Impetus: In Praise of Anne of Green Gables, Lucy Maud Montgomery

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In the cul-de-sac of our youth, Anne and I moved from one life, full of chaos and compaction of place, into another marked by wild and quiet and strangers. She was eleven, loquacious, red-haired, freckled, orphaned, outcast. She certainly had it worse than I did.

But I had my own issues at ten: plucked from a place of houses and more houses to so many trees; I was hawkish, evolving out of childhood, ugly. My smile flashed reluctance, silvered with braces, full of shy and silence. I had left friends on every corner and over every backyard fence. I had left ice-cream trucks and the bookmobile, a van with books bungee-corded in place, a rug woven with roads and neighbourhoods, a table and chairs made for children so parents could only stand outside the open doors while their children chose books to borrow. From a stone's throw away from the schoolyard to dirt roads that lifted their backs from the depths of the Pepacton Reservoir that climbed and climbed toward the sky and then disappeared into the woods at the top or hibernated under the winter snow for six long months of the year. I was lost.

But I had parents and a sister, grandparents next door, indoor plumbing, and a dog named Rosie, then another named Suzie, another Squiggy, and Ol' Dan. But Anne had imagination.

Oh, to be in love with the world like Anne. I wanted her happiness, like a child wants a lollipop, so I joined her out of loneliness. I opened her book over and over again

until I was brave enough to invite her in.

We built a treehouse with scrap timber and stolen nails from my father’s garage. She was the hammer with which I secured my foundation, and she was the railing that saved me from falling … or jumping.

We played in a hemlock hideaway. Sometimes we would wrap up in a quilt and read on the deck chairs with only the stars as witness. We caught salamanders in my grandma’s murky pond, their long bodies slick in our palms, their orange spots little sun-orbs of summer. We would put them in water in an old sandpail to watch, but we could never keep them long.

We’d hike and sometimes burrow into a crack of earth we found up on the hill behind my home. Down an almost vertical crevice barely as wide as our bodies, we lowered ourselves twenty feet. There was a rocky overhang on one side and a wall of stone, a giant sedimentary boulder as far as we could name it, on the other. In the middle, there was a stone circle where someone had built a campfire with a slit view of the sky; the rocks were black with soot and the floor of the crevice was deep with leaves. We were happy to hear their crunch when we stepped because we didn’t know if there was a bottom.

There we found a cave where we imagined a bear would return—but only after we had napped on a rectangular slab of stone so big and bed-like that we dreamed of being the pilgrims we were sure had stayed there long before us, who scratched their traveller names on those damp grey walls of time where we, too, scratched ours. We’d snack and nap and then return home before dark.

And when I had to leave for school or my mother needed me, I’d fold the corner of her until later. She never made a fuss, and when I rejoined her among the leaves and trees or under a flashlight before sleep, between the sheets of her stories, she acted as if I had never left.

When new friends were cruel or mother and sister unfair, she was my umbrella. I’d take her fishing down the road, and, while my sister poled and noodled, I sat with Anne. She kept me afloat.

Whatever we chose to do, it was with whirling and spinning, and wide-mouth grinning and open arms. The world beat in our hearts and fluttered in our veins.

In her mouth words were alive, trembling at being spoken. Sentences were strung together like beads on expensive gowns we would never wear. With words I could darn a hole in a heart or use them as an axe to break open a wound but would never. Her passion was written like a map I unfurled and followed.

And as for character and author, they were folded into my history, my future, my synapses, and pulsed through my pumping heart. They gave me hope and the words with which to write my own stories. Because of them, the world rises to meet my eager pen, and I have them both to thank for these many gifts.

Bio: Julene Waffle, a graduate of Hartwick College and Binghamton University, is a teacher in rural New York State; an entrepreneur, nature lover, and wife; a mother of three boys, two dogs, three cats, and a bearded dragon; and a writer. Although she has many literary influences, *Anne of Green Gables* has a special place in her heart. Waffle's work has appeared in *The Adroit Journal Blog*, NCTE's *English Journal*, *Mslexia*, and *The Bangalore Review*, among others. Her work also appears in several anthologies, and in her recent chapbook *So I Will Remember*. Learn more on the web at www.wafflepoetry.com, X: @JuleneWaffle, and Instagram: julenewaffle.

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