



*Anne of  
Green Gables,  
My Daughter  
& Me*

What My  
Favorite Book  
Taught Me  
about Grace,  
Belonging  
& the Orphan  
in Us All

*A  
Memoir*

LORILEE CRAKER

Lorilee writes with both lightness and depth, and I found myself completely taken by all three stories—hers, Phoebe’s, Anne’s. The beauty of her storytelling and the tenderness of the events she describes make this a thoroughly rich reading experience. Well done, Lorilee!

**SHAUNA NIEQUIST**

Author of *Bread & Wine* and *Savor*

To say it as Anne of Green Gables would, this encouraging book will be a “bosom friend” to your heart!

**HOLLEY GERTH**

Bestselling author of *You’re Already Amazing*

We are *all* enamored by the plight of orphans and gobble up their tales in the wide world of literature. Perhaps we each see ourselves—our fears of abandonment and creases of inadequacy—in their stories. Gently and with honest vulnerability, Lorilee Craker weaves the universal discoveries of orphan Anne into her own very personal story of being an orphan and adopting one. Open the cover. Turn the pages. You’ll come out the other end glad for the read and deepened by the journey.

**ELISA MORGAN**

Speaker; author of *The Beauty of Broken* and *Hello, Beauty Full*

In this artful tapestry, Lorilee Cracker—consummate wordsmith—gifts readers with a beautifully woven journey into the human heart. For her tender vulnerability, creative insight, and beautiful sentences, I highly recommend Cracker’s moving memoir.

**MARGOT STARBUCK**

Author of *The Girl in the Orange Dress*

Lorilee Craker’s *“Anne of Green Gables,” My Daughter and Me* is a deeply personal memoir about the search for identity that will strike a chord in all of us. Readers will feel as if they’re sitting on the couch beside Craker, flipping through family photo albums, as the author shares the touching—and funny!—story of her adoption, that of her daughter’s, and the impact of a red-headed “Anne with an e” heroine who lit the path ahead of them in the direction of true belonging.

**SUZANNE WOODS FISHER**

Bestselling author of *The Heart of the Amish*

With sparkling prose and charming wit, Lorilee Craker takes us on a journey where lives past, present, and fictional intertwine on the path to finding a place of belonging. Grab a cup of raspberry cordial, curl up on the window seat, and join their pilgrimage. You won't be disappointed.

**JENNIFER ERIN VALENT**

Christy Award-winning author of *Fireflies in December*

An absolute must-read for anyone who loved *Anne of Green Gables* as a girl! Anne's resilience combined with all of her big feelings gave me that trusted bosom-friend as I transitioned from girlhood to womanhood. And now Lorilee offers me the grown-up lens with which to view the scars I bear, the battle wounds of life, as a woman who is not defined by my abandonment but by my adoption into God's family.

**ALEXANDRA KUYKENDALL**

Author of *The Artist's Daughter*; specialty content editor, MOPS International

"*Anne of Green Gables, My Daughter, and Me* is a deeply satisfying read, shining brightly with author Lorilee Craker's personality and wit. For those of us who have adopted children, Craker concludes that we cannot rescue or fix them, but—like all parents—we can communicate to our children how worthy they are of God's abundant love.

**JENNIFER GRANT**

Author of *Love You More*, *MOMumental*, *Disquiet Time* (coeditor), and *Wholehearted Living*

With her characteristic spunk, sharp wit, and empathetic lens, Lorilee Craker peels back the layers of the heart in this uniquely woven cross-generational tale. Blending both humor and humility, Craker serves as the voice of the orphan in us. Lovely, lyrical, and laugh-out-loud funny . . . this uplifting memoir is a must-read.

**JULIE CANTRELL**

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Into the Free* and *When Mountains Move*

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Out of respect for their privacy, the names and identifying details of some people in this book have been changed.

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## “All ‘Spirit and Fire and Dew’”: An Introduction

*Anne is an amazing character. She represents something really profound for people considering she is an orphaned, undervalued, displaced soul, who is told she is trash. And Anne’s certainly the wrong gender to have value in the world. However, she turns around a community by absolutely remaining true to her spirit.*

MEGAN FOLLOWS, LEAD ACTRESS IN THE  
ANNE OF GREEN GABLES MINISERIES

“WHAT’S AN ORPHAN?”

