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RAINBOW VALLEY

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RAINBOW VALLEY

inspired by
L. M. Montgomery

written by
Graham Donahue

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Synopsis

It’s Prince Edward Island, Canada in 1906 as widowed Presbyterian minister John Meredith and his children— Jerry, Faith, Una, and Carl— settle into life in a new town. Mr. Meredith’s absent-mindedness, and his children’s mischief become the talk of all the local gossips. The children take in a runaway orphan girl named Mary Vance and help her find a home, all the while seeking to become children that their father and community can be proud of. Meanwhile, their father wrestles with his failures as a parent and befriends a woman named Rosemary West.

As the story unfolds, tensions rise as the family strives to live up to the community’s expectations of them, and John and Rosemary’s relationship struggles to come to fruition under the watchful eye of Rosemary’s controlling sister, Ellen. In the end, everyone learns to overcome loss and find new life, love, and meaning in the relationships they hold dear.

Cast of Characters

JOHN MEREDITH	Male, late 30's An absent-minded but kind and gifted Presbyterian minister and widowed father of four children.
JERRY MEREDITH	Male, around 14 The oldest child of the Meredith family. He's a diligent student and enjoys fishing, whittling, and other outdoor activities.
FAITH MEREDITH	Female, around 12 The oldest daughter of the Meredith family. She is spunky, cheerful, and a bit impulsive.
UNA MEREDITH	Female, around 10 The youngest daughter of the Meredith family. She's a kind and faithful daughter, sister, and friend who always tries to do what is right.
CARL MEREDITH	Male, about 8 The youngest child of the Meredith family who loves studying and collecting all kinds of creepy-crawly creatures.
AUNT MARTHA	Female, late 60s An elderly relative of John Meredith who lives with their family as a cranky and decrepit housekeeper.
MARY VANCE	Female, about 13 A runaway orphan. She's proud, rough, and a little mean, but hard working and loyal to her friends.
ROSEMARY WEST	Female, mid 30s A member of the church and community who befriends the Meredith family. She is a loving friend and faithful sister.
ELLEN WEST	Female, mid 40s Rosemary's controlling older sister. She is intellectual and terrified of being alone.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT	Female, around 50-60 A kind neighbor and friend to the Merediths, a bit of a gossip, and a loyal Presbyterian.
MRS. ALEC DAVIS	Female, around 50-60 A proud and very rich member of the church.
GOSSIP 1	Female, 20-80 One of the women of the town who like to discuss the local gossip with each other and Cornelia.
GOSSIP 2	Female, 20-80 One of the women of the town who like to discuss the local gossip with each other and Cornelia.
GOSSIP 3	Female, 20-80 One of the women of the town who like to discuss the local gossip with each other and Cornelia.

Place

The place is Prince Edward Island, Canada.

Time

The year is 1906.

Director Notes

CHARACTERS

AUNT MARTHA & MRS. ALEC DAVIS can double as GOSSIPS. GOSSIPS can be reduced to two actors by dividing GOSSIP 3's lines between CORNELIA and the other GOSSIPS as needed.

SETTINGS

Cornelia's Porch, The Manse Living Room, The Wests' Living Room, Rainbow Valley, Outside the Manse

These sets can be as simple or as elaborate as suits the needs and vision of the production. Note that there are a fair number of scene changes in this play, so a simpler set would likely be the most effective in many circumstances, but is by no means necessary.

Props

Sewing, knitting, mending materials
Cane fishing poles
Various books and writing utensils
Saint George the cat
A platter with tea and bread
A magnifying glass
A pocket knife
Flowers
Birch bark cup
Feather duster
Strike the snake
Cooking pot
Handmade wooden cross
A newspaper

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: Summer. Cornelia's Porch.

At Rise: CORNELIA and the GOSSIPS sit sewing, knitting, etc.

GOSSIP 1

What are we going to do with the minister's children, Mrs. Elliott?

CORNELIA ELLIOTT *(concerned)*

What have they done now?

GOSSIP 1

I came past the old Methodist graveyard on my way here, and there they were, playing and dancing on top of the gravestones!

