, the first childhood welfare program in Canada; the other provinces followed suit. But improving welfare doesn't necessarily mean improving rights.

Free compulsory public schooling gradually became mandatory across Canada toward the end of the 19th century. However, compulsory had different meanings to different people. Many families—especially those whose business was farming, logging, trapping, or fishing—could not have survived without their children's help; the children attended school only when they weren't needed at home. Most children left school permanently at 14.

For an orphan like Anne an education was not considered essential, and families who used orphans as a free source of labor were disinclined to send them to school. As Anne says in [Chapter 5](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/chapter-5-summary/), she began regular school attendance once she reached the orphanage—and she was at the orphanage for only four months. In Nova Scotia in 1901, a law was passed banning child labor in factories, but factory investigations weren't mandatory for several more years. However, Anne was not an official laborer: she wasn't paid for her work.

This background information explains why the three adults in this chapter don't question whether Anne herself should have a say in where she lives or what she does. At this point in North America, an 11-year-old orphan has no rights.

***Significance:***

Marilla inquires at Mrs. Spencer's about the mix-up, having sent word to Mrs. Spencer's brother that they were in need of a boy orphan. Mrs. Spencer, feeling defensive and "distressed," explains the message that the Cuthberts were in need of a girl orphan was relayed to her by her niece Nancy, who is both flighty and unreliable. Marilla concedes it was her fault for not seeing out such an important errand herself. Mrs. Spencer suggests a resolution to the difficulty. A Mrs. Blewett was just inquiring the day before about an orphan girl to help her care for her children, and there would be no need to send the girl back to the orphanage.

Uneasy about the prospect of shipping Anne off to Mrs. Peter Blewett, a woman known for her harshness and pettiness with servant girls, Marilla hesitates. By chance, Mrs. Blewett happens by the Spencer residence to borrow a recipe. Marilla at last takes pity on Anne, who turns pale and quiet at the sight of the shrewish woman. Marilla is not able to bear the thought of handing over such a "sensitive, high-strung" girl over to the likes of Mrs. Peter Blewett. It is decided that Marilla will return to Green Gables to discuss the matter with Matthew. Anne, barely able to contain herself, elicits a covert smile from the outwardly stoic Marilla. To her surprise, Marilla finds herself the new guardian of a little orphan girl; and even more to her surprise, Matthew  painfully wary of females of all types  "should be at the bottom of it."

Marilla accepts Anne into her home on the condition that she be left to raise the child in her own way, telling Matthew that if she fails "there will be time enough to put your oar in." In Marilla, we find a rigid, undemonstrative woman put upon to raise a spirited young girl in her latter spinster years. She assumes the responsibility as a challenge to shape the girl into a well-behaved, morally upright lady, and she aims to see that Anne learns life's daily lessons to that end.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

When they reach [Mrs. Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters)’s, [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) gets directly to the point: she’d told Mrs. Spencer’s brother that they wanted a little boy, but somehow the message got garbled. Mrs. Spencer says it must have been the fault of her “flighty” niece, Nancy. Marilla concedes it was the Cuthberts’ fault for not bringing the message themselves. They discuss sending Anne back to Nova Scotia, and Mrs. Spencer says it might be unnecessary: [Mrs. Peter Blewett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) has been looking for a girl to help with her large family.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Marilla’s discussion with Mrs. Spencer shows how it's taken for granted that orphans will be useful to the families that adopt them. Because Anne was expected to serve a particular function at Green Gables and isn’t the kind of child they expected, she has become a problem to be solved. Anne is forced to listen to such negotiations unfold, probably not for the first time in her life.

***Summary Part 2:***

Though [Mrs. Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) calls this development “providential,” [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert), to her surprise, feels uneasy. [Mrs. Blewett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) is rumored to be hard-driving, ill-tempered, and stingy. Marilla shrinks from surrendering [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) to such a person. Just then, Mrs. Blewett happens to come up the Spencers’ lane. As the guests sit in the parlor, Anne regards Mrs. Blewett worriedly and tries not to cry.

***Analysis Part 2:***

A short time ago, Mrs. Blewett’s arrival would have been welcomed by Marilla as an easy solution to the problem of Anne. Now that she’s gotten to know Anne a little and pictures her being put to work in yet another loveless household, however, Marilla rethinks the whole “problem.”

***Summary Part 3:***

When [Mrs. Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) explains the situation, [Mrs. Blewett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) looks [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) over sharply. She concludes that Anne looks delicate but “wiry,” and that the wiry ones are often the best. If Anne lives with her, she warns, Anne will have to “earn [her] keep.” Since she’s exhausted with caring for her baby, she agrees to take Anne home. But [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) looks at Anne’s helpless face and says that she and [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) will have to discuss the matter further.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Mrs. Blewett looks Anne over in a disturbingly objectifying way—defining her in terms of her surface characteristics and the expectation that Anne will justify her presence in the household. This is the opposite of being welcomed into a family. In contrast to her feelings just a day ago, Marilla realizes this and retreats from her plan to dispose of Anne.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley)’s expression is slowly transformed from despair to hope. When the other women step out of the room, she rushes to [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) in joy, but Marilla warns her that nothing’s decided yet, and scolds Anne for criticizing [Mrs. Blewett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters)’s looks (though she hides a smile of agreement). She tells Anne she’d better sit down and behave, and Anne says she’ll do whatever Marilla wants, if only Marilla will keep her.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Anne realizes that her hopes for a home and family may not be lost. Even if Marilla has partly decided, however, she maintains a strict exterior around Anne. Anne’s heartbreaking willingness to be agreeable and obedient shows how desperately she longs for acceptance.

***Summary Part 5:***

Later, back at Green Gables, [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) and [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) discuss [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) while milking the cows. Marilla has no idea how to raise a girl, and she’s afraid she’ll mess it up, but she has decided that Anne can stay. Matthew’s face lights up; he finds Anne so “interesting.” Marilla says it’d be better if Anne were useful, but she can be trained—and Matthew had better not interfere. Matthew agrees, but he urges Marilla to be good to Anne—he thinks Anne will be teachable if she feels loved.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Even though Marilla has softened toward Anne and is reconsidering her view of an adoptive child’s role in the household, she still expects Anne to contribute to life at Green Gables by being “useful.” Though Matthew doesn’t completely disagree, he has a more instinctive understanding of what Anne really needs—to be loved. If that happens, he senses that everything else will fall into place for Anne.