

VERSE: THE WAYSIDE INN

The Wayside Inn, nestled just beyond the village, presented a serene image with its low, white structure embraced by the cool shade of green trees and an adjacent orchard rich with red-cheeked apples peeking over the green fence. This picturesque setting, complete with a well below where children often stopped to draw water, became a haven for weary travelers and footsore wanderers. One could not miss the unique purple Judas Tree among the branches, adding a touch of color to the already vibrant scene.

Maurice, a sunburnt youth who called the inn his home, frequently found himself gazing down the road, eager to assist any passing travelers with their needs. His routine was disrupted one memorable morning by the arrival of a procession of horsemen, among them a young girl of remarkable beauty, riding a milk-white pony. Maurice was captivated by her golden curls, calm blue eyes, and the soft voice that thanked him as he helped with her pony. In a moment of connection, he offered her a blossom from the Judas Tree, which she accepted with a laugh that resonated like silver.

Years trickled by, each leaving its mark on the inn and Maurice. The memorable visit of the girl and her entourage remained a cherished memory, even as the possibility of her return diminished over time. The village and inn saw many changes, but none as profound as the day when news of a bridal train passing through brought back the excitement of that long-ago visit. Maurice, now older, recognized the bride amidst the pomp as the same girl who had visited years earlier. He attempted to reconnect with her through a symbolic gesture, throwing a blossom from the Judas Tree her way, but it went unnoticed, trampled in the dust as the procession moved on.

Time continued its relentless march, and the inn saw seasons change and many travelers come and go. Maurice's life remained intertwined with the inn's, observing

the natural world around him grow and fade. The moment of surprise came once again with the appearance of a carriage bearing a familiar crest. A woman, seemingly bearing the weight of years and sorrow, emerged. Maurice could scarcely reconcile this figure with the vibrant young girl and the radiant bride he remembered. The narrative poignantly captures the passage of time, the enduring nature of memory, and the inevitable changes that life brings.