The question, posed by my once-parentless kid, left me momentarily speechless. Seven-year-old Phoebe Min-Ju Jayne, she of the raven’s wing hair, golden skin, and human cannonball tendencies, asked for the definition as we were reading a children’s picture-book version of *Anne of Green Gables* one evening at bedtime.

Since my husband and I retrieved that gorgeous baby—a fire-cracker even at six months—from Korea, our world had never been the same. P, like Anne, is “all ‘spirit and fire and dew,’”<sup>1</sup> a lightning flash who broke off and then nuked the microwave knob (we use pliers to this day) at age two; ran naked through our church at age four; and somehow reversed Grandpa’s vintage convertible and rolled it down the driveway, barely averting catastrophe, at age five. Wild thing, she makes our hearts sing—sing, or stop cold five times a day.

Because Phoebe had been abandoned by her birth father while still in the womb and then bravely relinquished by her birth mother in Korea, Phoebe was our girl now. Yet I knew her casual question was one of great magnitude. The word *orphan* is six letters fraught

with baggage (and by “baggage,” I mean steamer trunk). The evocations are instant and panoramic, bringing up visions of vulnerable ragamuffins who are hungry, desperate, and alone. In our mind’s eye, we see a grimy urchin on the streets of Mumbai or a spindly, underdeveloped child, rattling his crib bars in an Eastern European orphanage. Orphans from literature and movies flit across our consciousness. Annie (“Leapin’ lizards!”), Harry Potter, Elsa from *Frozen*, Pip from *Great Expectations*, Tarzan, Luke Skywalker—and on and on the orphan archetype goes, all bound up in a great big Oliver Twist–tie. Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Robin, The Flash, Captain Marvel, Captain America, and Green Arrow: all orphaned!

Yet this word trips wires like almost no other. Adoptive mothers are especially sensitive to it. I once read an emotional blog by a mom in the process of adopting kids from Haiti. She just *loathed* that her I-600 immigration paperwork was stamped with the words “Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative.”

“The fact that the word *orphan* will describe you for a portion of your life breaks my heart,” she wrote. “It seems to signify that you’re lost, unclaimed and not cared for.” Her heart was yelling like a crazed fan at a hockey game: “I found you! I claim you! I will care for you!” A friend of mine, an adoptive mom, visibly bristled at the word when I brought it up; her eyes grew cold, and her arms folded around herself. Our conversation grounded to a screeching halt. After another friend lost both of her parents in a short span, she prickled when a coworker commented that she was “an orphan now.”

Many adoption agencies shy away from or even ban the use of the word in their processes with adopting parents because it’s not “positive adoption language.” Nobody wants the big fat “orphan” label tattooed to their foreheads or those of their children. Nobody wants to lug around that steamer trunk, for themselves or their kids.

But, if I may reference Inigo Montoya from *The Princess Bride*, I do not think *orphan* means what we think it means.<sup>2</sup> Yes, the common usage is the loss of parents, or at the very least, the abandonment by unfit, living parents. (Interestingly, in the Bible, the word occurs forty-two times, and it always refers to someone without a father; yet in terms of the animal world, orphans are almost always deserted by their mothers.) The word is so much broader and more expansive than we give it credit for. One thesaurus' listing of words related to *orphan*<sup>3</sup> popped out at me in neon:

Orphan: Bereft, left behind, and left.

Bereft.

Left behind.

Left.

By that definition, we've all been orphans at one time or another. We've all been brought to our knees by the loss of someone we love, somebody whose death bereaves us terribly. We've all been left behind, renounced, ditched, and forsaken. Fired. Dumped. Snubbed. And who among us has not been just plain *left*, plopped down on the curb of life, waiting for the ride that will never come?

This definition of orphan shifted my thinking on the word. It downgraded my response from Big Scary Word to something demystified, broader, relatable. I began to see orphans everywhere, spotting the *bereft* in the grieving daughter, the *left behind* in a teenage boy who doesn't make the baseball team, and the *left* in a divorced friend's eyes.