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Oh dear.

GOSSIP 2

Those children are always up to something.

GOSSIP 3

John Meredith has only been here a few months and already he and his children are the talk of the town.

GOSSIP 1

If he'd pay as much attention to his children as he does his books perhaps they'd be better behaved.

GOSSIP 2

This is what we get for calling a widower as our minister.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Well the children are not bad all in all. And Mr. Meredith must be one of the finest preachers in all of Prince Edward Island.

GOSSIP 1

Yes, and I suppose they might be model children if they were properly looked after.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I do wish he saw that they were properly dressed, especially when the Methodist minister's little girl always dresses so nicely. It makes us Presbyterians look bad.

GOSSIP 2

Their Aunt Martha isn't any help either. She's the worst possible manager for a manse. Half blind and deaf and cranky.

GOSSIP 3

Believe me, the state of that manse is something terrible. Everything is thick with dust and nothing is ever in its place. And we painted and papered it all so nice before they came.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Indeed.

GOSSIP 1

Well somebody had better speak to the minister about this.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I will speak to him about it tomorrow and take them some fresh made jam.

GOSSIP 3

Very well.

GOSSIP 2

I hope he listens to what you have to say.

Scene 2

Setting: The Manse Living Room

At Rise: JERRY and CARL are setting the hooks on some fishing poles. FAITH is trying to mend a stocking. UNA enters.

UNA MEREDITH

Faith, have you seen the clothes brush? I want to brush father's suit for service tomorrow. Everyone talks so when our clothes aren't right.

FAITH MEREDITH

I don't know where it is Una. But I don't care what folks say. They're just a bunch of gossips.

(UNA continues to look for the clothes brush.)

JERRY MEREDITH

The fishing poles are almost ready. Carl, do you know where we can get some worms?

CARL MEREDITH

I know of a great spot where there are heaps of them!

JERRY MEREDITH

Great! We'll need lots. Jem Blythe says they're always biting this time of year.

UNA MEREDITH

Are the Blythes going to meet us in Rainbow Valley, Jerry?

JERRY MEREDITH

No, I don't think so. At least not until later.

FAITH MEREDITH

Nan told me they have chores to help with around the house today. I'm glad we don't have any chores.

UNA MEREDITH

I'm not. All the other girls at school know how to do things. We don't know how to do anything.

(FAITH looks at her failed attempt to mend her stocking.)

FAITH MEREDITH

I certainly don't know how to mend stockings. I wish I could just get a new pair.

UNA MEREDITH

But Aunt Martha says we mustn't ask for new things because a minister's family should be— what's the word?

FAITH MEREDITH

Frugal.

UNA MEREDITH

Yes, that.

FAITH MEREDITH

I wish we were a blacksmith's children. Then people wouldn't expect us to be better than everyone else.

AUNT MARTHA *(offstage)*

Faith Meredith! That pet rooster of yours is about to hop in the soup pot and ruin dinner.

(FAITH puts down the sock and runs out.)

FAITH MEREDITH

Adam!

(AUNT MARTHA enters.)

AUNT MARTHA

I've just about had it with that creature! If he does it again I'll cook him in the soup pot!

(to FAITH)

Put him outside

(JERRY grabs the poles.)

JERRY MEREDITH

The poles are finished. Come on, let's go!

(CARL joins Jerry. UNA gives up her search for the clothes brush and joins them. AUNT MARTHA stops them.)

AUNT MARTHA

You children are not going anywhere until you've eaten something. It's past noon and you haven't eaten since breakfast. Let me fetch your father.

(AUNT MARTHA exits to the study. FAITH enters, followed by CORNELIA.)

FAITH MEREDITH

Mrs. Elliott is here.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Hello children.

ALL MEREDITH CHILDREN

Hello Mrs. Elliott.

(AUNT MARTHA enters.)

AUNT MARTHA

Mrs. Elliott. Nice to see you today.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I brought you some fresh made jam.

AUNT MARTHA

Thank you.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I still do all my own preserving. Every year Marshall tells me I ought to get someone to help me, but as long as I'm still breathing I like to do all that I can for myself.

