Rainbow Valley ends in the summer of 1907; Rilla of Ingleside begins in the summer of 1914.

What happened in between?

In this series of vignettes, the adolescent Blythes and Merediths navigate friendship, family, school, crushes, romance, and more poetry than Susan Baker is comfortable with.

Be sure to check the date at the top of each story, as these are memories: fragmentary, out of order, and elusive.

Compatible with LMM canon.
Jem Blythe flopped down onto the grass in a little sun-dappled hollow in Rainbow Valley and unleashed his most charming smile.

"Listen, Faith, I need a favor."

"Oh?" Faith Meredith said, sitting up out of the clump of clover where she had been daydreaming. "Aren't you already in my debt?"

Jem shut one hazel eye and screwed up his face as if thinking very hard. "Am I?"

"Who rescued you from Sissy Flagg after prayer meeting last week?"

Jem grimaced, recalling the determined look on Sissy's face as she had tried to manipulate him into walking her home. "You're right. I do owe you. Well, let me double my balance and you can pick the terms of payment."

Faith sighed elaborately. "What do you want now?"

"I want to prank Carl and Shirley."

"Carl and Shirley?" Faith asked skeptically. "Why?"

"Because it's fun?"

"Shirley's what, twelve? Thirteen? Where's the fun in that?"*

Jem waved an airy hand. "Oh, Shirley likes a joke as well as anyone. He's quiet about it, but he's got a wicked sense of humor."

Faith raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"He's very dry," Jem assured her.**

"It's a good thing your pranks are so subtle, then," Faith teased.

"Here's what I want to do," said Jem, barreling along as if Faith had agreed to help. "You know how they're always fishing down at the pond?"

"Yes . . ."

"I'm going to make a trout . . ."

"You're going to make a trout?"

"Just let me finish. I'm going to make a trout — a giant one, bigger than anything anyone ever caught in the Glen pond. And then I'm going to anchor it to a rock and set it in the shallows where they can
see it. Then we'll see how long they cast at it before they realize it's a set-up!

"You're going to make a trout . . ."

"That's where you come in," Jem said, grinning.

"Oh, is it?"

"I thought about carving it out of wood," Jem said reasonably. "but wood won't move in the water, so that's right out. But then, I found an old silk scarf in the garret and I'm thinking I could paint it trout colors and make a pretty good go of it, as long as I make sure to place it in the shadows by the reeds."

"Won't it just sink?"

"I borrowed a balloon from the physics lab at Redmond. For the inside."

"I'm waiting for the part where I come in," Faith said dubiously.

Jem shrugged. "I can't sew."

"And I can?"

"Una told us that Rosemary has been teaching you both to sew. She said you even made yourself a new dress for when you go to Queen's in the fall."

Faith pursed her lips. "I did. I can't say that I enjoyed it, but I did it."

"Sew me a fish, Faith. Please?"

"How about I teach you how to sew instead?"

"I don't have time for that. I just need one teensy little fish."

Faith adopted a long-suffering air and shook her golden-brown curls. "Sew a man a fish and he pranks for a day . . ."

"I'll owe you triple. Pleeeeeease?" Jem batted copper lashes ingratiatingly, earning himself a shove and laughing as he fell over into the clover.

"Talk is cheap," said Faith. "How do I know you won't stiff me like you did for Sissy Flagg?"

Jem propped himself up on one elbow and clutched a hand to his chest in feigned offense. "Let it never be said that James Matthew Blythe fails to pay his debts!" Then, with a shrug, "I forgot about Sissy Flagg. You're right. Name your price."

"Well . . ." Faith began, savoring the moment. "Tomorrow, Rev. Lewis is coming from Lowbridge for tea. He always brings that insufferable Evangeline with him and I end up having to entertain her. How about you come by the manse tomorrow about an hour before tea time and call me away on some very urgent business."

"What sort of business?" Jem asked.

"Doesn't matter. Just make it convincing."

"Done. And where shall we go?"
"Somewhere entertaining."

"Not a problem."

Faith allowed herself a grudging smile. "So you want me to sew a trout . . ."

Jem grinned and reached into his satchel for the silk scarf, balloon, and sewing kit he had brought along with him.

Notes:

* No one knows how old Shirley is. He's two when Rilla is born in 1899, and 16 in the summer of 1914, but he enlists in April of 1917, just after his 18th birthday. This makes him about three months older than Rilla. Shirley also spends three or four years at Queen's Academy for no particular reason other than LMM forgetting about him. Since canon is irreconcilable on this point, I have decided to embrace Shirley's indeterminate age as a running joke.

**Shirley was "sedate, sensible, thoughtful, full of a quiet humour." Rilla of Ingleside, Chapter 3: "Moonlit Mirth"
Nan Blythe walked down the Glen street carrying a can of white paint and a brush, her nut-brown braids swinging with the grim energy of her stride.

She would show them. Whoever had done it.

In days agone, she might have suspected Jem, but Jem was off at Queen's this term, the first of their little set to go. The Glen schoolhouse was quieter without him, though Faith Meredith did her best to keep things lively in his absence. Nan did not suspect Faith, however. She was never one for this sort of teasing.

No, none of the manse children, nor the Ingleside children, was responsible. Mary Vance might have done it, but she was finished with school, and was home this fall with Mrs. Marshall Elliott, learning the finer points of dressmaking.

"I can do plain sewing alright," Mary had said, "but I never had no need of embroidery and such frippery. I don't mean to learn fancy work. But Mrs. Elliott says I am a good seamstress and could be a fine one someday if I learn to fit things properly and do a few of those little tucks and frills she's always putting into things. So she means to teach me."

Nan had never been overly enamored of Mary Vance, but she could not lay this particular indignity at Mary's feet. She fixed her gaze on the little schoolhouse at the end of the Glen street and walked on determinedly.

Nan could see the hateful thing long before she reached the schoolhouse porch. There, on the outer wall, in vivid black and red, someone had painted Nan's name in letters three inches tall with a "take notice" of her and . . . Jerry Meredith. For good measure, the unknown vandal had painted a crimson heart around the pair, drawing every eye to that infuriating announcement. Why, you could practically read it from the road!

In ordinary times, no one would have dared such a thing, fearing the wrath of Mr. Hazard. But Mr. Hazard had been coughing himself gray all autumn, and letting all manner of things slide. Yesterday, he had dismissed the scholars early, too ill to take notice of the primer class, let alone the schoolhouse wall.

Nan stepped up to the porch and scowled. How Di and Faith had laughed over it. Even Walter had only shrugged at her. Shirley and Carl were oblivious, and Rilla couldn't understand why Nan was vexed in the first place. And Jerry . . . well, Nan had not even looked in Jerry's direction all day yesterday. Only Una was sympathetic, soothing poor Nan's wounded pride with a squeeze of her thin hand.

Well, whoever had done it would pay once Nan had found them out, Mr. Hazard or no. But for now, she must remove the disgrace forthwith. She shook back her braids, opened her paint can, and dipped her brush.

The black paint was very black and the red paint very red. Before she had finished a single coat, Nan
knew that it would take several more to blot out this stain upon her honor.

Just as she was covering the last of the vivid heart, Nan was startled by the sound of a horse clopping up the schoolhouse lane. She turned and groaned.

"Hi, Dad."

"Nan, daughter of Anne," hailed Dr. Blythe. "I did not expect to find you engaged in manual labor on such a fine Saturday morning."

"I'm just . . ."

Nan was crimson from the top of her collar to the tips of her ears. Would humiliations never cease?

Dr. Blythe took in the scene, reading the legend that was still quite visible under Nan's early efforts to erase it.

"I see," he said, nodding gravely. "I was just heading to the Upper Glen on a call and spotted you from the road. Is everything alright?"

Nan gulped and studied her shoes. "Yes. I was just . . . painting over . . . this . . ."

Dr. Blythe was not laughing. But he did look as though he could laugh.

"Has Jerry been up to some mischief?"

"Oh, no!" Nan said with a heartfelt cry. "It wasn't Jerry! I'm sure of it."

"I'm glad to hear it," Dr. Blythe replied. "I shouldn't like to see the two of you fighting. More than you usually do, that is."

"We do not fight," said indignant Nan. "We debate."

Dr. Blythe did not contradict his daughter. "And you two are still friends, even after . . . this?" He waved a hand at the painted spot.

"I . . . I haven't spoken to him since," Nan mumbled.

"Nan," Dr. Blythe said, his voice gone kind, "do go find him today. If he didn't write this, and you haven't spoken to him since, I'm sure he'll be worrying about you. Go let him know you're still friends."

"Well of course we're friends!" Nan said, passionately, a little catch in her voice. "But . . . I could never . . . never care for him in any other way."

A less distracted observer would have seen the look of tender affection that came across Dr. Blythe's face at these words. He hesitated a moment, but asked, "No? Are you so sure?"

This was utterly intolerable. Nan could not, would not discuss such matters with anyone, save maybe Di. Certainly not with her father! What did he know about it anyway?

"He's . . . he's not my ideal," Nan said loftily, hoping to put an end to the conversation.

Dr. Blythe bit his lower lip and took up his reins. "In that case, you must carry on," he said. "And I will give my sympathies to young Mr. Meredith."
Tipping his hat to his daughter, Dr. Blythe rode on to make his call.

Nan turned back to her work, slathering another coat of paint across her name and Jerry's.
"We have to do this properly," Rilla intoned. "It must be official."

"What should we do?" asked Carl.

They were standing in Rainbow Valley, by the little maple-shaded spring, hidden from casual onlookers by the exuberant greenery of late spring. Their solemn purpose demanded due ceremony, and Rilla had once heard Mother say that eternal vows should be sworn over running water.

"I will stand on this side of the spring and you stand on the other. Then we must clasp hands over the water and pledge our oath." Rilla's hazel eyes were shining, her tone as dignified as a roly-poly little miss of ten years could muster.

Carl swallowed. "What must we say?"

Rilla reached for Carl's hands. "I'll go first. Then you say it and put my name in."

Carl let Rilla take his hands in hers, gulped again, and steeled himself.

"I, Bertha Marilla Blythe, do solemnly swear that I will never, ever marry Carl Meredith. Now you."

Carl nodded. "I, Thomas Carlyle Meredith, do solemnly swear . . ."

Before Carl could finish his vow, there was a rustling in the rushes and a figure emerged. Carl and Rilla leapt apart, dropping their linked hands.

It was only Shirley. He had his fishing gear with him and must have wanted a drink from the spring. Shirley took in the scene, a skeptical look on his tanned face.

"Shirley!" Rilla exclaimed, surprised into shrillness. "What are you doing here?"

Shirley looked her up and down coolly. "What are you doing here?"

Rilla tossed her ruddy curls with ostentatious unconcern. "Carl and I are making a vow. Now go away."

"Wait!" cried Carl. "Umm, Shirley . . . could be our witness! You said it should be done properly, Rilla. And a witness would make it official."

"What exactly am I witnessing?" Shirley asked, his brows ascending to a lofty height.

"Carl and I . . ." Rilla said, blushing furiously, "Carl and I are never, ever going to get married."

"To one another," Carl clarified.

Shirley squinted at them. "Is this because Alice Clow crossed your names out at school today?"
"Yeth," said Rilla, pink to the ears and going pinker.

"Well, alright, then," Shirley said, setting down his tackle. "What must I do?"

"Just stand there," Rilla ordered. "We'll swear our oath and you listen. And if one of us ever tries to break it, you must remind us that we swore it good and proper and must never, ever be forsworn."

Shirley folded his arms over his chest and nodded.

"We'd better begin again from the beginning," Rilla said, offering her hands to Carl.

Carl looked beseechingly at Shirley, who had of trick of keeping his face impassive even when a twinkle of hilarity sparkled deep down in his brown eyes.

Rilla was oblivious. "I, Bertha Marilla Blythe, do solemnly swear that I will never, ever marry Carl Meredith."

Carl took a deep breath. "I, Thomas Carlyle Meredith, do solemnly swear that I will never, ever marry Rilla Blythe."

"Good," said Rilla, releasing Carl from her grasp. "It's official now, and no going back."

"Never," Carl agreed.

Shirley retrieved his fishing rod and said nothing. But he held out his net to Carl, who took it gratefully.

"Well, I guess that's settled, Rilla," Carl said in parting. "And you can tell Alice Clow all about it if you like."

"I'll go right now," Rilla agreed.

Rilla tripped off toward the Glen street, leaving Carl and Shirley to their fishing, quite satisfied that the solemn vow and promise would hold for all eternity.

Notes:

*Rilla and Carl "used to talk together of almost everything and were teased about each other at school; but one evening when they were about ten years of age they had solemnly promised, by the old spring in Rainbow Valley, that they would never marry each other. Alice Clow had 'crossed out' their names on her slate in school that day and it came out that 'both married.' They did not like the idea at all, hence the mutual vow in Rainbow Valley. There was nothing like an ounce of prevention." Rilla of Ingleside, Chapter 17: "The Weeks Wear By"
Una hesitated in the doorway, heart pounding.

"Una? Come in, dearest. Everything's alright."

Rosemary's voice was calm, so Una risked a peek. The room was clean, bright, and bare, though with a tang of blood still lingering in the air. Deserted, too. Aunt Ellen had helped the lying-in nurse carry away the copious laundry; Father and Doctor Blythe had gone to the kitchen for tea. None of the other children were on hand either: Jerry was away at Queen's; Faith had fled down to the shore with Di; Carl had gone to fetch Doctor Blythe and had stayed at Ingleside. Only Una had remained at the manse, huddled in the spare room closet with her hands over her ears.

Now, Rosemary lay calmly in the middle of the freshly-made bed, her taffy-colored hair still slightly damp, but brushed and braided. She smiled and patted the pristine quilt beside her, inviting Una to sit.

Una took one tentative step, then another, gripping the paper-swathed parcel in her hands, oblivious to the wrinkles she was making in the wrapping.

Halfway to the bed, Una peered into the bassinet beside it. There was not much to see, only a tight-wrapped bundle of white blankets with a little tuft of black hair emerging from the top. Una craned her neck, trying to get a look at the tiny face that was turned away from her.

"He's asleep," Rosemary whispered. "But not for long. When he wakes, you can hold him."

Una gulped, not quite sure she wanted to do any such thing, but reluctant to displease Rosemary.

"What . . . what's his name?" Una asked.

Rosemary smiled. "Bruce. After my brother. Bruce Knox Meredith. What do you think?"

Una turned the name over on her tongue a few times, then nodded.

When Rosemary patted the bed again, Una climbed up gingerly, trying her best not to jostle.

"I . . . I brought you something," Una said, hoping her voice was audible. "For Bruce, I mean. But for you, too."

She held out the package she had prepared and wrapped with such care, suddenly nervous. Maybe Rosemary already had one from her own family. She might, or she might have made a new one. Una flushed, wishing almost to take the gift back and hide it in the spare room closet where she had found it weeks before.

But it was too late. Rosemary was already untying the ribbon, already slipping off the paper.

"Una!" she exclaimed, careful to keep her voice quiet. "This is beautiful! Wherever did you get it?"
Una's face felt hot all over. "It's mine. Or, ours, I mean. All of us wore it. There was a note with it, saying our names and the dates we were baptized. I found it in the closet . . ."

She had been about to say ". . . with Mother's wedding dress," but stopped in time. A sob had lodged itself in her throat, choking off any further comment.

Rosemary beamed. "It's lovely, Una. And it smells wonderful. How can it be so clean after spending eleven years packed away?"

"I washed it," Una confessed. "I used the lavender water like you showed me. And there was a place on the hem where the lace was pulling away. I mended it."

Rosemary examined the hem. "I can't even tell where the mend is. You did a splendid job!"

Una's heart leapt at the compliment, but her voice trembled. "You don't have to use it," she said. "You might have another one."

Rosemary put an arm around Una's thin shoulders and squeezed. "Of course we'll use this one, dearest. Little Bruce couldn't have any better christening gown."

Una swallowed. "I think . . . I think maybe my mother made it."

Rosemary kissed the sleek, black head that was now nestled in the hollow of her shoulder. "I think you may be right, Una."

"Is that . . . is that alright? For Bruce to use something that . . ." She could not finish.

"I'd be honored to have him wear it," Rosemary said, her own voice slightly thick. "It would almost be like a blessing from your dear mother."

Una looked up with shining eyes. "Really?"

"Of course. She made it with tremendous love. I know that, and so do you. And so will Bruce."

Una felt relief shiver down her body. "I'm glad," was all she said.

They sat together in silence for a few minutes, Rosemary holding Una with as much tenderness as if she were an infant herself. Una might have cried, but she felt so warm and safe snuggled into Rosemary's chest that she only sighed.

After a time, Little Bruce began to stir. He gave a series of sharp cries to register his displeasure at finding himself all alone in a bassinet instead of occupying his rightful place at his mother's breast.

Before Una could rise from the bed, Father came in, smiling so brightly that Una stared. "Sounds like someone's awake," he said, scooping Bruce out of the bassinet.

Rosemary kissed the top of Una's head and released her. "Una, would you like to hold him?"

Una found herself unable to speak, but nodded.

Father beamed down at her. Bending toward the bed, he placed the bundle in her arms, saying, "Bruce, this is your big sister, Una. I suspect we'll have to make sure she doesn't spoil you."

Una looked down into the red, wrinkled face in her lap. The baby had gone silent, looking up at her with big, gray eyes that tended toward dark.
Una reached out a finger and stroked Bruce's cheek, marveling that anything real could be so soft. Ever so gently, she dipped her head and kissed his silky brow.

"Hello, Bruce," she smiled.
In October, Mr. Hazard took a bad case of bronchitis and was forced to give up the Glen school for a month to recover. Walter was not terribly sad to see him go. Mr. Hazard was a competent and encouraging teacher, but he had a Gradgrindian streak entirely alien to the race that knows Joseph.

Besides, if Mr. Hazard had not taken ill, Walter would never have laid eyes on Miss Margaret Douglas. She was a distant cousin of the Douglasses in the Glen, and had consented to come out from town to take the Glen school while Mr. Hazard recovered.

Miss Douglas had a thick braid of pale gold that she wore wrapped around her head like a halo. Miss Douglas had eyes as clear and blue as a July sky over Rainbow Valley. Miss Douglas always had a cheerful little posy of wildflowers tucked into her belt. But even if Miss Douglas had been plain and shabby (which she was not), Walter would have been enchanted by her.

On the first day of her reign at Glen St. Mary school, Miss Douglas had announced that the English curriculum wanted "supplementation" and that every scholar in the Glen, from 5-year-old Sadie Crawford to Walter's own Queen's class, would spend her tenure studying the female poets of Scotland.

Walter had felt a thrill from top to toe at this declaration, and had not quite stopped thrilling since. Of course, Walter Cuthbert Blythe knew his Robert Burns and his Sir Walter Scott and his Thomas Campbell as well as any of Alba's far-flung descendants. But many of the poems and songs in Miss Douglas's repertoire were new to him.

How had he never before encountered Anne Bannerman's "Fall of Switzerland"? Or Anne Lindsay Barnard's "Auld Robin Gray"? Or Baroness Nairne's Jacobite songs? Even Jem had liked those, and had been whistling "Wi' a hundred pipers an' a' an' a" ever since Walter taught it to him one Saturday when he was home from Queen's.*

Today, Walter arrived at school early to help build the fire. This had not been his habit in the past, when he had preferred to spend a stolen half hour reading on a mossy cushion behind a little clump of firs before school. But, he reasoned, at fourteen, he really should be assisting with some of the rougher chores that Jem had once handled with such casual aplomb, shouldn't he?

"Good morning, Walter," Miss Douglas beamed.

"Good morning, Miss Douglas," Walter replied over his armload of firewood. Nodding at the neat lines of script on the blackboard, he asked, "A new poem today?"

"Naturally," Miss Douglas said. "Today, we will have 'The Flowers of the Forest' by Alison Cockburn. Have you heard of her?"

"No," Walter said, setting the wood down next to the stove.

"Ah! A contemporary of Burns, and a good friend of David Hume. She was close with Walter Scott's mother, and recognized little Walter as a kindred spirit when he was only six years old."
Walter smiled. "What did she write?"

"Many things," Miss Douglas replied, gesturing toward the blackboard. "But this is what she is remembered for."

Walter read aloud:

_The Flowers of the Forest_

_I've seen the smiling_
Of Fortune beguiling,
_I've felt all its favours, and found its decay;_
Sweet was its blessing,
Kind its caressing,
_But soon 'tis fled — fled far away._

_I've seen the forest,_
Adornèd of the foremost,
_With flowers of the fairest, most pleasant and gay;_
_Sae bonny was their blooming!_
Their scent the air perfuming!
_But now they are wither'd and weeded away._

_I've seen the morning,_
With gold the hills adorning,
_And loud tempest storming before the mid-day;_
_I've seen Tweed's silver streams,_
_Shining in the sunny beams,_
_Grow drumly and dark, as he roll'd on his way._

_Oh fickle Fortune,_
Why this cruel sporting?
_Oh why still perplex us, poor sons of a day?_
_Nae mair your smiles can cheer me,_
Nae mair your frowns can fear me;
_For the flowers of the forest are a' wede away._

"It . . ." Walter furrowed his brow. "It's quite . . . desolate as isn't it? Every beautiful thing turned 'drumly and dark.'" The phrase shivered up his spine.

"Yes," Miss Douglas agreed. "Thy frowns cannot fear me, thy smiles cannot cheer me. Desolate is a good word."

"Why do they write this way, Miss Douglass?" Walter asked. "So many of these poems share similar themes. Burns can be melancholy by turns, but these . . ." He shook his head, struggling to articulate what unified so many of the poems and songs they had studied over the past several weeks.

Miss Douglas gave him a wan smile. "Do you know much of Scottish history, Walter?"

"Some. When we were children, my mother would tell us stories of Mary, Queen of Scots, and of the Jacobites. And now that I'm studying for Queen's, I am getting a bit more of the chronology."

"This song commemorates the Battle of Flodden in 1513. Do you know it?"

"Yes," Walter answered decidedly, glad to have put in the time to disentangle all the many similar
conflicts of past centuries. "That's when King James IV trying to invade England. A terrible defeat for the Scots. James was killed; his army slaughtered."

Miss Douglas nodded. "They say that every house in Scotland lost a son."

"Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion* is about Flodden, too," Walter added, proud to have something to contribute. "We learned the battle canto in our English course last year. *The stubborn spearmen still made good / Their dark impenetrable wood.*"**

"Yes," Miss Douglas agreed. "*Marmion* is part of the standard curriculum."

"But this poem isn't like *Marmion*," Walter said, looking back at the board. He re-read in a soft voice. "*The flowers of the forest are a' wede away.*"

"What do think the difference is?"

Walter considered. "*Marmion* always makes me feel that I could march away to battle," he said slowly, "but this makes me sorry anyone ever has."

"That's very well put, Walter," Miss Douglas said. "You're right to notice the themes. Abandonment. Ruin. Dashed hopes. For hundreds of years, one of the experiences that bound Scottish women together was the loss of their sons and husbands. Every generation saw a new war, a new invasion, a new rebellion. Some, like Baroness Nairne, wrote to encourage men at arms. But Alison Cockburn was deeply skeptical, and wrote the loss, not the glory."

"Is it a song, like the others?"

"A piper's tune. I'll tell you a secret, Walter: I've arranged for Neil McNab to come down around lunchtime with his bagpipes and play it for us."

"That will be wonderful," Walter said, starry-eyed.

"I'm glad you think so. Now, I must finish setting up the primer class's lessons. Will you lay the fire?"

"Yes, Miss Douglas," Walter answered, a slight smile of anticipation lingering on his finely-molded features.

"Thank you," she said. Then, reading the romantic exhilaration writ plain on his face: "But Walter? Remember: it is a lament. A dirge. No matter how fine it sounds, it is heartbreak and tears set down in verse."

Notes:

* "Jem departed whistling "Wi' a hundred pipers and a' and a'," and Walter stood for a long time where he was." *Rilla of Ingleside*, Chapter 3: "Moonlit Mirth"

**The Avonlea scholars studied the battle canto of Scott's *Marmion* in AoGG, and Anne quoted these lines in AoGG, chapter 29. In his boyhood, Walter was said to be working on an epic poem "strikingly resembling *Marmion* in some things, if not in others." *Rainbow Valley*, Chapter 3: "The Ingleside Children"*)
It was mid-morning by the time Gilbert tucked Rhona Carr's newborn son into her arms and left them cleverly as the old midwives used to say. An easy delivery was still a delivery and Gilbert never liked to leave a birthing room until he was quite satisfied that everything was as it should be, even if that meant staying an extra hour or two after a sleepless night. But there were just rewards for his labors in Rhona's glowing grin and her husband's delighted caress of baby Albert's silky head. It might be true that a first child is a poem but the tenth is very prosy prose, but, in Gilbert's opinion, the Charlottetown Guardian was quite as engrossing as Tennyson.

Now, Ingleside beckoned across the barren byways of early winter not yet beautified by snow. Gilbert saddled Kelpie — so named when Walter had lifted his nose from a volume of Burns long enough to take notice — and swung out into the road, glad the chestnut mare knew her own way home.

Down through the Upper Glen and past the MacCallum farm, Gilbert rode along by way of the blacksmith's forge and the new Methodist graveyard. At the edge of the village, he passed the schoolhouse, where several of his own little articles were hard at work over their lessons. Living epistles, Anne called them, though they were beginning to write their own stories these days. Gilbert smiled inwardly, thinking of all the unexpected turns of phrase that made life at Ingleside so lively. Hadn't it been just last Sunday when Rilla, singing with solemn conviction in the family pew, had transformed "Gladly the cross I'll bear" into "Bradley, the cross-eyed bear"? Poetry indeed.

Through the Glen street, past the post office and Carter Flagg's store, Gilbert summoned the energy to touch his hat to Elder Clow and Mrs. Alec Davis and half a dozen others who wished him good morning. He knew and loved them all — yes, even Mrs. Alec — but he was still a very grateful man when Kelpie was safe in her stall and Ingleside welcomed him with an enveloping breath of warm air.

Setting down his black bag, Gilbert stooped in the front hall to collect a spray of letters. Why hadn't anyone heard them drop through the mail slot?

"Anne? Susan?" he called, flipping through the letters as he meandered down the hall to the kitchen. One in particular caught his eye: a small brown envelope addressed to Anne and bearing the logo of the Canadian Woman magazine. It did not greatly resemble a circular.

"Susan?" he called again to no avail.

The kitchen was empty, though Susan had left a generous serving of apple crunch pie in the stove for Dr. Dear to break his fast. Enticing as it was, Gilbert's attention was all for the post. Crossing to the big kitchen window with its deep, comforting seat, he held the little brown envelope up to the light, squinting to discern the contours of its contents. It was the sort of envelope that usually held rejection slips, but not quite so slim.

"Anne?" he called again, a cautious hope kindling in his chest.
"Up here!" came a faint voice from the recesses of the cavernous house.

Tiredness fell away forgotten and Gilbert took the stairs two at a time. He found Anne at her writing desk in the sunny window-nook overlooking the back garden. Dressed casually in a loose green gown and frilled shirtwaist, she looked like a slim white lily, haloed by an oblique sunbeam.

"Hello, darling," she said, setting down her pen and turning her face upward for a kiss.

It never really got old, coming home to her. The little hopes Gilbert had cherished as a boy and nursed into proper aspirations during the long years of their engagement had only gone as far as the House of Dreams, to weddings and wedding-nights and perhaps, in their most dizzying forays, to the coos of downy, milk-drunk babies. He'd had all of those things and more — memories now, instead of dreams. It was startling sometimes to realize that life kept on going. Gilbert had seen thirty come and go, then forty, and, just this past October, forty-five. He'd accomplished everything he had dreamed as a boy in Avonlea, not least in attracting the love of the woman whose lips clung to his own. It was still astonishing. Anne would say thrilling.

"Susan went out?" Gilbert asked casually.

"Oh, yes. To Lowbridge with Rosemary. Apparently Carter Flagg's inventory is not equal to the Christmas feast they're planning. There was mention of pineapple."

"Pineapple?" Gilbert wrinkled his nose. "For the turkey?"

"I think it's meant to be a centerpiece," Anne shrugged. "How was the delivery?"

"All ship-shape," Gilbert answered, "though I think you'll be more interested in this delivery."

He presented the brown envelope with a courtly bow, reveling in the surprise in her wide, gray eyes.

"Go on, open it," he said when she hesitated over the flap.

"Oh, Gil, it's probably nothing," she sighed. "Please don't get your hopes up."

"Just open it," he urged.

Anne found her letter opener — a birthday gift from the twins, all silver blade and enamel-vined handle — and slit the envelope. Two papers fluttered out onto her lap.

"It's a cheque," she said wonderingly. "Twenty dollars."

"Canadian Woman?" Gilbert asked, barely able to contain the whoop building in his chest.

Anne unfolded the brief note and read it with starry eyes. "Yes. They've accepted 'The New House.' And the editor wants to see more of my work."

Gilbert shouted his joy and lifted Anne bodily from her chair. He spun her around several times, right there in the upstairs hall, knocking a framed picture off the wall and threatening several more.

"Gil!" she shouted, though there was more laughter than warning in her voice.

He stopped whirling, but only so that he could kiss her properly, pressing her up against the wall.

"Well done, Anne-girl!" he said, grinning to the limit.

"You're breathing awfully hard," she teased, smiling against his mouth. "Too much excitement for an
old codger."

Gilbert began to protest, but caught the scent of the wind and changed tacks.

"Too right," he breathed. "Someone ought to put me to bed."

Anne twinkled at him. "It's lovers whispering in the night, darling, not in the mid-morning."

"Ah, but they've already bought that poem," he said. "I'm sure there was a bit in there about wanting new work."

Anne laughed and threw her arms around his neck once more. Gilbert lifted her in his arms and blundered his way down the hall, trampling over cheque and envelope and note. They would keep.

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Notes:

*"The New House" is one of the poems Anne reads to her family on the veranda in *The Blythes Are Quoted.*
On Friday afternoon, there was a double wedding at the Glen St. Mary Presbyterian manse. Norman Douglas, fiery red and glowing with good humor, had wed Ellen West, who insisted on wearing a sensible suit of navy blue, not one of these white silk fripperies, if you please. Ellen's sister, Rosemary, had donned just such a dress: a concoction of white silk and lacy veil fit for a princess. Thus attired, she had married John Meredith, who, for all his dreamy forgetfulness, managed to focus all his earthly attention on his resplendent bride.