And with the scaling down of it came a new comfort level and the surprising thought that it's actually positive to talk about the O word. Because in a world of Elsas and Annas, Harry Potters and Miss Peregrine's peculiar children, Batmen and Catwomen, it's going to come up, over and over and over. Adoptees especially are going to wonder on some level where they fit into our culture's constant

orphan storytelling. No wonder, then, that *orphan* has become an important word for me and my house. Not only was that girl of my heart asking about it; it's a question I've been asking, in one form or another, for most of my life. After all, I was adopted too.

So when Phoebe asked about the definition of orphan, I tried to put the definition in plain terms and tell her in a way that she could understand—that there are many paths to orphanhood. Anne Shirley was orphaned when her loving, schoolteacher parents, Walter and Bertha, both succumbed to typhoid by the time she was three months old. “And Mommy was an orphan before Oma and Opa adopted her,” I explained. “My birth mother couldn't take care of a baby then, just like your birth mom couldn't take care of a baby, any baby, when you came. You were a kind of orphan, too, like me and like Anne, before we came to Korea and brought you home.”

“Like Anne . . .” Huh.

That conversation with my daughter lit something in me. We were, all three of us—me, Phoebe Min-Ju Jayne, and Anne—card-carrying castaways who had traveled a winding path to belonging. I've always wanted to tell the quirky, poignant, and oddly paralleled stories of my daughter's and my adoptions. In that moment, cuddled up together on P's bed, I knew I wanted to tell those stories plus one more in a book, braiding each chapter with a devilishly red-haired ribbon.

“*Anne of Green Gables, My Daughter, and Me* is the result. As I wrote, I wove in one smaller strand, the story of Anne's creator, Lucy Maud Montgomery, who invested her life's work in writing stories about children who felt as lost and alone as she did. “Maud,” the child of a mother who died when she was a baby and a mostly absentee father, seemed to be on a quest to find belonging for herself and her characters. As I've read thousands upon thousands of her words,

Maud has become a writing godmother to me. I deeply admire her fat, buttery words, her pitch-perfect references to the Bible and classic literature, and her ability to make me laugh *and* cry. She was a gifted humor writer who had the rare gift of handling both comedy and drama well. Yet she experienced the pummeling rejection known to every writer; *Anne of Green Gables* was rejected several times before being published.<sup>4</sup>

Part memoir and part Anne super-fan book, this book will interlace Anne's and Maud's stories with our yarns, taking you from the red-dirt beaches of Prince Edward Island to the ginseng fields of Korea. Along the way, you may uncover truths about your own search for identity, finding yourself in places you hadn't thought to look.

As you enter Anne's world through quotations from and retellings of a few of her stories, you'll fall under her spell, energized by her heart's vigor and an unsinkable spirit that couldn't be submerged even after she had been sorely bereaved, left alone, and just plain *left*. So full of hope and good humor, she reminds us we can all live our lives as she did—resilient, redemptive, and openhearted. She inspires “orphans” of every kind to find a home that feels right and that may or may not be with our biological relatives.

Since the 1908 release of Maud's first novel, *Anne Girl* endures—beloved, cherished, and admired, not because Anne is perfect, but rather because she's far from it. We see ourselves in the girl who hopefully uttered the words “tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet,”<sup>5</sup> wishing for a new day and a clean slate to begin again, or maybe just to break over Gilbert Blythe's cute head. She represents the unwanted stray that exists in all of us from time to time. She makes us believe in ourselves, though we've all been “left” in some essential way. She compels us to keep moving forward, even when it's hard.

## Meeting Anne

Most kids lucky enough to grow up with books discover a character who inspires them. Being from the prairies, I thrilled to Laura Ingalls Wilder and her homesteading adventures. And I cheered for that ambitious Little Woman, Josephine March, a prefeminist who wrote her way out of any hole. But I had only one real kindred spirit, a life-long literary companion. No one could light a candle to the carrot-headed magpie who found her way home to the reluctant care of a lonely, aging brother and sister who discovered they needed her far more than she needed them.