AUNT MARTHA

(to the CHILDREN)

You children go and wash up.

(The CHILDREN exit.)

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Where's the minister? I'd like to speak with him for a moment.

AUNT MARTHA

He's in his study. I've called him in to eat, but who knows if he'll come.

(AUNT MARTHA exits to the kitchen. JOHN enters absent-mindedly, reading a book.)

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Mr. Meredith.

(JOHN doesn't respond.)

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Mr. Meredith!

(JOHN hears her this time.)

JOHN MEREDITH

Mrs. Elliott. Excuse me, I didn't know you were there.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I do wish you would pay more attention to your surroundings.

JOHN MEREDITH

I apologize. I've been studying Augustine's Confessions once again. An incredible work—

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

Yes. Well, I wanted to speak with you about the children.

JOHN MEREDITH

What's the matter?

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I heard they were seen playing in the old Methodist graveyard again. This time they were playing and dancing on top of the gravestones!

JOHN MEREDITH

I apologize. I will speak to them about it. I'm sure they didn't mean any disrespect.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I'm sure they did not. But they do seem to get into a lot of mischief. If only they were properly looked after...

JOHN MEREDITH

I'm afraid I am a bit distracted at times.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

It's not just that. They never seem properly fed. And the way they dress! Are you sure Martha is adequate as a housekeeper? Perhaps you should find someone else.

JOHN MEREDITH

I'll admit she does struggle a bit as she gets older. But she's a beloved member of our family and I can't replace her. It would offend her I'm sure.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

What you need, Mr. Meredith, is a wife.

JOHN MEREDITH

My wife is in her grave!

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

I know that, otherwise I would not have suggested it!

JOHN MEREDITH

I'm sorry. I know you mean well. But a wife isn't simply a housekeeper or nanny. Until I can give a woman a fraction of the love I had for Cecelia I cannot marry her.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

You are right, of course. But do consider it.

JOHN MEREDITH

I will. And I do.

Scene 3

Setting: The Wests' Parlor

At Rise: ELLEN sits in the parlor stroking her black cat and wearing mourning clothes. ROSEMARY enters with a pot of tea and some bread.

ROSEMARY WEST

I've brought you some tea. Won't you eat something?

ELLEN WEST

I'm not hungry.

ROSEMARY WEST

You need to eat something.

(ELLEN reluctantly takes the tea and bread.)

ROSEMARY WEST *(beseechingly)*

Ellen, you can't go on like this forever. Mother's been gone for two months. I miss her too, but we must move on.

ELLEN WEST

How can I? You know I can't bear to be alone.

ROSEMARY WEST

Oh Ellen, you have me yet. Am I nothing to you? We have always loved each other so.

ELLEN WEST

I won't have you always. You will marry and leave me. I shall be left all alone. I cannot bear the thought— I cannot. I would rather die.

ROSEMARY WEST

I will never marry. Never.

ELLEN WEST *(doubtfully)*

Rosemary.

ROSEMARY WEST

I mean it. What would a man want with me? I'm an old maid now and I'm content with that.

ELLEN WEST

Don't be silly, Rosemary. Thirty-five is far from an old maid. You're young, smart, beautiful— I'm sure many men would want to marry you— and take you away from me.

ROSEMARY WEST

Well if that's true they have certainly taken their time to make it known. Besides, I don't care to marry. I love our life here. It's not the same without mother, but it's still full of happiness.

ELLEN WEST

You say that now, but wait until some man comes along and wishes to marry you. You'll fall in love and give all of this up and leave me alone.

ROSEMARY WEST

Ellen, I promise you I won't.

ELLEN WEST

You promise?

ROSEMARY WEST

Yes. I promise to never marry, and to stay here with you always.

(ROSEMARY helps ELLEN to her feet.)

ROSEMARY WEST

Now, come outside to the garden and get some fresh air. You've been cooped up inside this house for too long.

