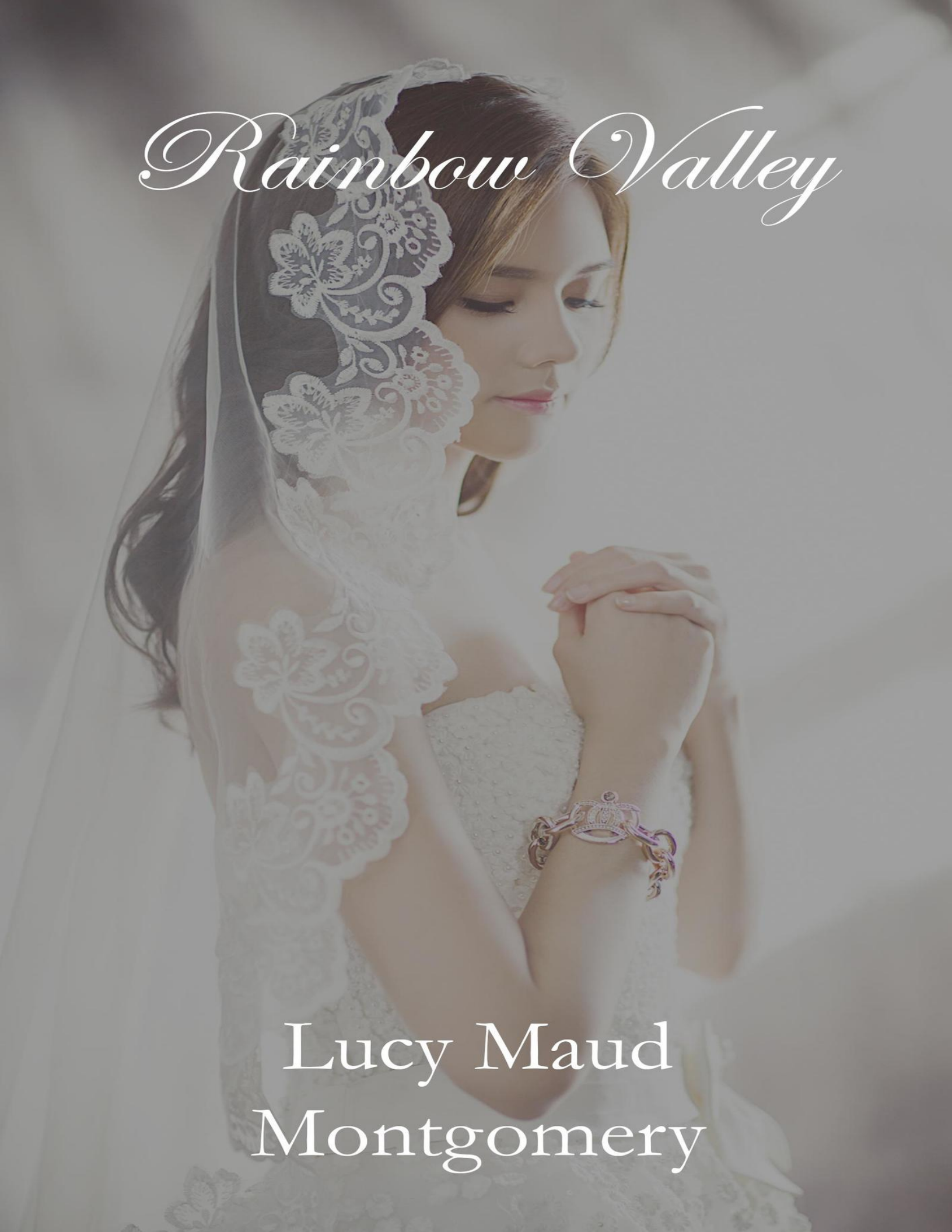
Rainbow Valley



Lucy Maud Montgomery

Rainbow Valley

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by Lucy Maud Montgomery

CHAPTER I.

It was a clear, apple-green evening in May, and Four Winds Harbour was mirroring back the clouds of the golden west between its softly dark shores. The sea moaned eerily on the sand-bar, sorrowful even in spring, but a sly, jovial wind came piping down the red harbour road along which Miss Cornelia's comfortable, matronly figure was making its way towards the village of Glen St. Mary. Miss Cornelia was rightfully Mrs. Marshall Elliott, and had been Mrs. Marshall Elliott for thirteen years, but even yet more people referred to her as Miss Cornelia than as Mrs. Elliott. The old name was dear to her old friends, only one of them contemptuously dropped it. Susan Baker, the gray and grim and faithful handmaiden of the Blythe family at Ingleside, never lost an opportunity of calling her "Mrs. Marshall Elliott," with the most killing and pointed emphasis, as if to say "You wanted to be Mrs. and Mrs. you shall be with a vengeance as far as I am concerned."