I met Anne around the time I was myself in “the depths of despair,”<sup>6</sup> having fallen victim to an eighth-grade she-bully who blacklisted me for most of the year. I didn’t know it would all blow over, as these things usually do, and that by year’s end I would find my own Diana Barry, a bosom friend who understood me just as I was. All I knew was that I was so lonely and that school was nearly unbearable. Anne’s melodramatic speeches (“My life is a perfect graveyard of buried hopes”<sup>7</sup>) gave voice to my pain; her deep sensitivity to rejection and insult reflected my own. I clung to my literary friend, distracted by her hilarious capers and inspired to find hope and beauty in the cruel ugliness of eighth grade. After all, Anne was able to put that insufferable Josie Pye in her place; maybe I could do the same with Viola Goossen.

Anne was my one true friend during those days and in the days to come. She was me, except that she dreamed of nut-brown hair, and my hair was the exact color of some nut, somewhere, before I started smearing it in various shades of “mochachino.” She dreamed of puffed sleeves, and I dreamed of buffed arms. She bemoaned her hair; I bemoaned my thighs. Minor details. Really, I’m a lot like Anne:

- Featherbrained? Check. Especially in the morning. I have to *drink* coffee to *make* coffee.
- Motormouthed? Obviously a check.
- Crazy for Gilbert Blythe? Check, *italicized*, **bolded**, and underlined. My dear husband, Doyle, sometimes jokes that should Gilbert Blythe appear at our door, drawn out of the pages of *Anne of Green Gables*, it will be all over between us.

Three cheers for Anne with an “e”! She is a girl who, give or take hair the color of orange soda and exceptional academic strengths, is my fictional twin. A girl who understands, more than dear Laura Ingalls and Jo March, what it is to be an orphan like me and, later, like my own fiery little girl. Even at my somewhat mature age, I still channel that plucky, dreamy girl who has endless “scope for the imagination.”<sup>8</sup> Anne’s impassioned spirit emboldens mine, and her sensitivity and boundless imagination mirror my own softhearted dreaminess.

I’m betting you feel the same way about Anne with an “e,” that she’s *your* kindred spirit too. She means so much to so many people. Come along for the ride as my girl and I step into the world of our favorite book—of reveling in ipecac-soaked drama, sampling liniment-flavored cake, and getting your best friend inadvertently spiffed on raspberry cordial.

Join Anne, me, and Phoebe Min-Ju Jayne as our stories plait together—one strand red, one raven black, and one mochachino. Link arms with us as we find our way to places of belonging, our forever homes. Settle in with us in this world of “spirit and fire and dew.” Here’s a story for the orphan in us all.

## A Couple of “Severe Mental Jolts”

*We learned that orphans are easier to ignore before you know their names.  
They are easier to ignore before you see their faces. It is easier to pretend they're  
not real before you hold them in your arms. But once you do, everything changes.*

DAVID PLATT, *RADICAL*

ON A SMALL CANADIAN PENINSULA protruding into the Atlantic Ocean, the little village of Avonlea was experiencing something of a ripple in the usual flow of things. Matthew Cuthbert, a man who literally never raised eyebrows, including his own, was supposed to be sowing his late turnip seeds at this hour of this day, like every other God-fearing farmer on Prince Edward Island. And yet there he was, at midafternoon, driving out of the village of Avonlea.

What is more, he was wearing his best suit and driving the buggy led by his chestnut-colored horse, as opposed to taking a less formal method of transportation. From this set of clues laid out for readers on the opening pages of *Anne of Green Gables*, Mrs. Rachel Lynde “betokened”<sup>1</sup> that he must be going a long way. This was no common errand her bachelor neighbor was on, and she would not rest easy until she knew where he was headed.

Mrs. Rachel marched out of Lynde’s Hollow and walked the quarter mile to Green Gables, the spacious house where the Cuthberts lived, to obtain answers to her burning questions. The home was set so

far back on the property that it was scarcely detectable from the main road. Not only was Green Gables hidden, both the house and the yard were painfully clean. “One could have eaten a meal off the ground,” we are told, “without overbrimming the proverbial peck of dirt.”<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Rachel Lynde did not approve of such an austere, reclusive house. In fact, in her opinion, inhabiting such a house wasn’t *living* in it so much as *staying* in it.<sup>3</sup>

Little did she know that soon enough the staying would melt into living, and this hermetically sealed dwelling situation of which she disapproved was about to bust wide open. No one in Avonlea, including her, would ever be the same.

