

Stageland

PRICE 15 CENTS

JUNE 1908

THE  
**BLUE BOOK**  
MAGAZINE



THE STORY-PRESS CORPORATION  
NORTH AMERICAN BLDG, CHICAGO.

COPYRIGHT 1908 BY THE STORY-PRESS CORPORATION  
ENTERED AT STATIONERS HALL LONDON ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

**COLOR PHOTO OF ANNA HELD IN THIS ISSUE**

**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* A Double Surprise

*Date of first publication:* 1908

*Author:* L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery (1874-1942)

*Date first posted:* Dec. 31, 2016

*Date last updated:* Dec. 31, 2016

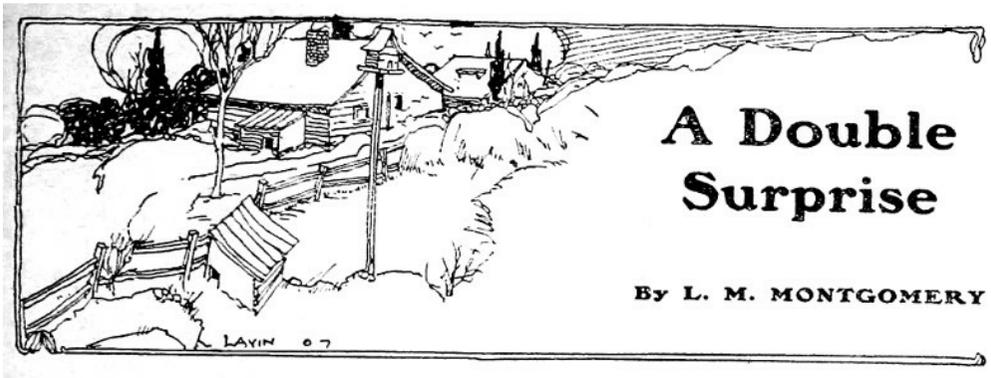
Faded Page eBook #20161233

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# A Double Surprise

L. M. Montgomery

First published *The Blue Book Magazine*, June 1908.



# A Double Surprise

By L. M. MONTGOMERY

I was visiting in Trenton when Aunt Anne came to our place. I felt real disappointed when I got home and mother told me she had been up. I had always wanted to see Aunt Anne, for father had loved her so furiously that I thought she must be worth seeing.

Father was always a good judge of women.

Sunnyslope, where she lived, was only about sixty miles from Talbot, where we lived; and sure enough, we had barely got settled when Aunt Anne arrived along; but, as aforesaid, I was away and I didn't get back until the day after she had gone home.

"She wants you to go out to Sunnyslope some day next week, and she is a perfect dear," said mother. "You must go—she has such lovely brown eyes."

Mother didn't exactly mean that I must go because Aunt Anne had lovely brown eyes; that is just mother's way of talking. Her ideas, as father used to say, never come in proper sequence. But she's none the worse mother for that. I picked out pretty good parents.

"Did she suggest any particular day?" I asked.

"No. She said any day would suit her, and if you'd send her word what train you'd be on, she'd meet you. She lives quite near the station, and I wish you could see what a mild, winning expression she has. It reminded me so much of your poor father. She says she has a nice old place out there, and you must look on it as a second home although it's a little lonely and out of the way. However, she has the jolliest laugh and a sweet pink-and-white face."

I reflected and decided that I wouldn't send word when I was coming, because I didn't exactly know myself. The Kingsleys had promised to come down some day the next week and I couldn't go until their visit was over. If Aunt Anne lived so near the station I could easily walk to her house. Besides, I have—or had—a mania for

surprising people.

The Kingsleys never came till Thursday, and Friday morning I announced that I was going up to Aunt Anne's that day to stay over Sunday. Mother looked dubious, because she never likes to see anyone start on a journey on Friday; she says it's unlucky. Of course I'm not superstitious; but I don't think I will go anywhere on Friday again. It's just as well to be on the safe side when there are plenty of other days in the week.

I got myself an early lunch to catch the twelve o'clock train, and I put on my prettiest, frilliest organdie dress and a floppy hat with pink poppies on it, because I knew, if Aunt Anne were anything like father, she'd love pretty clothes. Thus accoutered I kissed mother good-by, told her to be good, and got on my train.