Miss Cornelia was going up to Ingleside to see Dr. and Mrs. Blythe, who were just home from Europe. They had been away for three months, having left in February to attend a famous medical congress in London; and certain things, which Miss Cornelia was anxious to discuss, had taken place in the Glen during their absence. For one thing, there was a new family in the manse. And such a family! Miss Cornelia shook her head over them several times as she walked briskly along.

Susan Baker and the Anne Shirley of other days saw her coming, as they sat on the big veranda at Ingleside, enjoying the charm of the cat's light, the sweetness of sleepy robins whistling among the twilit maples, and the dance of a gusty group of daffodils blowing against the old, mellow, red brick wall of the lawn.

Anne was sitting on the steps, her hands clasped over her knee, looking, in the kind dusk, as girlish as a mother of many has any right to be; and the beautiful gray-green eyes, gazing down the harbour road, were as full of unquenchable sparkle and dream as ever. Behind her, in the hammock, Rilla Blythe was curled up, a fat, roly-poly little creature of six years, the youngest of the Ingleside children. She had curly red hair and hazel eyes that were now buttoned up after the funny, wrinkled fashion in which Rilla always went to sleep.

Shirley, "the little brown boy," as he was known in the family "Who's Who," was asleep in Susan's arms. He was brown-haired, brown-eyed and brown-skinned, with very rosy cheeks, and he was Susan's especial love. After his 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.

"I gave him life just as much as you did, Mrs. Dr. dear," Susan was wont to say. "He is just as much my baby as he is yours." And, indeed, it was always to Susan that Shirley ran, to be kissed for bumps, and rocked to sleep, and protected from well-deserved spankings. Susan had conscientiously spanked all the other Blythe children when she

thought they needed it for their souls' good, but she would not spank Shirley nor allow his mother to do it. Once, Dr. Blythe had spanked him and Susan had been stormily indignant.

"That man would spank an angel, Mrs. Dr. dear, that he would," she had declared bitterly; and she would not make the poor doctor a pie for weeks.

She had taken Shirley with her to her brother's home during his parents' absence, while all the other children had gone to Avonlea, and she had three blessed months of him all to herself. Nevertheless, Susan was very glad to find herself back at Ingleside, with all her darlings around her again. Ingleside was her world and in it she reigned supreme. Even Anne seldom questioned her decisions, much to the disgust of Mrs. Rachel Lynde of Green Gables, who gloomily told Anne, whenever she visited Four Winds, that she was letting Susan get to be entirely too much of a boss and would live to rue it.

"Here is Cornelia Bryant coming up the harbour road, Mrs. Dr. dear," said Susan. "She will be coming up to unload three months' gossip on us."

"I hope so," said Anne, hugging her knees. "I'm starving for Glen St. Mary gossip, Susan. I hope Miss Cornelia can tell me everything that has happened while we've been away—*everything*—who has got born, or married, or drunk; who has died, or gone away, or come, or fought, or lost a cow, or found a beau. It's so delightful to be home again with all the dear Glen folks, and I want to know all about them. Why, I

remember wondering, as I walked through Westminster Abbey which of her two especial beaux Millicent Drew would finally marry. Do you know, Susan, I have a dreadful suspicion that I love gossip."

"Well, of course, Mrs. Dr. dear," admitted Susan, "every proper woman likes to hear the news. I am rather interested in Millicent Drew's case myself. I never had a beau, much less two, and I do not mind now, for being an old maid does not hurt when you get used to it. Millicent's hair always looks to me as if she had swept it up with a broom. But the men do not seem to mind that."

"They see only her pretty, piquant, mocking, little face, Susan."

"That may very well be, Mrs. Dr. dear. The Good Book says that favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but I should not have minded finding that out for myself, if it had been so ordained. I have no doubt we will all be beautiful when we are angels, but what good will it do us then? Speaking of gossip, however, they do say that poor Mrs. Harrison Miller over harbour tried to hang herself last week."

"Oh, Susan!"

