



Nearby



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

Elizabeth Yates

Nearby

This warm, inspiring story—set in a rural New England village called Nearby—is brought to life through the eyes of Mary, the new teacher who devotes herself to changing prejudices and lifting her students' minds and hearts to a higher place. With beautiful description, award-winning author Elizabeth Yates weaves a complex plot packed with endearing characters and powerful messages.

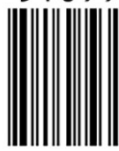
"Nearby is a wonderful example of literature that can address deep, mature issues—such as prostitution, suicide, neglect, and lust versus love—in a way that is not overly descriptive or dark, maintaining an underlying feeling of light and hope. Especially for older teenagers and adults, this clean language version of Nearby is a deeply inspiring book with one of the most beautiful, feel-good endings to a book I have ever read."
—Jenny Phillips



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by Elizabeth Yates

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This is an unabridged, clean language version of *Nearby*.

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Chapter 1

There would always have to be a first day, Mary thought, as she looked up from her desk and across the now empty schoolroom, but this one had been very difficult. She glanced up at the clock on the wall—four o'clock, and there was still work to be got through before she could put away the papers on her desk, lock the schoolroom door, and go back to Mrs. Bixby's.

Mary reached for a pile of papers. Shuffling through them, she would read a name at the top of one, then look toward the desk where such a child had sat, trying to fix in her mind names and faces. With some it was easy. Matt Martin, for instance. He was the big boy sitting in the opposite corner who seemed to pay not the slightest attention to anything she said but went on making airplanes out of bits of paper. Emily Bruce—Mary looked out at the empty room. Was she that little first-grader with the toothless grin or that eleven-year-old with the straw-colored hair and pale cheeks? One by one she went through the papers until all seventeen children were accounted for and more or less identified.

It would have been much better, Mary realized, if she could have reached Nearby a few days ago rather than the very day before the opening of school. She might have had a real visit with Mrs. Farnum, the former teacher of District School Number 22, and learned something from her about the children. Having arrived so late, all that she would know about the children was what she would find out herself, and that took time and was far from easy. She reached into a drawer for a list of the pupils with their former grades. Matt Martin had been in the seventh last year, but nothing she had seen today

made her feel that he was ready yet to do eighth-grade work.

Members of the same family were bracketed on the list. Ruthie and Janie West—Mary smiled to herself at the memory of the two little girls with a grade between them, as alike as two peas in a pod, with the briefest of skirts and the tightest of sweaters making their firm bodies as slim and trim as the gay new pencils Leonard Kingsbury had taken out of his box and arranged on his desk. Such an array of pencils it was for a boy who knew only how to write his name and that on everything at hand! Somebody must be very proud of the fact that Leonard was going to school, equipping him well for the venture.

Renny and Nezar Smith—the names were bracketed, but Mary wondered if it could be a mistake, for two boys so unlike could scarcely be imagined. Renny, nine years old, had dark hair and eyes and a quick, sly way about him. Nezar, seven, was squarely built, with sandy hair and light brown eyes. He was slow in answering questions and given to dreaming instead of the ardor of doing that which possessed some of the second-graders. They can't be brothers, Mary thought. Then, remembering the way they had gone out together at recess and when school was dismissed, she thought differently. There was something that linked them in brotherhood, though it might not be a tie of the flesh.

Mary heard steps on the walk leading up to the schoolhouse and turned toward the door, wondering who had forgotten something and was coming back for it. But they were not the steps of a child. The door opened, and a solidly built, ferret-eyed woman entered.

“Well, now, Miss Rowen, I'm glad I found you here.”

Mary rose to greet her visitor, instinctively feeling that she must be the former teacher, for no one could enter a room with such an air except one who had once belonged to the room.

“Can this be Mrs. Farnum?” Mary held out her hand.

“No one else,” the woman said, seizing Mary's hand and

gripping it hard. Then she sat down quickly in a chair near the desk and let her eyes roam the room.

“I’m so sorry that I couldn’t get here for a talk with you before school started,” Mary began.

“Don’t apologize for what can’t be helped. Besides, you’re the only loser. If you’d been here earlier, I might have told you something about the children, and your first day would have gone better.”

“How did you know that it was a difficult day for me?”

Mrs. Farnum looked at Mary Rowen; then she said tersely, “It’s easy to see that you come from the city.”

Mary let her glance fall to the papers before her, wondering how much longer she could stand this day.

Mrs. Farnum picked up one of the papers and started to read the names listed on it, announcing the grade a child should be in and, from time to time, giving her own version of a character.

“Ruthie West goes into second grade this year, and her sister Janie begins with first. Althea Flint is just starting, too, so she’ll be another first-grader. You’ll have to keep Nezar Smith in first. He’s just plain stupid. Been doing first-grade work ever since he came to school. Too bad to have such nice little girls with a boy like that.”

Mary pointed to the bracket. “Are they really brothers, Mrs. Farnum?” she asked.

Mrs. Farnum sniffed distastefully. “Brothers,” she said, “but not real ones. Nothing about that family is real.” She paused, her pencil point at Renny’s name. “Renny is bright enough, if you can get him to put his mind on what he’s doing. He ought to do fourth-grade work, but I don’t believe you can get him to.” She penciled a question mark after his name.

“John Barlow is your only third-grader so far,” Mrs. Farnum went on. “Such a good boy, easy to teach, easy to manage, comes

from one of the nicest families in town.”

Mary recalled the placid little boy who had gone at his work so willingly and remained after school to help wash the blackboards.

“Alvan and Avery Flint are fifth grade—not twins but so near to it that they’ve always done everything together. So is Constance Lovering. Nice children, all of them.”

The pencil moved quickly past the name Diane Carson. “Hopeless child, never saw her hands clean or her dresses with all their buttons on since I’ve been teaching. She’s sixth grade, and so is Andy Reagan. Fingal McFee is seventh, along with Emily Bruce, whose parents spoil her so, and so is Gwen Hazen. She’s a bad one, that girl, needs a stiff hand. You can’t do much with Patsy Strawn. She’s slow but well-meaning. I doubt if she ever causes you any trouble. She’s a motherly sort of child, quite a help at times with the little ones. She’s an eighth-grader, but only by the natural law of succession. Matt Martin”—the pencil poised at the last name on the list—“he’s eighth grade.”

“But, Mrs. Farnum,” Mary remonstrated, “he hardly seemed to be doing sixth-grade work in some things today.”

Mrs. Farnum closed the book and returned the pencil to the tray on the desk. “Matt Martin has to go into the eighth grade,” she said with finality. “His father is on the school board.”

“Oh, I see.” Mary smiled briefly at the former teacher. “At least he knows how to make model airplanes.”

Mrs. Farnum made a small sound with her lips indicative of her feeling for model airplanes. “There’s one thing about these children,” she went on, “and that is they’re all good Americans, straight from the old stock. Most of their families have been in Nearby for three or four generations. All except Renny and Nezar.” Mrs. Farnum sighed. “No one knows where they came from.”

Mary’s eyes ran over the names. Yes, the same thought had struck her earlier that day. The children were all of Anglo-Saxon or