All the Ingleside folk were there to celebrate, of course, along with Mrs. Bryant and her husband and Mary Vance. Some of the West and Douglas connections were also in attendance, eager to witness this improbable event, if only so that they could tell the tale of it later. The manse dining room was scarcely big enough to hold them all, a problem that was solved by setting up a separate table for the children in the sitting room.

Aunt Martha and Susan Baker had tussled over the wedding feast, with the result that Susan was permitted to make the wedding cake, but Aunt Martha maintained control over the supper itself. No Ditto, not today. Such an occasion demanded a festive dish. Aunt Martha had excavated an ancient recipe box from the recesses of her abode and thumbed through the cards, some of them disintegrating into dust under her very fingers. At last, she had found the one she wanted, copied in elaborate script on a powder-blue placard trimmed in paper lace. It had been a great favorite of Queen Victoria, or so she had heard in her girlhood, and was served at all the most fashionable entertainments of the 1850s.

And that is how the Blythe and Meredith children, in company with Mary Vance, came to be seated together at a long table, all of them staring perplexedly at plates heaped with spitched eels. The long, oily fish had been killed and cleaned, their gray-green skins peeled away with pliers like wet, slimy stockings. Then they had been split lengthwise and grilled, served up in long fillets with bits of the papery gray under-skin still clinging to one side.

"Spitched eels?" asked Jem, red brows ascending even as he stifled the laughter that threatened to explode from his chest.

"Spitched?" Jerry asked, looking to Walter for assistance with this lexical enigma.

"I . . . I . . ." Walter, ever eager to add a new word to his vocabulary, succeeded only in turning a shade reminiscent of the elegant anguilliformes on his plate.

"Even Ditto would be better than this," Faith scowled, prodding the grilled fish with her fork as if she half expected it to rise from the dead.

At this juncture, Aunt Martha hobbled into the sitting-room, her very best black silk dress swishing as she approached the table.

"Now be sure to eat your eels," she scolded vaguely toward the table at large. "Or there will be no wedding cake for you." Aunt Martha vanished whence she had come, leaving eleven pairs of eyes
trained longingly on the table in the hall where Susan's fabulous confection of plums and sugar icing towered in all its glory. It was a spectacular treat — the Dessert of Dreams. But was it worth . . . spitched eels?

Jem decided that it was. A few bites would make quick work of this monstrosity, and then on to more pleasant things. Besides, no matter how vile it tasted, Jem was sure that he would savor this story for many years to come.

Around the table, the others complied after a fashion. Faith set her jaw, flaked a forkful of eel off the fillet, and swallowed it with grim determination. Jerry, Carl, Di, and Mary Vance followed suit. Una, looking quite as green as Walter, managed one bite on the strength of Faith's encouraging nod. Nan and Rilla touched their utensils to the eels, scraping off tiny slivers so small as to be barely visible, and washing them down with long, quiet sips of water. Walter quavered, regarding the eels with dread deliberation and turning paler with every passing moment as he contemplated their unknown gustatory possibilities.

"You know, it's eels got you into this stepmother business in the first place," Mary Vance observed.

"How do you figure that, Mary?" Jerry asked.

"It's Carl's fault," Mary said comfortably.

"Me?" Carl squeaked.

"'Course you," replied Mary. "It was you that put the eel in Mrs. Carr's buggy, see? And that was awful naughty of you, so your Pa had to whip you. Only he couldn't because he hadn't any practice with bringing you up. And he felt so bad that Una heard him talking to himself about Miss West and ran up to tattle, and that's how come you're gettin' a new stepmother!"

"Oh, Mary!" admonished Faith, reaching over to squeeze Una's hand before she could begin to cry. "It isn't anybody's fault! And besides, we love Miss West. She won't be a stepmother to us. She'll be a friend!"

"Well, I don't see how she can be that," Mary answered, turning up her nose. "But I guess maybe she won't be quite like other stepmothers."

"She won't," said Jerry stoutly. "You leave off bothering Una, Mary Vance. And Carl, too. It isn't his fault about the eel in Mrs. Carr's buggy. He thought it was dead!"

"I did," Carl averred. "It was the biggest eel you ever saw. But it was so still lying at the bottom of Link Drew's basket that I thought it was dead!"

"Didn't you check?" Jem asked through a mouthful of eel.

"Well, I guess it isn't so easy to tell with eels," Carl shrugged. "They're awfully interesting creatures, though. Did you know that they live most of their lives in rivers, but when they're ready to spawn, they swim far out to sea, to a special meeting place with all the other eels, and they thrash about together and lay their eggs in the water, and then the male eels fertilize the eggs and then they all die! But the larvae hatch and turn into little elvers that look like noodles made of clear jelly and they swim back to the rivers and grow into great big eels like these!"

At this triumphant conclusion, Carl gestured to the eel on his own plate.

Several forks clattered to the table at once. Walter pushed back in his chair and hung his head between his knees, taking slow, deliberate breaths. Even Jem seemed less enthusiastic, the last bite of
eel on his plate going uneaten.

After a moment of stunned silence, the muffled sound of a stifled chortle rose from the seat across from Carl. A snort, a snicker, and then a peal of merry, childish laughter, crystalline in its clarity.

Carl cocked his head, noticing Shirley Blythe for the first time. That was curious enough — Shirley was only a year or two younger than Carl, but for some reason he had not figured into the annals of Rainbow Valley at all to this point. Now, he was unmistakable, if only because he was the only one taking delight in Carl's zoological explications.

Shirley caught Carl's eye and redoubled his mirth, shaking now with irrepressible laughter. Carl found the sound quite contagious, and soon he too had dissolved into giggles. From there, the uproar spread to Jem and Jerry, with Mary Vance's shout adding a hectic note to the chorus. Di and Faith joined in, and even Nan and Rilla, though if pressed, they could not have said why. Una smiled indulgently, but Walter was not yet recovered enough to participate in the merriment.

They laughed long and loud, until their breath gave out and they settled back into their chairs, replete with hilarity.

Shirley swabbed a tear from his eye with the heel of his hand. "Where did you catch the eels?" he asked Carl.

"On the bridge," Carl answered. "Have you never fished for eels before?"

Shirley shook his head.

"Do you like to fish?" Carl asked.

"I suppose so," Shirley answered. "No one's ever taken me before."

"Well, I'll show you how, if you like," Carl offered. "Tomorrow?"

"Alright," Shirley said, brown eyes bright with excitement.

"Where are you going, love?" asked Susan, who had just that moment appeared in the doorway.

"Fishing," Shirley answered.

Susan nodded. "That sounds like fun. Now, would anyone here like a piece of cake?"

"We . . . we . . ." Rilla began, seemingly on the verge of tears. "We haven't finished our thpitched eelth."

"Oh, never mind that," Susan said, beginning to gather up the plates. "Spitched eels indeed! You'll all have enough cake to fill your bellies and forget about eels."
It was November.

_Proper month for it._

Would it have been easier to bear in May, when the world was covered over in blossom and bud? No, Anne remembered the old sense of shame and remorse from long ago, when she had discovered that even in the midst of grief, life still called to her with many insistent voices. How incongruous that sunrises behind the firs and the pale pink buds opening in the garden had still given her the old inrush of gladness when she saw them. It had felt like disloyalty.

November couldn't be ruined, though. It was already an alien month, and Anne thought it was just as well to concentrate the heartache if you could. Though she knew all too well that grief-time had little enough to do with calendar-time.

Diana and Fred had stayed at Green Gables for a few hours after the last funeral guests had gone home. There had been furniture to move, rubbish to clear, food to stow away against the day when appetite returned. What a blessing to have such friends. And yet, Anne had been glad when they had gone, leaving Green Gables to mourn its own. The Wrights were good and kind and sweet, but it wasn't their sorrow — they were outside of it and couldn't come close enough to grieving hearts to help.*

Davy and Millie Keith had retired to their room soon after, taking all their little ones with them to crowd into the gaps and fissures of bereavement. Marilla had been mother and grandmother to them all, and Anne knew that her own grief, horrible ache that it was, was a peer to theirs, not its superior.

The front door of Green Gables creaked. Anne did not need to look up to feel Gilbert crossing the veranda toward her. In a moment, he stood behind her, wrapping strong arms around her waist and bending to rest his chin on her shoulder.

"Aren't you cold out here, Anne-girl?"

"Not anymore."

Gilbert squeezed gently, pulling her to him as if he hoped to absorb her whole.

"Are they all asleep?" Anne asked.

"Yes. Well, I'm not sure about Jem."

"But the rest?"

"Yes. They all crowded into your old room. At first it was just the girls in there, but Di was crying and Walter went in to comfort her. Then he started singing and Shirley wandered in. I brought them some quilts and helped them make pallets on the floor."
"Singing?"

"Must have been something they learned in school. Even Rilla knew it. *The land o' the leal* . . ."

Anne gulped tremulously and Gilbert turned her in his hands, enfolding her as she buried her face in his shirt. He made gentle sounds on the edge of language, caressing as tenderly as if she were a child herself.

After a few moments, Anne's breathing steadied. "Thank you for settling them," she said. "I should have been there with them. It's only . . ."

"Shhhh," Gilbert said, stroking her hair. "You've been strong all day, Anne. All week, in fact. It's alright to need a moment to yourself. She was your mother."

A sob leapt into Anne's throat, but she managed to whisper around it. "I called her that. At the end. It made her smile."

"I'm sure it did."

Anne pulled away a fraction and Gilbert took the opportunity to search his pockets for a handkerchief. When he found one, it was none too clean.

"Sorry," he grimaced, offering it to her anyway. "I've given away all my spares."

Anne breathed a laugh and took it anyway, blowing her nose on the driest corner.

*How does he do that?*

In the midst of the fiercest argument or the stormiest tears, Gilbert always found a way to make a little space for laughter. It brought her back to herself, brought them back to one another, like nothing else.

"But Jem's not with them?" Anne asked, her voice steadier.

"No. He went to Matthew's room and the door is closed."

Anne sniffled. "I should check on him."

"Stay," Gilbert said, hands on her hips. "Give him some time. He wanted to be alone."

Anne shook her head. "He shouldn't have to be."

"You needed some time alone," Gilbert observed fairly.

"Yes. And you came to find me. He needs someone, too."

Gilbert pulled Anne closer and kissed her lightly on the forehead. "I'll go," he said.

"No," Anne shook her head. "It has to be me."

"Why?"

"He might not let himself cry in front of you."

Gilbert considered for a moment before nodding. "Alright. But I'll wait up for you."

"You get some sleep."
"I'll wait up."

Anne paused a moment outside the door. This would always be Matthew's room, no matter who slept here, no matter how many years had passed. She knocked softly; when no answer came, she entered more softly still.

Curled on the bed, Jem looked smaller than he was. Standing, he was all arms and legs and disconcerting height; huddled under one of Mrs. Rachel Lynde's cotton warp quilts, he might have been a child again.

Anne perched on the edge of the bed and rested a hand on his shoulder. "Can I get you anything, dearest?"

Jem made no reply.

If he can't talk, I guess I can.

"I'm glad you have this room," she said, stroking her hand lightly up and down the line of his back. "I never see it but I think of Matthew. He seems to linger here — I never did get over expecting him to walk through this door at breakfast time. He would be glad you're here. He would have loved you so, and been proud of you. Like Marilla."

Jem turned over then, and met Anne's sympathetic gaze. His face was slack in the aftermath of tears, mouth uncharacteristically lax, long lashes clumped with moisture.

"Did you hear them all singing?"

"No," Anne answered. "But Dad told me about it."

Jem swallowed. "I . . . I didn't know that song. But they all did. I even heard Rilla."

"They learned it from Miss Margaret Douglas," Anne explained. "She's the supply teacher who has taken over the school this fall. Teaching them all about the female poets of Scotland."

Jem hesitated, opening his mouth twice before he spoke in a whisper.

"I wasn't crying over Aunt Marilla."

"No?"

"Of course I'm sad over her. So awfully sad, Mum. I loved her and I know she loved me. But . . . I think she must have known she was sick last summer. We had a good long talk, last time I visited. She knew I loved her, and . . . I don't think she was sorry to go. But when Walter started singing . . . and they all knew the words . . . and . . . I didn't . . ."

Jem dropped his head into the pillow and sobbed.

Anne traced a looping path across his back with her palm. Strangely, she couldn't stop herself from smiling through her own new-sprung tears.

Little Jem.

What did it matter that he was taller by a head now? Or that he couldn't walk down the Glen street without some young Miss or another making sheep's eyes at him? He was still a boy — a boy who had spent his first autumn away from home and come back to find that nothing stays where you left
it, not ever, and that a month or a week or a day is plenty of time for the world to tilt into an incomprehensible jumble.

"You're growing up, dearest," Anne whispered. "All of you. Someday, you'll all have your own lives. Your own places and families. It's just that you're the first to embark. And that can be lonely."

"Do we have to go?"

Anne smiled palely. "You must make your way in the world. You'll come home, but it won't quite be home in the same way. Like Green Gables," she said, looking around wistfully. "When I left here, I didn't think I'd ever feel so rooted in a place again. But then I had Dad, and you, and Ingleside is my home now. It will be the same for you."

Jem shook his head. "I don't want a new place. Can't I just come home to the Glen again?"

"Of course, darling. If that's what you want."

Jem sniffed. "I could be a doctor, like Dad. I think I'd like that. And I could be close to you — to all of you."

"That sounds lovely," Anne said, smiling. "But you don't need to decide all that right now. For now, sleep."

"Mum?"

"Yes?"

"Will you stay with me until I fall asleep?"

"Of course, darling."

It did not take long. Anne barely had enough time to get through the first verse of a song she knew he remembered:

\[I \text{ saw a ship a-sailing, a-sailing on the sea,}
\text{And oh, it was all laden with pretty things for me . . .}**\]

When Anne tiptoed to the spare room door, she saw that it was ajar, the wavering light of a candle casting shadows across the floor. Gilbert was in bed, but awake, as promised.

Wordlessly, Anne removed shoes and hairpins, stripped off her black crepe, loosened her laces and unfastened the busk of her corset. When she was down to her chemise, Gilbert scooted over to the other side of the bed and held back the covers, offering her the warm hollow where he had lain.

Anne climbed in, grateful for bed and heat and loving arms around her.

"How's Jem?" Gilbert asked.

"Very sweet," Anne smiled. "And asleep."

"Good."

Gilbert bestowed a soft kiss on her lips, but Anne leaned into it, lingered, melted open. Gilbert pulled away, smiling. "You need sleep."
"I need you."

"Now?"

"Always."

Notes:

*paraphrase, *Anne of Green Gables*, Chapter 37: "The Reaper Whose Name is Death."

**Anne of Ingleside*, Chapter 19
Jerry Meredith sat on the manse porch, dangling a small crocheted bird on a ribbon. On the blanket before him, Baby Bruce waved fat little arms, attempting to catch the toy and shoving it in his mouth whenever he succeeded.

Jerry smiled fondly. He would miss little Bruce when he went back to Queen's on Monday. He hadn't expected to grow so attached to the baby, but he was such a cute, roly-poly little chap, always so pleased when any of his older siblings paid him any attention. Jerry had volunteered to take him off of Rosemary's hands for an hour just for the pleasure of making him smile.

"Jerry?"

Jerry looked up sharply, alarmed at the tone in that quiet voice. Una was standing by the steps, her thin shoulders drooping, her dark blue eyes downcast.

"Una? Are you alright?" Jerry's spoke more sharply than he had intended, his words honed by the jolt of adrenaline that shot through him at sight of her dejected posture.

Una shook her head, her straight black braids swinging with the motion.

"Well, come here and sit," Jerry said, wrestling his voice into a gentler register. "Can you tell me what the trouble is?"

Una gulped. "I think I need a session of the Good Conduct Club," she whispered, folding herself into a perch at the edge of the blanket.

Jerry was surprised. The Meredith children had long ago abandoned the project of bringing themselves up; first because Father and Rosemary were equal to the task, and then because they had grown old enough to know right from wrong themselves.

"Have you done something wicked, Una?" he asked skeptically. Of all of them, Una's transgressions had generally been the slightest.

"I think so," she said, her lip quivering.

"Do you think you ought to tell Father?" Jerry asked, distressed by her desolate expression. "You know he will help you if you are in any difficulty."

Una shook her head. "I . . . I only wanted to ask you. You were always fair in the Good Conduct Club. And I wanted to ask . . . do you think it is ever right to tell a lie? When the truth might cause someone pain or trouble?"

Jerry felt stunned. He did not feel equal to such a knotty ethical dilemma. Not to mention that poor Una clearly felt afflicted by whatever situation had prompted this question.

"I think Father would know better . . ."
"No, Jerry," Una said, lifting her eyes to his. "I want your opinion."

"Well . . ." Jerry began, shifting uncomfortably. "Father told us that we must always be truthful and never even act a lie. I hope I can always live up to that charge. But it sounds like there's more to it than that. Can you tell me what happened?"

"No," Una sniffed. "It isn't mine to tell. But I thought that's what you would say."

Baby Bruce crawled across the blanket and into Una's lap. He snuggled his dark head against her chest and she wrapped her slender arms around him in a tender embrace. Jerry wanted to help, but he wasn't sure how to judge a situation without all the facts before him. He must say something, though.

"I think," Jerry said solemnly, "that we're old enough to let conscience guide us when two choices both seem wrong. Do you feel bad over the lie you told, or do you only feel bad because it was a lie?"

Una looked up from Bruce's black hair and fixed Jerry with her dark blue gaze. He was surprised to see that there were no tears there, despite her sorrowful expression.

"I don't feel bad over the lie," she said resolutely. "Telling the truth would have been much more terrible for . . . someone. But I don't like to lie. We promised Father always to be honest, and I feel wretched over failing there."

"In that case, I think perhaps you did right," Jerry said, relieved. "Your conscience will tell you when you've done wrong, Una. It will flash up like a red flag to warn you."

Una's smile was wistful, but then, Una's smile was always slightly wistful. "I'm afraid my conscience generally speaks in more subtle colors."

"I wish you'd let me help you, Una," Jerry said.

"You have," Una assured him.

Jerry frowned. "Well, as presiding judge of the Good Conduct Club, I forbid you punishing yourself over this. Whatever it is. No late nights in the graveyard. No fasting until you faint."

That got a smile. "No. Not anymore."

"You really should talk to Father, Una. Or Rosemary."

She nodded, but buried her face in Bruce's hair. "Thanks, Jerry. I'll think about it."
"I'll take Walt," Ken said jovially.

It was a kind gesture, or at least it was meant to be. No one had ever picked Walter Blythe first for any sport, which suited him just fine. He'd much rather be left to read his book peaceably under a tree at the edge of Robert Russell's empty pasture while the rest of them batted and fielded and shouted at one another, getting progressively stickier in the fug of the midsummer heat. But Ken had come back from Japan wild about baseball and found willing accomplices in Jem and Jerry.* They had spent the whole walk here hallooing through the Glen for Bertie Shakespeare Drew and Watty Flagg and all the other boys who perked up their ears at the call and joined in the parade. Oh well, at least it wasn't football.

"Hold on! I wanna play, too!" Faith said, assuming a wide-legged stance that dared any of the boys to say her nay. She had grown sturdier since Rosemary had taken over the provisioning of the manse and its table, shooting up several inches in the last year, as had all the Meredith children. She might never be as tall as Mrs. Blythe, but at thirteen, Faith was as strong of arm and as fleet of foot as most of the boys in her class. Walter had spent much of the past year watching her surreptitiously across the schoolroom, scribbling notes for appreciative verses when he should have been studying for his Queen's entrance.

"You'll make the teams uneven," Bertie Shakespeare Drew whined.

"Then I'll play, too!" said Di, leaping stoutly to Faith's side.

"And me!" Mary Vance added unhelpfully.

Ken looked Faith up and down from the crown of her hatless head to the toes of her scuffed boots and grinned appreciatively. Too appreciatively, Walter flared internally.


Persis flapped a dismissive hand at her brother from the sheltering shade of a mossy oak, where she and Nan were whispering secrets to one another among the verdure. Truth be told, Walter would much rather sit at Persis's feet as she wove tales of cherry blossoms and tea ceremonies and demonstrated how to fold translucent paper into butterflies, drinking in the beauty of her bright blue eyes and the gorgeous rope of her thick, golden braid. Nan was certainly enthralled, and their giggling camaraderie was infinitely more appealing than standing in the outfield in a state of perpetual anxiety, praying that no one hit a ball in his direction. Perhaps he should beg off baseball after all and make the teams even, though it seemed like shirking.

"How 'bout you, Roly-Poly?" Ken asked eight-year-old Rilla, who answered him with a stuck-out tongue and a sulky expression as she stalked over to join Nan and and Persis in more pleasant diversions in the shade.

"It's alright if the teams aren't exactly even," said Jem. "But I get Jerry."
Ken nodded, unsurprised. "I'll have . . . what's your name again?"

"Bertie Shakespeare."

"Silly me, how could I forget?" Ken said, chuckling in a way that suggested he hadn't forgotten at all.

Jem was deep in consultation with Jerry, earnest whisperings signaling some disagreement between them. Jem shook his head one last time and called out, "Faith! You're with us."

Ken picked Di to keep things square. Jem chose Shirley out of clannishness even if he was one of the younger kids on hand, and the rest of the players divvied up fairly enough that neither team had a notable advantage over the other. If anything, Walter thought that Jem's squad got quite the better end of the bargain, not having to endure Mary Vance's recitation of all she knew or imagined about baseball while Ken's team sat in the grass waiting their turns at bat.

They had no mitts, but played with an old lemon-peel leather ball that was soft enough to catch bare-handed. Four flat stones borrowed from the tumbledown wall bordering the pasture became bases and a short length of oak branch served for a pitcher's stripe. Jem did his best to clear the baselines of cowpies, but made no promises and hollered to his outfielders to survey their assigned domains for hazards. He took the mound, tossing a few practice pitches to Jerry at the plate.

Walter plunked himself down at the very end of the batting order, between Una Meredith and the untrammeled pasture beyond. He plucked at the grass and the heads of trefoil clover, twirling the stems between his fingers. How intricate a clover head was, each tiny white flute contributing to the whole, but complete in itself. There were a thousand clover heads in this field — no; a million! — each of them a perfect little galaxy. How many clover heads were there in Glen St. Mary? On the Island? In Canada? The thought made Walter feel tiny and vast all at once, as if he had become untethered in limitless space, soaring over the fields and the earth and the Milky Way, far, far up and beyond . . .

There was a dull thunk as bat met leather and a whoop went up from the rest of Ken's team.

"Nice one, Ford!"

"It's going long!"

The ball flew high and far, a single dark dot against the cloudless blue. Ken was off, already rounding first base and running hard for second, but he hadn't counted on Shirley, who stood calmly in left field, waving off a sprinting Sam Warren. Shirley took a single step to his right and caught the fly ball neatly, bringing it in to his chest before holding it aloft for all to see.

Ken's team groaned, but Ken himself shrugged it off, clapping encouragement to Di as he hustled off the field and flopped down into the grass at Walter's side.

"Good try," Walter said.

"Thanks," Ken grunted, applauding as Di slapped a line drive right up the middle over Jem's head. "Better than old Casey, anyway."

"Casey?"

"Sure. Like 'Casey at the Bat.'"

Walter grimaced. "I'm not familiar."
Ken jostled his shoulder in a way that reminded Walter that they had actually been good friends before the Fords went away to Japan. That seemed like an awfully long time ago, but Ken wasn't really a bad sort, even if he had proven to be an inconsistent correspondent.

"It's a poem," Ken grinned, then launched into a dramatic recitation, dark gray eyes sparkling with good humor.

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,  
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;  
But there is no joy in Mudville — mighty Casey has struck out.

He oversold every line, pronouncing each syllable with maximum gravitas so that by the end, Walter was shaking with laughter.

"It's practically Shakespeare," Walter giggled.

"Well now, it is," Ken mused. "Shakespeare wrote plays for the common people, didn't he? Full of dirty jokes and slapstick. I bet he'd have liked vaudeville poetry just fine."

He had a point.

"Have you seen a real vaudeville show?" Walter asked, intrigued.

"Yep. In Toronto. I like going to the theatre. Not opera so much, though Father likes it. But we saw kabuki in Japan and that was aces."

"Really?" Walter had quite forgotten the baseball game, the shouts and applause fading into nothingness as he devoted all his attention to Ken. "Could you understand what they were saying?"

"Not a word!" Ken admitted. "But it was different from the opera. There was so much to see the whole time. The plays go on all day long, but it wasn't boring at all."

Ken told him of the costumes and makeup, how the sets moved and rotated, and actors seemed to appear or disappear like magic.

"It sounds wonderful," Walter breathed.

"It was. I don't know if we'll ever go back there, but I think I'd like to travel more. See some more of the world. What about you, Walt? Where would you go if you could go anywhere?"

Where wouldn't he go? Walter loved the Island, glorying in every wave and flower. But he yearned to see places he had only read about, to breathe the air on the moors of Culloden or stand in the ruins of Hastings castle or gaze up at the belfries of Notre Dame . . .

"I'd like to see France someday," he said.

"You and me both," Ken grinned. "Tell you what, if I ever go, you come along."

Walter smiled back. Ken Ford wasn't half bad at all, even if he did love baseball.

"Hey!" Walter was brought back to reality by Jem, looming over him and prodding at his outstretched legs with a dusty shoe. "Your team's taking the field without you, fellas."

Ken was already on his feet, catching the ball Jerry tossed his way. "Aw, well we figured you'd all strike out so fast there wasn't much point in giving up our seats!"
Jerry called a jibe after Ken, but Walter didn't catch it. He was taking the hand Jem offered him, hopping to his feet and brushing grass from his trousers.

"You alright?" Jem asked in a low voice the others wouldn't overhear, his hazel eyes earnest.

Walter looked out into the field, where Ken was deploying his players with an easy smile and a handful of jokes.

"You bet," Walter said. "And if you hit anything very, very deep to right field, I'll be Johnny on the spot."

Jem guffawed and slapped Walter on the shoulder, sending him careening off into the outfield. It was pleasant there, standing in a riotous patch of white clover, watching the game from afar. Baseball wasn't his cup of tea and that was alright. But Walter thought that perhaps there might be verse or two in this as well. Something about the long, unclouded summer and the joyful shouts of children at play and the lasting bond of kindred spirits.

Notes:

*Rainbow Valley, Chapter 2: "Sheer Gossip"

"Are the Fords coming to the harbour this summer?"

“No. They are going on a trip to Japan and will probably be away for a year. Owen's new novel is to have a Japanese setting. This will be the first summer that the dear old House of Dreams will be empty since we left it."

“I should think Owen Ford might find enough to write about in Canada without dragging his wife and his innocent children off to a heathen country like Japan,” grumbled Miss Cornelia.
Nan Blythe gazed out the train window, watching the countryside slip past in the gleam and glamour of an autumn sunset. She had made this journey several times since term started in September, but never alone. How silent the compartment was, with the boys off at Redmond and Di and Faith staying in town for the weekend.

*Good. I like it quiet. Better for reading.*

Nan opened the scarlet-covered book in her lap with crisp resolution. *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* was certainly a thrilling read; Nan gloried in the mysteries of murder, theft, and stolen identity, all of them solved by Lady Molly's keen observations and rapier intellect.*

But today, not even Lady Molly's flight to the Mediterranean with a bloodthirsty gang hot on her heels could hold Nan's attention. Paragraphs slipped by, unabsorbed, and Nan was soon back to staring out the window.

*How could Di do it?*

Nan wasn't sore over Di beating her in the elocution competition, truly she wasn't. Though Nan loved English and regularly led the first-year class at Queen's in that subject, she knew that she could never match Di's fine alto voice, nor her steady nerves. Nan loved to recite, but she tended to get excited, speaking too fast or forgetting to project her voice to the back of the room. Of course, one time out of every ten, Nan would catch some indefinable spark that would transform her girlish recitation into a mesmerizing performance, but this had not been one of those times. She had not expected to win the competition, so she was not much disappointed over that.

But that Di should choose Faith Meredith to share the prize with her! That rankled. Especially when the prize was tickets to the Charlottetown Ladies' Aid Benefit Concert, necessitating both a weekend in town and the wearing of evening dresses . . .

Nan's face flushed with pique.

*They're probably getting ready right now.*

Nan could imagine Di and Faith giggling as they brushed one another's hair, maybe sharing a splash of the perfume that Faith kept carefully hidden among her stockings. Nan pictured Di in her new green evening dress with the embroidered sash. Faith would be trying to convince her to wear her hair up, even knowing how Mother disapproved.

It went without saying that Faith would look smashing in her sapphire gown. Faith looked smashing in the stiff, heavy bloomers they had to wear for physical education. Faith looked smashing drenched in mud, as Nan had seen her more than a few times that past summer. Something about her indomitable aplomb outshone even her lovely complexion and her silky, golden-brown curls. It had not escaped Nan's notice that Jem had spent most of the past summer looking at Faith as if she were the only girl in the world, whether she was dressed for church or being fished out of the harbor after falling out of Marshall Elliott's dory. But then, every boy in Glen St. Mary — and Charlottetown —
looked at Faith like that, except for Jerry and Carl. Even Walter!

Nan tossed her own sleek, nut-brown braids. Di might be better at elocution, but she'd never be the pretty Ingleside twin.

*Oh! What a vain, selfish, uncharitable thought!*

Nan was shocked at herself. Naturally, she had been hurt when Di chose Faith to go to the concert over her. She had just assumed that the bonds of twinship must trump friendship, as they always had in the past. Friends might come and go — Di knew that better than anyone, having fallen out with any number of "bosom friends" over the years — but twins shared an eternal, unbreakable bond.**

Nan groaned. If only the boys were here! It wouldn't hurt so much if she had been going home with Jem and Jerry. That could even be fun, to have them all to herself: to share a joke or get into a ripping debate. But they were off in Kingsport, no doubt following amusements of their own. And she was going home to a quiet weekend in Glen St. Mary with Shirley and Rilla. Would Walter be home? He often came home from his teaching job in Lowbridge on the weekends. But if he didn't, the best Nan could hope for was that Una might come over to Ingleside of an afternoon. But, as much as Nan liked Una — did anyone dislike Una? — an afternoon in her company was likely to be a subdued affair. Perhaps Susan would let them pull taffy.