"Calm yourself, Mrs. Dr. dear. She did not succeed. But I really do not blame her for trying, for her husband is a terrible man. But she was very foolish to think of hanging herself and leaving the way clear for him to marry some other woman. If I had been in her shoes, Mrs. Dr. dear, I would have gone to work to worry him so that he would try to

hang himself instead of me. Not that I hold with people hanging themselves under any circumstances, Mrs. Dr. dear."

"What is the matter with Harrison Miller, anyway?" said Anne impatiently. "He is always driving some one to extremes."

"Well, some people call it religion and some call it cussedness, begging your pardon, Mrs. Dr. dear, for using such a word. It seems they cannot make out which it is in Harrison's case. There are days when he growls at everybody because he thinks he is fore-ordained to eternal punishment. And then there are days when he says he does not care and goes and gets drunk. My own opinion is that he is not sound in his intellect, for none of that branch of the Millers were. His grandfather went out of his mind. He thought he was surrounded by big black spiders. They crawled over him and floated in the air about him. I hope I shall never go insane, Mrs. Dr. dear, and I do not think I will, because it is not a habit of the Bakers. But, if an all-wise Providence should decree it, I hope it will not take the form of big black spiders, for I loathe the animals. As for Mrs. Miller, I do not know whether she really deserves pity or not. There are some who say she just married Harrison to spite Richard Taylor, which seems to me a very peculiar reason for getting married. But then, of course, *I* am no judge of things matrimonial, Mrs. Dr. dear. And there is Cornelia Bryant at the gate, so I will put this blessed brown baby on his bed and get my knitting."

CHAPTER II.

“Where are the other children?” asked Miss Cornelia, when the first greetings—cordial on her side, rapturous on Anne’s, and dignified on Susan’s—were over.

“Shirley is in bed and Jem and Walter and the twins are down in their beloved Rainbow Valley,” said Anne. “They just came home this afternoon, you know, and they could hardly wait until supper was over before rushing down to the valley. They love it above every spot on earth. Even the maple grove doesn’t rival it in their affections.”

“I am afraid they love it too well,” said Susan gloomily. “Little Jem said once he would rather go to Rainbow Valley than to heaven when he died, and that was not a proper remark.”

“I suppose they had a great time in Avonlea?” said Miss Cornelia.

“Enormous. Marilla does spoil them terribly. Jem, in particular, can do no wrong in her eyes.”

“Miss Cuthbert must be an old lady now,” said Miss Cornelia, getting out her knitting, so that she could hold her own with Susan. Miss Cornelia held that the woman whose hands were employed always had the advantage over the woman whose hands were not.

“Marilla is eighty-five,” said Anne with a sigh. “Her hair is snow-white. But, strange to say, her eyesight is better than it was when she was sixty.”

“Well, dearie, I’m real glad you’re all back. I’ve been dreadful lonesome. But we haven’t been dull in the Glen, believe *me*. There hasn’t been such an exciting spring in my time, as far as church matters go. We’ve got settled with a minister at last, Anne dearie.”

“The Reverend John Knox Meredith, Mrs. Dr. dear,” said Susan, resolved not to let Miss Cornelia tell all the news.

“Is he nice?” asked Anne interestedly.

Miss Cornelia sighed and Susan groaned.

“Yes, he’s nice enough if that were all,” said the former. “He is *very* nice—and very learned—and very spiritual. But, oh Anne dearie, he has no common sense!

“How was it you called him, then?”

“Well, there’s no doubt he is by far the best preacher we ever had in Glen St. Mary church,” said Miss Cornelia, veering a tack or two. “I suppose it is because he is so moony and absent-minded that he never

got a town call. His trial sermon was simply wonderful, believe *me*. Every one went mad about it—and his looks."

"He is *very* comely, Mrs. Dr. dear, and when all is said and done, I *do* like to see a well-looking man in the pulpit," broke in Susan, thinking it was time she asserted herself again.

"Besides," said Miss Cornelia, "we were anxious to get settled. And Mr. Meredith was the first candidate we were all agreed on. Somebody had some objection to all the others. There was some talk of calling Mr. Folsom. He was a good preacher, too, but somehow people didn't care for his appearance. He was too dark and sleek."

"He looked exactly like a great black tomcat, that he did, Mrs. Dr. dear," said Susan. "I never could abide such a man in the pulpit every Sunday."

"Then Mr. Rogers came and he was like a chip in porridge—neither harm nor good," resumed Miss Cornelia. "But if he had preached like Peter and Paul it would have profited him nothing, for that was the day old Caleb Ramsay's sheep strayed into church and gave a loud 'ba-a-a' just as he announced his text. Everybody laughed, and poor Rogers had no chance after that. Some thought we ought to call Mr. Stewart, because he was so well educated. He could read the New Testament in five languages."