It's a little branch line that runs out to Sunnyslope and the train was a "mixed" freight. It fairly crawled, and it stopped for ever so long at little dingy stations and there wasn't another soul in the car except a tall, thin woman reading a tract. It was so monotonous I fell asleep and I woke up, hours afterwards, as it seemed to me, just as a brakeman banged a door and called something that sounded as much like Sunnyslope as it did like anything else in the language.

"Did he—oh, did he say 'Sunnyslope?'" I demanded wildly of the tall thin woman who was still poring over her tracts.

She looked up with a bored expression and said "Yes."

I grasped my parasol and skipped thankfully off that train.

Frankly, I didn't like the appearance of Sunnyslope at all. It didn't look in the least Aunt Anneish. Neither did I admire the station-master; he was so round and tubby and bald. But he was really a very affable person, and beamed on me when I asked him if he could direct me to Miss Thompson's place.

"Reckon I can, miss. But it's a right smart distance from here. It's an hour's walk round by the road. But look here. Are you good at short cuts?"

"At what?" I said stupidly.

"Cuts—short cuts. I can put you up to one that'll take you out to old Miss Thompson's place in half an hour. D'ye see that red house down the road? Well, when you get there look over the fields to the southwest and you'll see the windmill on the top of Abel Millars' barn. Just hike for that across lots, and you'll come out half a mile from the Thompson place straight down the road. You'll know it when you get there—there's a pond by the house and a mortal long lane and there aint another place nearer than Abel Millars'. But are you sure you're good at short cuts?"

You can never tell whether you're good at short cuts or not until you've tried,

and I never had, but I meant to right away.

I thanked the station-agent and I started down the dusty road. It was just two o'clock, which convinced me that the train had made better time when I was asleep than it had before, for I had not expected to get to Sunnyslope before half-past three. I shall never forget how hungry I was; and the day was so hot and that road so dusty. When I came to the red house I looked for the windmill and found it; and with all the rashness of inexperience I straightway "hiked across lots" to it. When I am an old woman and take to giving advice I shall say to all and sundry, "Beware of cross-cuts."

I'm not quite sure what "hike" means and I forgot to ask the station-master to define it exactly. But if to wade through hayfields to your knees, squirm under barbed wire fences because you don't dare to try to climb over them in a frilly organdie, run around four fields in deadly dread of a cow, and get lost in a spruce wood and come out on the wrong side with no guiding windmill in sight, be to "hike," then I hiked.

I walked around the edge of that wood looking for the windmill, and on the other side I came to a queer little low-eaved barn that looked as if it had never been built but had just grown up in the ferny, woodsy corner like a toadstool. Over it, away across the fields, I saw my blessed windmill, and I was just ready to resume "hiking" when I heard the most dismal, melancholy wail in the barn. For a second it frightened me; then it came again, and I knew it must be a cat. Moreover, there was something in the sound that made me think the animal was suffering.

I have a weakness for cats. To go and leave one in possible trouble was something I could not do, no matter how much "hiking" was before me. So I proceeded to investigate. The barn had a door secured on the outside with a rusty hasp, and I got in without any trouble. On one side of the barn was a little loft full of hay, and on the other was a little loft without any hay, and from this the wails were proceeding.

I called "Pussy, pussy," in my most winning tones, but though the yowls grew louder, no pussy appeared. I gathered my frills around me and gingerly climbed up a very dusty, very wobbly ladder in one corner; and then I saw the cat, a great big fellow, right in the middle of the loft. I was shocked at his appearance. He seemed to be starving and was just skin and bone; but he had a beautiful, striped coat and big bright famished eyes, and he looked like a cat that had seen better days. As soon as he saw me he staggered to meet me, then fell down and mewed faintly.

I actually had tears in my eyes as I picked up that cat and crawled down the ladder. I was thankful that I had "hiked" across lots and got lost, for otherwise he

would have starved to death.

It is not easy to climb fences in a frilly organdie with a big cat in your arms, but I did it and at last I reached the main road by Abel Millars'. I saw the Millars peering at me from their windows in amazement. I dare say I looked funny enough, tramping a dusty road in floppy hat and frills, with my arms full of cat; but I didn't care how I looked. As for the cat, he was so quiet and limp that I was afraid he would die before I could get him anything to eat.