*Lady Molly* slipped down onto the empty seat beside Nan. She didn't mind being alone. Better for reading. But to be left behind? Nan hid her face in her hands and cried.

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**Notes:**

*Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910) by Baroness Emma Orczy. Baroness Orczy is most famous for writing *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, which Nan would also adore.

**Di's passionate and ill-fated friendships are the backbone of her storyline in *Anne of Ingleside*:**

"*However, Di will probably soon get over this 'crush' and we'll hear no more of Jenny Penny.*" (Anne of Ingleside, chapter 28)

"*'I suppose this new infatuation will run its course in due time,' said Anne. 'Who is this Delilah, Susan? I don't want the children to be little snobs . . . but after our experience with Jenny Penny . . .’" (Anne of Ingleside, chapter 37)
Carl Meredith knew the sound of an animal in pain. The shrieking yowl from behind the blacksmith's shop told him that something awful was happening there.

Leaving Shirley behind him in the road, Carl sprinted past the shop and rounded its back corner. He skidded to a stop at the frightful scene before him.

The screams had come from a little tabby kitten, held tight in the merciless jaws of the biggest mastiff Carl had ever seen. The dog was tall and broad, with a bristly, brindled hide the color of storm clouds over the gulf, and a chest like a keg. As Carl watched, the monster gave its screeching prey another shake.

Carl felt the blood drain from his face. Surely the kitten could not survive such a shaking. But what could be done? That dog was as big as he was, and certainly much stronger.

Before Carl could hatch a rescue plan, he felt someone step up beside him. It was Shirley, of course, his brown eyes clouded with resolute fury. Without hesitation, Shirley bent down to the ground and picked up a flat, round stone. He fitted it to the curve of his long, flexible fingers, just as he did when he and Carl went skipping stones at the Glen pond. With an attitude of calm assurance, Shirley cocked his arm and flung his missile at the mastiff, catching it squarely between the eyes.

The dog yelped, dropped the limp kitten, and staggered backward. Shirley had a second missile in his hand, but he never needed it. With a whimper, the mastiff turned and fled with its tail tucked between its legs.

Carl ran forward and scooped up the kitten, cradling it to his chest as he knelt in the dust.

Shirley was only a step behind. He crouched at Carl's side, peering at the wounded animal. "Is it alive?"

"Yes," Carl said. "I can feel it breathing."

"Is it much hurt?"

"I suppose it must be," Carl replied, blinking back tears. "But I'll have to get it home to examine it more closely."

"Come on, then," Shirley said, standing and offering Carl a hand up from the ground.

Carl took Shirley's outstretched hand, vastly comforted by the steady assurance of his grasp. He ran a sleeve across his eyes, determined not to cry. It was only that he had been so frightened for the kitten, and so scared of that enormous dog.

"How did you manage to hit it like that?" Carl asked, slightly in awe of his friend.

Shirley shrugged. "It had to be done."
Together, the two boys set out for the manse to patch up the mewling kitten. Carl looked over his shoulder once or twice, anxious to see whether the dog would follow them. But he saw only Shirley, walking calmly behind him.
Di Blythe knocked softly at the library door.

"Come in!"

Di poked her head in with an apologetic smile. "Hi, Dad. I guess you heard the phone."

Dr. Blythe was already standing at the massive mahogany desk by the windows, tucking his stethoscope into his black traveling bag.

"Who was it?" he asked.

"Angus Murray. His mother is asking for you."

Dr. Blythe grimaced, but went on with his packing.

Di stepped into the room and stood in front of the bookcase where the ledgers stood in orderly ranks. The top shelf held the older volumes — case notes and files from old Dr. Dave, and a few that predated even those. At Di's eye level, half a dozen tan-and-maroon registers held the medical histories of nearly everyone in Glen St. Mary and the Upper Glen and the fishing village down at the Harbour Head. They were sacred — confidential — and completely off-limits to anyone but Dad.

"Is there anything you can do for her?" Di asked.

Dr. Blythe did not look up. "For Martha Murray? Not a thing except listen. She's 93 and declining as gently as anyone could ever wish." He clicked his bag shut. "Sweetheart, will you go tell Susan that I won't be home for supper? I have to check in on Mattie Crawford in the Upper Glen as well, and Martha Murray will keep me at least an hour just narrating her various complaints."

Di clenched her hand around a fold of her apron. This was her chance. She took a single deep breath. "Dad? Bring me with you."

He looked up, surprised. "You want to go on a call?"

"I could help!" Di said, words tumbling out. "Like you said, Mrs. Murray isn't really sick; she just wants a visitor. As long as you stop in for five minutes, she'll be satisfied that she saw you, and then you can leave me and go on to Mattie Crawford. I'll listen to all Mrs. Murray's ailments and be as sympathetic as can be. And then you can stop by for me on your way home from the Crawfords' and you won't have to miss supper!"

Di was somewhat breathless by the end of this speech, but she felt that she had presented her case as convincingly as she could. It had been more than a year since she had first hatched the idea of asking Dad to take her along on a call, but had never found the right moment. Especially now that she and Nan were away at Queen's, Di felt that she must seize the day, even if the fluttering in her stomach was awfully uncomfortable.
Dr. Blythe gave her an appraising look. "That might work," he said slowly. "Are you sure you want to come along?"

"Yes," Di said, almost too quickly.

"And you won't mind sitting with Mrs. Murray, even when she tells you about her bunions?"

"I'm looking forward to it," said Di, unable to suppress a grin.

"If you say so," Dr. Blythe shrugged. "Go tell Susan to expect us back at suppertime. I'll meet you out front with the buggy."

Di turned and flew toward the kitchen, feet barely touching the ground. She did not pause long enough to see Dr. Blythe shaking his head, watching her go with an expression of curiosity on his own smiling face.
On Boxing Day, Faith Meredith climbed the hill to Ingleside carrying a cake. A vicious snow squall had kept Christmas revelers at home yesterday, and many long-promised visits had been postponed. Few of the Merediths were much disposed toward visiting even today; Jerry had brought a nasty cold home from Redmond and generously shared it with the whole house. Only Faith was in any mood to go calling.

Faith shielded her eyes against the dazzle of sun on snow. The air was crisp and vaguely electric in the afterglow of the tempest, and downed branches lay shrouded in the drifts, softened by the flakes that had torn them from their trees. Faith reveled in the crunch underfoot and the crackle overhead, reflecting that a white Christmas was a wondrous thing, even when it was achieved by such violent means.

Luckily, someone had shoveled the walk up to Ingleside, but Faith was dismayed to see the unmistakeable tracks of a sleigh leading away from the house. Had the Blythes gone visiting?

Faith mounted the steps to the veranda, hoping that some of the family might still be at home. She knocked at the door and waited. And waited. She knocked again, but knew it was useless. Peering through the sidelite, Faith could see that Ingleside was dark and empty. It seemed that even Susan had gone out.

Faith sighed, wondering whether to leave the cake on the porch or carry it home with her. Perhaps she had a scrap of paper in one of her coat pockets and could write a note . . .

The door opened. Faith looked up, surprised, to find a flushed and bleary-eyed Jem, dressed in pajamas and a hastily-tied robe.

"Jem!" she said, startled into a truncated greeting.

"Hi, Faith," he croaked.

Faith frowned at the sound of his cracked voice. She surveyed his face and noted glassy, red-rimmed eyes, a dripping nose, and a pallor that the hectic patches in his cheeks could not mask.

"You're ill," Faith said unsympathetically. "Get back inside before you freeze."

"I'm . . . not . . . ill," said Jem, confirming this brazen pronouncement by swooning against the doorjamb.

"Jem!" Faith dropped her cake in a crumby smash and jumped to catch Jem as he slid down the wall.

"Jem, are you alright?"

"Just . . . tired," he panted, eyelids fluttering.

Faith attempted to shove Jem into the hall far enough so that she could shut the door, but found that she could not budge his unresponsive weight with any casual effort. When had he gotten so big? As
tall as Dr. Blythe, at least, and as broad in the shoulders, as befit the captain of the Redmond football team. Gritting her teeth with determination, Faith slipped her arms under Jem's, and half-lifted, half-dragged him into the hall. She propped him against the coat rack and knelt beside him to assess his condition.

"Jem? Jem, can you hear me?"

Jem opened one hazel eye. "Yes."

"Good," Faith said, relieved. "Where is everyone? Where is your father?"

"Visiting," Jem breathed. "Miss Cornelia."

"Well, you stay right here," she ordered. "I'm going to phone over for your dad to come home straight away."

Jem moaned. "No. No, I'm fine, Faith. Just need to go back to bed."

"Oh?" Faith said, a lawless smile twitching the corner of her mouth. "And just how do you propose to accomplish such a feat?"

"Help me up the stairs?" he asked, making an attempt at a charming smile.

Faith felt an odd flutter in her stomach. By why should she? Certainly she could help Jem up the stairs if he were awake enough take most of his own weight.

"I might be able to guide you," she said dubiously, "but there's no way I can carry you."

"I can walk," Jem assured her. "Just let me lean on you a bit."

A bit turned out to be rather a lot. By the time they reached the first landing, Faith was flushed herself, both with exertion and with a sudden consciousness of Jem's fever-heated arm around her shoulders that had never before afflicted her.

"Do you think you can make it?" she asked.

"Yes . . ." Jem whispered, unable to say more.

The final few steps were slow going, Jem's chest heaving with each labored breath, and Faith going slightly weak in the knees under his weight. Fortunately, the room Jem and Walter shared was only a few steps from the head of the stairs. Faith sidled through the door and deposited Jem on the bed he had recently abandoned. The bedclothes were still warm under her hand.

"Thanks," he breathed as she covered him with sheet, blanket, and quilt.

Faith shook her head, exasperated. "You should have just stayed in bed in the first place, Jem. Whyever did you come to answer the door?"

Jem was already half asleep, snuggled deep under the covers that Faith was smoothing over his shoulder. With one last breath before he succumbed, he murmured, "I was hoping it might be you . . ."
Susan Baker struggled to open the kitchen door at Ingleside, burdened as she was with an enormous basket of tomatoes from the garden. The next day would be spent in pickling and preserving, but Susan was well satisfied with her harvest, and looking forward to a triumphant cup of tea. Until she heard the sniffling.

Putting down her basket and setting aside her second-best bonnet, Susan searched her kitchen for the source. She discovered it in the window seat beside the chair where she herself often sat to peel potatoes or shell peas.

"Shirley! Whatever is the matter, child?"

Shirley raised a tearstained face to Susan, but did not uncurl himself. It had been several years since Susan had seen him cry like this — after all, big boys of eleven have generally begun to be sensible of their honor.

Shirley sniffed, composing himself. "I am feeling very sore over something, Susan."

Susan settled herself in the chair and reached out a hand to stroke Shirley’s thick, brown hair, reveling in the opportunity. He was such a sturdy, steady little chap, and it had been quite a long time since he had allowed her to caress him so. "Do tell me, dear. Tell old Susan what has hurt you and we shall set it right together."

Shirley hesitated for a moment, but only a moment. He had always run to Susan to be kissed for bumps, and rocked to sleep, and protected from well-deserved spankings, ever since he was small.*

"I was down at the pond today, fishing with Carl," Shirley said. "Andy Reese was hiding in the reeds and he heard me tell Carl that you are like a mother to me, Susan. And he laughed — Andy, not Carl; Carl would never laugh at me — and said that nobody can have two mothers."

Susan felt an odd mixture of delight and indignation. It was sweet beyond reckoning to think that Shirley thought of her as she always thought of herself, as a mother to her little darling. And to hear that Shirley had confessed as much to his best friend? Susan felt warm pride spread through her chest at the very thought.

But to face the calumnies of that little viper Andy Reese at the same time? "Nonsense," Susan said crisply. "Plenty of people have two mothers. Think of Carl — he had a mother when he was born, and now he has Mrs. Meredith, and aren’t they both his mothers?"

"That’s just what Carl said," Shirley nodded. "But Andy said that was different, and that nobody can have two mothers at the same time."

"Well, Andy Reese is a fool. Perhaps he can’t imagine having two mothers because his own is such an old besom that the thought of more than one is a horror to him."

Shirley smiled through his tears at that. "You shouldn’t let Father hear you talk like that, Susan."
"Perhaps not," Susan sniffed. "But I do not see him about at the moment, so it can be our secret, even though anyone with a speck of gumption knows that it is very true indeed."

Shirley's smile drooped a bit. "Andy said you couldn't really love me, Susan. He says that you aren't family, and you might leave us any time you please, because you aren't kin."

Susan resolved to have a word with Mrs. Reese the next time she was so fortunate as to encounter her in an out-of-the-way spot.

"Nonsense, dear," she said stoutly. "I gave you life, just as much as your dear mother did."

"Will you always love me, Susan?" Shirley asked fiercely, as if the question had been building inside him for a long while.

"Listen to the blessed child! Of course, I will always love you! You are my little brown boy and always will be, even when you are quite grown up, and that you may tie to."

"But what if I was very bad, Susan. Would you love me even then?"

"Mercy, child! You couldn't be bad. Such a question!"

"But suppose I was bad. Would you still love me? Even if I grew up to be a . . . a horse thief?"

Susan shook her head in consternation. "Shirley John Blythe, there is no earthly chance of your growing up to be a horse thief. Such a notion! But if it will settle your mind to hear it, yes, I would still love you, even if you were a horse thief."

"Would you still love me if I were a pirate? Or a viking? Plundering ships and burning villages?"

Susan, resigned at this point, answered flatly. "Yes, I would love you if you were a pirate. Or a viking. Or a vampire for that matter."

"Would you love me if I murdered someone?"

"Shirley!" Susan was beginning to become alarmed. "Has Walter been reading you poetry again? I will not have any more of such talk in my kitchen!"

"But would you, Susan?"

Susan looked down into the brown eyes she loved best, eyes clouded with earnest worry, insensible to the ridiculous nature of these outlandish questions. "Yes, I would," she said. Then, for good measure: "There is nothing you could ever do that would make me stop loving you, dear boy, even if I were very cross for a time. You can run down every disreputable possibility and you will never find a one that could make you anything but my own darling."

Shirley nodded gravely. "I love you, Susan," he whispered.

The thing was assumed, but it was rarely spoken. Eleven-year-old boys are not often inclined toward spontaneous expressions of heartfelt affection, and taciturn Shirley was perhaps less inclined than most.

Susan recognized the moment for the gift it was, and stored it away in her heart. In after years, she would visit it often, savoring its sweetness and resolving to do all she could to make herself worthy of this tender, hopeful trust. It had been a promise that was easy to give and harder to keep, but wasn't that true of all vows worth the swearing? For the moment, she put her arms around Shirley...
and hugged him close.

"Now, that's settled," Susan said wiping Shirley's cheeks with the hem of her apron. "And I seem to remember a plate of jam tarts in the pantry, just waiting to be eaten."

Notes:

*Rainbow Valley, Chapter 1: "Home Again"

**lightly paraphrased, Rainbow Valley, Chapter 1: "Home Again"
The paper was palely pink, delicately translucent. *Onionskin*, Jerry thought, though it was a prosy name for something so exquisite. The letter rustled in his hands, its many pages slipping over and through one another, whispering.

There was a pink monogram at the top of each page, demure and tidy, like her script. Of course she had monogrammed letter paper. If Jerry had thought to imagine it, he might have guessed that. But instead, it had been a surprise, falling out of the envelope and into his hands, accompanied by a single breath of lily-of-the-valley scent.

It wasn't an intimacy; she must use this same paper to write to her parents and to the headmaster of Queen's and to the Charlottetown *Guardian* whenever she quibbled with an editorial decision. But Jerry knew something about her that he hadn't known yesterday, and that felt precious, even if it wasn't secret. He wondered what sort of pen she used.

He had read the letter already, of course. Three times, now, or was it four? There was no more to learn from her words, but that didn't stop Jerry wanting to read them again. He settled himself into the old velveteen sofa in the boarding house common room and began again.

So far lost in this reverie, Jerry did not notice Jem until a lean, brown hand plucked the letter from his very fingers.

"And what do we have here?"

Jerry sat up sharply, but affected indifference. "Just a letter."

"A letter from Nan?" Jem raised one ruddy eyebrow and make a show of stifling his smirk.

"A letter from Nan?" Jem raised one ruddy eyebrow and make a show of stifling his smirk.

"Just school stuff."

Jem cleared his throat theatrically and began to read: "*Dear Jerry, You put the question all wrong. It doesn't matter whether Demosthenes' political strategy was sound; it is the quality of his rhetoric that . . .*" Jem fanned the pages in his hands. "Good grief, it goes on like this for ten pages!"

"I'll have that back, thank you," Jerry said, reaching for the letter.

Jem held it away. "Why on earth is Nan writing you tomes about . . ." he squinted at the prim handwriting, " . . . Demosthenes?"

"It's for an assignment."

"Nan's doing your coursework, is she?"

"No," Jerry said, beginning to feel heat blossoming in his cheeks. "We're just discussing it."

Jem grinned. "Oh, ho! In ten-page letters? Dollars to donuts the assignment isn't more than five, if it exists at all."
"I had a question . . . I thought she would have an opinion . . ."

"Well of course she would have an opinion," Jem chortled, "and if she didn't, she would find one in a hurry. But I'm sure we aren't short on opinions around here, are we? No other pretty girls with opinions on Demosthenes?"

"Not that I've met, no."

"We'll have to get you out more."

Jerry had been caught flat-footed by Jem's sudden arrival, but he sensed an opportunity to regain his stance here. "Oh? I would have thought that correspondence was infinitely more fascinating than Redmond social doings these days."

Jem adopted an exaggeratedly thoughtful pose. "Come to think of it, my letters have gotten awfully interesting lately. I had one from Miss Cornelia the other day . . ."

"Miss Cornelia, my foot," Jerry muttered. "I know Faith's handwriting well enough."

"Do you?"

"Ever since we got back to Kingsport, you've had a letter a week at least."

"And none of them ten-page essays on Demosthenes, I assure you."

Jerry had to smile at that. No, only Nan would send a ream of petal paper, written small and close, on Athenian oratory.

"May I please have it back?" Jerry asked, standing on his dignity.

Jem rolled his eyes and offered up the papers. "Does this mean that the two of you are going to be insufferable when the girls come out to Redmond?"

Jerry folded the letter back into its envelope and tucked it safely away in the interior pocket of his jacket. "I can only hope."
"Look for the ones that are moving against the flow," Carl said.

Una had her skirts tucked up in the waistband of her apron, wading calf-deep in the little reed-lined lagoon by the harbor shore. The water was calm here on the broad, flat expanse of pebbled sand, and the tides gentle.

"How do you tell them apart from the dog whelks?" Una asked. "They look so similar."

"Well of course they do," Carl replied. "They live in whelk shells, don't they? That's why you have to watch for the movement." He pushed a fall of golden-brown hair out of his eyes with a slender hand and scrutinized the seabed beneath his toes.

Una followed Carl's lead, peering through the gentle undulation of the subtle waves. She stood still lest she disturb the sand and cloud the cold, clear water lapping against her legs.

"Unfocuse your eyes a bit," Carl advised. "Just look for motion going off in an unexpected direction."

It seemed counterintuitive to blur her vision in order to find something, but Una followed her brother's instructions. The pebbles and shells merged into an undifferentiated mass of dark, rounded shapes. Some rolled gently with the water, rocking in time with one another.

A twitch against the flow caught Una's eye. She sharpened her gaze, darted her hand into the water, and stood up, grasping her prize between her fingers.

"I got one!"

Carl waded over to see.

"Well done, Una! That's a big one!"

The hermit crab lay quiescent in Una's damp palm, retracted so far into its brown-and-white whorl of shell that only the tips of its tiny pincers showed.

"It's scared," Una whispered.

"Of course it is," said Carl.

He reached gentle fingers toward Una's hand and righted the crab. Then, he dribbled cool water over her skin, forming a little pool in her cupped hand.

"Wee, sleekit, cowerin' beastie, O, what a panic's in thy breastie!" Carl crooned.

As if called by his voice, the hermit crab fanned its fanged legs and emerged. Two shining black eyes waved on the ends of stalks; delicate feelers of red and white reached out to test the air, the water, Una's palm beneath its feet.
Carl grinned; so did Una.

"It tickles," Una said as the creature began to scuttle along her fingers. "But won't it pinch me?"

"Nah," Carl assured her. "It's much too small. People are afraid of them sometimes, but they're completely harmless. All it wants is to be left alone."

"Shouldn't we put it back, then?"

Carl nodded. Una lowered her hand into the water, all the way to the bottom, and watched the hermit crab skitter away, camouflaging itself among the rocks.

"I never would have thought to unfocus my eyes," Una said, drying her hands on her bunched skirts. "How did you learn to do that?"

Carl smiled. "Every creature has its ways. If you really want to see it, you have to approach it on its own terms, not yours. Lots of people only have one way of looking at things, but they miss so much."

"What did you call it?" Una asked. "Wee, sleekit . . ."

"Wee, sleekit, cowerin' beastie," Carl grinned. "From Robert Burns: 'To a Mouse.' One day, Burns accidentally disturbed a mouse nest with his plough. So he wrote an apology to the mouse for exposing it when all it wanted to do was live a quiet, mouse-y life. You must have heard parts of it: The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men gang aft agley!"

"Oh, yes, I do recognize that," Una nodded, smiling at Carl's obvious enthusiasm. "Your favorite, is it?"

Instead of answering, Carl began to recite. It was a charming poem, and Carl inflected the Scots vocabulary with his genuine affection for every poor earth-born companion and fellow-mortal.

At the last verse, though, he turned from Una and seemed to address the hermit crab, still visible beneath the quiet sway of the lagoon.

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

When the final lines had settled to the surface of the water and filtered down to the half-glimpsed world below, Una stepped up beside Carl and took his cool, wet hand in hers. They stood for a while, together, in the gentle, sheltered pool at the edge of the vast Atlantic.
Walter Blythe approached the dyke of the old Methodist graveyard carrying a book and a sheaf of papers.

"Hello, Una!" he called to the slender, black-haired girl seated cross-legged on Hezekiah Pollock's tombstone. "You're just the person I was looking for!"

Una Meredith looked up from her own book at this greeting, her dark blue eyes gone quite round. "Me?" she squeaked.

Walter hopped over the top of the dyke, wending his way through the old gravestones until he had reached the place where she sat. "Yes, you," he said, smiling as he took his place beside her. "Unless there's someone else named Una in Glen St. Mary."

"I've never even heard of another Una, let alone met one," Una murmured.

"Well, I certainly have," said Walter, tapping the crimson-covered volume in his lap. "That's what I wanted to show you."

Walter had been hard at work on an essay for half the term and had thought of Una all through the writing of it. Professor Griswold had been suitably impressed with the end result and had even nominated Walter's paper for one of the end-of-year prizes in the English department.

Walter opened the book to its title page and passed it to Una with a smile.

"The Faerie Queene, by Edmund Spenser," she read in a shy, sweet voice.

"Have you ever read this?" Walter asked, with the enthusiasm he reserved for discussing literature of a particular vintage and sensibility.

Una only shook her head.

"It's an epic poem," Walter explained, "published in 1590. It's all knights and ladies and allegorical dragons. Spenser dedicated it to the glory of Queen Elizabeth."

Una turned several pages reverently, fingers brushing the margins where Walter's penciled notes indicated rhythm and meter, inference and metaphor. She paused at an intricate woodcut illustration showing a knight and a lady lounging together in a leafy clearing.

"That's the Redcrosse Knight," Walter said, pointing to the warrior whose brave shield and emblem were displayed in the lower right-hand corner. "And that is Lady Una."

"Lady Una?" Una echoed.

"Yes. We studied Spenser this term in our English literature course. We had to write about symbolism in The Faerie Queene for our final essay and I thought you might be interested to see what I wrote."
Walter handed Una the papers he carried and pointed to the title on the cover sheet.

"Una and the Redcrosse Knight, by Walter Blythe," she read.

Walter leaned over and began pointing out some of the main points. "It all starts with her name. Una. Representing unity, wholeness, and Truth-with-a-capital-T. It's also a play on an Irish name, Oona, which means lamb. And Lady Una has a lamb at her side — it represents Christ and tenderness and mercy. There's also a part where she gentles a lion. It's an allusion to Isaiah."

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion . . ." Una quoted.*

"Exactly," Walter smiled. "The lion becomes her faithful companion and mauls anyone who tries to do her harm when she gets separated from the Redcrosse knight."

"They get separated?"

"Yes, but never fear. They have all sorts of adventures with Arthur and Merlin, and there's a magnificent battle where the knight battles a dragon that has captured Una's family."

"And you wrote an essay about it?" Una asked. "Did you . . . get good marks?"

Walter laughed. "Yes, very good marks! But it's funny — I wasn't even thinking of my grades while I was writing it. It was such a pleasure that it didn't feel like work. And no matter what the marks, I thought you'd be glad to know a bit about your name. Have you ever wondered where your parents got it?"

"I have," Una admitted shyly, "but I've never asked. Jerry is named for our grandfather; Faith is faith of course; Carl is named for a philosopher Father admires. And I . . ."

Walter did not fill the silence of her hesitation.

"I wonder," Una said softly, "whether my mother knew The Faerie Queene."

"She might have," Walter nodded. "Could you ask your father?"

Una blushed. "I don't think so. I wouldn't want to make him sad, speaking of Mother."

Walter considered for a moment. "You may be right. It might hurt him to speak of her. But I think it might also hurt never to speak of someone you loved and lost."

Even as he said it, a poem blossomed in Walter's mind. An unspoken, unspeakable love. A name like a magic spell, with the power to break and the power to heal, as in the ancient sagas . . .

Una looked down at the page under her hand. "I can hardly understand the words," she said. "They're a bit . . . different, aren't they?"

"Yes," Walter conceded. "This edition has the old 16th-century spellings. But if you read it aloud, it's easy enough to understand. Here, I'll show you."

Walter cleared his throat and read a stanza from the third canto, leaning over Una's shoulder to see:

The day is spent, and commeth drowsie night,  
When every creature shrowded is in sleepe;  
Sad Una downe her laies in wearey plight,  
And at her feet the Lyon watch doth keepe:
Instead of rest, she does lament, and weep
For the late losse of her deare loved knight,
And sighes, and grones, and evermore does steepe
Her tender breast in bitter teares all night,
All night she thinks too long, and often lookes for light.

When he had finished, Walter looked down and was surprised to see a tear clinging to Una's dark lashes.

"Are you alright, Una?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she sniffed. "It's just . . . very beautiful."

Walter nodded. "Una, would you like to have this book — to keep?"

"Yes — if you can give it to me," Una said quietly.

"I'd be happy to," Walter smiled. "I don't think the Lowbridge scholars will be quite ready for Spenser. And here, the essay, too. I copied it over for you."

"You did? Why?"

Walter shrugged. "I just thought you might like to have it."

"Thank you," said Una. It was all she said, but there was something in her voice which repaid Walter for his thoughtful gesture.

He hopped down from the tombstone and made an exaggerated bow to the modest damsel seated there. "At your service, Lady Una."

Smiling, Walter took his leave to seek out a quiet corner of Rainbow Valley in which to write his poem of magic names. He did not pause to glance back toward the pale figure, alone among the graves.

Notes:

*Isaiah 11:6, KJV

**Rilla of Ingleside, Chapter 23: "And So, Goodnight"
Jem Blythe sat alone at the big table in the boarding house common room, books and papers heaped in untidy piles around him. His lamp burned low; his pencil had long since gone dull. Still, he scribbled, pausing every minute or two to check a diagram or a figure. This wasn't that difficult. He just had to apply himself.

"Well, here's a sight you don't see every night," said Jerry Meredith, appearing in the doorway in his dressing gown. "It's not even final exam time."

Jem looked up, frowning. "I thought you'd gone to bed."

"It's two o'clock in the morning. Everyone's gone to bed."

"Well, I'm studying," Jem scowled, turning back to his work.

"Why?"

Instead of answering, Jem rummaged under one of the piles. He drew out a midterm examination booklet marked "Chemistry" and tossed it to Jerry.

Jerry flipped it open and grimaced. "Well, you didn't quite manage to fail outright . . ."

Jem rolled his eyes.

"So now you're trying to catch up on a whole term of chemistry? In one night?"

"The professor called me in for a word," Jem said, dropping his pencil with a sigh.

"That bad, is it?" Jerry asked, taking a seat.

"The words your father featured prominently."

Jerry winced. "Sorry about that."

"You'd think the giant plaques everywhere would be reminder enough," Jem muttered, pushing back from the table.

He knew he was being unfair. There weren't plaques everywhere. Only the honor roll in the chemistry department. And the biology department. And the list of class presidents in the political science department. And the trophies in the display case outside the gymnasium. And the shelf of prize-winning theses in the lobby of the Medical School library. The only one that was really and truly giant was the Cooper Prize plaque in the main hall of the administrative building. That one even had a photo.

"You're a perfectly fine all-around student," Jerry assured Jem.* "Your study habits could be better, but you're no dunce. It's not fair to compare yourself."

* Footnote: Original text did not contain a footnote.
"I don't. Everyone else does."

"Well, that isn't fair either," said loyal Jerry. "But I never heard your dad brag."

"That makes it worse. He's humble, too," Jem snorted. "You know, we grew up with all those stories: winner of the Cooper Prize, captain of the football team, class president, Lambda Theta. All that. I just thought it was normal. I didn't have any idea what it meant til I came to Kingsport."

"It is pretty impressive," Jerry admitted.

"Can you imagine someone like that around here now?" Jem asked. "Someone that good at everything? We'd all hate his guts."

"Oh, I can imagine someone like that alright. Tall, handsome . . ."

Jem threw a wadded-up paper across the table, striking Jerry in the chest. "Pffft. Without the brains, though."

"Your brains are fine. Maybe buckle down to books a bit more consistently. I don't know how you and Faith plan to pass any classes at all."

Jem grinned. "Well, she is very distracting. I'll have to ask Dad how he managed to court Mum and still study enough to take the Cooper Prize."