"But I do not think he was any surer than other men of getting to heaven because of that," interjected Susan.

“Most of us didn’t like his delivery,” said Miss Cornelia, ignoring Susan. “He talked in grunts, so to speak. And Mr. Arnett couldn’t preach *at all*. And he picked about the worst candidating text there is in the Bible—‘Curse ye Meroz.’”

“Whenever he got stuck for an idea, he would bang the Bible and shout very bitterly, ‘Curse ye Meroz.’ Poor Meroz got thoroughly cursed that day, whoever he was, Mrs. Dr. dear,” said Susan.

“The minister who is candidating can’t be too careful what text he chooses,” said Miss Cornelia solemnly. “I believe Mr. Pierson would have got the call if he had picked a different text. But when he announced ‘I will lift my eyes to the hills’ *he* was done for. Every one grinned, for every one knew that those two Hill girls from the Harbour Head have been setting their caps for every single minister who came to the Glen for the last fifteen years. And Mr. Newman had too large a family.”

“He stayed with my brother-in-law, James Clow,” said Susan. “‘How many children have you got?’ I asked him. ‘Nine boys and a sister for each of them,’ he said. ‘Eighteen!’ said I. ‘Dear me, what a family!’ And then he laughed and laughed. But I do not know why, Mrs. Dr. dear, and I am certain that eighteen children would be too many for any manse.”

“He had only ten children, Susan,” explained Miss Cornelia, with contemptuous patience. “And ten good children would not be much worse for the manse and congregation than the four who are there

now. Though I wouldn't say, Anne dearie, that they are so bad, either. I like them—everybody likes them. It's impossible to help liking them. They would be real nice little souls if there was anyone to look after their manners and teach them what is right and proper. For instance, at school the teacher says they are model children. But at home they simply run wild."

"What about Mrs. Meredith?" asked Anne.

"There's *no* Mrs. Meredith. That is just the trouble. Mr. Meredith is a widower. His wife died four years ago. If we had known that I don't suppose we would have called him, for a widower is even worse in a congregation than a single man. But he was heard to speak of his children and we all supposed there was a mother, too. And when they came there was nobody but old Aunt Martha, as they call her. She's a cousin of Mr. Meredith's mother, I believe, and he took her in to save her from the poorhouse. She is seventy-five years old, half blind, and very deaf and very cranky."

"And a very poor cook, Mrs. Dr. dear."

"The worst possible manager for a manse," said Miss Cornelia bitterly. "Mr. Meredith won't get any other housekeeper because he says it would hurt Aunt Martha's feelings. Anne dearie, believe me, the state of that manse is something terrible. Everything is thick with dust and

nothing is ever in its place. And we had painted and papered it all so nice before they came."

"There are four children, you say?" asked Anne, beginning to mother them already in her heart.

"Yes. They run up just like the steps of a stair. Gerald's the oldest. He's twelve and they call him Jerry. He's a clever boy. Faith is eleven. She is a regular tomboy but pretty as a picture, I must say."

"She looks like an angel but she is a holy terror for mischief, Mrs. Dr. dear," said Susan solemnly. "I was at the manse one night last week and Mrs. James Millison was there, too. She had brought them up a dozen eggs and a little pail of milk—a *very* little pail, Mrs. Dr. dear. Faith took them and whisked down the cellar with them. Near the bottom of the stairs she caught her toe and fell the rest of the way, milk and eggs and all. You can imagine the result, Mrs. Dr. dear. But that child came up laughing. 'I don't know whether I'm myself or a custard pie,' she said. And Mrs. James Millison was very angry. She said she would never take another thing to the manse if it was to be wasted and destroyed in that fashion."

"Maria Millison never hurt herself taking things to the manse," sniffed Miss Cornelia. "She just took them that night as an excuse for curiosity. But poor Faith is always getting into scrapes. She is so heedless and impulsive."

"Just like me. I'm going to like your Faith," said Anne decidedly.

“She is full of spunk—and I do like spunk, Mrs. Dr. dear,” admitted Susan.

“There’s something taking about her,” conceded Miss Cornelia. “You never see her but she’s laughing, and somehow it always makes you want to laugh too. She can’t even keep a straight face in church. Una is ten—she’s a sweet little thing—not pretty, but sweet. And Thomas Carlyle is nine. They call him Carl, and he has a regular mania for collecting toads and bugs and frogs and bringing them into the house.”