I was a weary and thankful girl when I saw the "mortal long lane" and a big old-fashioned house peering through the willows across a little creek. The lane led up to the back porch door and I knocked there. But no Aunt Anne appeared and I noted with dismay that the kitchen-blinds were down. Finally I trailed around through a wilderness of sweet clover and caraway to the front door; and there was a young man sitting on the doorstep.

He looked resigned and determined, as if he had been sitting there a good while and meant to sit as long as was necessary. He stood up when I appeared, however, and looked surprised. It was borne in upon me that he was a very good-looking young man, and I would just as soon not have been carrying that cat.

"Can you tell me if Miss Thompson is home?" I said wearily.

"I'm afraid she isn't," he answered. "I've been waiting here a good while, hoping she would return. It is very important that I should see her before I go back to town."

"She surely will be back soon," I said anxiously, "because I know she is expecting me some day this week. She is my aunt, and I know it will be all right for me to go in and make myself at home. Besides, I must get something for this cat to eat—don't you see he is starving?"

The young man agreed that the case was urgent enough to justify housebreaking; but every door and window was fastened up hard and tight. We went around and tried them all, while I explained how I had found the cat. Finally, we discovered a dairy under the willows down by the pond. It was padlocked, but the young man picked the lock with his penknife—very knacky he was about it, too—and we got in. There was nothing in it after all but a little pitcher of skim-milk, and I found a saucer and gave the cat some. He nearly choked in his eagerness to swallow it.

"You mustn't give him too much," warned the young man. "A little at a time until he gets accustomed to it."

I was glad the young man was there, because I should probably have let the cat drink the whole pitcherful and kill himself. When he had had as much as we thought good for him we shut him up in the wood-house.

“We’ll wait a little while,” I said, “and then, if aunty doesn’t come home, we’ll try to get in some way. I know she wouldn’t mind. She’s the dearest soul, mother says; I can’t understand her being away. Perhaps somebody is sick.”

We went and sat down on a bench under the willows. It was cool and dreamy and shadowy there and I would have felt quite peaceful if I hadn’t been so hungry. I hadn’t eaten much lunch, and think of all I had been through since then! As for that poor young man, it turned out that he had had nothing to eat since breakfast.

“I came out on the morning-train and I’m bound to stay here till I see Miss Thompson,” he said. “I’ve come out to get her to give our firm an option on some property she has in town. It’s very important—and there’s another fellow after it. He’s coming to-morrow—we found that out; but he doesn’t know we want it, too. The firm depends on me to bring this to a successful conclusion, and it will mean something to me if I can manage it. I understand Miss Thompson is a pretty sharp person in a business-dicker. May I ask you to put in a good word for me?”

Remembering how he had picked that padlock for me, I agreed at once. As a general thing, picking locks isn’t a recommendation, but there are exceptions to every rule. Besides, I always like to oblige people with splendid steel-blue eyes and cleft chins, such as he had. We were real friendly and comfortable. He told me his name was Donald Murray and I told him mine was Jennie Thompson; and it turned out that he knew some people who knew the Kingsleys, and that made it seem almost as if we were really acquainted.

We sat there and talked for nearly an hour, varied by frequent trips to the wood-house to feed the cat, who grew livelier at every visit and seemed in a fair way to recover permanently. But the less hungry the cat got the more hungry I got; and by four I was simply desperate.

“I’m going to get in and get something to eat,” I said. “Aunt Anne would have a fit if she knew I was starving in her yard—and there’s no more milk than the cat will need. We must break in. I’ll tell you what we can do: break one of the little panes in the porch-window and get at the catch. Then I can get in and open the door.”

It was simple enough and we did it cheerfully. In two minutes we were inside and I had the sitting-room blind up and my hat off. It was a pretty nice place, only fearfully prim and neat.

“Now, I’m going to get tea,” I said gayly. “We’ll make ourselves right at home; that will please Aunt Anne. Wont she be surprised when she comes home?”

Mr. Murray agreed that she probably would. Then he kindled a fire in the kitchen-stove. He was a very knacky young man, and I privately thought that he would be a very useful person to have in the family. Meanwhile, I set the table and

explored Aunt Anne's pantry thoroughly. It was well stocked, and I found cake and cold ham and preserves galore; but not a solitary crumb of bread could I discover, hunt as I would.

"Never mind," I said cheerfully, "I know what I'll do. I'll mix up a pan of baking-powder biscuits. I'll have them ready to eat in half an hour, if you just keep a good fire on."