Jerry furrowed his brow in Jem's direction. "Well, he didn't."

"What do you mean?" Jem asked.

"Oh come on, you must know that story," Jerry said, perplexed. "Your parents weren't together when they were at Redmond."

"I know they had some sort of quarrel," Jem said, frowning. "But I generally try not to know too many details about my parents' romance."

Jerry crossed his arms. "You're telling me you don't know about the time your dad proposed and your mother turned him down flat?"

Jem stared. "No. And how do you know?"

"I heard your mother tell it to Rosemary once," Jerry shrugged. "They were talking about near-misses in romance, and how Rosemary refused my father because of Aunt Ellen. And your mother said that turning down your dad's proposal in college was the worst mistake she ever made."

"She turned him down?" Jem couldn't quite wrap his head around the concept.

"Yeah. He proposed. I think she said their sophomore year? And she sent him packing. They hardly spoke after that, the whole rest of the time they were at Redmond. Then some rich Kingsport man came on the scene and started courting your mother. She almost married him. She and your dad didn't make it up until after he had typhoid. And that was after graduation."

Jem was stunned. "I guess I had a vague idea that they had some sort of falling out, but I definitely didn't know all that."

"See?" Jerry smiled. "Your dad had plenty of time to study for the Cooper. No distractions. What would you do, if Faith pitched you?"
Jem shuddered. "Don't even joke!"

Jerry seemed unable to resist needling him. "If Faith refused you and you still had to see her around campus? You might shut yourself up in the library, too."

"I might," Jem muttered, but then unleashed another dazzling grin. "But I don't think there's much chance of that. She's dead gone on me."

"Cocky bastard," Jerry laughed, flinging the paper ball back at Jem.

"Well, I may not be Cooper Prize material, but I'm reasonably certain she likes me fine anyway. Besides, I don't spend all my time with her. I do have a job, you know."

"How's that going?" Jerry asked. "Close to paying Mr. Ford back for his sailboat?"

"Getting closer," said Jem. "I hope I'll be done by summer."

Jerry shook his head. "Two years of scut work at the hospital for a boat that's in pieces at the bottom of the harbor. I hope it was worth it."

Jem grinned again. "Don't worry. It was."

"You know," Jerry said judiciously, "that if you weren't my best friend I'd have to challenge you to a duel or something. Can't you and Faith be a little more discreet?"

"Why do you think we were sailing out all the way out to Gull Island?"

"And then wrecking so that every boat in the harbor had to spend a night and a day searching for you? Oh yes, very quiet. I'm sure everyone in the Glen has quite forgotten."

"It was an accident," Jem answered comfortably. "I was a perfect gentleman, I assure you."

Jerry snorted. "You do know that there is a difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law, right?"

"You've got nothing on me, Your Honor, and never will," Jem smirked.

"And just what are your intentions toward my sister, Mr. Blythe?"

Jem raised an eyebrow. "Is that a secret? I'd marry her tomorrow if I didn't have two more years of medical school ahead of me."

Jerry turned serious. "Have you proposed?"

"No, but I will."

"She's only 18, Jem."

"Thus my not having proposed yet." Jem sighed. "I wonder what made Dad propose when they were at Redmond, knowing he still had medical school ahead of him."

"I wonder why your mother said no," Jerry said. "It's hard to imagine."

Jem shook his head. "I have no idea. Must have been a nasty shock for Dad, though."

"I'll say. It sounds like he had everything else going for him."
"I guess I never really thought about it before," said Jem, pensively. "Everything could have been different. What if she'd married that rich fellow? What if they never moved to Glen St. Mary? It's hard to imagine things turning out any other way."

"Well, you wouldn't be here to imagine it," Jerry observed. "And I'd be very lonely."

"Nah, you'd just have a different best friend. And some other girl."

"Don't even joke."

Jem was still mulling things over. "I never really thought about Dad, either. How did he end up in the Glen? Think about the kind of student who could take the Cooper Prize. He could have gone to a big hospital in Toronto, or maybe even London. Been a famous surgeon or a medical school dean. Why did he go back to the Island? Not even to Charlottetown, but to Glen St. Mary?"

Jerry shrugged. "I dunno. But your dad's always seemed pretty happy to me."

"I always thought so," Jem agreed. "But I didn't realize what a star he must have been."

"Well, what do you want to do when you're a doctor?" Jerry asked. "Work at a big hospital in the city?"

"Nah. Even if I were a top student, that's not for me. I want to do what Dad does. Serve a community. I think I'd be good at it."

"Sure you don't want a big adventure? A chance to do your dad one better?"

"Nope," Jem said contentedly. "A quiet life for me. Give me Faith and a general practice and I'll be happy. Two and a half years from now, I'll have everything I ever wanted."

"As long as Faith says yes," Jerry teased.

"I'm not worried about that. I'm more worried about passing first-year chemistry."

"You can see your whole life stretched out in front of you, can't you?"

Jem grinned. "Yep. And I like the look of it."

Notes:

*Jem "had always been a sturdy, reliable little chap. He never broke a promise. He was not a great talker. His teachers did not think him brilliant, but he was a good, all-round student. He never took things on faith; he always liked to investigate the truth of a statement for himself." Rainbow Valley, chapter 3: "The Ingleside Children"

**Based on comments in The Blythes are Quoted, the Blythe children did not necessarily know all about their parents' history.

Jem: "Do you mean to say, mums, that you and dad were on bad terms when you went to school?"

Gilbert: "Your mother thought she had a grudge against me, but I always wanted to be friends. However, that is all ancient history now."

... Jem (to Nan): "When dad and mums get to talking like that, we find out a lot about their early days we never knew."
Additionally, Anne floors Di with a reference to her own childhood in *Anne of Ingleside*. So I'm interpreting that as them not always knowing all the backstory.
Peace on Earth, Good-will to Men

December, 1912

Walter paused by the old Methodist graveyard, looking up at the golden glow of the manse. Through the frost-rimed windows, he could see that the sitting room was crowded with young people chatting, canoodling, and laughing over glasses of ruby-red punch. Jem and Jerry were home from Redmond and the Queen's contingent had arrived yesterday. On arrival, Faith had sent a note over to Lowbridge:

_We mean to get up a little pre-Christmas party at the manse tomorrow evening. Father and Rosemary have taken Bruce to visit the over-harbor Wests, so it will just be our own friends, with everyone back from the ends of the earth for the holiday. Won't you come join us, Walter?_

Walter leaned on his bicycle and sighed. It had been a cold and slippery ride from Lowbridge. Six miles, but it felt longer. His head had ached all through school today and he had nearly fallen asleep halfway through demonstrating a proof of Euclidean prime numbers. He wished himself in bed, feeling a sudden, childlike longing for Ingleside and the weight of familiar quilts. Perhaps he would only stay a little while . . .

Trudging up the ice-encrusted walk and onto the porch, Walter knocked at the manse door. It opened, releasing a puff of warm air that rushed out to engulf him.

"Walter!" Di exclaimed, dragging him into the hall. "We thought you mightn't have gotten Faith's note!"

"How's the party?" Walter asked, shrugging off his coat and leaving drips of cold mud on the mat.

"Well, you missed Nan and Jerry going three rounds on the causes of the Thirty Years' War," Di groaned. "Apparently there is disagreement over whether it was primarily a religious conflict pitting Catholic against Protestant, or the birth-pangs of the modern nation-states as they transitioned from medieval to modern forms of government."

"I take it that the question remains unresolved?"

Di chuckled. "Faith finally shoved some fruitcake into their mouths and sent them to their respective corners. It was getting tedious."

Di led Walter into the sitting room, where firelight and the scents of cinnamon and spruce enfolded the company in mellow merriment. Walter nodded greetings to Mary Vance and Miller Douglas, squashed into a single armchair. He settled into a miraculously vacant seat by the fire, surveying the jolly crowd. Over by the upright piano, Jem was telling a garrulous story to Carl and Shirley's rapt delight. Faith was running back and forth from the kitchen, calling to an unseen Una and passing plates of cookies among the chattering guests. Di had gone to conference with Nan, who was smiling and nodding eagerly. Jerry was deep in conversation with Gertrude Oliver on some point — if Gertrude was here, surely Rilla was around somewhere? Walter had an overwhelming impression of buzzing and too-bright lights and a curious heaviness in his limbs.

Suddenly, Walter's head rang. No; no, it was only a bell. Nan was ringing a bell. Must she? And
with such enthusiasm?

"Listen, everyone," Nan called, her voice sweet and clear. "We're going to sing carols! I've copied out some lyrics and Una has agreed to play for us."

Una Meredith slipped from her seat and moved toward the piano, ducking her head shyly as the boys made way for her. She shuffled through the sheet music on the rack and held one up for Nan to see.

"Excellent!" Nan beamed. "Christmas Bells!" She scooped a little stack of cards from the table beside her and distributed them among the guests. There weren't quite enough to go around, but that only gave the revelers excuses to get close to one another, giggling and leaning familiarly over shoulders for a better view.

Una settled her fingers over the piano keys and plinked a gentle introduction. At Nan's signal, the partygoers joined in with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's much-beloved words.

_I heard the bells on Christmas Day_  
_Their old, familiar carols play,_  
_And wild and sweet_  
_The words repeat_  
_Of peace on earth, good-will to men!_  

_And thought how, as the day had come,_  
_The belfries of all Christendom_  
_Had rolled along_  
_The unbroken song_  
_Of peace on earth, good-will to men!_  

Walter did not sing, though this had always been one of his favorite carols. He loved the image of Christmas Day dawning continuously over the earth from East to West, welcomed in every moment by another bell taking up the joyous peal. He closed his eyes, and let the words flow over him.

_Till ringing, singing on its way,_  
_The world revolved from night to day,_  
_A voice, a chime_  
_A chant sublime_  
_Of peace on earth, good-will to men!_  

Walter opened his eyes when he heard the next verse begin. Nan's doing, he knew. Most people didn't bother to sing the middle section, but Nan loved Longfellow, too, and would not abridge him.

_Then from each black, accursed mouth_  
_The cannon thundered in the South,_  
_And with the sound_  
_The carols drowned_  
_Of peace on earth, good-will to men!_  

Walter's breath caught. He remembered Professor Griswold's lecture on Longfellow's biography: how Longfellow's wife had burned to death in their home, despite Longfellow's efforts to smother the flames with his own body; how the poet's famous beard camouflaged the physical scars he bore for the rest of his life; how his 18-year-old son Charley had run away to fight in the American Civil War soon after; how Longfellow had penned "Christmas Bells" sitting by Charley's hospital bed, uncertain whether the boy would ever recover from the terrible wounds he had suffered in battle.
It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

The singers were doing very well for an informal gathering. Of course, most of them knew the song already — at least the first verses and the last. And Una played very sweetly.

Walter felt unaccountably moved by them all. Perhaps it was only that he was so very tired, but the familiar faces around him shimmered in the hearthlight, strong and happy and beautiful in their youth and vigor. Now that the less familiar verses were past, they looked up from their lyric sheets, smiling at one another as they crescendoed into the finale.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men.

As the final notes dropped from Una’s fingers, Walter was confused to find the room moving around him, even as he sat still. He blinked, but could not clear his head. He caught one last sight of Jem, looking alarmed and moving toward him fast, before blackness closed around him from every side and he slumped in the chair, unconscious.
Anne unpacked the little satchel of books, setting each volume on the single shelf by the window. The room was bare, but she had brought a few things from home to make it more comfortable. The books were most important. Coleridge and Keats, Wordsworth and Scott, and the much-beloved, raggedy-spined Tennyson. A scrapbook of Longfellow's sea poems that Walter had compiled himself in his boyhood completed the collection.*

Anne turned to Walter, lying so still and pale in the hospital bed. Gilbert had insisted on admitting him to the hospital in Charlottetown once it became apparent that Walter would have his own passage perilous with typhoid. At the moment, Anne could hear Gilbert out in the hall, conferring with the Charlottetown doctors, asking about new treatments they might try.**

As quietly as possible, Anne moved the room's lone chair closer to the bedside. Sitting, she rested her elbows on the apple leaf quilt she had spread over her unconscious son, and prayed a while. She had kept this vigil before, and seen her prayers answered. If love could save him, he would be saved; if it couldn't, at least Anne would know that she had never left his side.

*How beautiful he is,* she thought, watching the shallow rise and fall of Walter's chest. Though pale and gaunt from his illness, there was no mistaking the delicate curves of brow and cheek, the long black lashes and thick, dark hair, the nose that anyone might be proud of. In repose, he looked so much younger than nineteen.

*He will recover. He has a long life ahead of him. And so many poems to write.*

Anne turned in her seat and reached for one of the books on the shelf. Not the Tennyson, nor the gilt-edged Wordsworth. She chose instead the little scrapbook, feeling the need to see Walter's neat, steady handwriting on its pages. The words were not his own, but he had chosen these poems out of love, and Anne wanted to give them back to him now.

"Seaweed, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow" she began:

> When descends on the Atlantic  
> The gigantic  
> Storm-wind of the equinox,  
> Landward in his wrath he scourges  
> The toiling surges,  
> Laden with seaweed from the rocks:

Anne remembered the first time she had read this poem to Walter. He couldn't have been more than eight or nine. How he had thrilled to the cadence, rhymes doubling back on themselves like waves: breaker and eddy and undertow.

"Was Longfellow Canadian, Mummy?" he had asked.

"No, dearest. A Yankee."
"Oh," Walter said, disappointed. "It sounded as if he knew our shore."

"I think he was from Maine," Anne mused. "That's not so very far from here, and I suspect the sea there is similar."

"I will never look at seaweed the same way again after this," Walter said, dreamily. "I will always wonder whether it is a visitor from some far-off, bright Azore."

"What of the other stanzas?" Anne had coaxed. "What do you think when you hear this one?

So when storms of wild emotion
Strike the ocean
Of the poet's soul, ere long
From each cave and rocky fastness,
In its vastness,
Floats some fragment of a song."

Walter frowned. "Do you think a poet really needs storms of wild emotion to write? Can't you write just as well when you are happy and calm?"

"Sometimes, you can," Anne assured him. "There are some stories that are best told when we are content and all is right with the world. But I think Longfellow knew that a poet must put his own joys and sorrows and fears into his work if it is going to be worth sharing."

"I have plenty of joys," Walter said, considering. "But I don't think I really have any sorrows. Nor fears, either, except maybe of ugliness. I love for things to be beautiful and hate to see them spoiled."

"Then you should write from joy," Anne smiled. "I hope you will not have too many sorrows, Walter. But, as Longfellow tells us elsewhere, Into each life a little rain must fall.*** And when it does, you will write from that."

He will write. He will recover and he will write.

In the hospital room, Anne persevered, hoping that the insistent rhythm of Longfellow's words would reach Walter, soothing him as no cool cloth or gentle touch could.

Ever drifting, drifting, drifting
On the shifting
Currents of the restless heart;
Till at length in books recorded,
They, like hoarded
Household words, no more depart.

"Mummy?"

Anne lifted streaming eyes from the page and saw that Walter was awake. It had been many years since he had called her by that name, and she thought that she must sob. But her boy needed her strength now, and she would not give in to fear.

"Hello, sweetheart," she said, taking his lax, white hand between her own. "You're in a hospital. But you're doing very well. Dad's off talking to the doctors, and I'm here. I'm right here."

"Mummy?" Walter whispered. "Read it again?"
Notes:

*"Walter had been reading Longfellow's sea poems to the others and they were steeped in the beauty and mystery of the ships." *Rainbow Valley*, chapter 29. LMM quotes and references Longfellow many, many times and I will continue to be an obnoxious fangirl about it.

**"When Walter was in the hospital with typhoid last year I was almost crazy,' sighed Rilla, a little importantly. 'They never told me how ill he really was until it was all over — father wouldn't let them." *Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 2.

***Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Rainy Day"
Di Blythe leaned against the White Lady, absorbed in her book. Walter had ordered it from Charlottetown after one of their recent heart-to-hearts and it had become one of her dearest treasures as soon as she beheld the cover. She caressed it as she read, running her fingers over the embossed Staff of Hermes and the title: A Country Doctor by Sarah Orne Jewett.*

The first time she had opened it, Di couldn't help laughing. The main character was an orphan named Nan. Of course, it was silly to imagine her own twin traveling around the countryside, visiting patients, dreaming of going to medical school instead of getting married . . .

What's in a name anyway?

Not for the first time, Di wondered how her parents had chosen which of them would be Nan and which would be Di. Perhaps it was already obvious from the minute she was born that she would have red hair. In that case, perhaps they had decided that two redheaded Annes would be too many. But the newborn babies Di had seen were mostly bald. And some of them started out black-haired and turned blonde, or vice versa. Perhaps Mother and Dad had just picked at random.

What if I had been Nan and Nan had been Di?

Would this novel feel like even more of a sign? It was already uncanny in so many ways. Orphan Nan, cared for by Dr. Leslie and his old-fashioned, gruff-but-secretly-tender housekeeper, Marilla. And as for Dr. Leslie . . . Di ran her finger down the page:

There was something singularly self-reliant and composed about him; one felt that he was the wielder of great powers over the enemies, disease and pain, and that his brave hazel eyes showed a rare thoughtfulness and foresight.

Di knew that it was only a series of coincidences. Sarah Orne Jewett had written this book decades ago, when Mother and Dad were no older than she was now. And Walter had told her that it was based on Jewett's own childhood with her physician father.

"Did she ever become a doctor?" Di had asked.

"No. A writer, of course," Walter chuckled.

"Oh." Di should have realized that. "I suppose she got married, though?"

Walter hesitated. Looking down at his younger sister, he seemed to decide something. "Not exactly . . ." he said slowly. "Di, you've read Henry James, right? The Bostonians?"

"Yes . . ." she answered carefully. She couldn't have hidden The Bostonians — all three volumes of it — from Walter, especially when they spent so much of their time together reading. It had taken her half of last summer to get through it once, though only another two weeks to get through it again. Even so, she had managed to deflect any discussion of it and Walter had never pressed.
"You remember Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant from that novel?" Walter asked.

Di blushed. She was unlikely to forget them.

Walter was blushing himself. "Yes. Well. As they say, a Boston marriage. Sarah Orne Jewett lived for many years with Annie Fields, the widow of a famous publisher in Boston. Henry James admired her greatly."

"Oh," Di said again. In September, she would be back in town with the public library close at hand and the bookshops besides. If Sarah Orne Jewett had written a line, Di resolved to read it.

At present, she turned her attention back to A Country Doctor.

[Nan] might be seen every day by the doctor's side, as if he could not make his morning rounds without her; and in and out of the farm-houses she went, following him like a little dog, or, as Marilla scornfully expressed it, a briar at his heels; sitting soberly by when he dealt his medicines and gave advice, listening to his wise and merry talk with some, and his helpful advice and consolation to others of the country people.

Di sighed. In the months since Dad had first let her come along on a call, she had seized every opportunity she could. It was never enough. She never tired of seeing Dad work, or of helping in any little way she could. Yet, it never seemed to turn into anything more. She might go on a thousand calls, but all anyone saw was a dutiful daughter assisting her father.

As they drove home together in the bright noon sunshine, he said, as if the question were asked for the sake of joking a little, "What are you going to do when you grow up, Nan?" to which she answered gravely, as if it were the one great question of her life, "I should like best to be a doctor."

Ever since she could remember, everyone had known that Jem would be a doctor. How many times had she heard Dad say that Jem had the hands of a "born surgeon"? Or Mother refer casually to his going to medical school, even while he was still at Queen's? Jem assumed it himself. No one ever assumed that Di would go to medical school. She could barely let herself imagine it.

But why shouldn't she? If Nan Prince could be a doctor, why shouldn't Di Blythe do the same?

Nan Prince never married.

True enough. But Sarah Orne Jewett . . .

It seems to me like stealing, for men and women to live in the world and do nothing to make it better. You have thought a great deal about this, and so have I, and now we will do the best we can at making a good doctor of you. I don't care whether people think it is a proper vocation for women or not. It seems to me that it is more than proper for you, and God has given you a fitness for it which it is a shame to waste.

Notes:

*Sarah Orne Jewett, A Country Doctor (1884)

**Rilla of Ingleside, Chapter 3: "Moonlit Mirth"
"We are so late!" Jerry muttered, pulling on his gloves as he and Jem jogged up the long drive to the elegant estate hosting the Queen's Academy convocation dance.

"No use bellyaching over it now," Jem scoffed. "Besides, what were you going to do to make the ferry go faster? Row?"

"If there had been oars, I would have," Jerry snapped. The Kingsport ferry had been three hours late. Three hours! On any other trip, it wouldn't have mattered, but Jerry had been dreaming of this night for weeks. And now it was almost certainly ruined. If only he hadn't had to stay at Redmond for that history exam . . .

"I see Faith and Di," Jem said, waving.

Jerry spotted them, too. Standing by the lilac bushes near the deserted entrance, both girls were dressed in their evening gowns, chatting. Di looked fresh and pretty in green, her long, red hair falling over her shoulders in ringlets. Faith, stunning in sapphire, wore her hair up like a grown woman. Well, Jerry thought, she was 18 now, and Di wouldn't be until August.

When Faith caught sight of Jem, she squealed and ran down the drive into his arms. Jem gave a whoop and whirled her around, stopping only to kiss her soundly right there in the middle of the empty lane.

Jerry did not pause to admonish them.

As if they'd hear me anyway.

"Hello, Di," he said, adjusting his white bowtie as he reached her.

"Late enough?" Di asked, shaking her head.

"The ferry was late!" Jerry protested. "There was nothing we could do!"

"Well, the first set is half over already. You'll be lucky if she has any openings at all on her card!"

"I know. I know!" As if Jerry hadn't been muttering the same thing to himself all the way through Charlottetown. "Was she very upset when Arthur canceled on her?"

Di shrugged. "She was a little disappointed. But since Faith and I were going without escorts, she didn't have to walk in alone. And she wasn't in the room a minute before she started getting dance requests. The Gold Medalist is in high demand, as you might expect."

"I know." Jerry was swamped by another wave of disappointment. All this planning and now . . .

"Here's your ticket," Di said, holding out an embossed card. "What are you waiting for?"

"Thanks, Di," Jerry said, swallowing.
"Get in there!"

Jerry obeyed, leaving Jem and the girls behind. In the foyer, a hostess took his ticket and waved him through to the ballroom, crowded with Queen's students celebrating their graduation. Jerry paused to make sure his coattails were in order, then plunged into the humming throng.

*How will I ever find her in this crowd?*

Jerry remembered the letter that Di had sent, going over the details of the plan; Nan's dress would be yellow. That was lucky; not many girls looked good in yellow, so she should stand out among the more common blues and greens. Jerry scanned the crowd. Blue, blue, red, green, blue, pink... *yellow.*

Yellow? Was Di joking? Nan's dress wasn't yellow. It was a pale, soft gold, with something glittery in the netting over the silk. As she waltzed past in the arms of some unknown boy — whom Jerry hated on sight — she shimmered like candlelight. If Jerry had any breath left, he would have laughed; trust Nan to have an appropriate dress on hand in case she happened to win the Gold Medal. He wondered briefly what she would have done if she had lost.

The dance ended and the conductor of the orchestra announced a 10-minute intermission.

*Excellent.*

Jerry pushed his way through the crowd to the spot where Nan's partner was bowing and taking his leave.

*Bye.*

Nan had her back to Jerry, her thick, nut-brown hair bouncing as she bobbed a curtsey in farewell to the boy.

Jerry took a deep breath. "Excuse me, miss. Does the Gold Medalist have any dances left on her card?"

Nan whirled around, eyes wide with shock. "Jerry!"

He smiled, heart racing at sight of her rapturous expression. "Congratulations, Nan! As one Queen's Gold Medalist to another, I salute your achievement." He bowed formally, rising to find her blushing furiously.

"Jerry!" she gasped. "How? How did you get here? How did you get in?"

"Di gave me her guest ticket," Jerry shrugged.

"Di . . . ? But, she said she and Faith were just going to come together since Jem . . . wait, is Jem here with you? I thought he was staying in Kingsport through convocation."

"He's around here somewhere," Jerry said vaguely, not wanting to waste any of the precious intermission.

"It's very lucky Faith doesn't have an escort," Nan said. "Practically everyone asked her, you know."

"I'm sure they did. And how is it that you don't have an escort? I would have thought the Gold Medalist would have been much sought-after as a partner."

"Well, I did have one," Nan said, furrowing her brow. "Arthur Morrison. You must know him; he's
a friend of Jem's. But he cancelled on me at the very last min . . ."

Nan's face froze in the middle of her thought. Jerry knew he couldn't possibly keep a straight face for another second. The muscles of his cheeks quivered as he tried to hold back a grin.

"This is a set-up!" Nan cried, her lovely brown eyes flashing with what Jerry fervently hoped was delight. She was smiling, wasn't she?

"But . . ." Nan's face fell. "Jerry, you should have told me you were coming! I wouldn't have filled up my dance card. And now I've promised all these dances . . ."

"I'm sorry, Nan," Jerry said, meaning it. "We were supposed to get in hours ago, but the ferry was delayed. I was supposed to come surprise you at your boarding house and be your escort from the first. But we just got in twenty minutes ago. We changed on the ferry and ran all the way here. I'm sorry I'm so late."

"I am, too," she said, blushing prettily. "I . . . I would have been glad to have you as my escort."

All at once, Jerry felt his disappointment melt away. So what if Nan didn't dance with him tonight? They had a whole summer in the Glen ahead of them. And soon enough, she would come to Redmond. There would be plenty of dances in Kingsport, far away from the watchful eyes of Glen folk who disapproved of the minister's children dancing at all. No, Jerry didn't care if Nan danced with every boy in this room except him, as long as she kept blushing like that when he looked at her.

Once more in command of his face, Jerry took Nan's hand lightly in the tips of his fingers and kissed it decorously.

"In that case, Miss Blythe, I must leave you to attend to your many admirers. But perhaps I may see you home at the end of the evening?"

Nan nodded, glowing pink to the ears.

Jerry smiled at her and turned to go, hoping to find a good vantage point from which to watch the dancing.

"Jerry, wait!"

*I'm going to have to get better at keeping a straight face.*

"Yes?" he said lightly, turning back.

Nan had her dance card open. "I left a break! Just here, after the triple-step. I knew I'd need a rest after that, so I crossed out a dance so I could sit. But you could have that one. It's a waltz."

Jerry imagined her, face flushed from the faster dance, waltzing in his arms, and almost said yes. Instead, he said, "No, you'll need that break." When disappointment flickered across her face, he smiled and gestured toward the French doors that opened onto the lawn, "But perhaps you'll meet me outside to rest? I'll fetch you some lemonade."

Nan's smile was incandescent. "Yes. I'll meet you right by the little elm with the crooked trunk."

Jerry gave a sigh of exaggerated exasperation. "You've been here, what? An hour? Mostly inside, dancing? And you're already on friendly terms with the trees?"

Nan giggled and slapped his arm with her dance card. "There aren't so many here. And they're quite
starved for companionship."

"Then I shall go and keep this little elm company until you come to join me," Jerry said, bowing.

"Yes. After the triple-step. But . . . oh, I think I see my next partner coming to collect me."

Afterward, Jerry could not have said what possessed him to be so bold, but he did not stop to think. He stepped forward, bent to Nan's ear and whispered, "Lucky man." Then he kissed her cheek, feather-light.

In the next instant, Jerry turned and strode confidently toward the French doors, leaving Nan rooted where she stood among the swirling crowd.

Jerry leaned against the trunk of the elm, waiting. This was better luck than he had expected; most of the guests who wanted fresh air seemed to be choosing to promenade in the lantern-lit garden on the other side of the ballroom, rather than on the shadowy lawn. A few couples lingered here and there, but the light from the hall only extended so far. Beyond the glow, it was dark enough that their features were indistinct, deserted enough that their whispers went unheard. Nan's elm stood at the edge of the circle of light, but just because they met here didn't mean they had to stay here . . .

Jerry started. There was no mistaking the couple bounding down the lawn toward him now, dim light or no. Jem, tall and annoyingly handsome in his tailcoat, even if he did keep tousling his own hair, and Faith, her golden-brown curls having escaped down her back, for reasons Jerry was loath to imagine. Even in the poor lighting, they were as conspicuous as a full-rigged man-o-war in Four Winds harbor.

"You're out here alone?" Jem sighed, recognizing Jerry and steering Faith toward the elm. "Where's Nan?"

"She promised all her dances," Jerry said, feeling defensive. "But she's meeting me here on her break."

Faith rolled her eyes. "A dance card isn't an ironclad vow. March right in there and tell her to clear it! Better yet, I'll do it!"

"Faith, don't!" Jerry cried, taking a step toward his sister before he realized she was bluffing. He straightened his tie, trying to regain some of his dignity. "It isn't refined for a lady to clear her dance card at a social event. Though I notice that you don't seem to have any scruples on that front."

Faith shrugged. "Nope! But I didn't promise any of my dances to anyone."

Jem poked her in the ribs. "It isn't good manners to reserve all your dances for your escort, either."

Faith batted her eyes over-sweetly. "Luckily, Di is my escort and she hates to waltz."

Jem laughed and pulled her into a hug.

_Really, the two of them are barely decent._

Jerry realized that he would probably have to put up with plenty more than this over the next few months. Jem and Faith had been writing to one another all year, but hadn't actually spent any time together except for a few weeks at Christmas. Certainly Jem had turned over a new leaf when it came to diligence in his correspondence. But now summer stretched before them and who knew what they were going to get up to without the Northumberland Strait between them. Jerry did not
relish the prospect of being their chaperone. Though if Faith were going to keep Jem occupied, perhaps that would free up some of Jerry's own time . . .

The sound of a lively triple-step drifted down the lawn through the French doors. Jerry adjusted his collar.

"Excuse me," he said, bowing to Jem and Faith with mock formality. "That's my signal to procure some lemonade."

"Anything we can do to help?" Jem asked.

"Yeah," Jerry said. "Make yourselves scarce."

"Gladly," Jem grinned. A moment later, he and Faith were galloping down the dark lawn, farther and farther from the lights of the dance.

With a vague sense that he should probably be doing something older-brotherly to put a stop to all that, Jerry set out to find the refreshment table.