“I suppose he was responsible for the dead rat that was lying on a chair in the parlour the afternoon Mrs. Grant called. It gave her a turn,” said Susan, “and I do not wonder, for manse parlours are no places for dead rats. To be sure it may have been the cat who left it, there. *He* is as full of the old Nick as he can be stuffed, Mrs. Dr. dear. A manse cat should at least *look* respectable, in my opinion, whatever he really is. But I never saw such a rakish-looking beast. And he walks along the ridgepole of the manse almost every evening at sunset, Mrs. Dr. dear, and waves his tail, and that is not becoming.”

“The worst of it is, they are *never* decently dressed,” sighed Miss Cornelia. “And since the snow went they go to school barefooted. Now, you know Anne dearie, that isn’t the right thing for manse children—especially when the Methodist minister’s little girl always wears such nice buttoned boots. And I *do* wish they wouldn’t play in the old Methodist graveyard.”

“It’s very tempting, when it’s right beside the manse,” said Anne. “I’ve always thought graveyards must be delightful places to play in.”

“Oh, no, you did not, Mrs. Dr. dear,” said loyal Susan, determined to protect Anne from herself. “You have too much good sense and decorum.”

“Why did they ever build that manse beside the graveyard in the first place?” asked Anne. “Their lawn is so small there is no place for them to play except in the graveyard.”

“It *was* a mistake,” admitted Miss Cornelia. “But they got the lot cheap. And no other manse children ever thought of playing there. Mr. Meredith shouldn’t allow it. But he has always got his nose buried in a book, when he is home. He reads and reads, or walks about in his study in a day-dream. So far he hasn’t forgotten to be in church on Sundays, but twice he has forgotten about the prayer-meeting and one of the elders had to go over to the manse and remind him. And he forgot about Fanny Cooper’s wedding. They rang him up on the ‘phone and then he rushed right over, just as he was, carpet slippers and all. One wouldn’t mind if the Methodists didn’t laugh so about it. But there’s one comfort—they can’t criticize his sermons. He wakes up when he’s in the pulpit, believe *me*. And the Methodist minister can’t preach at all—so they tell me. *I* have never heard him, thank goodness.”

Miss Cornelia’s scorn of men had abated somewhat since her marriage, but her scorn of Methodists remained untinged of charity.

Susan smiled slyly.

“They do say, Mrs. Marshall Elliott, that the Methodists and Presbyterians are talking of uniting,” she said.

“Well, all I hope is that I’ll be under the sod if that ever comes to pass,” retorted Miss Cornelia. “I shall never have truck or trade with Methodists, and Mr. Meredith will find that he’d better steer clear of them, too. He is entirely too sociable with them, believe *me*. Why, he went to the Jacob Drews’ silver-wedding supper and got into a nice scrape as a result.”

“What was it?”

“Mrs. Drew asked him to carve the roast goose—for Jacob Drew never did or could carve. Well, Mr. Meredith tackled it, and in the process he knocked it clean off the platter into Mrs. Reese’s lap, who was sitting next him. And he just said dreamily. ‘Mrs. Reese, will you kindly return me that goose?’ Mrs. Reese ‘returned’ it, as meek as Moses, but she must have been furious, for she had on her new silk dress. The worst of it is, she was a Methodist.”

“But I think that is better than if she was a Presbyterian,” interjected Susan. “If she had been a Presbyterian she would mostly likely have left the church and we cannot afford to lose our members. And Mrs. Reese is not liked in her own church, because she gives herself such

great airs, so that the Methodists would be rather pleased that Mr. Meredith spoiled her dress."

"The point is, he made himself ridiculous, and *I*, for one, do not like to see my minister made ridiculous in the eyes of the Methodists," said Miss Cornelia stiffly. "If he had had a wife it would not have happened."

"I do not see if he had a dozen wives how they could have prevented Mrs. Drew from using up her tough old gander for the wedding-feast," said Susan stubbornly.

"They say that was her husband's doing," said Miss Cornelia. "Jacob Drew is a conceited, stingy, domineering creature."

"And they do say he and his wife detest each other—which does not seem to me the proper way for married folks to get along. But then, of course, I have had no experience along that line," said Susan, tossing her head. "And *I* am not one to blame everything on the men. Mrs. Drew is mean enough herself. They say that the only thing she was ever known to give away was a crock of butter made out of cream a rat had fell into. She contributed it to a church social. Nobody found out about the rat until afterwards."