I pinned up my frilly sleeves, put on a gingham apron of Aunt Anne's I found behind a door, and mixed up my biscuits. Mr. Murray stood in the doorway and watched me. I didn't mind, but I mightn't have liked it if I had skinny arms.

At first I thought I was going to be stumped for baking-powder. I couldn't find any for a long while, but finally I discovered some in a can away up in the corner of a back shelf. My biscuits were a success and came out as light and feathery as foam.

Then we sat down in Aunt Anne's willow-shaded dining-room and began our tea. We were so hungry and everything was so good; we were having a lovely, comfy, jolly little meal—when the world came to an end!

Without any warning—I suppose we were laughing too much to hear her steps—a woman appeared in the doorway of the dining-room—a tall, gaunt female with hard, cold-blue eyes and a thin, sunburned face. She wore a hideous dress of green print with yellow flowers in it, and a battered old sunhat tied down over her iron-gray hair. As for surprise—oh, she was surprised beyond doubt. Anyone could see that. So was I.

"What does this mean?" she said. "Who are you, and what are you doing in my house?"

Her house! I just gasped.

"I—I thought this was my Aunt Anne's house," I said miserably.

I can't describe what I felt like and I'm not going to try. But amid all my anguish, the most prominent thought in my mind was—what would Mr. Murray think? Would he suppose I was a fraud and a fakir, as that dreadful woman plainly supposed?

"My name is Miss Sarah Jane Thompson," she said stonily, "and this is my house, and I'd like to know how you got into it when I locked it up. Can you explain that to me, sir?"

She turned to Mr. Murray and hurled this question at him, after having stared me completely out of countenance.

"I—I—my name is Murray, Miss Thompson," he stammered, "of the firm of Alsopp & Hicks in Trenton. I came out to see you on business—about an option on that land you have in Middleboro—and—and—"

He floundered hopelessly; he couldn't tell how he got into the house without

incriminating me and he wouldn't do that. I came to his rescue with all the dignity I could assume.

"There is some mistake here—"

"I should think there was," interjected Miss Thompson with a scornful sniff.

"I came up from Talbot to visit my Aunt—Miss Anne Thompson, and the station-agent directed me here. I thought it was her house and so I came in and made myself at home—"

"Evidently," with another sniff and a glance at the table.

—"inviting Mr. Murray to do likewise. I'm very sorry that I've mistaken the house, and if you will be kind enough to tell me where Miss Anne Thompson lives, I shall not trespass any longer on your hospitality."

"A very likely story," said Miss Thompson contemptuously. "There is no other woman of the name of Thompson living near here. I believe you are two burglars and I ought to have you arrested. Anyhow, there aint any money in the house, so you can't have found any. Just tramp, both of you, this minute. No, I don't want to hear another word," as Mr. Murray attempted to speak, "I haven't any business I'm anxious to transact with you."

I picked up my poppy-hat and trailed out, followed by Mr. Murray. I felt like an unprincipled adventuress, and wondered if he thought me one, too. Miss Thompson followed us to the door and with an outraged expression of countenance watched us go out of the yard. I believe she only let us go because she dared not leave us alone while she went to get someone to arrest us.

"Well, my chance for securing an option on that land is gone forever," said Mr. Murray, as we walked up the mortal long lane.

"Perceval will get it to-morrow."

"I'm so sorry," I said contritely. "It's all my fault—"

"Indeed it isn't—don't for a moment—"

"Yes, it is. If I hadn't asked you in this wouldn't have happened. But I did think it was Aunt Anne's house, truly I did."

"You are not to blame in the least. And after all, it's a good joke; it will be something for me to laugh over all my life. Now, the only thing to do is for us to find your aunt's place, and then I'll go back to Trenton on the night-express; it passes through at twelve o'clock."

"That dreadful woman said she was the only Thompson here, but she can't be," I said wearily. "I know Aunt Anne lives somewhere in Sunnyslope."

"Sunnyslope? This is Henslow! Sunnyslope is fifteen miles farther on. You got off at the wrong station."

It was the last straw. I just felt like sitting down among the golden-rod of Miss Sarah Jane Thompson's mortal long lane and crying. Two tears really did brim up in my eyes.

"Oh don't," implored Mr. Murray. "I'll tell you what we'll do. There's no up-train till the morning, but I'll get a team at the station and drive you to Sunnyslope."

"I couldn't think of troubling you," I said feebly.

