

In Loving Memory

by Eleanor McChesney

Anne Ross stood, back against the wall, surveying the empty playground. She had slipped out of lunch early to get some peace and quiet before all the other children came out to break. Suddenly, the bell rung and a crowd of noisy, boisterous children came stampeding out of the school building. Anne sighed and went back inside.

As she was walking down the corridor, she was struck by the sound of the most amazing music. It appeared to be coming from one of the tiny music rooms. At the top of the double doors that led into the practice room were two, thick, fire-proof circles of transparent glass. If Anne went up on tip-toe, she could just see through into the room.

There, sitting on a piano stool and playing a very battered guitar, was a boy. He looked about the same age as Anne (eleven), and had wispy hair that was such a pale yellow that it was almost white. His jeans, although black, had faded so much so that they were now a very light grey. His top was the same. His skin too, had little colour, and had a greyish white hue. His eyes, though, were a most magnificent silvery grey.

Suddenly, Anne, who was leaning on the door handle for support, pushed down on it too heavily.

CRASH!

Anne came tumbling through the door. The music stopped abruptly and the boy stood up, looking a lot like a frightened rabbit.

Anne got to her feet.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb you.” And she turned to go. But just as she did, the boy called after her,

“No, wait.” Turning around, Anne saw that the boy was smiling. She smiled back, then, spinning around to face him properly she said,

“That was beautiful music you were playing.” The boy shrugged.

“It was nothing, really.”

Just then the bell rang for afternoon lessons.

“See you later then.” Anne called over her shoulder. The boy said nothing, giving just a little wave as Anne disappeared out the door.



It was Saturday and Anne was sitting in her bed-room doing her home-work. Somewhere far off in the distance, she heard a gloomy repetitive piece of music, going round and round, though she couldn’t think where it was coming from. With a bored sigh she glanced up at the window. Just as she did a face ducked down, disappearing out of sight.

Feeling very frightened, yet curious to know who, or what was out-side her room, Anne opened the window and peered out at the empty street. Anne was

about to close the window when she heard a small snuffle come from underneath her. Looking down, she saw the boy that she had met at school just that week.

“Wha- How...Who?” garbled Anne.

“Hello,” said the boy, standing up with his guitar case and brushing down his dusty-grey trousers.

“Thought I’d come over and surprise you.”

“Well, you did that all right!” Anne offered him her hand, “Come on, climb through the window.”

As soon as the boy was inside, the two of them enjoyed listening to his guitar music. He played that familiar piece of music that Anne had heard yesterday. Anne smiled. She just knew that today was going to get a lot more interesting now.



“Well,” said the boy, “I suppose I’d better get going.”

“Please stay!” begged Anne. “You have barely just arrived!” But the boy just shook his head.

Anne looked down at the floor. That eerie music had started up again, and she hated it. She wanted to scream at it to stop, to go away, but of course she knew she couldn’t. The boy seemed to notice her sad face, as he added,

“But I’ll meet you in town tomorrow after school at the cafe, yeah?” Anne nodded, and looked up to say something else, but the boy had already gone.



When Anne came in from school the next day, she was accosted by her mother, who fell upon her as soon as she came through the door.

“Anne, oh Anne, where have you been?” she asked, “I’ve been worried sick about you!”

“School, mum,” said Anne trying to untangle herself from her unruly mother.

“Where else do I go on a Tuesday morning?”

Her mother sighed and released her.

“Come and sit down, cup-cake,” said her mother, patting the sofa.

Anne came over and sat down. Her mother took Anne’s hands in hers, then took a deep breath, cleared her throat and said,

“Anne, your father’s just got offered a promotion, and... and-” She looked away, as if she didn’t want to say what she was about to say.

“And he’s accepted it and that means that we have to go with him to-”

“Go with him to *where?!* ” asked Anne, exasperated. The slow, waltzing music drifting gently out from the radio suited the speed of her mother’s speech perfectly.

“To New Zealand,” said her mother, and then she got up and gave Anne a quick hug. “I’m sorry, honey, but it’s for the best, and we’ll only be away for a couple of years, three at the most.”

Anne just sat there, unable to move a muscle, struck dumb with shock.



By the time Anne got to the cafe, it was already quarter past five. She scanned the cafe for the boy, and sure enough, she saw him waving at her from a cosy-looking table in the corner of the cafe.

“Where have you been?” he asked her, as she flopped down into the seat opposite.

“Well...” began Anne, but a waitress came bustling up beside them, cutting her short, “What would you like to drink, deary?” she asked, whipping out her note pad and pen.

“Water, please.” said Anne, who really didn’t feel like drinking anything at all, but had asked for something just to be polite.

When she had gone, Anne tried again,

“You see, my father’s job is moving to New Zealand, and, well, we have to go with him.” She gabbled, hardly able to contain herself any longer.

The boy didn’t say a word, just gazed into her eyes in a sorrowful manner, as if she’d just let him down. Anne had to look away, and ended up looking out

the window. The sad violin music coming from a near-by busker only added to her despair.

“We’ll be back in two years.” She blurted desperately, but she could practically hear him say under his breath: “Yeah, right.”



DING DONG!

Anne rushed to get the door. It was the boy she had made friends with.

Anne led him through piles of half packed boxes, into the living room, and as Anne packed up the last few boxes, he played her a soothing song on his guitar.

It was sad saying goodbye. They exchanged addresses, and promised to write to each other because although it was 2004 the boy apparently didn’t have a computer to email with.

HONK HONK!

Mrs Ross flew into a sudden frenzy, running about the house like a headless chicken, doing the one hundredth absolutely *last* check.

At last they were ready, and Mrs Ross locked up the house while Anne got into the taxi. But just as the door closed, she shouted

“Wait!”

The driver paused in mid-action, clearly annoyed at the frequent delays.

“What’s your name?” she asked the boy. The eerie music had started up again, and she didn’t like it one bit. By this time the driver had already closed the door and started the engine, and she looked up just in time to see him mouth

‘Marcus Greenway’



Anne sent Marcus letters every week during the five years that they were away, but each one was returned with *‘Not known at this address’* scrawled over it.

Anne was bemused and annoyed with Marcus for not letting her know that he was moving, so the first thing Anne did when she got home to England was, in fact, to rush out again.

She walked briskly into town, and went into the coffee shop where she and Marcus used to meet. She went up to the waitress that had served them on their first outing there, and who had served them ever since.

“Hello, there, love,” said the waitress. For some reason this struck Anne as odd. She had told the waitress (Hilda) her name many times before, and Hilda had sworn she would always remember it.

“Have you seen Marcus recently?” enquired Anne.

“Who?” asked Hilda, with a puzzled expression on her face.

“You know, the boy I always used to come in with,” pressed Anne, “Always wore pale clothes and never spoke much.”

Hilda’s face lit up.

“Ah, you’re Anne, aren’t you?” she said. “Yes, you came in here all the time. Never with any boy, though. You did talk to yourself a lot, I remember that much.”

Anne was truly and utterly bewildered. She asked everyone in town; even dear old Mrs. Grayling, who could recall events from fifty years ago, had no recollection of Marcus. Feeling totally defeated and confused, she walked home through the graveyard. Anne found herself humming the beautiful tune that Marcus used to play, then she heard the sound of a guitar, but this time it seemed to be coming from somewhere over her shoulder. Anne whipped around, and came face to face with a row of gravestones. Anne felt so numb inside that she didn’t care. As she walked along she gazed at the grave stones. Suddenly, a shiver ran down her spine. There, on one of the headstones, was carved:

In Loving Memory of Marcus Greenway

1856—1867

R. I. P