Scene 4

Setting: Rainbow Valley

At Rise: The CHILDREN are enjoying a day outside. CARL watches insects with his magnifying glass, FAITH and UNA sniff flowers they have picked, JERRY whittles a stick, etc.

FAITH MEREDITH

I think Rainbow Valley is the loveliest place in the world.

JERRY MEREDITH

It is a dandy spot.

CARL MEREDITH

There's lot's of ants!

FAITH MEREDITH

I'm glad we can play here since father said we're not to go to the graveyard.

JERRY MEREDITH

He didn't say we couldn't go there. He just said we need to be respectful and not play on any of the gravestones.

FAITH MEREDITH

Well, even the graveyard doesn't compare with Rainbow Valley. It feels so magical here. And today feels like just the sort of day where something might happen.

(There is a rustle in some nearby bushes.)

UNA

What was that?

FAITH

There's something in those bushes.

JERRY MEREDITH

I'm going to see what it is.

(UNA grabs JERRY's arm.)

UNA MEREDITH

Oh, don't.

JERRY MEREDITH

(breaking free)

I'm going.

CARL MEREDITH

I'm going too. Maybe it's a raccoon. I've always wanted to see a raccoon in the daytime!

(JERRY and CARL walk over to the spot and are surprised.)

FAITH MEREDITH

What is it?

JERRY MEREDITH

It's a girl!

(FAITH and UNA rush over as JERRY and CARL help MARY to her feet.)

JERRY MEREDITH

(to MARY)

Who are you?

MARY VANCE *(cautiously)*

I— I'm Mary Vance.

JERRY MEREDITH

And where did you come from?

(MARY starts to cry. UNA and FAITH put their arms around her.)

FAITH MEREDITH

(to JERRY)

You stop bothering her!

(to MARY)

Don't cry, dear. Just tell us what's the matter. We're friends.

MARY VANCE

(collecting herself)

You won't tell your pa or ma or anybody if I tell you?

CHILDREN

We won't.

MARY VANCE

Cross your hearts?

CHILDREN

Cross our hearts.

MARY VANCE

(gaining confidence)

Well, I've run away.

CARL MEREDITH

Run away?

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Scene 20

Setting: A split stage, no particular settings

At Rise: On one side of the stage FAITH is writing a letter. On the other side of the stage the GOSSIPS are standing. CORNELIA enters carrying a newspaper and approaches the GOSSIPS.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT

(very distressed)

Oh, have you seen *The Journal* today?

FAITH MEREDITH *(writing)*

To whom it may concern. Everyone in town seems to think that we manse children are bad on purpose, but that isn't true. All the old gossips like to talk about us, and why we do things, but they never think to ask us for our side of the story.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT *(reading)*

So I wanted to write this letter to *The Journal* so that everyone can see that we never mean to be bad.

FAITH MEREDITH

First I want to explain to everybody why I came to go to church without stockings on so that everybody will know that father was not to blame one bit for it. I gave my only pair of black stockings to Lida Marsh because she hadn't any and her poor little feet were awful cold and I was so sorry for her.

GOSSIP 3 *(reading)*

No child ought to have to go without shoes and stockings in a Christian community before the snow is all gone, and I think the Ladies Aid ought to have given her stockings and not left it all to me.

(Reactions from CORNELIA and other GOSSIPS.)

FAITH MEREDITH

When I gave her my stockings I forgot they were the only black pair I had without holes. But I am glad I did give them to her because my conscience would have been uncomfortable if I hadn't.

GOSSIP 2 *(reading)*

When she had gone away I remembered that all I had to wear were the horrid red and blue things that Mrs. Joseph Burr of Upper Glen sent us.

FAITH MEREDITH

They were dreadfully coarse and I never saw any of Mrs. Burr's own children wearing anything like them.

GOSSIP 1 *(reading)*

But Mary Vance says Mrs. Burr gives the minister stuff that she can't use or eat herself and thinks it ought to go as part of the salary her husband signed to pay but never does.