...

Though not fixed in as picturesque a setting as Green Gables, the bungalow I was brought home to as an infant was nearly as immaculate. It was in that house, located on a humble street of Cold War-era bungalows on Winnipeg’s northwest side, that a beauty supply salesman named Abe phoned his wife from work, broaching the subject of adoption. A man he worked with at Monarch Beauty Supply had recently adopted a baby with his wife. He wondered out loud if this might be a solution to their childlessness, now approaching three and a half years since their September wedding day. His wife, a nurse named Linda, said little before replacing the black phone on the wall. The notion was startling, but not unfamiliar. As a labor and delivery nurse, she had cared for many newborns who had been surrendered by their birth mothers. Might one of those babies come to belong to her and Abe? New hope bubbled like a current under her skin.

Linda set a dish of crab apple preserves on the table for supper, picked from their tree in the yard and canned by her own hands. *Adoption*. She tasted the word in her mouth. It wasn’t unheard of

in broader society; in fact, she knew all those babies at the hospital were adopted by childless couples. But in their culture, their world, it hadn't been done yet. Linda couldn't think of a single relative (and she and Abe had hordes of them) or anyone in their church community who had adopted a child. The baby would not be a Mennonite, ethnically, for Mennonites were more than a denomination; they were a peculiar people, set apart by history, culture, language, and shared beliefs. But did that really matter? Some folks might think so. Some folks might think this was risky business for sure, raising someone who was not your natural child. Who knew what kind of person this baby might grow up to be?

But somehow, Linda didn't care. She knew Abe didn't either. She remembered the excitement in his voice on the phone. They were ready to open their hearts.

Their house, 542 Kingston Avenue, was tidy and small. Much like Marilla Cuthbert's yard, on Linda's watch, "one," too, "could have eaten a meal off the ground without overbrimming the proverbial peck of dirt." Its amenities included a patio; a huge, gnarled poplar tree along with several crab apple trees in the backyard; and a weeping willow tree in the front. Though only four years old, the house had its quirks already—the chief being a bomb shelter in the basement. The previous owners may have built it to protect themselves from Castro or Khrushchev, but the Mennonite salesman's wife used it to house mason jars of crab apples, tomatoes, and cold bean salad. In the future, her children, procured in an unusual way, would become very familiar with the cold, damp space. "Could you please go down to the Bomb Shelter and bring me up two jars of beets?" she would call down the stairs, where they were flopped on the shag rug, watching *Gilligan's Island*. She never failed to refer to it by its given name, and in capital letters. *Bomb Shelter*.

In present day, the kitchen smelled of bay leaves and cabbage, of rhubarb and plums and canning spices, their shared tradition and heritage, 443 years of Mennonite foods and folkways expressed in a kettle of borscht and fruit *platz* with streusel topping.

There were just two empty little bedrooms across the tiny hallway, but castles of space were available in their hearts. Why God had not answered their prayers for children yet was a mystery, a painful reality, yet they believed that He knew best, that His unknowable ways were right and good. Doctors had no answers for them, so they kept praying, together with hands clasped at the supper table, and all alone when nobody knew what they were thinking. When Abe got home from work, they would have a new conversation, the kind in which the old passes away and new life comes.

...

Mrs. Rachel Lynde was silent for a full five seconds when she heard the reason for Matthew Cuthbert's extraordinary errand.

A little boy.

From Nova Scotia.

An *orphan*.

It was almost impossible to find the words to form the whys and wherefores, but Mrs. Rachel was noted for always speaking her mind and finding the words to do so. Usually, she tacked on the words "that's what" to her declarative sentences to add a note of inarguable finality.

We are told that Matthew's going "to meet a kangaroo from Australia"<sup>4</sup> might have been a less flabbergasting development. We are also told that there was a dish of crab apple preserves on the table, already set for Matthew's return with the orphan boy from Nova Scotia.

As Marilla, Matthew's sister, ticked off her reasons for adopting

an orphan from the asylum, Mrs. Rachel could only stare in horror. Mrs. Alexander Spencer, a respectable woman known to them both, was going to adopt a little girl at the same time. She was charged with selecting a boy for them and bringing this boy to them on her way back home.