The wait for lemonade was longer than Jerry had anticipated, and he hurried back to the elm with not a moment to spare. As the last notes of the triple-step died away, he breathed deeply, hoping that Nan's own exertions would distract her from his discomposure. Realizing he had lost half the lemonade sloshing down the lawn, Jerry poured most of his own into Nan's so that he could offer her a full cup.

*Just calm down.*

Where was she? The triple-step had been over for several minutes, and now the orchestra was striking up the waltz. Was she coming? Had he misunderstood her instructions? Jerry looked up at the elm. It was a little crooked, but was there another with a more pronounced bend?

"Jerry?"

He nearly spilled the rest of the lemonade, but somehow managed not to. Turning, he found that the sight of Nan, rosy-cheeked and gazing up at him, did little to steady his hands.

"Lemonade?" he asked, offering her the nearly-full cup in what he hoped was a calm voice.

"Thanks," she breathed.

They sipped together in silence for a moment, suddenly awkward when they finally had the freedom to speak.

At last, Nan cleared her throat. "You've all been planning this for a while?"

"Weeks. Maybe months," Jerry admitted. "I'm so sorry we were late. It was a good plan."

"You could have just asked me outright," Nan observed. "Wouldn't that have been simpler?"

Jerry shrugged. "I wanted to surprise you."

Nan smiled sweetly. "I was surprised."

"Pleasantly?"
"Very pleasantly."

Jerry felt his heart begin to hammer again. For all the complications, this was going so much better than he had allowed himself to hope.

Suddenly emboldened, he reached out, plucked the cup from Nan's hand, and set it in the grass under the elm beside his own.

"Dance with me."

The music floating down over the lawn was loud enough for them to keep the rhythm, though Jerry didn't much care whether they were in time. All he knew was that Nan Blythe was in his arms, and happy to be there.

There was no rush.
Mrs. Agatha MacDougal was stronger than she looked. After thirty years of boarding Queen's students at her house in Charlottetown, she could heave a trunk up the well-swept staircase with the ease of a seasoned porter. She was doing so now, never faltering under the weight of Carl Meredith's worldly possessions.

Shirley Blythe, following along behind her, nearly smiled, thinking of how much Mrs. MacDougal reminded him of Susan. Not in appearance, certainly — Mrs. MacDougal's ample figure and cloud of strawberry-blonde frizz were nothing like Susan's spare, gray form and spiky bun. But both shared a certain grim demeanor layered over an undeniably affectionate, proprietary nature.

"Welcome, Mr. Blythe," Mrs. MacDougal had said, shaking his hand firmly upon their introduction moments before. "Carl has told me all about you, of course. And I had your brothers here, too, when they were at Queen's. Tell me, how is Walter?"

"Much improved, Mrs. MacDougal," Shirley answered.

"Dear Walter. Terrible thing, typhoid. He's better now, you say?"

"Yes."

"Good," said Mrs. MacDougal, clapping her hands together. "I must mix up a batch of orange shortbread and send it to him. He always was partial to it."

At the top of the stairs, Mrs. MacDougal shifted the weight of Carl's trunk. Shirley had offered to carry it for her, but she had waved him off, insisting it was no trouble. After all, he had his own belongings to carry, didn't he?

Carl was already in the rose-papered room at the end of the hall, setting down his satchel, duffel bag, and crate of books on one of the beds. This done, he hurried back into the hall to relieve Mrs. MacDougal of her burden.

"Thank you, Carl," she said, though with an air that informed him that such chivalry was appreciated, but unnecessary.

Turning to Shirley, Mrs. MacDougal asked, "And where is your trunk?"

Shirley shrugged, holding up his carpet bag and satchel of books.

"That's all you brought?" she asked, perplexed.

"Shirley travels very light," Carl said, dusting off his hands after stowing his trunk in the room.

"But won't you need more things?" Mrs. MacDougal pressed. "A winter coat? Boots?"

"We're going home on Friday," Shirley observed.
Mrs. MacDougal looked him up and down, then gave a curt nod. "I see. Well, I do hope that you will come to look on this as your home as well. I know that it is only a boarding house, but I aim to make everyone here comfortable. I hope you will be as happy here as you are in your own bed."

"I'm sure I will be," Shirley assured her.

"Well, you boys make yourselves at home," Mrs. MacDougal said. "I'll call you for supper in an hour. And then early to bed. Must rest up for your first day of term!"

"Yes, Mrs. MacDougal," they said together.

When she had gone, Carl led Shirley down the hall to their room.

"It's not a bad place, you know," Carl said. "After a while it does start to feel like home."

Shirley looked around the room, which exuded a sort of shabby, lived-in comfort. The two narrow beds were amply supplied with drooping pillows and an odd assortment of blankets. The cabbage-rose wallpaper was so old-fashioned that it had become quaint, like the elaborate filigree adorning the chunky brass lock on the door. The two battered desks, defaced with decades of scratching and light graffiti, evoked the presence of all the dozens of boys who had slept and studied here before. Carl's trunk stood open, disgorging its contents onto bed and floor as Carl extracted his dressing gown and hung it on a peg behind the door.

"I feel quite at home already," Shirley said.


"You think I need more clothes?" Shirley asked with an even voice and a twinkling eye.

Carl pursed his lips. "What if there's a dance? Bring your nice suit."

"Fine," Shirley said. "I'll bring my nice suit when we come back next Monday. Happy?"

"Deliriously," Carl said, beginning to unpack his books.

Shirley opened his carpet bag and began hanging his few shirts and his extra vest in the wardrobe. He didn't understand what all the fuss was about. Why should he clutter up the room with unnecessary objects he would only have to carry back and forth? Didn't it make more sense to bring only what he needed?*

When Shirley moved to the desk to stack his books on the little shelf, he caught Carl giving him an appraising look.

"Are you nervous?" Carl asked.

"Nervous?"

"First day at Queen's?" Carl said, slightly exasperated. "First time away from home?"

"Do I look nervous?" Shirley asked.

Carl cocked his head. "I don't know. What do you look like when you're nervous?"

Shirley shrugged. "You tell me."

"Can't. Never seen it."
Shirley snorted. "In that case, just assume I'm not."

"You'll be fine," Carl assured him. "I'll show you around a bit, introduce you to some friends."

"I'm not nervous, Carl."

Carl looked unimpressed. "I'm just saying that it's alright if you are. It's a whole new place! A whole new experience! It's normal to be a little worried."

Shirley couldn't help smiling at Carl's misplaced concern. "I'm fine, Carl," he said, clapping him on the shoulder.

Crossing the room to the empty bed, Shirley tested the mattress, lay down, and laced his fingers together behind his head. "Yes," he said, as much to himself as to Carl. "I think I can be perfectly happy here."

Notes:

*"At least flying is a clean job. He will not get so dirty and messed up as he would in the trenches, and that is well, for he has always been a tidy child." Susan, speaking of Shirley in *Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 25: "Shirley Goes"
Una sat in the window of the manse sitting room, knees up against her chest, nose pressed against the glass. The morning was dreary, and though Una had a warm sweater wrapped snugly around her shoulders, something in her craved the cool pane against her skin.

It had happened again, as it always did, sooner or later. Someone in trouble, needing a kindness or sometimes only a sympathetic ear. Una's ear, more often than not.

Most of the time, there was little she could do but listen, hold a hand, stand witness to tears. But there were also times when she could make things better. Never entirely — no one ever seemed to bring Una a problem that could be solved easily. But she had learned that a few carefully-chosen words could encourage a despairing heart; an unobtrusive invitation could mend a friendship; a small lie could provide a little shelter.

That had been a hard lesson to learn — wasn't it Truth that was supposed to set you free? It had been several years now, but Una still remembered the haunted eyes of the little girl from the fishing village, quaking under her mother's molten eye on the manse porch. The child had come up to bring fresh fish for Reverend Meredith, stayed to play a while with Una, and stolen the little beaded purse that Una loved so much.* The girl's mother had found the trinket and marched back up to the manse, one powerful fist half-lifting the child by her threadbare collar.

That purse had been one of Una's most beloved treasures, but what did that matter in the face of the little girl's fear?

*I gave it to her. It was a gift.*

A lie. But it had cost only something Una loved, and saved the girl a beating.

The sitting room door opened and Rosemary Meredith floated in, carrying a freshly-laundered afghan. She draped it carefully over the back of the sofa, patting it fondly before turning and catching sight of Una.

"Una! You startled me! I thought you were still in bed."

Una gave a smile that was little more than a softening of her eyes. "No. I couldn't sleep."

Rosemary crossed the room and lowered herself into the armchair by the window seat. Peering closely at Una, she reached out and placed a warm hand on Una's knee. "What troubles you, dearest? I can see plainly that something does."

Una remained quiet for a long moment. No, she could not divulge what troubled her. But surely it would be a relief to talk the matter over with Rosemary — it always was. Perhaps if she only discussed her own feelings, that would be safe enough . . .

"I . . . I have been wondering," Una whispered, "why people tell me things."
Rosemary blinked. "Tell you things?"

"Yes," Una said, deep blue eyes serious. "It seems that when people have troubles, they tell them to me. Sometimes I can help, but often enough I can't. But that doesn't seem to matter much — they tell me anyway."

Rosemary searched Una's face, seemingly trying to decide which facet of this unlooked-for dilemma to tackle first. "Una," she said slowly, "are you . . . or anyone else . . . in any danger?"

"No. I don't think so, anyway. It's only that it's . . . a burden. To know other people's secrets. I'm glad to help if I can, of course, but I don't know why people come to me."

Rosemary patted the thin form under her hand. "I expect they trust you."

"But why?" Una asked, sitting up. "Sometimes it's friends — I can understand that. But sometimes people I barely know . . ." She stopped. Burden or no, she had promised secrecy and would not be forsworn.

Rosemary was a long time answering, as if she were picking her way carefully along an unfamiliar and lightly-marked path. When she did speak, her voice was gentle.

"Do you know anything about Episcopalian worship, Una?"

Surprised by this non sequitur, Una frowned. "No. Not much."

"In some ways, it is similar to Presbyterianism," Rosemary explained, "but in others it is quite different. One difference is the sacrament of confession. Have you heard of that?"

"Is that when you tell your sins to a priest?"

"Yes. When a penitent confesses their sins, and shows contrition, a priest can give absolution."

Una cocked her head. "Absolution? Do you mean forgiveness?"

"Yes."

"I thought only God could forgive sins."

Rosemary smiled. "Ultimately, yes. But I have often found it helpful to speak with a priest when something weighs on me. He can offer counsel. And absolution is a sacrament. It's hard to explain if you haven't done it, but I find that it sets my heart at ease."

Una was unsure what any of this might have to do with her secrets, but it certainly was interesting. Rosemary did not often go to the Episcopal church at Lowbridge — not since she married Father — and none of the children, save baby Bruce, had ever gone with her. If Mrs. Marshall Elliott objected to Jerry's going to the Methodist prayer meeting, what might she say about the manse children attending Episcopal services?

"Do you confess to the priest at Lowbridge?" Una asked, curious after all.

"Not often," Rosemary said, the open kindness of her face inviting confidence. "But when I feel the need, yes."

"Couldn't you talk to Father about your sins?"

Rosemary looked as if she might want to laugh, but didn't. "Yes. And I do. But sometimes it is a
good idea to get an outside perspective on things."

"And a priest can give you . . . absolution?"

"Yes. But the Anglican church in Canada also recognizes lay confession. That means confession made to an ordinary person. Only a priest can give formal absolution, but anyone can be a vessel of God's forgiveness. Perhaps that is what people see in you, Una."

Una recoiled. "No," she said, thin lips gone white. "No. I don't have the power to forgive people for their sins."

"Maybe not," said Rosemary, infinitely gentle. "But I think that something draws people to you. They feel that their secrets are safe with you, or maybe that you can understand their weaknesses. I don't know exactly; it's not a common vocation, to be a confessor."

"I don't want to be a confessor," Una said, her heart racing. "I don't want to know people's secrets."

"Of course not, dearest. But the thing about vocations is that you don't choose them. They choose you. And I suspect that perhaps God reaches people through you."

Una shivered. "I wish He wouldn't."

Rosemary reached for Una's hand and squeezed. "Have you talked to your father about this? I daresay he has some experience with this sort of burden in his own ministry."

Una only shook her head. Father had so many responsibilities — how could she ever think of weighing him down with her own troubles? No, better to bear them herself. Though it certainly was comforting to talk things over with Rosemary . . .

"Una, would you like to come to Lowbridge with me sometime?" Rosemary asked. "I don't go often, but I do go once in a while. It might help you to speak to the priest there. You could even confess if you felt moved to do so. Priests swear a solemn vow to guard the secrets in their trust. Perhaps you could hand some of yours to someone who is better prepared to hold them."

Una blanched. "But I'm a Presbyterian."

"I don't know how much God cares about our denominational divisions," Rosemary smiled. "If one form of worship speaks to you over another, I don't see any harm in that."

Could she really do that? She was a minister's daughter — wouldn't speaking to a priest imply that Father was not equal to her spiritual dilemmas? And what would Mrs. Elliott say?

But even as the reasons against chased one another around her mind, a tiny shoot had sprouted in Una's heart. If only she could give it voice.

"I think . . . I would like to go with you," she whispered. "If it wouldn't hurt Father's feelings."

"No, dearest," Rosemary assured her. "I think he would understand."

"And I'm still a Presbyterian," Una clarified.

Rosemary reached out and squeezed her hand. "Of course. A very brave one."

Notes:
"Una hesitated between an old beaded purse and a gay picture of Daniel in the lion's den, and finally offered Mary her choice. Mary really hankered after the beaded purse, but she knew Una loved it, so she said, 'Give me Daniel. I'd ruther have it 'cause I'm partial to lions.'" Rainbow Valley, chapter 9
"Foul on Red!" cried the referee.

"OH COME ON!" Jem shouted from the stands. "She didn't touch her!"

Jerry elbowed him in the leg. "Will you please sit? They're not allowed to defend against a shot in progress, even if there's no contact."

Jem sat back down with a huff. "These are the stupidest rules."

Jem and Jerry sat halfway up the wooden risers. At least, Jerry sat. Jem had a place on the long, honey-colored bench, but he tended to jump out of it at intervals, shouting over the voices of the players and the occasional bouncing of the basket-ball. To right and left, above and below, long stretches of empty bleacher separated the few reluctant spectators who had come out on a Saturday night to watch the Redmond Redstockings take on the Kingsport Normal School girls' basket-ball team.

On the court, play had resumed. Faith was doggedly harassing a Normal School player who was trying to pass to a teammate standing under the basket. Faith faked right, luring the blue-clad girl into releasing the ball, then darted back to tip the lazy pass to a Redmond teammate.

"ATTA GIRL!" Jem called, clapping as Faith ran down the court.

Clad in long-sleeved red sailor suits with voluminous, over-the-knee bloomers, the Redmond Reds played five-a-side basket-ball under the new, improved rules for the 1914 season. Whereas earlier teams had played on a three-zone court with players strictly confined to their designated areas, the new iteration used a court with two halves. Two players were assigned to the offense and two to the defense; these were not allowed to stray from their halves of the court, but Faith was the center or "rover" and could move freely, though she was not permitted to score.

"I don't see why she can't run and shoot," Jem muttered as Faith tossed a well-timed pass to an undefended teammate who looped the ball into the basket. Jem's enthusiastic applause was distinctly audible amid the tepid acknowledgements from the sparse crowd.

"Much too vigorous," Jerry intoned in his very best impression of old Deacon Hazard as the referee retrieved the ball from the basket. "Dangerous to the reproductive system, you know."

Jem rolled his eyes. "Have you ever seen what a corset can do to a ribcage? We saw a patient in clinic this week . . ."

"Noooooo!" Jerry said, waving his hands in front of him. "No medical stories. Not after last week."

"This isn't anything like that!" Jem protested. "That was cadaver lab. This was just . . ."

Jerry shook his head. "Nope. Your privileges have been suspended for the rest of the month."
"Fine." Jem muttered. "All I meant to say was that if people were really concerned about women's health, they'd ban corsets, not basket-ball. HEY! That's gotta be a foul! Really!"

"Will you sit down?" Jerry said, tugging on Jem's scarlet sweater. "You're not refereeing this match."

"Well someone should!"

"Just sit."

Jem flopped onto the bench and mussed his curls in frustration.

"Clinic going well, though?" Jerry asked.

"Fine," Jem said. "Much better than chemistry. I get on with the patients better than the lab equipment."

"I'll bet."

"Oh, hey," Jem said, sudden remembrance lighting his face, "did you have that meeting with the dean?"

Jerry nodded.

"And?"

Jerry couldn't help smiling. "He says I'd be a fine candidate for the law school. He'll recommend me himself, if my grades next year are as good as they have been so far."

"That's wonderful!" Jem said, pounding Jerry on the back. "You're going to do it, then?"

"I think so."

"Well, congratulations, counselor!"

"Rather a long way to go yet," Jerry replied through a broad smile.

Jem waved an impatient hand. "You'll do fine. NICE SHOT, HELEN!"

The crowd broke into moderately enthusiastic applause for the Reds' offense. Only Jem had leapt to his feet.

"Have you talked to Nan about it?" he asked, settling back into his seat.

"No," Jerry said, hesitating. "Do you think I should?"

"Do you think you should?" Jem asked.

"It's . . . I don't know . . ." Jerry faltered. "I mean, I want to, but it feels . . . too soon."

Jem raised a skeptical brow. "Too soon to talk?"

"We haven't . . . we don't have any kind of understanding . . ." Jerry trailed off.

"You don't think you can talk to Nan about your plans for the future? GOOD HUSTLE, RUTH!"

"I don't want to presume . . . that is, to imply that she should care . . ."
Jem turned his full attention to Jerry. "Jerry. Do you love her?"

"Yes."

"You want to marry her someday?"

Jerry spluttered. "I . . . well . . . yes, but . . ."

"Well, there are two ways to reach an understanding on that score. One's talking. And the other . . ."

Jem turned back toward the game in progress. "Well, less talking, but probably not your style."

"I won't ask which is yours," Jerry muttered.

"Oh, we talk plenty," Jem grinned. "CATCH HER, FAITH!"

Jerry worried a loose thread on the hem of his jacket. "You think I should tell Nan about law school? Or maybe ask her if it's alright? What should I say?"

"You're the one always writing those interminable letters. Surely there must be room in one of them to say, 'Hey, Nan, I'd like to be a lawyer.' Gods, what do you write about anyway?"

"This and that."

"Well, write about this."

"You don't think I'd better talk to her in person?" Jerry asked. "Shouldn't something like this . . . it's important, so it should be face-to-face. But I won't see her til summer . . ."

Jem rubbed his hands over his face. "Look, you're probably right. Face-to-face, you can gauge her reaction. So get on the ferry. Go over to the Island and see her next weekend."

"Just for a day?"

"You need more than a day?"

Jerry nodded slowly. "You're right . . . I could do that."

"THAT'S OUT ON BLUE!" Jem bellowed, hands cupped around his mouth for unnecessary amplification. He fixed Jerry with a twinkling hazel gaze. "Just do yourself a favor — when you write to say you're running over to see her, don't say you have something important you need to discuss in person."

"Why not?"

Jem grinned. "Don't want to get her hopes up, do you?"

Jerry's eyes flew wide. "I don't think . . . Not yet! She wouldn't think . . ."

"I don't think she's writing all those letters for love of the postman," Jem winked. "EMILY'S WIDE OPEN!"

"We've barely even seen one another since last summer . . ."

"Well, she's coming to Redmond in the fall, isn't she? You'll have plenty of time to catch up then. Just don't disappoint her now."
The referee blew a sharp blast on his whistle, signaling the end of the game. With the final score at 8-5, the Reds carried the day, a fact celebrated with scattered applause from the spectators and jubilant hugs among the players. As the Reds lined up to shake hands with their vanquished opponents, Jerry turned to Jem.

"So what should I say?"

"What’s wrong with, 'I’d like to come see you next weekend?’ Honestly, you make things so complicated."

Faith bounced over to the risers, flushed with victory and health-endangering exercise. Damp curls had escaped onto her neck and the red tie of her sailor suit was smeared where she had used it to sponge sweat from her face. "Auditioning for a coaching position, are you?" she asked, squinting up at Jem.

"The coaches can't even call out plays from the sidelines!" Jem groused. "It's against the rules, apparently."

"They're going to kick you out one of these days, you know."

"And miss out on the entertainment I provide? Never."

The Reds filed past the stands and toward the dressing room in a giggling chorus of "Hi, Jem" and "Hi, Jerry." Jem wiggled his fingertips in their direction. "Great game, Hazel! Ruth, that jump shot's come a long way!"

"I'm going to go get changed," Faith said, fanning herself with her hand. "Then can we go get something to eat?"

"Sure. You in, Jerry?"

Jerry shook his head. "Wouldn't dream of it."

"You have to eat," Faith objected.

"I will," Jerry said. "But no need for me to play gooseberry."

"Suit yourself," Faith shrugged, backing away toward her teammates.

"Just get him home at a reasonable hour, won't you?" Jerry called after her.

Faith stuck out her tongue and sauntered off toward the dressing room.

"You know, you really are welcome to come with us," Jem said.

"Not a chance," Jerry replied, rising and putting on his coat. "Wouldn't want to interrupt your talking. Besides, I have a letter to write."

Notes:

*"'The many friends of Miss Faith Meredith, Gerald Meredith and James Blythe,' read Susan, rolling the names like sweet morsels under her tongue, 'were very much pleased to welcome them home a few weeks ago from Redmond College. James Blythe, who was graduated in Arts in 1913, had just completed his first year in medicine."  *Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 1, “Glen 'Notes' and Other Matters"
I had some fun researching women's college basketball rules from 1914. The short answer is that there were a lot of different sets of rules in circulation — this is a plausible subset of them. Also, a Google image search for "women's basketball 1914" is a delight. In 1914, women were only allowed to dribble the "basket-ball" once at a time. The bottom of the basket was not removed until 1916.
On Saturday afternoon, Nan put on her pink merino wool dress — the one with the embroidered yoke and bits of lace at the sleeves. Mother had chosen the fabric especially for Nan — it was just her color — and Mrs. Marshall Elliott had fitted the bodice, but Nan herself had labored over the embroidery all last autumn. She was very glad she had, even if she didn't have many occasions to wear something so fine when she was busy teaching. But you never could predict when you might need to look your best, could you?

Nan was still trying to decide between a gold chain and a little pearl pendant when she heard Mrs. Hamilton answer a knock at the front door.

"You must be Mr. Meredith," Mrs. Hamilton said. "Come right in and make yourself comfortable."

Dear Mrs. Hamilton. She hadn't batted an eye when Nan had asked if she might receive a gentleman caller; she had even insisted that he stay to dinner.

Nan hastily donned the pearl and took one last look in the mirror. She pinched some color into her cheeks and took a calming breath. There was no reason to be nervous. None at all.

She saw Jerry seated in the parlor before she reached the bottom step. He didn't wait, but hurried into the hall and took her hand in his.

"You look wonderful, Nan," he said, and raised her fingers to his lips.

Nan felt unaccountably shy. Why should she? But it took an effort to lift her lashes.

When she did, she looked down into dark, hopeful eyes and felt a mad desire to throw herself into Jerry's arms and kiss him as if they were alone in their maple grove in Rainbow Valley, screened by broad midsummer leaves. Something in her expression must have betrayed her because Jerry had to fight back a smirk.

"You, too," she said, voice too high, too faint. What was wrong with her?

"Can we go for a walk?" Jerry asked.

Nan thought of the late-winter weather, of thick red mud and slushy puddles and the delicate merino wool falling in a pristine cascade to her ankles.

"Yes," she said. "Just let me get my coat."

"I wanted to talk to you about something."

The lonely lane through winter woods was rutted and rough. Nan knew this way well — her schoolhouse was just over the next hill. In autumn, the route had been a glory of bronze and scarlet; in winter it had proven treacherous, though Nan still walked this way for the sake of familiar trees.
Now, she and Jerry strolled down the center of the unpaved road, arm in arm, avoiding the worst of the frigid mud that seeped into the wheel tracks to either side. They were bundled snugly against the cold, and Nan smiled into her collar when she saw that Jerry wore the green scarf she had knit for him as a Christmas gift. He held her arm close to his body, his free hand covering hers, though Nan could barely feel his fingers through their combined mittens.

"Alright," she squeaked, berating herself yet again for her ungovernable voice.

Jerry took a breath deep enough that Nan could feel the shudder even through his thick winter coat, and hers. "I've been thinking, Nan, about what I want to do after I graduate."

She felt a little thrill raise gooseflesh on her arm and did not trust herself to say more than "Yes . . ."

"And I've been thinking that I . . . I might like to be a lawyer."

"A lawyer?" Nan echoed.

"Or maybe a judge someday, or a legislator."

Nan stopped in the middle of the road, bringing Jerry to halt by her side. She closed her eyes, trying to imagine him in a courtroom, or as a judge, black hair and flashing black eyes above a black robe.

"Yes . . ." she said, opening her eyes and finding his. "I can see you as those things. Arguing a case. Handing down a just, but merciful sentence. Drafting a law. Yes. You'd be good at that."

A little furrow in the center of Jerry's brow cleared, and Nan recognized relief in his dark eyes. She smiled serenely at him, glad to have eased his mind.

"It would mean law school," Jerry said, facing her squarely now. "Two years of it."

Nan's smile grew brighter. "You mean you would stay in Kingsport? Not just next year, but two more after?"

Jerry nodded, his own smile beginning to widen. "Yes. Perhaps we could study together. If you're up for the fighting."

"We do not fight," Nan sniffed. "We debate."

The crease in Jerry's brow flickered back into existence. "You'd make a good lawyer, Nan," he said quietly.

"Perhaps . . ." Nan conceded. "But even if I wanted to be one, Redmond Law School doesn't admit women."

"They're thinking of changing that," Jerry said in a rush. "The faculty — they're having all sorts of meetings and debates and votes. The medical school has graduated women for twenty years. And a few provinces admit women to the bar — even New Brunswick now!"

"Does Nova Scotia?" Nan asked. "Or PEI?"

"No," Jerry conceded. "But it won't be long. It's 1914. They can't keep women out forever."*

Nan pressed her lips together. "Well, it's a moot point, at least in my case."

"Why's that?"
"Because I don't want to be a lawyer."

"Are you sure?" Jerry asked, grasping both her mittened hands in his own. "You would be great. Really, Nan. Consider it."

Nan held Jerry's gaze, discerning a tremor of real worry in his expression.

"I don't have to consider it," she said. "It's not what I want."

Jerry swallowed. "What do you want?"

The answer was on the tip of Nan's tongue, but she couldn't say it. Not yet. It was still too soon.

"Happiness," she said instead.

"And being a lawyer wouldn't make you happy?" Jerry asked carefully.

"I don't think so."

"But you don't mind if I try for it?"

Nan reached up and twined her twice-woolly arms around Jerry's scarf-swathed neck, kissing him sweetly on the corner of his mouth. "Not at all. I'll even help you study."

Jerry's shoulders relaxed. "Do you think the others can withstand that?"

"They'll just have to make do," Nan said solemnly. Then, with a bright flash of her pearly little teeth, "Oh, Jerry, you're going to stay in Kingsport! I can't tell you how glad I am!"

Jerry pulled her into a tight embrace. His arms felt warm and solid and, as Nan would reflect often in the coming years, audaciously permanent.

Notes:

*Frances Fish was the first woman to graduate from Dalhousie Law School in 1918. The first woman admitted to the Bar in PEI was Roma Stewart in 1926.
Anne Blythe sat on the veranda at Ingleside, feet drawn up on a little table and a green-covered volume of verse propped on her knees. It was evening, but the days were longer now, with lingering sunsets of peach and gold sending slanting rays across the pages. The book was not new, but it was new to her. Paul Irving had sent it from New York with a brief note:

Dear Teacher,

I send you Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. I know that this is not the sort of poetry that we pored over together in the old days in Avonlea, but I think that you might find that there is something to it, if you will give it a chance. I didn't, at least not at first. But it has crept up on me and I find myself wanting to share my slow-dawning discovery with you. I hope you will forgive me for so insolent a gift, offered only in the spirit of literary inquiry.

Please give my best to Dr. Blythe and all your dear children. Tell Walter he may send along as many of his verses as he cares to — I will be happy to read them and offer an honest (read: "gentle") critique.

With love,
Paul

Whitman had certainly proven to be a departure from her usual fare. Anne was finding it challenging, but had to admit that it had elicited more than a few of her old thrills. Perhaps she would have disdained Whitman once — free verse too formless, subject matter unquestionably improper. But, per Paul's plea, she had given him a chance and found herself entranced.

It was difficult to pick a favorite among Whitman's varied offerings. At first, Anne thought perhaps she loved "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" best, for its astonishing collapse of chronology — the connections forged across time between the ferry passengers of one century and another. But then she had also loved "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," so heartrending in its terrible grief — *I mourn and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring*. And how could she elevate either over "I Sing the Body Electric," with its intoxicating joy in the miracle of the human form?

Was it sacrilege, to argue, as Whitman did, that the soul dwells in the body and that the body is the soul? Perhaps. But the more Anne read, the more she thought that Whitman's exultation in the body was a worthy celebration. His love of humanity, in its simplest moments and gestures, sanctified the mundane.

To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough . . . I do not ask any more delight, I swim in it as in a sea . . .

Anne gazed out over the lawn, down toward Rainbow Valley. Hadn't she felt that herself? The joy of immersion around a crowded dinner table, or amid a pile of squirming children? No, Whitman wasn't Tennyson, but there was something in him that spoke to her of love agape, unfettered, enveloping.
There were also the other poems, the ones Paul no doubt had in mind with his pre-emptive apology. Anne turned the pages softly, looking up to be sure that none of the children had crept up to surprise her. But no, she was alone on the veranda as she re-read "One Hour to Madness and Joy!"

