



Akin to Anne: tales of other orphans, L.M. Montgomery, edited by Rea Wilmschurst. McClelland and Stewart, 1988. 250 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-6156-0.

In this collection of L.M. Montgomery's rediscovered stories, all but two of the nineteen tales were written between 1900 and 1908, before the publication of *Anne of Green Gables*, her first novel. After their first appearance in a variety of forgotten magazines, these stories had been lost to the reading public. Here they are reprinted, complete with original illustrations when such were available. The book's appearance is old-fashioned and appealing, the stories beautifully presented,

each with an ornate title page and scroll-worked opening letter. Rea Wilmschurst's discovery and consequent publication of these stories in a gift to this new generation of children and to all of us who ever were children. Into our 1980's world of harsh reality, where the-search-for-truth prevails in the guise of cynicism, these tales reintroduce some of the magic of believing.

Montgomery's own mother died when she was an infant and her father moved west where he eventually remarried, leaving his daughter to be raised by her aging maternal grandparents, strict Presbyterians. This less than idyllic childhood left the young Maud perpetually in search of a mother, of love and a real home, much like the orphan girl Charlotte, in "Charlotte's Quest", which opens this collection. Charlotte turns to a witch for help in finding a mother while Montgomery herself works her own creative magic. In her stories, orphans successfully find all that they could wish for.

As Anne, Montgomery's best known heroine, so often demonstrated, the key to hope in the face of misfortune is simply to have imagination. Imagination and optimism shine through in L.M. Montgomery's tales. In the warm, story-book world she creates, nothing is impossible. Kin will find kin, and like hearts be united.

These stories are peopled with virtuous, dreamy-eyed orphans, and with women like Marilla who hide soft and generous hearts beneath gruff, business-like exteriors. In these Cinderella-plots, the beautiful are rich, and the poor are kind, and dreaming is a reasonable escape from harsh reality. Justice prevails, for virtue is unfailingly rewarded and mischief leads only to wholesome learning and never to disaster.

When Montgomery's orphans find love, they inevitably find security. A place to call home and freedom from financial worry are synonymous with happiness for her orphans, regardless of their age. Hardship and poverty may

be endured from necessity or for the sake of love. Still, the meek shall inherit the earth, and Montgomery's heroes and heroines do reap earthly reward.

In these tales, children find blood kin who love them; grown brothers and sisters are reunited; adult orphans create family and home together; and talent discovers both mentor and protector in one.

The longest story included, "The running away of Chester", is also perhaps the most moving in this collection. Young Chester takes it upon himself to escape the loveless protection of his Aunt Harriet Elwell, his father's stepsister. Like Anne, Chester "possesses imagination" and so he is able to endure the hardships that beset him as he seeks a livelihood. Chester's goodness, like Anne's, is tempered by mischief. And the tale itself centers around the struggle he faces with his conscience. When he finds love and security with a "rosy lady", he learns that virtue is not easily achieved. Does he confess to his benefactress that he has misled her? Should he risk losing the happiness he has found? Montgomery's answer, of course, is yes, for happiness based on falsehood is tainted. Still, honesty will find its own reward and Chester's dilemma is happily resolved once he confesses his past.

This type of internal struggle of conscience is frequent in *Tales of other orphans*. But Montgomery believes unapologetically that goodness does prevail. Her characters often wonder aloud if they may be dreaming or compare their good fortune with something out of a storybook, for often meetings and turnings in their lives are stunningly coincidental. Still, isn't it true that when fortune, good or bad, touches our lives heavily, we often see where the smallest of acts or incidents tipped the scale: an impetuous decision, a careless word, an unexpected change of heart? In Montgomery's tales, this truth is used again and again to illustrate that hope is always feasible and happiness indeed a possibility, no matter what present circumstances may suggest.

Rea Wilmshurst writes a thorough and insightful introduction, more illuminating perhaps if it is read after the stories rather than before. The tangle of names and complex relationships is not an obstacle once the reader has met the characters face to face.

Still it is ultimately the characters and their tales that make this book worth reading. A rediscovery of Montgomery in *Tales of other orphans* is a rediscovery of hope: a welcome thing in our anxious world.

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