At age sixty, Matthew was troubled by his heart and therefore challenged to do the farm work that a hired hand might help with, if hired hands were easy to find, which they were not.

Matthew and Marilla had come to the conclusion that adopting a boy to help on the farm would pose a solution to their problems. If they got a boy around ten or eleven, he would be the perfect age to accomplish chores right off, and young enough to be raised up proper. They meant to give him a respectable home and schooling. The brother and sister had received a telegram from Mrs. Spencer that morning. The orphan boy was on the 5:30 train that very afternoon, and Matthew was on his way to pick him up.

Mrs. Rachel was rendered all but catatonic by this news. She received, we are told, a “severe mental jolt,”<sup>5</sup> and felt that nothing would shock her after this. *Nothing!*

In Avonlea, one good verbal thumping deserved another, and Mrs. Rachel pelted Marilla with disapproval, all but bopping her about the head with reasons why she had clearly gone insane. Marilla Cuthbert, she of hard angles and graying hair brought up in a stiff knot with two hairpins jammed through it, of restricted experience and straitlaced morals, of the saving grace of a mouth that suggested a sense of humor, took the onslaught like a chief.

She was expecting Mrs. Rachel’s disapproval and had thought through some of the same talking points her neighbor brought up. This is because the talking points Mrs. Rachel brought up are the same viewpoints, worries, and opinions that have been brought up

about orphans since time immemorial. According to Mrs. Rachel and home pundits over the centuries, adopting an orphan is foolish, reckless, risky, and unsafe because of the following:

You're allowing a stranger into your house and home.

This stranger has an unknowable temperament and hails from a mysterious ancestry. (Why, he could be from a family of lunatics! Hairy people! Circus people! Grits! Tories! Democrats! Republicans!)

Mrs. Rachel, like so many others, allowed her imagination to mosey down a long dark alley of possibilities, where she was jumped every few steps. How many potential mothers and fathers and families allow themselves to be taken hostage by the unknown (and mostly untrue)?

She continued with the nugget of the thing: You don't know how this little stranger—this potentially deranged fire-eater who supports the wrong political party because it is in his very *blood*—will turn out, *that's what*. You don't know what the outcome will be, *that's what*. (Obviously, people over the centuries have been able to predict with 100 percent accuracy how their genetic posterities will turn out.)

And that is the deal breaker for most people, including Mrs. Rachel.

Not that she took a breath, but I believe Mrs. Rachel might have noted that Marilla seemed unmoved by her theories and *that's whats*. So she pulled out the big guns, the horror stories, the tales of orphans past that should have caused those two hairpins to pop right out of Marilla's tightly wound head.

Just the week before, Mrs. Rachel said that she read in the paper how a couple had taken in a boy out of an orphanage. The boy set fire

to the house at night—*deliberately!* That innocent couple was nearly fried alive in their own beds.

She knew of another case (of course she did) where an adopted boy sucked the whites and yolks out of eggs, just slurped the ever-loving dilly out of them and could not be broken of the vile habit. (On the bright side, he did not have a protein deficiency.)

“If you had asked my advice in the matter—which you didn’t do, Marilla—I’d have said for mercy’s sake not to think of such a thing, that’s what.”<sup>6</sup>

Marilla, with hairpins still intact, remained unmoved. Mrs. Rachel saved the *pièce de résistance* for last, a story she must unleash for Marilla’s own good.

“Well, I hope it will turn out all right,”<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Rachel said in a way that suggested there was no way it would. She then begged Marilla, “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,”<sup>8</sup> should she find herself burnt to a crisp in her bed or possessed of hundreds of vacant eggs, unusable for custard pie.

But there was a worse fate than these, and Mrs. Rachel laid this one on her friend with all the righteous indignation in her being:

#### The Case of Strychnine in the Well.

Strychnine, you ask? A darling of literature (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie both made great use of it in their literary murders), strychnine is essentially rat poison that is often fatal when ingested. Mrs. Rachel told Marilla she had heard about an orphan asylum child in New Brunswick who had poisoned a well, leading an entire family to die in appalling anguish. (One can assume that Mrs. Rachel’s tone left no doubt that she feared the siblings Cuthbert would shuffle off this mortal coil in similar, appalling fashion.)