Here was Whitman in sex-drunk euphoria, shouting the raptures of the flesh with all his astounding verve:

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ madness amorous! } O \text{ trembling!} \\
O \text{ to escape utterly from others' anchors and holds!} \\
\text{To drive free! to love free! to dash reckless and dangerous!} \\
\text{To court destruction with taunts — with invitations!} \\
\text{To ascend — to leap to the heavens of the love indicated to me!} \\
\text{To rise thither with my inebriate Soul!} \\
\text{To be lost, if it must be so!} \\
\text{To feed the remainder of life with one hour of fullness and freedom!} \\
\text{With one brief hour of madness and joy.}
\end{align*}
\]

A dangerous poem, was it not? Ingleside was a house of serious talks and grave responsibilities, and there was quite enough *courting destruction* in the air these days without literary invitation to . . . madness and joy.

Anne smiled to herself. It wasn't likely that Jem would go raiding her bookshelf, was it? Nan might, but she would snap the cover shut as soon as she realized what she was reading. Walter was the only one likely to pay it any mind. And Walter . . . Anne could not suppress a gentle laugh at the thought of Walter — still too thin, but growing stronger every day, *thank God*. He was as likely to be scandalized by the free verse as by its contents. Her dear, dear boy, who thought of love in sonnets, not in ragged ecstasy.

*Perhaps one day, if he's lucky . . .*

No, Anne could not condemn a volume of verse because the poet's cup of love ran over. She knew that the children had all read Mordaunt's "The Call" — *one crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name!* — and was that not as true of love as it was of war?*

And yet.

And yet.

There were also those *Calamus* poems. Those were truly dangerous. Nothing to laugh over, even privately. They spoke of love, yes, but the sort of love that could not be spoken in Glen St. Mary. Nor in New York, by Whitman's account.

*Perhaps*, Anne thought, *I should take a penknife and cut out the Calamus cycle.*

Some eccentricities might be forgiven as literary fancy, but not these. Not here, not now. Anne did not worry overmuch about causing a scandal herself, but she did not want to cause trouble for Gilbert. And surely there would be trouble if one of the children were to borrow *Leaves of Grass* and show the *Calamus* poems to a friend.

Was it worth it, Anne wondered, to condemn "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Lilacs" to flame and ash for fear of "We Two Boys Together Clinging"? Could they really be separated, even if the knife did its work well? And weren't the frightening poems the ones worth reading? The ones that offered
But Mrs. Dr. Blythe of Glen St. Mary, PEI could not keep Walt Whitman's *Calamus* poems in her house. The fire it was. Or the penknife.

But first, Anne would read the cycle through just once more. There was something to them — lives and loves she knew not herself, but part of Whitman's glorious tapestry nonetheless.

Turning to the beginning of the *Calamus* cycle, Anne read again the opening lines, not yet famous:

*In paths untrodden,*  
*In the growth by margins of pond-waters.*

**Notes:**

*One of the poems that Rilla recites at recruiting meetings (*Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 11) is Thomas Osbert Mordaunt's "The Call," in which the hero dies gloriously in battle:*

*Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,*  
*Throughout the sensual world proclaim,*  
*One crowded hour of glorious life*  
*Is worth an age without a name.*
Walter's heart was pounding in his chest, his lungs straining and beginning to burn. He felt pathetic. This shouldn't be so hard.

"Jem," he wheezed, "please slow down."

Jem reined in his stride with a little hop, much to the delight of Bruce Meredith, perched atop his broad shoulders.

"Sorry, Walt. Do you need a rest?"*

"No," Walter grimaced. "Just go slower."

"Fast!" Bruce cried. "Go fast, Jem!"

The red shore road wound down from Glen St. Mary, past the old House of Dreams and on toward the Four Winds Light. They had been walking a little farther every day since Jem arrived home from Redmond, but Walter hadn't made it all the way to the light yet. He had been determined that today would be the day, but now his lungs felt horribly constricted. He wanted to open himself up to the salt air, feel it course through him in a torrent, but his body took only thin sips, never allowing him to slake his thirst for oxygen.

"Take it easy," Jem said, scrutinizing Walter's blanched face. "Dad said not to push yourself too hard yet. We made it to Miss Cornelia's yesterday — let's try for three steps past her door today."

"I'm going to the Light today," Walter muttered.

Jem shook his head. "Walter, you can't force yourself to get better all at once. No one gets over typhoid easily, and you had a close shave. Go slow. We'll have you back in fighting form soon enough."

"I'm going to the Light," Walter repeated. "It's only half a league."

Jem did not contradict him.

"Go fast, Jem!" Bruce urged, digging his heels into Jem's sides.

Instead of leaving Walter to his fate, Jem began to gallop back and forth, charging down the road for a short way and then backtracking to the spot where Walter hobbled along. Bruce shrieked his joy, clutching Jem's head with stubby fingers and gripping tight with pudgy knees.

Despite the stitch growing in his side, Walter had to smile at the laughing child and his noble steed. "Half a league, half a league, half a league onward," he quoted, before running short of breath.

Jem took up the lines:

"Forward the Light Brigade!"
Charge for the guns!" he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

He capered forward and back again, the cadence of Tennyson’s lines propelling him on as much as Bruce’s shrill joy.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.
Their not to make reply,
Their not to reason why,
Their but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Now here was a poem! Despite the weakness of his body, Walter felt his blood thrum with the cadence. Beyond argument, reason, or question, the momentum of the words gave courage to his heart and strength to his limbs.

I must learn to write like this.

Could he? Could a quiet life in the placid Glen ever inspire anything so stirring from his own pen?

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
Rode the six hundred.

Bruce gasped. "Jem said a bad word!"

"Did I?" Jem, flushed with the exertion of simultaneous exercise and recitation, looked to Walter for assistance.


"Oh," Jem said. "Um, sorry, Bruce. No more bad words. Mustn't send you home full of mischief, or your mother won't let you come on our walks anymore."

Bruce giggled.

Walter scanned through the next few lines in his mind. "You're alright for Flashed all their sabres bare, but after that stanza, just skip to the last."

Jem grinned and was off again.

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while 
All the world wondered. 
Plunged in the battery-smoke 
Right through the line they broke; 
Cossack and Russian 
Reeled from the sabre stroke 
Shattered and sundered. 
Then they rode back, but not 
Not the six hundred.

Walter felt as shiver race up his spine. They had all learned Tennyson's poem off by heart from the sixth Royal Reader, and the thrill had never faded. To hear Jem recite, his voice carrying over the harbor breeze and Bruce's squeals, spurred Walter onward.

When can their glory fade? 
O the wild charge they made! 
All the world wondered. 
Honour the charge they made! 
Honour the Light Brigade, 
Noble six hundred!

When the last lines had wafted away on the wind, Walter looked up and beheld the Four Winds Light before him. His body ached, and the stitch in his side pinched uncomfortably, but he had made it. Panting, he took the last few steps and laid his hand against the cool, salt-sprayed wall of the lighthouse.

"Well done, Walt," Jem beamed.

"Well done, Walt!" Bruce echoed.

Walter had no breath to reply, but nodded and smiled as best he could.

"Alright, half a league homeward!" Jem said, and was off, galloping back up the road, Bruce squealing with delight, before Walter could take a single step.

Notes:

*As far as I can discover, Jem is the only member of the family who ever calls Walter "Walt."

Tennyson, "Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854)
Una and Faith had not shared a bed for many years, but Una was glad that Faith sought her out tonight. It was unseasonably cold for July, and the two girls snuggled down under the coverlet, whispering.

"Are you scared, Faith?" Una asked, eyes sparkling with wonder.

"No," Faith beamed, burying her face in the pillow for a moment before peeking out again. "Do you think I should be?"

"Amy Taylor told me that her sister Hattie was wild to get engaged, but then when it happened, she realized what it meant and was petrified."

Faith giggled. "No, I'm not scared. How I could I be? It's just Jem."

Just Jem was not a phrase that Una heard very often, at least not from anyone but Faith. Jem Blythe was quite a lot. But Una knew that Faith and Jem understood one another as no outsider to their happiness could. She was not afraid for her sister, either.

"Let me see your ring again," Una said.

Faith needed no coaxing. It was an old ring — very old— and not particularly fashionable: a deep red garnet set in a simple gold band. In the moonlight, it was nearly black.

"It belonged to Dr. Blythe's mother," Faith explained, stroking the ring with her thumb.

Una let out a little giggle.

"What?" Faith asked, poking her in the ribs.

"Nothing," Una said, still smiling. "Just . . . you wouldn't expect Jem to be so sentimental, but he is."

Faith rolled her eyes. "You have no idea."

"Does anybody else know yet?" Una asked, wriggling with excitement.

"No. No one except Father, because Jem asked permission. And I suppose Rosemary must know if Father does. But even they don't know it happened today. We're going to surprise everyone at the picnic tomorrow."

"Surprise?" Una asked, suddenly wary.

Faith tried and failed to stifle a grin.

"What are you planning, Faith?" Una squeaked.

"It's a surprise!"
"Knowing what you and Jem consider a surprise, you're likely to give us all heart failure!"

"Well," Faith said, considering, "it's possible. But Dr. Blythe will be there to come to your aid."

"Unless he's the one with heart failure," Una reasoned.

Faith shrugged. "I guess he's pretty healthy." Then, squirming with delight, "Oh, Una, this is going to be so much fun!"

"You really won't tell me what you're planning?" Una pleaded.

"No, silly. Then it wouldn't be a surprise! And besides, I didn't just mean tomorrow. I get to marry Jem! I've got a whole lifetime of fun ahead of me."

"I'm happy for you, Faith," Una said, wrapping a delicate arm around her sister's waist. "And happy that you're so happy."

"Thanks, Una," Faith said, hugging her back. "It will still be two years til Jem is done with medical school. But come July of 1916, I'll be Mrs. James Blythe, and that you may tie to, as Susan says."

"Can I be your bridesmaid?" Una asked, only realizing afterward that it was a presumptuous question. "Unless you'd rather have Di, of course," she amended.

"Of course you can be my bridesmaid, you goose!" Faith grinned. "You can even pick the color for your dress if you want."

"Are you going to wear Mother's dress?" Una asked, wide-eyed, thinking of the gray silk dress that had comforted her so much in her childhood.

"I don't know," Faith considered. "I've never tried it on. I think Mother might have been quite a bit smaller than I am. You'll be able to wear it when you get married, though."

Una blushed. "I don't think I'll ever get married."

"Nonsense!" Faith declared. "We just have to be on the lookout for the right chap."

Una hoped that it was dark enough to hide any further stain of crimson rising into her cheeks. She knew very well who the right chap was, but had no hope of ever doing anything about it.

"Tell me about the proposal," Una said, hoping to distract Faith. "Did you know he was going to ask today?"

Faith beamed. "Not at first. He asked me to go for a sail. But as soon as I saw that we were headed to Gull Island, I knew."

"Gull Island?" Una asked, puzzled. "That little rocky island way out in the gulf?"

"That's the one," Faith smiled.

"Why would he take you all the way out there?"

Faith giggled. "It just had to be there."

"Why?"

"That's . . . another story for another day."
Una frowned. "Wait. Was that where you wrecked Mr. Ford's sailboat?"

Faith could only nod.

"Is there more to that story than I have heard before?" Una asked, her eyes going very round.

Faith nodded again, biting her lower lip in an effort to keep from grinning.

Una shook her head. "Faith Meredith, what did you do?"

Faith seized the edge of the coverlet and raised it up over their heads. "Come under with me and I'll tell you," she whispered.
Gilbert sat at his desk, head propped in his hands, rubbing his temples with his long, brown fingers. He hadn't slept at all last night. That was not so unusual in itself, but most of the time, coming home at dawn meant that he could crawl into bed for at least a few hours of blissful oblivion.

Not today, though.

At dawn, they had launched the boats and gone in search of Jem and Faith. Gilbert had tried to persuade Anne not to come down to the wharf, but doubted if she had even heard him.

"They're fine, Anne," Gilbert had assured her, believing it was true. "Maybe they've gotten into some trouble, but Jem is a good sailor with a level head. If something happened, he would have found somewhere safe to land."

Anne had merely stared back at him, sleepless grey eyes huge in her pale face. Gilbert gathered her into his arms and tried to impart some of his own certainty through the embrace.

That had been at dawn. By noon, when there was still no trace of Jem and Faith, nor of Owen Ford's sailboat, Gilbert began to pace the wharf. He hadn't gone out in the first wave of boats, thinking it would be better for him to stay in one place in case the kids were hurt and the searchers needed to find him. But as the sun began to slip down the summer sky, he felt his assurance quaver a bit around the edges. Anne stood on the shore with Rosemary Meredith, silent, wringing her hands until they were streaked red and white.

Gilbert did not approve of going in to comfort a baby every time it cried. Jem was dry and warm and fed, and lifting him out of his cot in the middle of the night would only spoil him.*

But it was a new house and a new room, and Little Jem had been out of sorts ever since Walter had inconsiderately replaced him at Anne's breast a month ago. He was only 15 months old — too young to be weaned, in truth, and sensible of the injustice.

Anne had tried to nurse them both at first, but it was too much. Gilbert could see that plainly. Between the two babies — three, but let that alone for the moment — one after another, and Walter the sort that never really seemed to settle, Anne was thinner than she should be, and paler. She still nursed Jem now and then, despite Gilbert's concern — for comfort, she said, though whether she meant hers or Jem's Gilbert never could quite tell. Tonight, Anne was finally asleep, and Walter, too, and Susan off somewhere in the stillness of Ingleside, getting a well-deserved rest as well. One midnight snuggle wouldn't ruin Jem, but he'd surely destroy all peace if he really got going.

Gilbert crept down the hall and peeked around the corner of the door. Jem was standing in his cot, fat hands gripping the rail, with tears on his round, red cheeks. When he saw Gilbert, he changed tacks in a hurry, swallowing a sob and squealing, "da-DEE! da-DEE!"

Gilbert took two quick steps across the room and hoisted Jem before he could disturb the slumbering house. They settled into the rocking chair together, Jem conforming himself to Gilbert's chest with all
the boneless solidity of a sandbag.

Anne might have sung a song or recited a verse, but Gilbert had no ear for music and only passing familiarity with the rhymes of childhood. Instead, he took Jem's dimpled hand in his own and began to recite the catechism of Leidy's *Elementary Treatise on Human Anatomy*.

"This is *pollex*, the thumb," Gilbert said, rolling Jem's pudgy digit between his own flexible fingers. "Next is *digitus index*, for pointing and scolding and general investigation of unknown things. Then we have *digitus medius* — that's it's right name, though it has many others: *digitus obscenus, digitus impudicus, digitus verpus*."

Jem gurgled as if arguing a point and Gilbert responded earnestly.

"Don't take my word for it, by any means! You go right down to the library and ask old Leidy's *Anatomy* — all the fun parts are in the footnotes, so be sure you don't skip them. And next is *digitus annularis*. That's an important one. It's also called *digitus cordis* — the heart finger — because some believe there's a vein that connects it directly to the heart. Nonsense, of course; all fingers have a similar vein structure. It's only symbolism, not anatomy, that puts rings on that finger — *annulus* is Latin for ring, you know. Well, I suppose that's another talk for another day. And last, we have *digitus parvus*. I suppose this is the point where Mummy would say, *wee wee wee!*

Jem giggled his approval, then burrowed into Gilbert's shoulder, eyes drooping.

"Of course, every finger has several bones," Gilbert went on, despite the improbability that something as soft and formless as Jem's wee hand could have any structure at all. "Here we have the distal phalange, middle phalange, proximal phalange . . ."

By the time Gilbert reached the capitate bone ("cartilaginous at birth, but ossifying right on schedule at the end of the first year . . .") Jem was asleep. Gilbert rubbed his own hand over the sturdy little back, tracing the curve of spine and the swell of tiny ribs. He held him awhile, for his own comfort or Jem's it would have been impossible to say.

When Gilbert felt himself begin to doze, he rose and placed Jem gently back in his cot. He smoothed the red curls, damp with that inevitable mixture of drool and muggy breath that always left babies slightly soggy. Anne would have said *dewy*. Whatever the word, Jem's cheek had made a warm circle on Gilbert's shoulder that chilled cavernously when they parted.

At tea-time, with no news, Mrs. Marshall Elliott had coaxed Anne and Rosemary home with her for some fortification. John Meredith stayed behind, looking imploringly out over the harbor.

"They'll be back, John," Gilbert said. "Jem would never put Faith in danger."

"I know," John said, so softly Gilbert barely heard him.

A boat rounded Four Winds Point, small sail billowing. Gilbert and John both looked sharp, shading their eyes and trying to count heads. As the boat approached, Gilbert could make out Owen Ford standing in the bow. Closer and closer it came, until he could see that Owen was shaking his head.

The lump in Gilbert's throat was growing more solid. *Tension in the glottis, straining to close for swallowing when it wants to open for tears.*

Owen threw a line up to the dock and Gilbert hauled in the little dory, tying it securely.

"We checked the shore up as far as Spruce Bluff," Owen said as Gilbert extended a hand, first to
him, then to a solemn Ken.

"I'm sure they're fine," Gilbert repeated. "Though I fear the same may not be true of your boat."

"I don't care about the boat, Gil," Owen said. "Just give me a minute and we'll go out again. Has anyone checked down past the cliff-breakers?"

John Meredith blanched.

"Jem wouldn't sail that way," Ken scoffed. "He's smarter than that."

"He might if he were trying to show off," Gilbert muttered.

Owen met Gilbert's eye and nodded. "We'll go. We'll be careful, right, Ken?"

"Wait!" Ken shouted. "Look!"

All eyes followed his index finger to the spot where Captain Malachi Russell's bluff green skiff plowed the waves. Yes, there were definitely more than two people on board. And there were Walter and Jerry following along in Captain Malachi's wake, and three or four other boats farther back that had already heard what news there was to hear.

Gilbert strained to see. Yes, a glint of late sun on damp red curls, huddled under a blanket next to a smaller form, but definitely sitting up. Definitely alive, thank God.

And that is when Gilbert began to be angry.

*Of all the heedless, harebrained, arrogant...*

Owen caught Captain Malachi's line and Gilbert hurried to extend a hand to Faith, half lifting her up onto the dock. She gave an apologetic little smile, then rushed to her father, who held her tight, swaying.

Gilbert turned to Jem, still sitting hunched in the bottom of the boat, and gave him a look that dared him to smile.

Now Gilbert was waiting at his desk. Anne and Susan had taken charge of Jem, insisting that he be fed and cleaned up before anything else. There were several nasty gashes and scrapes on his shins that would need to be dressed, in any case. Gilbert would have done it himself, but Anne had plucked the bandages and ointment from his hands and sent him to the library to cool off.

It wasn't working.

In fact, half an hour alone had only given Gilbert time to rehearse his fury. He wasn't sure where to start. Perhaps with the fact that Jem had scared his mother half to death? Perhaps that he had taken unnecessary risks with a boat he had promised to treat with extra care? Perhaps that he had kept Faith Meredith out overnight?

No, not that last. It couldn't have been helped, if there had been trouble with the boat. Whatever might have happened, Gilbert trusted Jem to protect Faith. In fact, he would trust him with the very lives of every person in Glen St. Mary.

*Not would. Will.*

The Glen was growing rapidly, and the truth was that Gilbert should have taken a partner in his
practice years ago. But he had put off finding one, despite Anne's concern that he was constantly overworked. In just a few years, he could have Jem by his side, and wouldn't they be a fine pair? Assisting one another with minor surgeries, conferring over diagnoses, and — heaven — trading off middle-of-the-night babies. Someday, Gilbert would begin to step down, hand things over. It wasn't just the practice he would entrust to Jem — the business entity with its accounts and ledgers. It was the community — the lives of everyone in the Glen, from birth til death. All in Jem's hands.

And if Jem wasn't ready? Wasn't up to the task? Well, that would be Gilbert's own fault, wouldn't it?

Over the years, Gilbert had prodded here and there, first trying to ascertain whether Jem actually wanted to be a doctor, then whether he really did want to practice in the Glen. If he didn't — if he wanted to be a farmer or a grocer or a full-time surgeon in the city — Gilbert would give his blessing and wave farewell with a smile. But the joy of knowing that Jem really did want to come home, to go into practice together, was inexpressible.

What must it have cost his own father to watch Gilbert reject the life and land that were John Blythe's whole world? To farewell his only child with nothing but heartfelt encouragement, and turn back to those empty fields alone? A lesson learned too late to remedy the hurt, but Gilbert prayed that his father knew that it had been learned after all, and that he was truly sorry.

A tentative knock at the library door interrupted this line of thought.

"Come in," Gilbert said, an unmistakeable edge in his voice.

Jem peeked around the corner of the door. Gilbert was pleased to see that he looked at little nervous. 

Good.

"Hi, Dad," Jem said, stepping into the room.

"Sit down, Jem."

He obeyed.

Gilbert looked at his son over his own steepled phalanges for a long moment, still not quite sure where to begin. Before he could decide, Jem said, "I'm really sorry, Dad."

"You should be."

"I am."

"What happened?" Gilbert asked, his voice deadly calm.

"Uh . . ." Jem faltered. "I sailed too close to the breakwater at Gull Island. It was an accident."

"Was it?"

Jem grimaced. "No. I mean, yes, but . . . I was reckless. I was trying to . . . I don't know . . ."

"Impress someone?"

Jem gulped.

"Well, I'm sure she's very impressed," Gilbert said coldly. "Half the harbor out looking for her and the other half back at home whispering about her reputation. Well done."
Jem had flushed crimson. "We didn't . . . I mean . . . nothing . . ."

Gilbert held up a hand to interrupt the spluttering. "I believe you, Jem. I know you wouldn't do anything to hurt any girl, especially Faith. But rumors are poisonous and there's nothing you can do to stop them now."

To Gilbert's vast surprise, Jem let out a burst of nervous laughter.

"It's not funny, son."

"No. I know. It's only . . ." Jem was obviously working hard to control himself, but with indifferent results. "Do you remember the time she got up in church and explained about cleaning house? Or the time she wrote to The Journal about her stockings?"

Gilbert bit his own lip. How he and Anne had laughed heartily and heartlessly over that letter to the The Journal.*** Even now, sometimes, Anne would say, "I want to explain to everybody . . ." and they would dissolve into giggles. But this was not the moment.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't help much in this case," Gilbert said, though some of the steel had gone out of his voice.

"I suppose not," Jem said. "Listen, Dad. I'm sorry. Really I am."

"I'm glad to hear it," Gilbert said. "Though there are several people in line for apologies before me. Your mother, for one."

"I did. I know she was worried. I apologized."

And she forgave you at once, Gilbert grumbled to himself. Truth be told, Anne was more likely to be upset with him for scolding Jem than she was to be angry at Jem in her joyous relief.

"Who else?" Gilbert asked.

"Reverend Meredith?"

"I don't know," Gilbert said pointedly. "Do you think he wants to see you right now?"

Jem winced. "He's a very forgiving minister . . ."

Gilbert shook his head. "He's a father. A father who just spent a whole day and a whole night wondering where his 17-year-old daughter was. I'd maybe hold off on John Meredith for a day or so. Who else?"

Jem swallowed audibly. "I . . . I already apologized to Faith."

Gilbert could feel his anger ebbing. Jem was obviously contrite. It was always so difficult to stay angry with him. But wasn't that why he needed to be corrected? Held to a high standard?

"And I suppose she forgave you, too," Gilbert sighed.

The calm that softened Jem's features had absolutely no place in this discussion. A look of profoundly satisfied contentment shone in his hazel eyes, removing any of the fear or uneasiness he should have been feeling in this moment.

"Yes," was all he said, but Gilbert didn't need to hear anything but his tone.
Oh, so that's the way of it?

Gilbert pressed his lips together. He hated to venture off-topic, but this needed attention, too. And soon, by the look of things.

"Jem . . ." he said slowly, "If you and Faith are . . . I think we probably need to talk about . . ."

"Oh, gee, Dad, not again!" Jem groaned. "We've had this talk. And nothing happened!"

Gilbert could not suppress a chuckle. "A slightly different talk, Jem."

Jem wrinkled his nose and frowned, but seemed resigned to whatever was coming his way.

"Faith is 17."

"I know!"

"You're a college student. That can be very . . . alluring."

"I can only hope."

"No, Jem, listen." Gilbert did his best to balance between authority and affection. "She's very young. You need to give her time. Go slow."

Jem raised a skeptical brow.

"I'm not stupid, son," Gilbert sighed. "You've had your eye on Faith Meredith for a while now. But you have to remember that she's not where you are. She's still at home. Still has another year at Queen's. Maybe when she goes to college . . ."

"How old was Mum when you fell in love with her?" Jem demanded.

"All the more reason you should listen to my advice," Gilbert said. "Just . . . don't rush her."

"Alright. I won't. Is that all?"

There was more Gilbert wanted to say. But he would have to think about the best way to impart what lessons he had to offer. For now, he was slightly miffed to find that he had lost the upper hand in this conversation.

"Not quite," he said. "I think your apology list is still incomplete."

"Uh. . . ." Jem said.

"I believe there is the small matter of a certain sailboat?"

Jem deflated. "Oh. Yeah. I'll go talk to Mr. Ford in the morning. Maybe I can . . . get a job in Kingsport."

"That's a good start."

Jem rubbed strong, suntanned hands over his face. Hands of a born surgeon, Gilbert thought, biting back a smile. Now that this was over, and everyone safe, he knew that he and Anne would share a chuckle over it with Owen and Leslie. Maybe not with John and Rosemary, though. At least not for a few years.
Standing, Gilbert stepped out from behind the desk and put a warm hand on Jem's shoulder. "I'm glad you're safe," he said, allowing himself to feel his own relief. "Now, go get some sleep. You have a busy term ahead of you, with a job on top of everything."

Jem nodded and rose to leave the library. At the door, he paused. "Dad?"

"Yes?"

"I really am sorry. I was an idiot. And careless. It won't happen again."

"I know, Jem. I'm just glad to have you home."

Notes:

**"Susan, I keep thinking of once when [Jem] cried for me in the night. He was just a few months old. Gilbert didn't want me to go to him — he said the child was well and warm and that it would be fostering bad habits in him. But I went — and took him up — I can feel that tight clinging of his little arms around my neck yet. Susan, if I hadn't gone that night, twenty-one years ago, and taken my baby up when he cried for me I couldn't face tomorrow morning." Rilla of Ingleside, Chapter 6: "Susan, Rilla, and Dog Monday Make a Resolution."

**from Joseph Leidy's *Elementary Treatise on Human Anatomy* (1889)

***Rainbow Valley, Chapter 12: "An Explanation and a Dare" and Chapter 26: "Another Scandal and Another 'Explanation'"
Faith Meredith dragged herself onto the beach, her waterlogged skirt an iron band around her legs, her shins scraped and bruised from stumbling along the half submerged rocks. Her hair dripped down over her sodden shoulders, tangled with salt and strands of bladderwrack.

"We could have DROWNED!" she shouted, red in the face with exertion and fury.

"I'm sorry, alright!" Jem answered, collapsing in the sand at her feet and breathing hard. "What else do you want me to say?"

"I told you that you were too close to the rocks!"

"And you were right. Congratulations!"

Faith looked out to the end of the natural breakwater that formed the tip of Gull Island, where the splintered remains of Owen Ford's sleek new sailboat were slipping beneath the waves.

"Mr. Ford's boat!" she moaned. "And after we promised we would be careful!"

"I know. I know!"

"I can't believe you, Jem! What were you thinking? What did you . . ."

"Could you please stop yelling at me for just one minute! God!"

Faith blinked. She had never heard Jem swear before, even in moments of especial pique. He must be uncommonly upset now. Faith felt that perhaps she should be offended by this transgression, rather than exhilarated.

With an effort, she stifled a retort.

Jem dropped his head. "I'm sorry. Alright, Faith? I'm sorry."

Faith swallowed. She had been scared — it was no easy thing to half-wade and half-swim fifty yards in skirt and petticoats, even with Jem behind her, catching her when she slipped. But she was safe now, and the shrillness of her fear was ebbing. Looking at Jem's blanched face, it occurred to Faith that he might have been scared, too.

She sat down in the sand beside Jem, not quite touching, but close enough that she could feel little vibrations as he breathed.

"Alright," she said.

Jem looked up, hazel eyes anxious, checking to see if she meant it.

Faith caught her breath. This close, he was overwhelming. It was easy to forget, in their many moments of relaxed camaraderie, just how handsome he was, even with his red curls salt-matted,
how tall and broad-shouldered. Captain of the Redmond football team and all that. Faith Meredith rarely felt insignificant, but there had been a few times this summer when she had wondered, with a fluttering of her heart, why Jem Blythe bothered to seek out her company. After all, he must have all the Kingsport girls eating out of his hand.

But it wasn't a Kingsport girl he had invited for a sail on the harbor, and it wasn't a Kingsport girl he was looking at now, beseeching eyes begging her forgiveness.

"It's alright, Jem. I'm fine. We're fine."

He exhaled, seemed to deflate a bit.


"What?" Faith asked gently. "What did you want?"

"Forget it. It's stupid."

Faith's stomach felt oddly twisted, but she wanted to know what he had meant to say. "Why are we out here, anyway, Jem?"

He snorted. "I had a plan."

"What sort of plan?"

"Well, I was going to get you out on the water. I had a picnic basket and everything! You know, I go back to Kingsport next week . . ."

Faith's heart was skidding, not quite sure if it wanted to rush along madly or stop altogether.

Jem gave a little breath of a laugh. "I wanted to tell you before I left. That . . . I love you, Faith."

Stopping. Definitely stopping.

"Oh?" was all she managed to say.

Jem barreled along, the worst of it over. "And I wanted to ask permission to . . . write to you."

"Write to me?" Faith echoed in amazement.

"Yes," he said, looking suddenly nervous. "Well, you still have another year at Queen's and I thought . . . I thought I could write you letters."

"Oh," Faith said again, befuddled. "Alright."

Jem grimaced. "Not quite the enthusiasm I was hoping for."

"No," Faith shook herself. She had not often found herself tongue-tied and this was not the time to start. "No," she said, more decidedly. "Writing is fine. I just thought . . . you were going to ask permission to . . . kiss me."

Jem let out a sound that might have been a laugh and might have been a sob. "That, too."

Faith felt herself smile. It wasn't voluntary — she could no more have stopped herself from grinning in that moment than she could have stopped the sun from shining down on the sparkling harbor.
"Well," she said, more steadily than she felt, "don't keep me in suspense."

Jem's own smile was dazzling. Faith Meredith was not a girl to go weak in the knees, but she was very glad that she was sitting, nevertheless.