FAITH MEREDITH

I just couldn't bear to wear those hateful stockings. Everybody would have made fun of me. I thought at first I'd pretend to be sick and not go to church next day, but I decided I couldn't do that, because it would be acting a lie, and father told us that is something we must never, never do. It's just as bad to act a lie as to tell one...

CORNELIA ELLIOTT *(reading)*

...though I know some people, right here in the Glen, who act them and never seem to feel a bit bad about it.

FAITH MEREDITH

I will not mention any names, but I know who they are and so does father.

(pause)

FAITH MEREDITH (CONT)

So I just decided I would put my boots on and go that way. I can't see why it was so wrong and I was careful to wash my legs just as clean as my face. But anyway, father wasn't to blame for it. Father does not look at people's legs in church, so of course he did not notice mine.

CORNELIA ELLIOTT *(reading)*

I suppose I did very wrong, since everybody says so, and I'm sorry and I am wearing those awful stockings to punish myself, although father bought me two nice new black pairs as soon as Mr. Flagg's store opened Monday morning.

FAITH MEREDITH

But it was all my fault, and if people blame father for it after they read this they are not Christians and so I do not mind what they say. There are lot's of other things I could explain, but my hand is getting tired of writing, and I don't have the time to waste explaining things to nosy old gossips. But there is one more thing I want to mention before I stop. Mary Vance told me that Mr. Boyd is blaming the Baxters for stealing potatoes out of his field.

GOSSIP 2 *(reading)*

They did not touch his potatoes. They are very poor, but they are honest. It was us did it.

(CORNELIA and GOSSIPS react.)

FAITH MEREDITH

We never thought it was stealing. We just wanted a few potatoes to cook over a fire in Rainbow Valley. Mr. Boyd's field was the nearest, so we climbed over his fence and pulled up some stalks.

GOSSIP 1 *(reading)*

The potatoes were awful small because Mr. Boyd did not put enough fertilizer on them and we had to pull up a lot of stalks before we got enough.

FAITH MEREDITH

We didn't mean any harm, but if it was stealing we are very sorry and we will pay Mr. Boyd for them if he will wait until we grow up.

GOSSIP 3 *(reading)*

We never have any money now because we are not big enough to earn any, and Aunt Martha says it takes every cent of father's salary to run this house even when it's paid up regularly— and it isn't often.

FAITH MEREDITH

But Mr. Boyd must not blame the Baxters any more, when they were quite innocent, and give them a bad name. That is all I have to say. Yours respectfully, Faith Meredith.

(CORNELIA and GOSSIPS groan.)

Scene 21

Setting: The Wests' Parlor

At Rise: ROSEMARY lets UNA in.

ROSEMARY WEST *(surprised)*

Una Meredith! What are you doing here? Did you walk here all by yourself? Come in.

(UNA enters nervously.)

ROSEMARY WEST

Is there something I can do for you?

UNA MEREDITH

Yes. I came to- I came to-

ROSEMARY WEST

Why, Una, what's the trouble? Don't be afraid to tell me.

(ROSEMARY puts her arm around Una.)

UNA MEREDITH

I came— to ask you— to marry father.

(ROSEMARY looks dumbfounded.)

UNA MEREDITH

Oh, don't be angry, please, Miss West. You see, everybody is saying that you wouldn't marry father because we're so bad. He is very unhappy about it. So I thought I would come and tell you that we are never bad on purpose. And if you will only marry father we will all try to be good and do just what you tell us. I'm sure you won't have any trouble with us. Please, Miss West.

ROSEMARY WEST

Una, dear, it isn't because of you poor little souls that I cannot be your father's wife. I never thought of such a thing. You're not bad— I never supposed you were. There— there was another reason altogether.

UNA MEREDITH

Don't you like father? Oh, Miss West, you don't know how nice he is. I'm sure he'd make you a good husband.

(ROSEMARY smiles at UNA's devotion.)

UNA MEREDITH

(seeing ROSEMARY's smile)

Oh, don't laugh, Miss West. Father feels dreadful about it.

ROSEMARY WEST

I think you're mistaken, dear.

UNA MEREDITH

I'm not. I'm sure I'm not.

ROSEMARY WEST

I see.