“Only it was a girl in that instance,”<sup>9</sup> she added, just to be fair.

*A girl.* Marilla and Matthew had distinctly asked for a boy, not a girl. So, really, there was nothing to be concerned about, was there?

...

I know something of Matthew's astonishment when the stationmaster informed him that the orphan he'd come to pick up was in fact the earnest little girl sitting on a stack of shingles and not the boy he had expected. My surprise came in a sterile hospital delivery room on the southeast side of Grand Rapids, Michigan, on the day my second baby boy was born. That was the same day that I imagined a baby girl with gemstone clarity for the first time.

The ultrasound technician had told me this infant was a girl, in utero. And so the baby's closet was crammed with pink footie sleepers and other girlie loot, every befrilled outfit given as gifts from others. Doyle and I had chosen the name Phoebe for our expected daughter, a name we both thought was the bee's knees. To us, it was golden, not too popular, and not too weird. We wanted to unearth a vintage treasure, a biblical name that meant "bright shining star." I was still somewhat hung up on Ruby, my other favorite at the time, and waffling a bit, but Doyle insisted.

"Phoebe is the name of a bird, too," he said. Doyle digs birds. That somehow sealed the deal. Plus, the ancient Phoebe mentioned in Romans 16 was a leader in the early church and the apostle Paul's emissary to the Romans. I dig that, a lot. A Titan in Greek mythology, a bird, a bright shining star! We would bestow all of this on our daughter's tiny shoulders, a mantle of history, story, and meaning.

Yet here was our second son, screaming blue murder, enraged yet exquisite. His older brother, three-year-old Jonah, was in the safekeeping of his doting Grandma Pat and Grandpa George at that moment.

I must have known somehow that the ultrasound technician was

off when she had said she thought most likely we were having a girl. “I can’t get a perfect shot, but as you can see—” she pointed to a nebulous blotch on the screen—“I’m pretty sure we are having a girl here.”

Doyle and I nodded as if that amorphous blob told an indisputable story. We bobbed our heads in agreement to seeing something we did not see. She was the one wielding the squeeze bottle of ultrasound gel, after all.

Obviously, she was misinformed.

I wanted a girl, a daughter, with every cell of my being but had not allowed myself to totally surrender to the possibilities. On some level, I knew. Even as I wrote thank-you notes to people, and laundered and folded flowery wee ensembles, I was aware that something was skew-whiff with the girl theory.

Dr. Grey’s announcement “It’s a boy,” then, was not the severe mental jolt it might have been. Oh, we were definitely jostled, just not *completely* rattled to our foundations. Doyle and I both shot each other wide-eyed looks.

“*Whaaaaaat? A boy?*” It still gave us a good few minutes of quaking.

My first thought was that now I could use the boy name I loved. I’m not a name freak for nothing. I had a grand boy’s name tucked away just in case my instinct was right and this baby did not turn out to be a Phoebe. *Ezra*. Ezra Finney Brandt Craker. Ezra, because it was poetic and robust and still original in our neck of the woods; it was also old-fashioned, rare, and biblical, like our firstborn’s name, Jonah. The name possessed a certain offbeat quality and zest for life we liked and hoped to impart to our new son. Finney was after Doyle’s beloved Grandma and Grandpa Finney, and Brandt was my cherished grandma’s maiden name. A one-of-a-kind name for a one-of-a-kind boy. I adored him to the moon from that first quaking moment.

In that delivery room at Metropolitan Hospital on Grand Rapids’

southeast side, we were expecting a girl and received a boy instead. It was the exact opposite of Matthew and Marilla's situation.

The difference is, in my case, I also received a daughter. My next thought, after the boy surprise; the name delight; and the love for him that broke over me like a surf, was a revelation. We were going to adopt a girl someday.

An old African proverb says that children have two birthdays: the day they are born, and the day when they are first envisioned by their mothers. December 19, 2000, the day we welcomed our baby boy into the world, was also a birthing day for Phoebe. I settled in with Ezra, holding his warmth and sweetness next to my skin and put thoughts of another child aside for the time being. I didn't know who, and I didn't know when or where, but a radiant knowledge had taken root: A bright shining star was coming to us all.