"Fortunately, all the people the Merediths have offended so far are Methodists," said Miss Cornelia. "That Jerry went to the Methodist prayer-meeting one night about a fortnight ago and sat beside old William Marsh who got up as usual and testified with fearful groans.

'Do you feel any better now?' whispered Jerry when William sat down. Poor Jerry meant to be sympathetic, but Mr. Marsh thought he was impertinent and is furious at him. Of course, Jerry had no business to be in a Methodist prayer-meeting at all. But they go where they like."

"I hope they will not offend Mrs. Alec Davis of the Harbour Head," said Susan. "She is a very touchy woman, I understand, but she is very well off and pays the most of any one to the salary. I have heard that she says the Merediths are the worst brought up children she ever saw."

"Every word you say convinces me more and more that the Merediths belong to the race that knows Joseph," said Mistress Anne decidedly.

"When all is said and done, they *do*," admitted Miss Cornelia. "And that balances everything. Anyway, we've got them now and we must just do the best we can by them and stick up for them to the Methodists. Well, I suppose I must be getting down harbour. Marshall will soon be home—he went over-harbour to-day—and wanting his super, man-like. I'm sorry I haven't seen the other children. And where's the doctor?"

"Up at the Harbour Head. We've only been home three days and in that time he has spent three hours in his own bed and eaten two meals in his own house."

"Well, everybody who has been sick for the last six weeks has been waiting for him to come home—and I don't blame them. When that over-harbour doctor married the undertaker's daughter at Lowbridge

people felt suspicious of him. It didn't look well. You and the doctor must come down soon and tell us all about your trip. I suppose you've had a splendid time."

"We had," agreed Anne. "It was the fulfilment of years of dreams. The old world is very lovely and very wonderful. But we have come back very well satisfied with our own land. Canada is the finest country in the world, Miss Cornelia."

"Nobody ever doubted that," said Miss Cornelia, complacently.

"And old P.E.I. is the loveliest province in it and Four Winds the loveliest spot in P.E.I. ," laughed Anne, looking adoringly out over the sunset splendour of glen and harbour and gulf. She waved her hand at it. "I saw nothing more beautiful than that in Europe, Miss Cornelia. Must you go? The children will be sorry to have missed you."

"They must come and see me soon. Tell them the doughnut jar is always full."

"Oh, at supper they were planning a descent on you. They'll go soon; but they must settle down to school again now. And the twins are going to take music lessons."

"Not from the Methodist minister's wife, I hope?" said Miss Cornelia anxiously.

"No—from Rosemary West. I was up last evening to arrange it with her. What a pretty girl she is!"

“Rosemary holds her own well. She isn’t as young as she once was.”

“I thought her very charming. I’ve never had any real acquaintance with her, you know. Their house is so out of the way, and I’ve seldom ever seen her except at church.”

“People always have liked Rosemary West, though they don’t understand her,” said Miss Cornelia, quite unconscious of the high tribute she was paying to Rosemary’s charm. “Ellen has always kept her down, so to speak. She has tyrannized over her, and yet she has always indulged her in a good many ways. Rosemary was engaged once, you know—to young Martin Crawford. His ship was wrecked on the Magdalens and all the crew were drowned. Rosemary was just a child—only seventeen. But she was never the same afterwards. She and Ellen have stayed very close at home since their mother’s death. They don’t often get to their own church at Lowbridge and I understand Ellen doesn’t approve of going too often to a Presbyterian church. To the Methodist she *never* goes, I’ll say that much for her. That family of Wests have always been strong Episcopalians. Rosemary and Ellen are pretty well off. Rosemary doesn’t really need to give music lessons. She does it because she likes to. They are distantly related to Leslie, you know. 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. “*The Life Book* was the best book he’s ever written and he got the material for that right here in Four Winds.”

“Captain Jim gave him the most of that, you know. And he collected it all over the world. But Owen’s books are all delightful, I think.”

“Oh, they’re well enough as far as they go. I make it a point to read every one he writes, though I’ve always held, Anne dearie, that reading novels is a sinful waste of time. I shall write and tell him my opinion of this Japanese business, believe *me*. Does he want Kenneth and Persis to be converted into pagans?”

With which unanswerable conundrum Miss Cornelia took her departure. Susan proceeded to put Rilla in bed and Anne sat on the veranda steps under the early stars and dreamed her incorrigible dreams and learned all over again for the hundredth happy time what a moonrise splendour and sheen could be on Four Winds Harbour.