Despite drenched clothes and damp hair, his lips were impossibly warm and soft against hers. Faith reached up a tentative hand, half afraid to caress the subtle roughness of his jaw, and half afraid she might push him over in the sand. This was . . . was . . .

After several minutes, coherent thought resumed. Faith pulled back slightly, breathing harder than she had been when she emerged from the sea.

Jem gave a little shudder of laughter. "Faith?"

"Hmm?"

"We're shipwrecked."

Faith let out an hysterical giggle. She crumpled against Jem's shoulder, helpless, shaking with hilarity. He laughed, too, until they were both in tears.

"We're going to have to build a shelter," Faith gasped, wiping her eyes. "Re-invent fire. Learn to forage."

Jem reached out long, flexible fingers and brushed sand from her cheek. "Honestly, that sounds wonderful."

"Good. I do hope Redmond won't miss you."

"It will just have to get along without me."

Jem put a strong arm around Faith's waist and squeezed gently. "It seems we have a lot of work to do. But first . . . do you want to take off your skirt to let it dry?"

Faith pushed him away, giggling anew. "You're as soaked as I am."

"Yes," he said, unleashing another stunning smile. "And I'll be happy to take off anything you'll let me. I'm so cold!"

Faith reached out, grabbed him by the front of his frigid, sopping shirt, and pulled him in for another kiss. Someone would rescue them, eventually. But they were in no hurry.
Carl tossed his golden-brown head, hoping to discourage the mosquitoes buzzing around his ears. They hadn't been so numerous earlier in the afternoon, but it was getting on toward evening, and no doubt they could smell the caked-on sweat of a long day spent hiking the brook to the place where it branched from a larger stream, and then farther. This far from the Glen, there were deep, quiet pools beyond the reach of most casual anglers, bordered by overhanging banks and lush stands of sweet flag that would have rustled if there had been a breeze.

"You can slap them, you know," said Shirley.

"You know I don't like . . ."

Carl's protest was interrupted by the thwap of Shirley's palm against the back of his neck. "Got 'im."

Carl grimaced. "Thanks."

Shirley laid aside his fishing pole and stretched, flexing his legs all the way to his long, brown toes. He had long ago discarded shoes and socks, though any further concession to the sticky heat was inadvisable, on account of the mosquitoes.

"How deep do you think this pool is?" he asked.

Carl peered into the water. "Deep enough for all the fish to have found nice, safe hidey-holes, apparently."

"I'm going to see if it's swimmable," Shirley said, rising and shrugging off his suspenders in one graceful motion. He had grown tall this summer, but not yet broad. Feet and hands too big, of course, like most boys, but he moved with a purpose that muted any awkwardness. Brown-skinned even in winter, Shirley was tanned now, though Carl wondered how it was possible that he had escaped the stark lines on neck and forearm that marked the boundaries of cuff and collar on Carl's own body.

Carl began to reel in his line, tucking the hook safely out of the way and then leaning back on his palms.

"Aren't you coming?" Shirley asked. When Carl made no immediate reply, he shrugged. "Suit yourself."

Draping the last of his clothes over a low-hanging branch, Shirley stepped out into the water, feeling for a drop-off. He found it, and, in an instant, had submerged, searching for the bottom.

He was gone a heartbeat too long, and Carl sat up, ready to call his name, though what that might have accomplished was anybody's guess. But, no, there he was, surfacing in a froth of dripping hair and glistening brown skin. It did look wonderfully refreshing.

Shirley shook the water from his eyes and began to tread. "Eight feet at least, maybe ten," he called. "Come in, Carl!"
"The mosquitoes will miss me."

"That's half the point!"

This last was accompanied by a splash that erupted from Shirley's cupped hand, slapping against the water like a fluke.

"Get in! Or do I have to come make you?"

"Alright, I'm coming," Carl answered, pulling his shirt over his head. When he had tossed his clothes in a heap over the mossy log where they had sat, he mounted the highest part of the bank, standing over the center of the pool. "You said it's deep?"

"Yes, it's deep here," Shirley answered. "There's an underwater ledge over to that side, but you'll be safe if you jump in here."

Carl took two running steps and leapt. He drew his knees up to his chest and landed with a terrific splash, sinking deep into the welcoming water. Down and down he went, until there was no more down to go and kicked off the bottom.

Emerging in a rush, Carl shook plastered hair out of his eyes and beheld Shirley, dripping, doused by the wave he had created. Shirley reciprocated, sending a sheet of water in Carl's direction, and soon they were splashing and wrestling.

Carl's toes found the edge of the submerged ledge. Standing, he was still chest-deep, but had much better leverage. For a moment, he had the initiative and ducked Shirley soundly.

Shirley soon found even footing and attempted to return the favor. They grappled, laughing, neither able to win a clear advantage. Shirley dodged to one side, but Carl recognized the feint and didn't commit to it. He thought he spied an opening, but Shirley parried and caught him by the wrist, holding his arm immobile in the air. There was a flash and sparkle in the deep brown eyes, a glee in the contest, whatever its outcome. Their free hands splashed until Shirley got the upper hand there, too, pinning Carl's other arm to his side. Thus pinioned, Carl acted without thinking. Darting minnow-swift, he leaned in and kissed Shirley on the corner of the mouth.

It had been impulse.

Mistake.

Madness.

Shirley's eyes flew wide, but it was Carl who gasped, horrified. Never in his wildest . . . well, perhaps his wildest, but certainly never in his ordinary dreams . . .

Shirley's grip had dissolved instantaneously, like a sprung lock. Carl would have moved away if he could have moved at all.

With awful deliberation, Shirley looked around them, first over one shoulder, then the other. There was nothing to see on the banks of the pool but reeds and trees, and their clothes hanging lank in the breezeless summer air.

Shirley moved then, and Carl flinched, closing his eyes to absorb the blow.

Instead, he felt long fingers on either side of his face and Shirley's unexpectedly soft kiss on his mouth. His lips were cool at first touch, but warmer where they parted.
It was not a long kiss, nor very deep.

But it was intentional.

Unmistakable.

By the time Carl dared to open his eyes, Shirley had rolled over on his back and was kicking placidly for the opposite bank.

Carl stepped off the underwater ledge, letting himself plunge down into the depths, where it might be easier to breathe.
To Rosamund

October, 1913

To Rosamond*

Di Blythe looked up from the papers in her lap, one ruddy brow arched in skepticism. She scanned Walter, who was leaning forward, gray eyes eager for her verdict. Di hated to disappoint him, but she had to be honest. For his own good.

"They're . . . well, they are quite lovely," Di admitted. "But, Walter. To Rosamond?"

They were alone in a bronze-and-bittersweet dell in Rainbow Valley, lolling in the aureate shade of a golden birch. Di had come home for the weekend, but Nan had not — too busy with marking essays, she insisted — and the Redmond contingent would not be home until Christmas. Perhaps that was just as well.

Di had always loved to read Walter's drafts, feeling honored that he trusted her with his imperfect poems. But these . . .

Walter winced. "Is it that obvious?"

"To an anonymous editor? No." Di said. "To anyone from the Glen? Yes."

"I don't think many people in the Glen read sonnets," Walter grumbled.

"No," Di conceded, "but the few who do would find these quite a revelation."

"I just needed . . . a muse," Walter protested. "It doesn't mean anything."

Di pursed her lips eloquently, and Walter had the good grace to blush. With a groan, he threw himself backward into the deep carpet of fallen foliage and clapped his hands over his face.

Di regarded him with badly disguised impatience. "I don't understand, Walter. Faith? Really?"

"What is there to understand?" came the muffled reply. "She's gorgeous. Vivacious. Exciting!"

"Granted," Di said, fairly. "But I never would have thought she was your type."

Walter rolled up onto one elbow, grey eyes blinking. "Why not?"

Di shook her head. "I love Faith. She's my best friend. But she is a human whirlwind. Are you trying to tell me you want a girl who can't sit still for ten minutes at a time? Who is never happier than when she's cooking up some shocking bit of mischief? Who studies enough to get by, but would rather be sledging down a hill than curled up with a book? Leave Jem aside for the moment. Even if she were free — which she isn't — would you really want to pursue her?"

"Yes."

"I don't know, Walter," Di frowned. "I never got the impression that you particularly enjoyed being Faith's partner in crime. Don't you remember the pig-riding incident?"**
"Of course," Walter said, the color in his cheeks turning patchy with remembered humiliation.

Di nodded. "That's Faith. She's got enough sense to govern her impulses a bit more now, but it's a veneer. She's still a pig-rider at heart."

"I suppose," Walter conceded. "But . . . whenever she's in the room, I can't take my eyes off her. She's fascinating. Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety."***

Di squared the sonnet pages by tapping their edges smartly against her knee. "She's no Cleopatra, Walter. And even if she were, you need someone who fits into your life. Who belongs there."

Walter pressed his lips together. "Isn't there something to be said for being complementary? Why should we love people who are similar to ourselves? Shouldn't we look for someone whose strengths and weaknesses are opposite our own? To supply what the other lacks?"

"Maybe," Di said. "But you have to have some common ground. What do you think Faith's doing right now, this very minute, on a gorgeous Saturday afternoon in October?"

"Oh, I have a pretty good idea," Walter muttered.

Di sighed. "That's not what I meant. Though, actually, it's not a bad way to summarize your incompatibility. I can't imagine you ever wanting to be so . . . demonstratively affectionate."

"No," Walter agreed.

"I only meant that she's probably at a football game, yelling her head off, dressed head-to-toe in white and scarlet. Or, better yet, climbing down out of the bleachers to try to catch a pass herself."

"Probably," Walter snorted.

"She doesn't want to be here, Walter, talking about rhyme schemes. And you don't want to be there."

"I guess I see your point."

"Just let it go, Walter. Even if Jem weren't in the picture, it still wouldn't work out. And I don't think he's going anywhere any time soon."

"I suppose not." Walter pulled a glum expression.

"They really are beautiful sonnets," Di said kindly, turning back to the papers in her hand. "You capture her in words. Anyone who knows her would see it right away, but only because of how well you've written her. And your word play is wonderful, even if that hope and charity line rather gives the game away."

Walter scooted over to sit beside her, transforming from disappointed dreamer into attentive editor. "I wasn't sure about this last couplet," he said, pointing to the lines in question.

"I saw that, too," Di nodded. "Does honey-tongued really rhyme with Rosamond?"

"Got any better ideas?"

Di grinned. "Moribund."

Walter snorted and threw a handful of leaves at her. Di sent an answering volley, prompting Walter to collapse again in mock-defeat.
A shout from farther up the valley announced the arrival of Rilla, towing Una Meredith behind her. Di handed the sonnets back to Walter, who slipped them into his satchel.

In their final moment alone, Di held his eye. "Walter? Don't go ruining a wonderful friendship by hoping for something she can never give you. Trust me: it isn't worth it."

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Notes:

**"[Walter] had written a sequence of sonnets 'to Rosamond' — i.e., Faith Meredith . . . That sonnet sequence was really a remarkable thing for a lad of twenty to write." Rilla of Ingleside, chapter 2**

**Rainbow Valley, chapter 12**

***Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, Act 2, Scene 2***
"There he is!" said Hazel Marckworth, giggling as she pointed toward a tall, sandy-haired boy lacing up his cleats on the sidelines. "My brother Anthony."

"He must be good if he made the team as a freshman," Faith said, settling in beside Hazel in the bleachers.

It was a golden afternoon, the raking light of crisp October outlining all of Redmond in relief so sharp that every detail might have been carved in a monument. The trees had bedecked themselves in festive raiment, the cheerful maples of a nearby grove sporting spirited scarlet well suited to the occasion, while the honey-lemon elms looked on from loftier heights without announcing their allegiance. There was enough breeze to ruffle the leaves and to make Faith thankful for the scarlet-and-white sweater Rosemary had knit it for her as a going-away present. The matching scarf was Jem's, of course, bestowed on her that morning for safe-keeping.

"Peppermint?" Faith said, taking a little paper sack from her pocket and offering one first to Hazel, then to Jerry on her other flank.

"You do go all out with a color scheme," Jerry observed, waving away the red-and-white candies. He had a decorous snip of scarlet-and-white ribbon pinned to his lapel, but looked askance at Faith's getup. "I'm still not sure whether you're you or a barber pole."

"It's my patriotic duty," Faith averred, popping a peppermint into her mouth. "Or whatever the equivalent is for being loyal to a school."

"Ah, but you're a traitor in our midst," Hazel teased. "How can we trust you to maintain your allegiance when it's our own Reds against the med school?"

Faith laughed, a musical sound that rose and fell with the bobbing of her tawny curls. "You have me there, I'm afraid," she admitted. "But it's all Redmond in the end, isn't it?"

The referee blew a blast on his whistle, calling the captains of the scrimmaging squads onto the field. There was no mistaking Jem, even before he unbuckled his helmet and extended a broad hand to the undergraduate captains. More than once this fall, Faith had caught sight of him across the quad or coming toward her on one of the meandering paths in the park and had recognized him by his gait long before he was close enough for her to see his face. There was something inexpressibly comforting about that, proving for certain that she would know him at a single far-off glance, even with his copper curls hidden or his smile faded or his voice too faint to hear.

*Or his nose broken,* Faith winced moments later as Jem absorbed another smashing hit from the undergraduate defense. But no, there was no blood, and Jem grinned as he accepted a hand up out of the mud from his apologetic adversary.

"Oh, my!" Hazel exclaimed. "They do hit hard, don't they? I'm not sure whether I hope Anthony gets to play or not at this rate!"
"I'd say he's thinking the same thing," said Jerry nodding toward the bench, where Anthony Markworth was balancing side-to-side looking positively green.

"GO! GO! RUN!" Faith screamed on the next play, urging Jem on as he wove for nearly twenty yards before being hog-piled by half the defense. The exhilaration of it lifted her right out of her seat, and Hazel and Jerry with her, yelling their heads off for Jem, who emerged mud-soaked and triumphant from the crush.

"Shoot me, Harry," a bored voice drawled behind them as they settled back onto the bench. "I can't believe we're wasting a whole afternoon just so you can watch Tony dearest cool his heels on the sidelines."

Hazel stiffened. There was only one Anthony on the team, and there was something menacing in the sardonic commentary.

Faith turned half-around to find the speaker: a tall, well-dressed boy with amber eyes and black hair pomaded into casually perfect waves. He held a cigarette loosely in his long fingers and blew a smoke ring over the head of his florid-faced companion. When Faith looked back, he caught her eye and held it in a gaze too lazy to be called challenging, too bold to be called indifferent.

Faith blinked first, turning back to the scrimmage and tucking a hand through Hazel's arm.

"I've been thinking about going out for basket-ball next month," she said, re-directing Hazel's attention. "You should try out with me."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Hazel demurred. "Isn't it awfully . . . rough? For girls I mean?"

Faith scoffed. "Nonsense. It's good exercise. And I bet you'd be great at it. I saw you run that time your hat got away from you on the quad. You're a natural."

The grating voice again: "Just look at them. Clobbering one another like brutes. You actually like this, Noyes?"

Before the unknown Noyes could answer, Faith whipped around and confronted the speaker.

"If you're so bored, then why are you here?"

The black-haired boy looked her up and down coolly before taking an unconcerned drag on his cigarette. "Same reason you are, sweetheart."

"Faith!" Jerry said under his breath. "Leave him be."

Faith rolled her eyes but submitted to Jerry's cajoling, turning back toward the match in progress. It was difficult to tune out the barbed comments, which became more frequent and more pointed as the half progressed. However, Faith Meredith refused to be baited, and poured her energy into cheering loudly and lustily enough to compensate for a whole stadium of cynics.

Thankfully, their misanthropic neighbor did not return to the stands after halftime, having found either some more amusing diversion or someone else to annoy.

"Look! Look!" Hazel cried. "Anthony's going in!"

Faith and Jerry added their whoops to Hazel's joyous yell, hoping that a warm welcome would help Anthony Marckworth shake off his freshman jitters.
"He's really quite fast," Hazel assured them. "If they can only get him the . . ."

All three recoiled as Anthony received both the ball and a crushing tackle in quick succession. The ball skittered away from him as he fell, occasioning a free-for-all as the fumble squirted away from several players in succession.

"Oh, darn," Hazel blurted, quickly covering her mouth with a gloved hand.

Faith giggled. "You'll hardly shock me, Hazel," she said. "You should have heard Jem yesterday when he got a paper cut."

"What makes you think she didn't?" Jerry asked. "If she was within half a mile of the library, that is."

The second half passed in a series of rushes and counter-rushes that left the opposing squads nearly indistinguishable in their soiled and muddy sweaters. Anthony did not last long, but Jem played nearly every minute, on both offense and defense, giving quite as good as he got. When the med students ran in a touchdown in the waning seconds of the fourth quarter to take a 20-14 lead, the referee called the proceedings to a close, lest anyone risk further injury.

Faith applauded, bouncing on the balls of her feet as the crowd began to file out of the stands. She placed a fresh peppermint on her tongue, then began climbing down over the risers, rather than shuffling along toward the crowded aisle.

"You coming?" she asked, turning back to Jerry and Hazel when it became apparent that they were not following her.

"You go ahead," Jerry grimaced. "Hazel and I will go congratulate Anthony."

"Check him over for broken bones, more like," Hazel amended.

Faith shrugged. They could suit themselves, but she was was off to find Jem.

He found her first, pushing his way through the merry crowd and surprising her from behind with a muddy hand over her eyes.

"I'd hug you, but I don't think the sweater would appreciate it," he said, a grin clearly audible in his voice.

Faith turned and flung her arms around him, mud and all. "You were brilliant! That tackle you made in the third quarter was spectacular. He definitely would have scored if you hadn't caught him."

"And all I have to show for it are these bruised ribs," Jem smiled, dropping a brief kiss onto her cheek. "Hmmm. You smell like peppermints."

"You want one?" she asked, dimpling.

"A peppermint?"

"Yes."

"Umm . . . sure. Why not."

Faith took hold of Jem's damp sweater and pulled him down into a long, deep kiss, not caring a fig that scores of people milled around them. When she released him, he had her peppermint between his teeth and a dazed expression on his flushed face.
"You'll need to change out of that uniform," she said, smirking.

"Uh huh."

"Probably somewhere a bit more private, though."

"Uh huh."

Faith looked over her shoulder to where Jerry and Hazel were chatting with Anthony, the florid-faced Harry hovering on the periphery of their conversation minus his caustic friend.

"I don't think they'll miss me for a few minutes," she said, already taking several steps toward the maple grove behind the bleachers.

"I've got to get to the locker room . . ." Jem began, though his following feet told a different tale.

"I won't detain you long," Faith said, slipping a hand through the crook of his arm. "I only want my peppermint back."
When You're Nervous

September, 1913

After a hearty supper, Mrs. MacDougal sent the boys up their room to get a good night’s sleep before the first day of term. Carl brushed his teeth and changed into his nightshirt, climbing into bed with a little frisson of nerves he couldn’t quite place. This was his second year at Queen’s and he had been looking forward to returning all summer, at least until . . . well . . . best not to think on that if he could help it.

When Shirley came back from the bathroom in his dressing gown, Carl hid behind his Canadian Geographic. They’d been chummy this past week or two, but neither had spoken of the day they had hiked up the valley to the deep, hidden pool. Maybe he had only dreamed it after all.

There was a click at the door. The lock? Carl had never used it last year, but if it made Shirley feel more secure, that was alright. Now, if he would just get into bed, they could turn out the light and Carl could hide in the darkness.

A footfall and then a quiet creaking of slats, but it was Carl’s own bed that sagged under a new weight. What on earth . . .

Carl peeked up over the top of his magazine and goggled. Shirley was perched stiffly on the edge of the bed, looking down at his own feet, his hand resting tentatively on the quilt between them. For the space of a few heartbeats, Carl knew that he could ignore the gesture and it would be withdrawn and never repeated, nor mentioned. Or . . .

Or he could stretch out his own hand, press his pale palm to the tanned fingers that had caressed his face not a dozen days ago at the quiet, reed-lined pool.

When he did, he was met instantly with a deep brown gaze simultaneously fierce and fragile. Shirley did not move any closer, but the distance was closing just the same. Carl leaned forward, then more, until he pressed a tender kiss to Shirley’s lips and felt a tiny ripple of relief answer him.

He would have sat back, but Shirley brought his other hand up to brush down his cheek and Carl was definitely not dreaming the palm warm against his pulse, nor the inrushing breath he drew when Shirley’s mouth opened below his. Then Carl was plummeting as an anchor into unseen depths, leaving the mundane world above or behind or in another universe. Eyes buttoned shut, Carl was immersed in other sensations: gooseflesh prickling up his arm, the rushing hiss of blood singing through his veins, and an inexplicable scent, reminiscent of warm bread, that must have been baked into Shirley's very skin during his formative years in the Ingleside kitchen.

When he surfaced for breath, Carl opened his eyes to find Shirley’s very close, dark lashes fluttering. All he could say was, “Oh.”

“Is that alright?” Shirley asked, and Carl realized he had an answer to the question from earlier this afternoon.
What do you look like when you’re nervous?

You tell me.

Can’t. Never seen it.

“Yes, it’s alright,” Carl breathed. “Only, you never said anything after . . .”

Shirley rolled a shoulder uneasily. “I didn’t know what to say.”

“Me neither.”

“But it’s alright?”

Perhaps there were words that might have cleared things up for the both of them, but Carl didn’t know them, at least not yet, so he answered with another kiss. Not so soft this time. He kneeled on the bed and threw his arms around Shirley’s neck, kissing him soundly until they toppled over onto the quilt together, laughing. They lay there a long time, nose to nose, looking at one another as they had never let themselves look before, fingertips inquiring whether it was alright to skim here or rest there and finding that it was.

After a long while, Carl licked his own lips. “We should get some sleep. It’s a big day tomorrow.”

“I haven’t thought past tonight,” Shirley admitted.

That made Carl laugh again, a clear, merry peal that he stifled in the quilt. “You’ve come all the way to Queen’s and haven’t thought about school?”

“Not even a little.”

“Well, you’ll need your wits about you in the morning,” Carl smiled, sitting up.

Shirley followed, his brown hair mussed and cheeks flushed rosy enough that it took quite a lot of effort not to kiss him again. Carl gave him a playful shove instead.

“Off to bed with you, Blythe.”

Shirley obeyed, leaving the bed cavernous behind him. Carl watched unabashed as he hung up his dressing gown and climbed into his own bed on the other side of the nightstand. Shirley pulled the covers up under his chin and Carl had one last glimpse of deep brown eyes before he snuffed the lamp.

“Goodnight, Shirley,” he said, certain he would not sleep, but trying to set a good example.

“Goodnight, Carl.”

Carl lay rigid on his back, hands planted firmly on top of the quilt, trying to breathe normally if only he could remember how. Goodness, how was he ever going to get through school tomorrow? He’d be expected to greet old friends and find his classes and remember anything at all about algebra, which would be quite impossible if he left his mind here in the little rose-papered room at the end of the hall. But he must try. He’d get through the day and then come back to Mrs. MacDougal’s for supper and then . . .

“Carl?”

“Yes?” Carl squeaked.
Shirley’s voice was quiet and he sounded a long way off, even if Carl could have reached out and touched him from here if he had dared. “Do you remember when you used to stay over at Ingleside and we’d both sleep in my bed?”

“Yes.”

“I always liked that. You would tell me about animals and how they slept. I remember that Pacific sea otters sleep holding hands.”

Carl swallowed. Jerry had always refused to share a bed with him, never knowing what toads or spiders might crawl out of his pockets in the wee sma’s, so for many years, Carl had slept alone in his old cot, which was so short that he could never stretch out, and had strange bed-fellows.* Shirley had never been afraid of anything, not even snakes, and there had been many visits to Ingleside when Carl had ended a long explanation of chipmunk hibernation or the habits of honeybees to find Shirley asleep on the pillow beside him. But that had been different.

The silence expanded and Carl realized that Shirley would never ask in so many words. He would only put out a hand to see whether Carl would take it.

“Shirley?”

“Yes?”

“These beds . . . they’re awfully small.”

“Alright.”

Did he sound disappointed?

Carl cleared his throat. “But . . . if you move all the way over, I can probably fit.”

He could. There was plenty of room as long as you didn’t mind lying spoon-fashion. Carl kissed the back of Shirley’s neck and went searching for a hand with his own. Fingers intertwined, he thought perhaps he might be able to sleep after all.

Notes:

*Rainbow Valley, Chapter 4: "The Manse Children"
It was awfully quiet in Rainbow Valley these days. Faith and Jerry were off with Jem at Redmond; Di and Nan and Walter were teaching; Carl and Shirley were at Queen's. Sometimes Una forgot that they were all quite grown up now. You could still find Rilla Blythe dreaming in a sunny nook from time to time, or Carl and Shirley fishing for trout in the reed-lined pond on weekends. Una herself liked to read in the shade beneath the White Lady. She was rarely interrupted there.

This morning, Una did not have a book with her. In fact, it was so early that the feeble light sifting through the birches would not have illuminated a page. She walked like this when she could not sleep. In the mists of early morning, Rainbow Valley seemed to lie on a border between two worlds, simultaneously immediate and ethereal. Una had never told anyone, but she often felt close to her mother in these early morning reveries, when time seemed irrelevant and distance immaterial.

Una wandered along the brook for a while, until she came to a little maple grove. The gray haze was lightening into the pale yellow of morning, illuminating the trees and what lay under them.

Suddenly, something moved in the grove, and Una leapt backward in surprise. Whatever it was, it was big and dark, and it should not have been in Rainbow Valley in the pre-dawn gloom.

Una recalled the debacle of Henry Warren's ghost and resolved to stand her ground. She was eighteen years old now, and growing into her courage. Una peered through the mist to see what — or whom — lurked under the maples.

When the shape resolved into sense, Una's hand flew to her mouth, but did not quite stifle her surprised "Oh!"

The apparition was none other than Mary Vance — a Mary Vance who had just awoken in the arms of a still-sleeping Miller Douglas.

Mary's own eyes flew wide as she took in her predicament, responding to Una's surprise with a similar cry of her own.

Una had begun to back away from the grove, but Mary leapt to her feet and called to her. "Una, wait! Come back here a minute! Oh, this is a fine kettle of fish!"

This commotion roused Miller from his slumber. Sitting up, he seemed shocked to find Mary standing over him.

"Una!" Mary called. "Come back!"

Una gulped, but stopped backing away.

"What happened?" Miller asked Mary, seemingly too groggy to have noticed Una yet.

"Oh, we fell asleep!" Mary replied, giving him a little kick of frustration.
"Ouch! You mean we've been here all night?!

"It certainly seems that way," Mary scowled.

"What . . ." Una began, but could not seem to find words.

"Oh, come here, Una, and I'll explain everything," Mary said.

Una was in no doubt that this was true, but she was not sure that she wanted to hear everything that Mary might explain.

"We came down here last night," Mary said, twisting her skirt through her fingers, "to get away for a little while. We were only talking, Una, true's you live, and we must have just . . . fallen asleep."

A certain tone of amazement in Mary's voice, coupled with the look of dawning horror on Miller's face, convinced Una that this was probably the truth.

"You just . . . fell asleep?" she asked tremulously.

"Of course we did," answered Mary. "Didn't we, Miller?"

At Mary's prodding, Miller spoke to Una, possibly for the first time ever. "It was just an accident. Honest, Una."

"Oh, we're in for it now," Mary groaned. "Old Kitty Alec will have your hide and Cornelia will never let you come around the place ever again! Never!"

"I'm sorry, Mary," Miller said, sounding like he meant it. "I shouldn't have fallen asleep!"

"Well, I guess I fell asleep same as you," Mary said, justly. "And I suppose we'll both be in for it when we get home."

"Could we try to explain?" Miller asked, forlorn.

"How?" Mary seemed on the verge of tears. "Your aunt won't believe us any more'n Cornelia will."

Mary wrung her hands and Miller looked stricken. Una glanced from one to the other, wishing there were something she could do. It had been an accident, she felt sure of it. It seemed terribly unfair that Mary and Miller should be kept apart forever for such a mistake, as surely they would be. Oh, what would Mrs. Elliott say about this? Unless . . .

"No," said Una quietly.

Mary and Miller stared at her, uncomprehending.

"No," said Una more firmly, though she trembled slightly as she spoke. "Miller, you run home now and go straight to the morning chores. If your aunt misses you, just say you were out in the barn early. And Mary . . . you were with me, weren't you? We stayed up late talking and fell asleep in my room. We'll go right now and apologize to Mrs. Elliott for worrying her when you didn't come home last night."

Mary's white eyes had gone very round. "Una . . . you would . . . lie? For me?"

Una bit her lip. "Well, I don't like it very much," she confessed. "But I'm afraid they might not believe you as I do, and . . . oh, Mary, you could be in real trouble over this."
Miller was already on his feet, brushing leaves and grass from his coat. He paused to pluck a particularly conspicuous twig from Mary's hair. The tender gesture tugged at Una's heart. Miller Douglas might not be her own ideal of romance, but Una knew that he cared for Mary and wouldn't willingly do anything either to hurt her or to hurt his own chances of winning the approval of Mrs. Marshall Elliott.

"Go on then, Miller," Una said, afraid she might lose her nerve if they lingered too long.

Miller started for home, but took only one step before he turned back to give Mary a chaste peck on the cheek. Mary blushed furiously, and Una studied her feet.

When Miller had disappeared into the mist, Mary linked arms with Una. "Thanks, Una. Truly. I never would have asked you to do it, or even thought of it myself. I'm sorry to make you lie, but I'm real grateful."

"You really do care for Miller, don't you Mary?" Una asked.

"I do," Mary answered, more earnestly than Una was used to hearing her. "Cornelia doesn't approve and I don't know what I can do to change her mind. She says Miller comes from a low family, and I don't see how there's any getting around how he was born!"* 

"It's not fair," Una sympathized. "But maybe one day it won't matter so much."

"One fine day, perhaps, but I can't see how."

"Things change," Una said. "I often wish they didn't, but perhaps sometimes they change for the better."

"Well, all I know's I owe you a favor, Una. And so does Miller. You're right — we could be in a lick of trouble for this. Real trouble, not kid stuff."

