

## My Interview With Lucy Maud Montgomery

By *READ* Literary Editor Bryon Cahill • Illustration by Chris Murphy

**L.M.** Montgomery is a name that many young readers know well. She is the author of *Anne of Green Gables*, as well as six sequels. The novels follow Anne Shirley, an orphaned girl who is taken in by an elderly pair of siblings, Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, and grows up on their farm. Generations of girls have fallen in love with this series of books. But you don't have to be a girl to enjoy Montgomery's writing. In fact, this *boy* took such pleasure in reading *Anne of Green Gables* that as soon as I finished the book, I went straight to the author's hometown to seek her out.

Cavendish is located on Prince Edward Island, Canada, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Montgomery moved there in 1876, when she was 2. Her mother had just died of tuberculosis, and her father had remarried and moved away, so the child was raised by her maternal grandparents (who, incidentally, were the inspiration for the Cuthbert characters). Montgomery grew to love her surroundings so much that she went on to immortalize Prince Edward Island in literature.

When I arrived at Cavendish, I was promptly informed that Montgomery had passed away in 1942. Sadly, I had once again been less than diligent in my research. I sat at the foot of a grand oak tree and sighed as the sun went down. Then I heard a voice whisper, "What is an imagination for if not to enable you to peep at life through other people's eyes?"

I blinked. She was there—Lucy Maud Montgomery.

**Bryon Cahill:** Hello, Ms. Montgomery. I must say, you look quite lovely for a dead woman.

**L. M. Montgomery:** Why, thank you, dear. And, please, call me Maud. All my dearest friends call me Maud.

**Cahill:** This is some place you've got here, Maud! Are all the days as splendid as today was?

**Montgomery:** I believe the nicest and sweetest days are *not* those on which anything very splendid or wonderful or exciting happens but just those that bring simple little pleasures, following one another softly, like pearls slipping off a string.

**Cahill:** Ah, that's poetry. Many people don't know that you were a poet. In fact, you also wrote journals, essays, and, of course, you wrote *Anne*.

**Montgomery:** I cannot remember a time when I was not writing. To write has always been my central purpose, around which every effort and hope and ambition of my life has grouped itself.

When I was not writing, I was indulging in the creation of scrapbooks. They detail events in my life and are filled with collages of magazine cutouts, newspaper clippings, photographs of Prince Edward Island—and even pieces of my cats' fur!

**Cahill:** Oh, yes, I remember! I saw them online at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery site at [lmm.confederationcentre.com](http://lmm.confederationcentre.com).

**Montgomery:** What on earth are you talking about?

**Cahill:** Don't worry about it. Did your mother's death or your father's departure affect your writing?

**Montgomery:** Life cannot stop because tragedy enters it, Mr. Cahill. Besides, I was young when all that happened. As I grew up, I kept my writing to myself. I always got the sense that my grandparents cared for me out of a sense of family duty, and that was all. I believed in myself, however, and I struggled alone, always alone, in secrecy and silence. I never told my ambitions and efforts and failures to anyone. I listened, unmoved by the sneers and ridicule of various relatives who thought my scribbling a rank

folly and waste of time. But down, deep down, despite all discouragement and rebuff, I knew I would arrive someday.

**Cahill:** You have always had a huge fan base among girls. Do you think boys can enjoy your work as well?

**Montgomery:** I think boys can enjoy my novels just as much as girls do, if they would only open their minds to allow the indescribable beauty of nature and romance of love to enter!

**Cahill:** When you put it *that* way, it sounds *very* girlie!

**Montgomery:** How would you like me to put it? All I know is that there is a universal appeal to these books. All boys should read the series, because it will help mold them into well-rounded gentlemen. And if that isn't enough for them, then let me clue your male readers in on this: Girls tend to ignore the flirtations of barbarians and welcome the kisses of princes.

**Cahill:** And that's what it's all about, isn't it? ... Tell me, how did you get the idea for *Anne*?

**Montgomery:** I had always kept a book in which I jotted down (as they occurred to me) plots, incidents, characters, and descriptions. One day, I came across a faded entry that was written many years earlier that said, "Elderly couple applies to orphan asylum for a boy. ... By mistake, a girl is sent to them."

I remember well the very evening I wrote the opening paragraphs of *Green Gables*. It was a moist, silvery, sweet-scented evening in June. I was sitting at the end of the table in the old kitchen, with my feet on the sofa beside the west window, because I wanted to get the last gleams of daylight on my portfolio.

**Cahill:** What is it about Prince Edward Island? Being here now, I can see that it is quite beautiful. In your day, however, was it really as perfect as Anne makes it out to be?

**Montgomery:** Prince Edward Island was my home for 35 years before I married a Presbyterian minister named Ewan Macdonald. I moved with him to Ontario.

I remember that in my younger years on the island, I was enchanted by my pastoral surroundings. I must admit, though, Anne's often-exaggerated sense of romanticism may occasionally detract from the true beauty of the place. Some of her enthusiasm comes from me. There are such a lot of different Annes in



me. If I were just the one Anne, it would be ever so much more comfortable, but then it wouldn't be half so interesting. If voices had color, hers would have been like a rainbow. But honestly, Anne talks entirely too much sometimes! Enough talk. For now, let us sit in silence for a bit.

**Cahill:** Um ...

**Montgomery:** Shh ... If you can sit in silence with a person for half an hour and yet be entirely comfortable, you and that person can be friends. If you cannot, friends you'll never be, and you need not waste time in trying.

**Cahill:** Um, OK.

**Thirty minutes later, the first evening star appeared.**

**Cahill:** Ms. Montgom—I mean ... Maud.

**Montgomery:** Oh, splendid! Now we are kindred spirits! I want you to promise me that whenever you see that star, you'll remember that I am believing in you.

**Cahill:** I promise. But wait, before you go, would you like to say anything directly to our readers?

**Montgomery:** Laugh at your mistakes, but learn from them; joke over your troubles, but gather strength from them; make a jest of your difficulties, but overcome them.

**Cahill:** Thank you, Maud. Farewell.

**Montgomery:** Another chapter in my life is closed. ■