CHAPTER III.

In daytime the Blythe children liked very well to play in the rich, soft greens and glooms of the big maple grove between Ingleside and the Glen St. Mary pond; but for evening revels there was no place like the little valley behind the maple grove. It was a fairy realm of romance to them. Once, looking from the attic windows of Ingleside, through the mist and aftermath of a summer thunderstorm, they had seen the beloved spot arched by a glorious rainbow, one end of which seemed to dip straight down to where a corner of the pond ran up into the lower end of the valley.

"Let us call it Rainbow Valley," said Walter delightedly, and Rainbow Valley thenceforth it was.

Outside of Rainbow Valley the wind might be rollicking and boisterous. Here it always went gently. Little, winding, fairy paths ran here and there over spruce roots cushioned with moss. Wild cherry trees, that in blossom time would be misty white, were scattered all over the valley, mingling with the dark spruces. A little brook with amber waters ran through it from the Glen village. The houses of the village were comfortably far away; only at the upper end of the valley was a little tumble-down, deserted cottage, referred to as "the old Bailey house." It had not been occupied for many years, but a grass-grown dyke surrounded it and inside was an ancient garden where the

Ingleside children could find violets and daisies and June lilies still blooming in season. For the rest, the garden was overgrown with caraway that swayed and foamed in the moonshine of summer eves like seas of silver.

To the sought lay the pond and beyond it the ripened distance lost itself in purple woods, save where, on a high hill, a solitary old gray homestead looked down on glen and harbour. There was a certain wild woodsiness and solitude about Rainbow Valley, in spite of its nearness to the village, which endeared it to the children of Ingleside.

The valley was full of dear, friendly hollows and the largest of these was their favourite stamping ground. Here they were assembled on this particular evening. There was a grove of young spruces in this hollow, with a tiny, grassy glade in its heart, opening on the bank of the brook. By the brook grew a silver birch-tree, a young, incredibly straight thing which Walter had named the "White Lady." In this glade, too, were the "Tree Lovers," as Walter called a spruce and maple which grew so closely together that their boughs were inextricably intertwined. Jem had hung an old string of sleigh-bells, given him by the Glen blacksmith, on the Tree Lovers, and every visitant breeze called out sudden fairy tinkles from it.

"How nice it is to be back!" said Nan. "After all, none of the Avonlea places are quite as nice as Rainbow Valley."

But they were very fond of the Avonlea places for all that. A visit to Green Gables was always considered a great treat. Aunt Marilla was

very good to them, and so was Mrs. Rachel Lynde, who was spending the leisure of her old age in knitting cotton-warp quilts against the day when Anne's daughters should need a "setting-out." There were jolly playmates there, too—"Uncle" Davy's children and "Aunt" Diana's children. They knew all the spots their mother had loved so well in her girlhood at old Green Gables—the long Lover's Lane, that was pink-hedged in wild-rose time, the always neat yard, with its willows and poplars, the Dryad's Bubble, lucent and lovely as of yore, the Lake of Shining Waters, and Willowmere. The twins had their mother's old porch-gable room, and Aunt Marilla used to come in at night, when she thought they were asleep, to gloat over them. But they all knew she loved Jem the best.

Jem was at present busily occupied in frying a mess of small trout which he had just caught in the pond. His stove consisted of a circle of red stones, with a fire kindled in it, and his culinary utensils were an old tin can, hammered out flat, and a fork with only one tine left. Nevertheless, ripping good meals had before now been thus prepared.

Jem was the child of the House of Dreams. All the others had been born at Ingleside. He had curly red hair, like his mother's, and frank hazel eyes, like his father's; he had his mother's fine nose and his father's steady, humorous mouth. And he was the only one of the family who had ears nice enough to please Susan. But he had a standing feud with Susan because she would not give up calling him Little Jem. It was outrageous, thought thirteen-year-old Jem. Mother had more sense.

“I’m *not* little any more, Mother,” he had cried indignantly, on his eighth birthday. “I’m *awful* big.”

Mother had sighed and laughed and sighed again; and she never called him Little Jem again—in his hearing at least.