Una returned Mary's squeeze. "I don't like to lie, Mary. But you didn't really do anything wrong. Jerry told me once that when two choices both seem wrong, I must trust in my conscience. And I think it will rest easy over this."

The rising sun had burned off the last of the mist. Mary and Una walked arm-in-arm down the red shore road to tell their lie, both feeling for the first time that they were friends rather than playmates.

Notes:

*I"I won't have Miller Douglas hanging round Mary,' she said crisply. 'He comes of a low family. His father was a sort of outcast from the Douglases — they never really counted him in — and his mother was one of those terrible Dillons from the Harbour Head.'” Miss Cornelia in *Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 1: "Glen Notes and Other Matters"
"Tell us a story, Walter," Rilla begged.

Spring sunlight filtered through the acid-green canopy of the White Lady, illuminating the soft swale overlooking the brook in Rainbow Valley. The junior representatives of the houses of Blythe and Meredith had gathered there: Carl and Shirley home from Charlottetown; Una having left Bruce at the manse for once; Rilla rosy, with long limbs splayed over the grass. They were an amiable group, Rilla thought, and if they lacked some of the boisterous banter that spiced conversation among their older siblings, they could find quieter ways to enjoy one another's company.

Having Walter home from Lowbridge was a rare treat. He had given his scholars a brief respite from their labors before the last big push toward the Queen's entrance exam, and taken a break himself. Rilla hoped a weekend of lazy afternoons and Susan's cooking would put some color into his cheeks.

For now, Walter sat with his back up against the birch, surveying the burbling brook and the hopeful charm of Rainbow Valley in blossom time. Rilla and Una sat together at his feet, with Carl and Shirley farther down the slope, listening attentively.

"What sort of story?" Walter asked, preparing to indulge her.

Rilla looked up through the boughs of the White Lady, remembering all Walter's tales of dryads and naiads. "Something with nymphs in it," she sighed.

"Nymphs?"

"You've been reading Classics, haven't you? For Redmond?" Rilla asked. "You must have some naiad stories we've never heard before."

Walter made a show of thinking for a long moment. "Alright, I've thought of one," he smiled. "But it's terribly tragic."

"Let's hear it," Rilla said, wriggling in anticipation.

"Shall I tell it?" Walter asked Una, holding her gaze until she dropped her eyes, nodding assent.

Rilla pouted. "Stop teasing and tell!"

"You've asked for it," Walter shrugged, settling himself against the birch. "Do you hear those tall grasses sighing down around the edges of the pond?" he asked, eliciting nods from his audience. "Do you know what they're called?"

Rilla and Shirley shook their heads.

"They're reeds, aren't they?" Carl offered.

"Yes, but they have a name. Do you know it, Una?" Walter asked.
Una blushed. "Rosemary calls them sweet flag."

Walter nodded. "Yes, sweet for the scent and flag — an old name for an iris. They aren't irises, but their leaves are similar. They grow in the swampy ground at the edges of ponds and rivers. But they have another name: calamus. This is the story of how the reeds got their name and why they whisper their lament in the wind."

Rilla clasped her hands under her chin, settling in for the tale. How she loved to listen to Walter speak, especially when his gray eyes sparkled with such obvious enthusiasm for his performance. He had a fine, clear voice and a way of inflecting every phrase with subtle emotion that made Rilla feel as though she were inside a story, not apart from it.

Walter spread his hands before him and began:

"The Greek poet Nonnus tells us that long ago, the great river god, Meander, had a beautiful son, whom he called Calamos. Calamos was tall and long-haired and fleet of foot — The Quick One — who swam like a fish in his father's flowing waters.

Calamos had a dearly beloved friend named Carpos. Carpos was a mortal boy, but so beautiful that the goddesses took notice of him and called him The Flower of Love. But Carpos had no eye for goddesses. He liked best to play with his friend, Calamos, running races along the banks and swimming in the river.

One day, Calamos and Carpos set out to race. The first half of the race was on land. Nimble Calamos could have won it easily, but he fell on purpose to give the victory to his friend. The second half was a swimming race, and again, Calamos, the very son of the river, could have taken the prize without much trouble. But he so enjoyed watching his beautiful playfellow that he swam lazily, hanging back and keeping Carpos always before his eye.

But just when Carpos was about to win the race, a great wave came up and pulled him beneath the water. Calamos, the stronger swimmer, made it to shore. He cried out for Carpos, but got no reply. He called to the naiads, afraid that they had stolen Carpos from him, but again, his cries went unanswered.

Then Calamos realized the awful truth: that Carpos had drowned and would never return to him. And he cried, 'My star sank in the stream and has not yet risen! What care I to see the light any longer?'

So Calamos cut his hair in grief and scattered it in his father's fatal waters. The son of the river made bubbling streams of his tears and declared that Calamos and Carpos had had one life, and would have one death. He bid the naiads build one empty barrow on the river's bank and cut their own hair — one single strand to mourn himself, their brother, and all the rest for Carpos. Then Calamos threw himself into the resisting river to quench his burning love and swallowed its waters again and again until he drowned.

When Calamos' body floated to the marshy bank, it became the reeds that bear his name — calamus — and they sigh in the wind evermore, lamenting lost Carpos."

Walter's finale met absolute silence. Or, rather, near-absolute, but for the sighing of the sweet flag at the margins of pond waters.

Rilla sat quite stunned. What could have inspired Walter to tell such a shocking story? Perhaps Susan was right after all in her suspicion of poetry. Rilla was quite sure she would never be able to walk by the Glen pond, never hear the gentle rustling of the grasses there, without imagining poor, drowned...
Calamos and his ceaseless weeping. She glanced around the circle of listeners, gauging whether the others were in similar distress.

Una, very pale, had a handkerchief pressed to her lips, seeming to stifle a sob. Carl was shifting his weight from side to side, two crimson spots burning in cheeks otherwise gone as pale as Una's. And Shirley . . . Shirley had gone utterly still, as if the story had been Medusa, rather than Calamos and Carpos.

Resolving that she must save the situation if no one else would, Rilla cleared her throat. "That was . . . quite fascinating, Walter."

Walter shrugged at her. "You said you wanted a story with naiads in it."

"That wasn't quite what I had in mind . . ."

"I think it was very beautiful," came a small voice from behind Una's handkerchief. "I will always think of it when I see sweet flag. Or hear it."

"That's just the problem, isn't it?" Rilla interjected. "Oh, Walter, why would you tell us such a sad story?"

"It's Greek mythology," Walter observed. "It's all like that."

"Oh, there must be some cheerful bits of it," Rilla countered. "What was that one Mother told us about Apollo turning into a dolphin? Do you remember, Shirley?"

Shirley blinked once at being thus directly addressed. "No," was all he said.

"Something about leading ships home in a storm . . ." Rilla muttered, wrinkling her nose.

Walter lay down in the grass, lacing his fingers behind his head. "If you're going to tell a story, Rilla, tell one that you know."

"The only stories I know are ones you've told me yourself, or else they're from books that you've already read," Rilla protested.

"Oh, come now. There must be something interesting you know that I don't," Walter prodded. He reached out a hand and began plucking clover heads, flicking them expertly at his sister. She reciprocated, sending several dainty missiles back in his direction until she succeeded in hitting him in the nose.

"I surrender!" Walter said, laughing. "Though I won't let a physical assault distract me from the matter at hand. You owe me a story."

"You know them all already!" Rilla groaned.

"I don't suppose . . ." Una ventured, "that Walter will have heard what happened to Mrs. Alec Davis's cow last week?"

Walter grinned up at the overhanging branches of the White Lady. "No, but I hope I'm about to!"

Rilla giggled. "Oh, you tell it, Una. You heard it directly from Mary Vance."

"I couldn't," Una blushed. "You tell, Rilla — you do all the voices so well."

Rilla, who was secretly proud of her impressions, obliged. "Well, Mrs. Alec Davis baked a custard
pie last Friday. Was it Friday? Or Saturday? Do you, remember, Carl? Carl?"

Carl jumped as if electrified. "Sorry. What?"

"The cow. Was it Friday or Saturday."

"Cow?"

"Oh, never mind," Rilla muttered. "It doesn't matter. Let's just say it was Friday . . ."

Notes:

*Nonnus's Dionysiaca, Book 11, lines 369-481. I'm paraphrasing and condensing based on the translation by WHD Rouse.
"He knows!"

"He doesn't. It was just a story."

"He knows!"

"Calm down. He doesn't. He didn't pay us any special attention. I watched."

"Do you think he'll tell?"

"He doesn't know."

"We can't meet like this anymore. Not in the Glen. It isn't safe!"

"It's never going to be completely safe."

"What are we going to do?"

"Nothing. We do nothing. Just . . . lie low for a while. Let them forget."

"They won't forget that story in a hurry!"

"We'll throw off suspicion. Just for the summer, while everyone's around. Try walking Miranda Pryor home from prayer meeting or something."

"Miranda Pryor?!"

"She won't bite you."

"Joe Milgrave might."*

"He'll get over it."

"You really don't think Walter suspects?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you think he's read the Calamus poems?"

"Maybe."

"No more clever jokes about pond-waters, then."

"Alright."

"Maybe we shouldn't even go fishing anymore."
"Now that really would make them suspicious. Don't worry. We'll just keep quiet for the summer. Everyone will be off to Redmond in the fall."

"Not Una. Or Rilla."

"I don't think there's much danger from Una. And Rilla's not that inquisitive."

"They want me to go, too, you know. To Redmond."

"Do you want to go?"

"Not yet."

"You can go if you want to."

"No. I'll wait."

"It's alright. I'll catch up next year. Go."

"Not a chance."

"Did you come up with an excuse?"

"I told them I want to pay part of my own way, so I'm taking the school at Harbour Head."**

"They believed it?"

"Seemed to."

"I'll be home weekends."

"I know."

"Not so many people around then."

"You really think it will be safer in the fall?"

"They'll all be too busy to notice us."

"So that's it? This is goodbye?"

"Just for the summer."

"What are you doing? Don't light a match! They'll see it a mile off!"

"I don't want to say goodbye in the dark."

"Goodbye . . ."

". . . goodbye."

Notes:

**"Carl Meredith was walking with Miranda Pryor, more to torment Joe Milgrave than for any other reason. Joe was known to have a strong hankering for the said Miranda, which shyness prevented him from indulging on all occasions. Joe might summon enough courage to amble up beside Miranda
if the night were dark, but here, in this moonlit dusk, he simply could not do it. So he trailed along
after the procession and thought things not lawful to be uttered of Carl Meredith . . . [Miranda] would
much rather have walked with Joe than with Carl, with whom she did not feel in the least at home.
Yet it was something of an honour, too, to have a college boy beside her, and a son of the manse at
that.
Shirley Blythe was with Una Meredith and both were rather silent because such was their nature."
*Rilla of Ingleside*, Chapter 3: "Moonlit Mirth"

**"Carl Meredith and Shirley Blythe came home last Friday evening from Queen's Academy. We
understand that Carl will be in charge of the school at Harbour Head next year and we are sure he
will be a popular and successful teacher."
"He will teach the children all there is to know about bugs, anyhow," said Miss Cornelia. "He is
through with Queen's now and Mr. Meredith and Rosemary wanted him to go right on to Redmond
in the fall, but Carl has a very independent streak in him and means to earn part of his own way
through college. He'll be all the better for it.""
*Rilla of Ingleside*, Chapter 1: "Glen Notes and Other Matters"
"Is it always like that, Dad?" Jem asked as the buggy rolled down the moonlit road, away from the house where Joe and Molly Churchill had just welcomed their first child.

"Not always," Gilbert answered, smiling. "But often enough."

"I knew Molly MacAllister at school," Jem said. "I always thought of her as a timid little thing, like a sparrow. I never imagined she could be . . . like that."

Gilbert chuckled. "It's amazing to see, isn't it? Watching someone turn into a warrior? She did very well, especially for her first time."

Jem shook his head. "I can still scarcely believe it. There's Molly, so tiny you'd think her arms would snap if she carried a bucket of water. When I saw her with that enormous belly, I thought for sure she was going to break in half."

"The body is an astonishing creation," Gilbert said. "Sometimes, it seems so fragile — such a delicate balance of pulse and breath that the tiniest poke should push it out of order. And sometimes, it can endure or achieve more than you could imagine. Make no mistake, birth is an honest-to-goodness miracle. We help, but the main thing is helping mothers find their own strength."

Jem sat quiet for a moment. He had gone on simple calls with his father for years, but this had been his first birth. After a year of medical school, he had felt he was ready to assist, and Gilbert had agreed to take him along.

"How many babies have you delivered, Dad? Give or take?"

"One thousand seventy-four."

Jem was surprised, not by the number, but by its specificity. "That an estimate?"

Gilbert chuckled. "I do keep case notes, you know."

"But you know how many births off the top of your head?"

"The ledger for births is numbered," Gilbert shrugged. Then he grinned. "James Matthew Blythe, number 93. When we get home, you can enter little one-oh-seven-four yourself."

Jem sat a bit taller. The ledgers in the library were confidential; all the Blythe children had grown up with the explicit understanding that so much as touching one would incur swift and severe punishment. If his father would actually let him write in one, Jem knew that he had begun to think of him as a fellow-physician. A colleague.

"Can I ask you something, Dad?"

Gilbert nodded, letting the reins slacken a bit.
"I've often wondered," Jem said, shifting on the seat, "and even more now that I've started studying obstetrics. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. But I wondered . . . what happened when Shirley was born?"

Gilbert swallowed audibly. It was too dark to be sure, but Jem thought that the shimmering moon was not wholly responsible for his father's pallor. "Placental abruption," he answered in a dull tone.

"Really?"

Gilbert nodded. "Not a complete abruption, but plenty to be going on with."

"Mum . . . hemorrhaged?" Jem asked cautiously.

"Yes."

"It was severe?"

"Yes."

Jem was not due to start his practical obstetrics course until the fall term, but he had attended enough lectures to know the truth.

"Dad. You . . . saved her."

Gilbert's mouth gave a grim twitch that could not have been called a smile.

"How?" Jem asked in awe.

"If I knew, I'd tell you."

"Couldn't you have taken her to town? A Caesarean section . . ."

Gilbert was shaking his head. "There was no time."

"No warning?"

"No. Not really. I thought . . . I thought that maybe Shirley was a bit on the small side, but it's very difficult to tell that sort of thing before the birth. And then, all of a sudden . . ."

Gilbert exhaled and did not finish his thought.

Jem prodded the recesses of his mind for everything he had ever read about fetal development. "So . . . there must have been a small tear, asymptomatic, for a long time. And then it tore away all at once?"

"Yes."

"Geez, Dad."

Gilbert merely nodded.

"Risk factors for placental abruption . . ." Jem said, as much to himself as to his father. How old had Mum been when Shirley was born? Thirty-two? Thirty-three? "The risk goes up with age," he mused, "but she wasn't very old."

"No. She wasn't," Gilbert said faintly.
"Do you think it made a difference that she had all six of us so close together?"

"Seven."


"Maybe."

Jem was thinking hard, now. But if births close together were a risk, why would they have had Rilla so soon after Shirley? And Mum was only thirty-four when Rilla was born — plenty of women in the Glen had children into their forties. Why . . .

Suddenly, Jem realized that any answers to this line of questioning would provide more information than he cared to have. He changed tacks in a hurry.

"And Shirley? Was he healthy?"

"Tiny," Gilbert said. "Full term, more or less, but delicate."*

"And Susan took care of him?"

"I don't think she put him down once for the first three months."

"But he's alright now, isn't he?"

"Nearly as tall as you are, if you haven't noticed," Gilbert said, a note of pride in his voice. "And still growing."

"And Mum . . ."

"It was a very close shave." Gilbert's tone indicated that he would say no more about it.

Jem sat stunned. But why should he be? He knew that his father saved lives. Maybe not every day, but often enough. That was the job, wasn't it?

"Promise me something, Jem," Gilbert said, his voice husky.

"Sure, Dad."

"When your own children are born, call me. Wherever you are, I'll come to you. If they're easy deliveries, you can do them yourself. That can be wonderful. Truly. But if they aren't . . . I would spare you that."

Jem let himself imagine, just for a moment, what it might feel like to hold Faith's life in his hands. He wondered whether it really was too late to pursue a career as a greengrocer.

"Alright, Dad. I will."

"Good. Never forget what you're up against, Jem. Death is greedy. Celebrate the miracles, like today."

"Are there many like today?"

"Every baby is a miracle."

Gilbert twitched the reins, telling the horse to pick up the pace. He took a single deep breath. "Don't
worry, Jem. You'll do fine. And so will Faith."

Jem flushed. "I haven't even proposed yet."

"I imagine it won't be long now."

"Someone advised me to go slow," Jem muttered.

"And you listened!" Gilbert said, regaining his customary grin. "See? Miracles abound."

Notes:

*"After [Shirley's] birth Anne had been very ill for a long time, and Susan mothered the baby with a passionate tenderness which none of the other children, dear as they were to her, had ever called out. Dr. Blythe had said that but for her he would never have lived." *Rainbow Valley*, chapter 1, "Home Again."
Rilla put on her georgette gown, knotted up her hair and bound a little double string of pearls around it. Then she tucked a cluster of pale pink baby roses at her belt. Would Ken ask her for a rose for a keepsake? She knew that Jem had carried to the trenches in Flanders a faded rose that Faith Meredith had kissed and given him the night before he left.

_Rilla of Ingleside_, Chapter 16: "Realism and Romance"

Faith Meredith had devised a plan, but in the event, she hadn't needed it. Without prompting, Di Blythe had proposed — rather forcefully, it must be said — that all the youth of Ingleside and the manse spend the evening at the shore, save the parting couples. Perhaps Di had read Faith's mind; perhaps she had only woken that morning to find that Nan had knelt at the window all night.

Rilla had protested a bit, but Walter had steered her by the arm and tactfully confided that he had something very particular he wished to ask her on their walk down to the harbour, thus sweeping away any vestige of resistance. Carl and Una had even fetched little Bruce along with them, so there was virtually no chance of anyone wandering through Rainbow Valley unannounced. There would be time enough for public goodbyes tomorrow.

Firefly time found Faith and Jem intertwined in a little dell bordered by rose bushes, most of the blossoms blown and disintegrating, raining down red and pink at the slightest provocation. It was as romantic a spot as anyone might wish, but, truth be told, Faith valued the sheltering hedges of thorny vine more than the flowers themselves. In fact, she found herself wishing the roses gone — their sickly perfume cloyed, threatening to mask the lower scents of salt and sweat that she wanted unalloyed.

"Wait . . . stop . . ." Jem gasped. He pulled away, breathing raggedly. Putting Faith's hands away from him, he sat up, drawing his knees protectively toward his chest.

Faith smiled, cheeks flushed and glowing. She reached a hand up to stroke his jaw, fingers as light and gentle as the August breeze rustling the leaves overhead. "You alright there?"

"Yeah," Jem panted, shying away from her hand. "Just . . . I . . . just . . . gimme a minute."

His collar hung open, and the first two buttons, but no more than that. Whatever anyone might imagine, in the two years since Gull Island, Jem had never let her get at that third button, nor any others.

Faith sat up as well, but she did not bother to smooth her skirt, nor comb the petals from her hair. She rested her cheek against his heaving shoulder, wove her arm through the gap at his elbow. This was not a night for unsaid things.

"What do you do?" she asked quietly, "when you want me and can't have me?"

Jem snorted and shook his head. "You don't want to know."
"Don't I?" Faith asked. "Then perhaps I will tell you what I do." She leaned in close, the better to whisper in his ear. "I wait until the whole house is asleep, and then I hike my nightdress up over my hips, and . . ."

Jem pulled away from her, smiling, but shaking his head. "Don't tell me this, Faith."

"Why not?"

"Because you have an awfully high opinion of my powers of self-control."

That made her laugh. "I'm sure your self-control is equal to any situation," she said. "But I was wondering more about your imagination."

"My imagination?" Jem asked, regarding her with surprise.

"Yes," Faith replied, lips curved in mischief. "There are certain . . . rules . . . that we must abide by, even as an engaged couple . . ."

"Oh, I'm aware; don't worry."

"But, given the circumstances, I think we might find some imaginative way to abide by the letter of the law."

Jem's eyebrows had disappeared behind his red curls. "What exactly do you have in mind?"

Wordlessly, Faith reached across his body and took his hand in hers. With lingering tenderness, she kissed each finger, pausing to press his palm to her cheek before she guided it beneath her hems. Jem hesitated for a heartbeat, but Faith met his hazel gaze without teasing for once, and he complied without protest.

He was too hesitant, and she had to press and pilot his hand with her own until he was convinced that she was not as fragile as he supposed. But Jem Blythe was a quick study, and it was chemistry that gave him fits, not anatomy.

Faith nuzzled into his neck, whispering soft words of encouragement and instruction until he settled into a rhythm that left her incapable of coherent speech. Then she purred against his throat, her breaths a series of little catches that came closer and closer together.

The rose-laden glade faded into legend, part of a distant and half-remembered world of little consequence. If concrete objects continued to exist beyond the aura of her incandescent skin, Faith could not perceive them.

When she melted against him at last, Jem held her close and steady.

"I could get used to that," he whispered into her hair.

Faith did not answer, but infused her shuddering breaths with an accent of amusement. When she opened her eyes, she was surprised to discover her own fingers embedded talon-like in the placard of Jem's shirt, two open buttons evidently sufficient after all.

"I don't know where you are right now," Jem said from a long way off, "but you look like you're having fun there."

"I'm right here," Faith breathed. "Come join me."

He made a throaty sound only distantly related to laughter. "No, I don't think so."
She disentangled her hand from the fabric at his chest and and reached again, but he caught her wrist and held it firmly away from him.

"No. I'm not kidding, Faith. Touch me right now and you'll be on your back so fast . . ."

She smiled a hair's breadth from his cheek. "Don't tempt me."

"No. Not like this."

"Alright," she agreed, letting her arm go lax in his grasp to show she would not press the point. "How about I just stay in this general vicinity," — waving a slim hand to indicate everything above his gaping collar — "and leave you to your own devices?"

Jem appeared to give this suggestion more careful consideration than any decision he had ever made, which, given the past month, was saying rather a lot.

"You'll . . . let me . . ."

"Let you?" Faith pulled back far enough to look Jem in the eye, a bit of her customary snap returning. "I'm not doing you a favor. I'm entirely selfish, I assure you."

He smiled at that, hazel eyes twinkling. "Are you?"

"Yes," she said, nodding. "I want a memory I can look forward to."

"And that's the memory you want?" Jem asked, vastly amused.

Faith took his face between her hands and kissed him unhurriedly, lips still pliant in the aftermath of his embrace. "Will you remember me like this?" she asked.

"Always."

"Then return the favor, won't you?"

Jem shook his head, not in refusal, but in recognition of the palpable hit. "Alright," he said. "But you keep those hands where I can see them. Deal?"

Faith grinned her agreement and ended all further conversation with a kiss worth remembering.

Later, when they lay among the fallen petals, Faith stretched a lazy hand above her head and plucked a small, pink rose from one of the wild bushes bordering their clearing. With a smug smile, she brought it to her lips and gave it a decorous peck.

"Take this," she said, dropping the blossom onto his chest. "And if anyone asks about our farewell, you can say that I kissed a rose and that you carry it with you always."

Jem laughed with abandon. He gathered her to him and buried his face in her golden-brown curls, grinning. "God, I'm gonna miss you, Faith."
"We were very happy before the war, weren't we? With a home like Ingleside, and a father and mother like ours we couldn't help being happy. But that happiness was a gift from life and love; it wasn't really ours—life could take it back at any time. It can never take away the happiness we win for ourselves in the way of duty."

- Walter to Rilla, *Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 15: "Until the Day Break"
What is your favorite novel?"

Jem piped up immediately. "I don't know that my tastes have developed much, Mother. Nothing has challenged *The Life Book of Captain Jim* for me since I was in the primer class, and I doubt anything ever will."

Walter looked unimpressed. "*The Life Book* is well and good, but surely you've read something else since you were eight."

"'Course I have," said Jem, comfortably. "Nothing better, though."

"Let us stipulate that *The Life Book* holds a special place in all our hearts," said Gilbert, "and set it aside as a sacred text, rather than a mundane object up for debate."

"In that case, I'll take the *Sherlock Holmes* novels as a body," said Jem, leaving Walter looking as if he wished he had left well enough alone. "What about you, Walt?"

Walter considered. "I am inclined to say *Idylls of the King*, by Tennyson, but since that is properly a series of narrative poems rather than a novel, I will take *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott."

"Medieval knights and ladies?" teased Di. "Now whose taste is stagnating?"

Walter affected shock. "Silence, maiden; thy tongue outruns thy discretion!"*

Di and Nan dissolved into giggles.

"And what venerable work of suitably mature literature will you offer to represent yourself, Di?" Walter asked, smiling. "Surely you will not inflict *The Bostonians* on the rest of us."

"*Ethan Frome*," Di said, flashing him a smile that was also a warning to stay away from all things Boston-related.

"*Ethan Frome?" Walter grimaced. "Is that even a novel? What is there to like about *Ethan Frome*?"

"You mean besides incisive prose and keen psychological observation?" Di asked. Then, pressing the back of her hand to her forehead in a mock swoon. "I suppose there's also thwarted passion and frustrated potential."

"You mean hopeless wretches trudging around in the dreary snow," said Nan, who was entirely in sympathy with Walter's opinion of Edith Wharton. "The town is named *Starkfield*, for goodness' sake."

"We all know how you love your fiction subtle, Nan," Di teased. "Still reading *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*? Or have you moved on to *The Scarlet Pimpernel*?"

"If you mean to imply that I should feel ashamed of appreciating Baroness Orczy's many fine works, you should know that literary snobbery does not become a lover of books," Nan sniffed, somewhat undercutting her own point by delivering it with an air of patient condescension. "Besides, I don't think I could pick a favorite. *Jane Eyre* or maybe *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, though I do love *Northanger Abbey*, too... if I could have only one, it would probably be... *Frankenstein*."

"*Frankenstein?" Rilla squeaked."

"So, the more lurid the better?" Jem grinned.

"*Frankenstein* isn't just *Frankenstein*," Nan replied, eyes shining with enthusiasm. "Do you know
anything about Mary Shelley? Not just a pioneering author, but such a fascinating woman! They say that she and Percy Shelley . . ."

"Nan!" Anne interrupted her daughter. "Perhaps the Shelley romance is not exactly suitable conversation for the table?"

With a significant look at Rilla, Nan desisted. Walter had gone crimson in the cheeks, but no one else was familiar enough with the scandalous tale to be anything but intrigued.

"What about you, Rilla?" Gilbert asked, attempting to steer the conversation back toward general interest. "What's your favorite novel?"

"Wuthering Heights," said Rilla with a shy smile, as if confessing something very wicked.

Gilbert nodded solemnly. "Mine, too."

"Really?" said Nan and Di in the same moment, though Nan sounded enchanted and Di appalled.

Anne rolled her eyes. "He's putting you on. He can't stand Wuthering Heights. All those passions! I distinctly remember fighting quite a pitched battle over it at Redmond."

Rilla and Nan looked somewhat crestfallen, though Di gave an all-knowing nod.

"Alright," Gilbert said, raising an eyebrow in Anne's direction. "What's my favorite novel, then?"

Anne raised a hand to her chin and tapped her lips theatrically with a finger. "Jem has already claimed Sherlock Holmes. And while I must assume that all works by Robert Louis Stevenson are in the running, I would still have to say . . . Sense and Sensibility."

"Really?" the younger generation asked in chorus.

Gilbert chuckled into his plate. "And I assume that you will stake your own claim to Pride and Prejudice?"

This sent Anne into a fit of giggles that left her children no less perplexed.

"I'm not sure what the meaning of this is," Jem interjected. "And I'm not sure that I want to."

"Do you really love Sense and Sensibility, Dad? Or is that another joke?" asked earnest Rilla.

If Gilbert and Anne had not been laughing so hard, one of them might have answered.

When he had regained control of his breathing, Gilbert directed his attention to Susan. "Any favorite novels, Susan?"

"I am of the opinion that a novel is just a pack of lies," Susan assured him, dodging the question. "When I was a girl, they were not considered proper reading material. If I want to be entertained, the Glen Notes provide quite enough thrilling stories on their own."**

This pronouncement elicited general amusement from the assembly. Anne studied the happy faces at the table as if fixing them all in her memory. Jem, so open and amiable; Walter with his high ideals; Di, so like her father; Nan with her beautiful fancies; Rilla with her starry-eyed hopes; Shirley . . .

"Shirley!" Anne said, distressed to find that he had been overlooked again. "Dearest, you haven't told us what your favorite novel is."
The table fell quiet, eager to hear Shirley's answer. He rarely volunteered any sort of personal information, and the older children sometimes felt as though they hardly knew him as anything but Susan's "little brown boy." Not so little anymore.

Shirley sat up a bit straighter, the better to meet this challenge. In a steady voice that betrayed no quaver of disuse nor indecision, he answered: "The Count of Monte Cristo."

"Ooooh, I didn't even think of that one!" Nan said, delighted. "A thwarted love! An unjust imprisonment! A tale of vengeance and mercy! Good choice!"

"I agree," said Walter, regarding Shirley with curiosity.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd go in for so much gore and madness," Jem said, jostling Shirley's elbow with his own.

"Why do you love it, sweetheart?" Anne asked gently.

Shirley hesitated a moment, as if gathering his thoughts.

"In the beginning," he said, "just before Dantès is cruelly prevented from marrying Mercedes, he says, Man does not appear to me to be intended to enjoy felicity so unmixed; happiness is like the enchanted palaces we read of in our childhood, where fierce, fiery dragons defend the entrance and approach; and monsters of all shapes and kinds, requiring to be overcome ere victory is ours.****

The ordinary din of quiet chewing and clinking silverware stilled, every eye fixed on Shirley. He had certainly never said so many words at once — his own or anyone else's — in any of their hearing. They hardly recognized him.

After an awkward pause, Gilbert cleared his throat and raised his glass to Shirley. "Well said, Monsieur Dumas. A toast, then, to the happiness we must win."

Notes:

*Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, chapter 3

***"When I read a novel that makes me want to weep I just say severely to myself, 'Now, Susan Baker, you know that is all a pack of lies.'" *Rilla of Ingleside*, chapter 11.

***Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, chapter 5

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