

# Why Anne of Green Gables Wasn't My Literary Heroine After All

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Anne Shirley, red-headed heroine and beloved character to millions, was everything I knew I could never be. She was bubbly, energetic, talkative, a gregarious little girl you just couldn't help but love.

Like many book-loving introverts, my own childhood was shaped by the hours I spent holed up in my room, reading about the many adventures of Anne of Green Gables. I wished that words could slip so easily from my own oft-tied tongue. I imagined myself a heroine so irresistible that the most desirable boy at school wouldn't even mind me smacking him with a slate. I dreamt that I, too, could captivate and charm anyone I met. I thought that my own quiet nature would never be what the world wanted most. Would anyone have fallen in love with Anne had she not been so talkative? Surely not, I thought.

When I was nine years old, I made a list of New Year's Resolutions and at the very top, I scrawled what I felt was most important: "Talk more." Anne had convinced me that something was "wrong" with me, the quiet bookworm with boringly straight and brown mousy hair (no wild curls or arguably auburn tints in my locks!). I would rather do absolutely anything than talk freely and loudly. If only I was more outgoing, more talkative, more fun, I could be better. If only I was more like Anne.

After years of poring over L.M. Montgomery's Anne series, I finally picked up another one of Montgomery's books: *Emily of New Moon*. I was surprised to find that Emily was everything Anne wasn't: dark and quiet, introspective and moody, and reclusive and restrained. She was odd in a definitely-not-charming way. You will never see Emily rousing up her girlfriends for an adventurous hike in the woods or laughing merrily as the center of a party (or if you do see her laughing at a party, you'll also find her exhausted in her room later from all the socialization). There will be no piling of flowers upon her head, no arms linked merrily with girlfriends, no playground stunts or dares, no spotlight cast upon her at all. The two characters both come from troubled childhoods. Both write and think and feel deeply, but present two very different images to the world around them. Emily is the introvert to Anne's extroverted side (although, for the record, I would say that Anne was technically an extroverted introvert, but that would need to be a whole other essay). Emily is decidedly not loved by very many in the world and, in fact, the people that do love her are a rag-tag mix—a pair of spinster sisters, one more dark and reclusive than Emily herself; an uncle with special needs; two best friends with some serious childhood issues; and a somewhat floundering teacher.

It wasn't until later in life, when I began researching the woman behind the world's most beloved heroine that I realized the truth: Even L.M. Montgomery, the very woman who brought Anne into existence, was nothing like her. She, too, was more like Emily of New Moon.

Though Montgomery's own childhood mirrored Anne's sharply (she was raised by strict and conservative grandparents after her mother died of tuberculosis when she was a toddler, her imagination was her constant companion during a lonely childhood, she too had a distant father come back to love her), she was nothing like her. While Anne was fair and bright—impossible to miss with her trademark flaming red hair—Montgomery was dark and brooding. While Anne lived life out loud, her every thought a monologue into the world, Montgomery was withdrawn, hiding the pain of her husband's mental illness, her own struggles with depression, and the pain of losing a child through stillborn death from the world, and expressing herself through written word instead. I can't help but wonder if Montgomery created her to give life to the "real" side of herself, the side she felt she had to hide.

Like Emily and Montgomery, I have grown up somewhat uncomfortable with my place in the world, awkward and unsure, happy in the comfort of my own home, perfectly content to spend hours alone without ever speaking a word aloud. (No, really, I do this is a lot.) I will never be the life of a party or the girl who people seek out because they know I will have something to say. I will never deliver a heartfelt monologue or have others stand 'round while I entertain with words alone. I will forever be known as "the quiet one." I will always seek to be around others, but run back to the quiet of myself to recover. I will never be as talkative as Anne, as fun as Anne, or as charming as Anne.

And while at one time in my life, that might have ruined me, might have caused me to run back up to my room and make a decidedly determined resolution to change, these days, I'm happy to say that I am just fine with who I am. I am much more of an Emily, anyways. And I've finally learned to embrace that. So, to all the fellow Emily's of the world, who are much happier with a good book than a conversation, can I just say—I hope we can be bosom buddies.

Quietly, of course.