



## *Chapter 1*

### *Mrs. Rachel Lynde Is Surprised*

**M**rs. Rachel Lynde lived just where the main road into Avonlea crossed a quiet little brook. The stream started away off in the woods of the old Cuthbert place. There, it was said, the stream rushed noisily over the rocks, forming wild waterfalls and dark pools. But by the time it reached Lynde's Hollow, it was a well-behaved little stream. Not even brooks could run past Mrs. Rachel Lynde's window without being noticed. She always kept a sharp eye on everything that passed by, from brooks to children. And if she noticed anything odd or out of place, she would never rest until she'd uncovered every last detail.

Mrs. Rachel Lynde was one of those very busy bodies who manage not only their own business, but everyone else's, as well. She kept a spotless home, ran the Sewing Circle, managed the Sunday school, and volunteered at various

charities. She knitted twice as many quilts as any other woman in Avonlea. And she still had time to keep a close watch on the main road that crossed Lynde's Hollow and wound up the steep red hill toward Avonlea. The town was at the end of a little point sticking out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, surrounded by water on both sides. So anyone going to or from Avonlea had to pass right in front of Mrs. Rachel's all-seeing eye.

One early June afternoon, Thomas Lynde, the timid little man known as "Rachel Lynde's husband," was planting turnips on the hill beyond the barn. Mrs. Rachel was sitting in front of her warm, sunlit window. She knew that Matthew Cuthbert was supposed to be doing the same thing over at Green Gables, for she'd overheard him say so at Blair's store over in Carmody.

And yet, there was Matthew Cuthbert, at 3:30 on a busy weekday, driving over the hollow and up the hill. What's more, he was wearing his best suit—proof that he was going someplace other than Avonlea. Now, everyone knew that Matthew was the shyest man alive. He hated going anywhere he might have to talk to strangers.

So, where was Matthew Cuthbert going—and why?

Unless she found out the answer, Mrs. Rachel's entire day would be ruined. So she decided right then to pay a visit to Marilla Cuthbert, Matthew's sister.

It was a short walk up the road to Green Gables. It was the old Cuthbert property, hidden as far back from the main road as possible.

*It's no wonder Matthew and Marilla are both a little odd, living away back here by themselves,* thought Mrs. Rachel. *Trees aren't much company, though goodness knows there are plenty of them. Sure, they seem contented enough. But then, I suppose, they're used to it. They say a person can get used to anything—even to being hanged!*

The backyard of Green Gables was very green and neat and precise. Not a stick or stone was out of place. For if it were, Mrs. Rachel would surely have noticed. She concluded that Marilla Cuthbert must sweep her yard as often as she swept her kitchen floor.

Mrs. Rachel knocked firmly at the kitchen door and stepped inside. The room might have been bright and cheerful, with views of the white cherry blossoms in the orchard and graceful birches down by the brook. But Marilla, who took everything very seriously, did not trust the carefree dance of sunshine on the floor. So she let a tangle of green vines cover the windows. And she scrubbed and scoured her kitchen so much that it looked almost painfully clean.

Before she'd even closed the door, Mrs. Rachel had made a mental note of every detail. The table was set with three plates, so they must be expecting company. But they were just

everyday dishes. And there was only one kind of cake, so the company must be very ordinary. Why, then, was Matthew so dressed up? The mystery surrounding the usually unmysterious Green Gables was making Mrs. Rachel fairly dizzy.

“Good evening, Rachel,” Marilla said briskly, looking up from her knitting. “It’s a fine evening, isn’t it? Won’t you sit down? How is you family?”

Marilla Cuthbert and Mrs. Rachel were complete opposites. In spite of their differences—or perhaps because of them—there was a connection between them that could almost be called a friendship.

Marilla was a tall, thin woman—all angles and no curves. Her dark hair was streaked with gray. She wore it twisted up in a hard little knot, stabbed fiercely with two wire hairpins. Marilla had lived a narrow life with strict morals. Yet her mouth always seemed ready to find humor, especially when other people took themselves too seriously.

“We’re all pretty well,” said Mrs. Rachel. “But I was afraid *you* weren’t when I saw Matthew driving off. I thought maybe he was going to the doctor’s.”

Marilla’s lips twitched, as she tried to hold back a smile. She had expected Mrs. Rachel to show up. She knew her neighbor would see Matthew and need to satisfy her curiosity.

“Oh, no. I’m quite well, although I did have a bad headache yesterday,” Marilla replied. “We’re getting a boy from an orphanage in Nova Scotia. He’s coming on the train tonight, and Matthew went to pick him up.”

Mrs. Rachel was shocked. For five seconds, she was actually speechless. A boy! Of all people, Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert adopting a boy! From an orphanage! And without asking her advice!

“You see,” Marilla continued matter-of-factly, as if getting boys from Nova Scotia orphanages happened routinely on Avonlea farms, “Mrs. Alexander Spencer said she was going to get an orphan girl to work for her. So Matthew and I decided to get an orphan, too—only a boy instead, to help with the chores. Matthew’s sixty, you know, and isn’t as strong as he used to be. His heart troubles him a lot. So we asked Mrs. Spencer to pick us out a good ten- or eleven-year-old boy when she went over to get her girl. We mean to give him a good home and schooling, and train him up proper.”

Mrs. Rachel, who prided herself on always speaking her mind, declared, “Well, Marilla. I think you’re doing something mighty foolish. You’re bringing a strange child into your house, and you don’t know a single thing about him. Why, it was only last week I read in the paper how an orphan boy set fire to his new house—

*on purpose*, Marilla—and nearly burned up the people who'd adopted him. If you'd asked my advice—which you didn't, Marilla—I'd have said don't even think about taking such a big risk."

"I admit I've had some doubts myself, Rachel," Marilla answered calmly. "But Matthew was so set on the idea that I finally gave in. You know, he almost never speaks up about what he wants. Besides, you can't live in this world without taking risks. Why there's even risks in having children of your own, for they don't always turn out well. And our little boy will be Canadian, just like us."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you if he puts poison in your well water, like that orphan girl did over in New Brunswick."

"Well, don't worry, Rachel. We're not getting a girl. I'd never dream of taking in a girl to bring up."

Mrs. Rachel would have liked to stay and see the imported orphan. But she couldn't wait to spread the news. As she hurried up the road, she thought, *Matthew and Marilla have no idea what they're getting into. They don't know anything about children. They probably think that poor orphan boy will act calm as a grown man. Now, won't they be in for a little surprise!*

But if Mrs. Rachel Lynde could have seen the child waiting patiently at the train station, she would have said the Cuthberts were in for more than just a "little surprise."