He was and always had 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. Once Susan had told him that if he touched his tongue to a frosty latch all the skin would tear off it. Jem had promptly done it, “just to see if it was so.” He found it was “so,” at the cost of a very sore tongue for several days. But Jem did not grudge suffering in the interests of science. By constant experiment and observation he learned a great deal and his brothers and sisters thought his extensive knowledge of their little world quite wonderful. Jem always knew where the first and ripest berries grew, where the first pale violets shyly wakened from their winter’s sleep, and how many blue eggs were in a given robin’s nest in the maple grove. He could tell fortunes from daisy petals and suck honey from red clovers, and grub up all sorts of edible roots on the banks of the pond, while Susan went in daily fear that they would all be poisoned. He knew where the finest spruce-gum was to be found, in pale amber knots on the lichened bark, he knew where the nuts grew thickest in the beechwoods around the Harbour Head, and where the best trouting places up the brooks

were. He could mimic the call of any wild bird or beast in Four Winds and he knew the haunt of every wild flower from spring to autumn.

Walter Blythe was sitting under the White Lady, with a volume of poems lying beside him, but he was not reading. He was gazing now at the emerald-misted willows by the pond, and now at a flock of clouds, like little silver sheep, herded by the wind, that were drifting over Rainbow Valley, with rapture in his wide splendid eyes. Walter's eyes were very wonderful. All the joy and sorrow and laughter and loyalty and aspiration of many generations lying under the sod looked out of their dark gray depths.

Walter was a "hop out of kin," as far as looks went. He did not resemble any known relative. He was quite the handsomest of the Ingleside children, with straight black hair and finely modelled features. But he had all his mother's vivid imagination and passionate love of beauty. Frost of winter, invitation of spring, dream of summer and glamour of autumn, all meant much to Walter.

In school, where Jem was a chieftain, Walter was not thought highly of. He was supposed to be "girly" and milk-soppish, because he never fought and seldom joined in the school sports, preferring to herd by himself in out of the way corners and read books—especially "po'try books." Walter loved the poets and pored over their pages from the time he could first read. Their music was woven into his growing soul —the music of the immortals. Walter cherished the ambition to be a poet himself some day. The thing could be done. A certain Uncle Paul —so called out of courtesy—who lived now in that mysterious realm

called “the States,” was Walter’s model. Uncle Paul had once been a little school boy in Avonlea and now his poetry was read everywhere. But the Glen schoolboys did not know of Walter’s dreams and would not have been greatly impressed if they had. In spite of his lack of physical prowess, however, he commanded a certain unwilling respect because of his power of “talking book talk.” Nobody in Glen St. Mary school could talk like him. He “sounded like a preacher,” one boy said; and for this reason he was generally left alone and not persecuted, as most boys were who were suspected of disliking or fearing fisticuffs.

The ten year old Ingleside twins violated twin tradition by not looking in the least alike. Anne, who was always called Nan, was very pretty, with velvety nut-brown eyes and silky nut-brown hair. She was a very blithe and dainty little maiden—Blythe by name and blithe by nature, one of her teachers had said. Her complexion was quite faultless, much to her mother’s satisfaction.

“I’m so glad I have one daughter who can wear pink,” Mrs. Blythe was wont to say jubilantly.

Diana Blythe, known as Di, was very like her mother, with gray-green eyes that always shone with a peculiar lustre and brilliancy in the dusk, and red hair. Perhaps this was why she was her father’s favourite. She and Walter were especial chums; Di was the only one to whom he would ever read the verses he wrote himself—the only one who knew that he was secretly hard at work on an epic, strikingly resembling “Marmion” in some things, if not in others. She kept all his secrets, even from Nan, and told him all hers.

“Won’t you soon have those fish ready, Jem?” said Nan, sniffing with her dainty nose. “The smell makes me awfully hungry.”

“They’re nearly ready,” said Jem, giving one a dexterous turn. “Get out the bread and the plates, girls. Walter, wake up.”

“How the air shines to-night,” said Walter dreamily. Not that he despised fried trout either, by any means; but with Walter food for the soul always took first place. “The flower angel has been walking over the world to-day, calling to the flowers. I can see his blue wings on that hill by the woods.”

“Any angels’ wings I ever saw were white,” said Nan.

“The flower angel’s aren’t. They are a pale misty blue, just like the haze in the valley. Oh, how I wish I could fly. It must be glorious.”

“One does fly in dreams sometimes,” said Di.

“I never dream that I’m flying exactly,” said Walter. “But I often dream that I just rise up from the ground and float over the fences and the trees. It’s delightful—and I always think, ‘This *isn’t* a dream like it’s always been before. *This* is real’—and then I wake up after all, and it’s heart-breaking.”

“Hurry up, Nan,” ordered Jem.