UNA MEREDITH

Oh, Miss West, I know father would be so happy if you married him. And I want father to be happy.

ROSEMARY WEST

Will you take a little letter from me to your father?

UNA MEREDITH

Oh, are you going to marry him?

ROSEMARY WEST

Perhaps— if he really wants me to.

UNA MEREDITH *(bravely)*

I'm glad— I'm glad.

(quivering)

Oh, Miss West, you won't turn father against us— you won't make him hate us, will you?

ROSEMARY WEST

Una Meredith! Do you think I would do such a thing? Whatever put such an idea into your head?

UNA MEREDITH

Mary Vance said stepmothers are all like that— and that they all hate their stepchildren and make their father hate them— she said they just can't help it— just being stepmothers makes them like that.

ROSEMARY WEST

You poor child! And yet you came up here and asked me to marry your father because you wanted to make him happy? You're a darling! Now listen to me very closely, dearest. Mary Vance is a silly little girl who doesn't know very much and she is dreadfully mistaken about some things. I would never dream of trying to turn your father against you. I would love you all dearly. I don't want to take your own mother's place— she must always have that in your hearts. But neither have I any intention of being a stepmother. I want to be your friend and helper and chum. Don't you think that would be nice?

UNA MEREDITH

Oh, it would be lovely!

ROSEMARY WEST

Do the others— do Faith and the boys have the same idea about stepmothers?

UNA MEREDITH

No. Faith never believed Mary Vance. She loves you already. And Jerry and Carl will think it's jolly. Oh, Miss West, when you come to live with us, will you— could you— teach me to cook— a little— and sew— and— and do things? I don't know anything. I won't be much trouble— I'll try to learn fast.

ROSEMARY WEST

Darling, I'll teach you and help you all I can. Now you won't say a word to anybody about this will you until your father himself tells you you may? And you'll stay and have tea with me?

UNA MEREDITH

Oh, thank you— but— I think I'd rather go right back and take the letter to father. You see, he'll be glad that much sooner, Miss West.

ROSEMARY WEST *(smiling)*

I see. Then come into the other room and I'll write a little note for you to take back to him.

(UNA exits as ELLEN enters.)

ELLEN WEST

What is Una Meredith doing here?

ROSEMARY WEST

She came to ask me to marry her father.

ELLEN WEST

And you're going to?

ROSEMARY WEST

It's quite likely.

(ELLEN joyfully embraces ROSEMARY.)

ELLEN WEST

(with happy tears)

Then we can all be happy.

Scene 22

Setting: Rainbow Valley

At Rise: ROSEMARY paces. JOHN enters.

JOHN MEREDITH

Rosemary!

(They embrace.)

JOHN MEREDITH

But I don't understand. You said you couldn't care for me. What changed?

ROSEMARY WEST

It's a long story. It was because of a promise to my sister. But she's freed me from that promise. And now–

(beginning to cry)

Oh, Mr. Meredith–

JOHN MEREDITH

John.

ROSEMARY WEST

(laughing through her tears)

John– I'm so sorry for the way I've treated you. I couldn't tell you how I truly felt or I would have betrayed Ellen. But it was wrong of me. Can you ever forgive me?

JOHN MEREDITH

My dear, I would forgive you a thousand times over. This whole experience has shown me how deeply I love you– more deeply than I ever thought I could. Say you'll be my wife.

ROSEMARY WEST

I will be your wife. Whole-heartedly!

(They embrace. The CHILDREN enter.)

UNA MEREDITH

(to the others)

See, I told you!

FAITH MEREDITH

Oh, Miss West! Is it true you're going to marry father?

ROSEMARY WEST

Mmhmm.

CHILDREN *(ad lib)*

Hooray! That's jolly!

FAITH MEREDITH

I'm glad.

ROSEMARY WEST

I'm glad too.

JOHN MEREDITH

Ever since that first time I saw you here I've had the feeling this place was magical.

ROSEMARY WEST

It truly is.

UNA MEREDITH

Rainbow Valley is the best place in the whole world!

(END OF PLAY)



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