"It's a pleasure. And from any point of view I'd rather be doing that than waiting around Henslow for the night-express."

"I wonder you'd trust me sufficiently to go anywhere with me," I said, trying to smile through my tears. "Haven't I got you into enough trouble already? How do you know I've really got an Aunt Anne? I half doubt it myself, in the face of Miss Sarah Jane's incredulity."

"I would trust you to any extent," said Mr. Murray gravely, "and if you assured me you had a dozen Aunt Annes, all surnamed Thompson, I should believe you."

The world didn't look quite so black after all. I wiped my eyes, straightened my hat, and prepared to step blithely out of the gate.

Then I remembered! In my dismay I clutched Mr. Murray's arm.

"Oh, I forgot the cat," I cried wildly. "I must go back and tell her about him, indeed I must."

"Don't venture into that woman's clutches again," said Mr. Murray.

"I must," I said firmly. "I can't leave that poor animal to her tender mercies. If she wont promise to look after him until she finds his owner I shall have to take him with me. You wait here and I'll go back."

"Indeed, no; if you are going to risk a return to the dragon's den I'm going with you," declared Mr. Murray chivalrously.

Back we went.

Miss Thompson had been watching us all this time from her door, and now she came out through the yard to meet us and confronted us just by the wood-shed.

"What's bringing you back here?" she demanded.

I had plucked up some spirit by this time and I looked her straight in the eyes, giving her glare for glare.

"I came back to tell you that there is a cat in this shed. I found him starving in a barn back in the woods and brought him down here and gave him some milk I found in your dairy. He must belong to someone in the settlement. Will you keep him until you find his owner? If not, I'll take him with me."

"A cat? My lost Peter! Where is he?" shrieked Miss Thompson.

She flung open the wood-shed door and rushed in. The cat was dozing on the

sunny window-ledge, but the minute he saw Miss Thompson he sat up and purred. That woman actually fell on her knees before him, hugged him against her cheek, and began to cry.

“Oh, Peter,” she sobbed, “I’ve been hunting everywhere for you—and I thought you were stolen or killed—and I was just wild. You precious creature!”

Her cold blue eyes were quite soft with tears as she turned around to me.

“To think that it was you brought Peter back; and to think how I’ve treated you. I shall never get over being ashamed of it. But I’ll do what I can to make up. You must come in and finish your tea and your young man can have his option and anything else he wants. I believe everything you’ve said and more, too; but honestly, there aint anybody named Anne Thompson in Henslow.”

“I know there isn’t now. I thought this was Sunnyslope. Aunt Anne lives there.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what. My hired boy will drive you over there whenever he comes back from the other farm. I’d take you myself, but I absolutely can’t leave Peter just now. He’s been missing a week and I’ve been just about crazy. I was away to-day hunting for him, but not a trace of him could I find, and that’s why I was so grumpy. But I can be real good-natured. You come in and see.”

I don’t think I would have gone in if it hadn’t been for Mr. Murray’s sake. I wanted him to get that option. But Miss Thompson couldn’t be kind enough after that. I told her all about finding Peter and then we went in and finished our teas. The biscuits had got cold, but they were real good still.

“The bread was locked up down cellar,” said Miss Thompson. “I have to keep things locked up because I don’t believe my hired boy is honest, though he is a real good worker. What I can’t understand is, how you got the biscuits so light without any baking-powder. There isn’t any in the house.”

“Oh yes, there is,” I said. “I found some in a little yellow can away back on the top shelf.”

Miss Thompson dropped her biscuit and stared at me. Then she clapped her hands to her head and began to laugh. She threw herself back in her chair and twisted herself about and shrieked with laughter. I thought the woman had gone crazy.

“That was tooth-powder,” she gasped at last. “You riz those biscuits with my cousin’s tooth-powder! She broke her bottle of it when she was here visiting and put it in an old baking-powder can. She went away and forgot it and I put it up there.”

Miss Thompson went into another paroxysm of laughter and even Mr. Murray smiled. I was crimson with mortification and felt more like crying than laughing.

“Never mind,” said Mr. Murray in a low tone, as Miss Thompson went to bring

the bread. “They were good biscuits, anyhow. And I’m coming up to Talbot soon to get the recipe for them if you’ll let me. May I?”

I nodded. What with “hiking” and housebreaking and surprises I was really too played out to speak.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *A Double Surprise* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]