

TWO TESTS.

Busy, Flossie?" asked Virginia Thorne, coming into her cousin's room. "Why, what is this? In trouble, dear?"

She took the childish, sensitive face between her hands and turned it towards her. Flossie tried to smile, but the red eyes and quivering lips could not be disguised. Virginia drew her gently down on the lounge.

"Tell Cousin all about it, pet. Maybe she can reduce your mountain to a mole hill. Is it Lyle Richmond?"

Virginia was seven years the elder of the two and regarded Flossie, still a timid and sensitive child at seventeen, with an almost motherly affection and care. Her stronger nature, cool, sensible, yet tender, was Flossie's refuge when crushed with shame or sorrow over some trifling blunder or sharp word. So now, though the younger girl only nodded and burst into tears, she had no idea of withholding her confidence.

Virginia smiled a little, then frowned, but Flossie's eyes were hidden on her breast.

"Poor little girl! Does it make her neck ache to stretch up to his ideal height?" she asked, a hint of irritation even in the loving mischief of her tone. "What has he said or done now?"

She knew Lyle Richmond, his fastidious taste, and critical judgment. To love him might indeed be a good education, to paraphrase the old compliment, but it was by no means likely to be a pleasure for one of Flossie's sensitive nature. She had been sorry from the first that her little cousin's fancy had taken this turn, natural as it was. Lyle Richmond was a prince in appearance, education, manner, not lacking in wealth, nor even the lesser matter of morality. Oh, yes, a prince among men, but a prince very well aware of his own attractions, and determined to accept nothing less than a princess of sweetness, purity, and wisdom for his bride.

Flossie was sweet and pure enough for any man, Virginia thought, knitting her brows, but it is scarcely fair to expect a girl to be a paragon of wisdom at seventeen. In her secret heart she doubted whether even Lyle Richmond at seven and twenty was quite capable of judging every one accurately. She admired him of course. Who could help it? But Flossie's distress rather warped her judgment.

"Come, pet, tell Cousin. What has he said now?"

"Nothing," Flossie sobbed. "He is a gentleman, and of course he won't say anything. Oh, Virginia, I would give anything it only he weren't—just for one half hour—so I could find out what he really does think."

"My dear, gentleman and hypocrite are not necessarily synonyms," Virginia protested, laughingly.

"I didn't mean that," Flossie sighed.

"But I do think it is awful to go among folks that are always the same, whether you please them or offend them. You never know whether you are hurting their feelings or not, for they keep smiling right along. You may have shocked them fearfully, and not know it till weeks after."

"Be comforted, dear," her cousin answered dryly. "Such models of deportment are rare in this world, outside of the etiquette books. Moreover, a true lady or gentleman never takes offense where none was meant, and isn't easily shocked by a trifling mistake. I think you are making yourself miserable about nothing, again."

"Virginia," suddenly sitting up and looking at her cousin with questioning eyes, "Was I a perfect simpleton? Didn't he act as if he—liked me?"

"Everybody thought so," Virginia answered.

"And I haven't been presuming enough to disgust him, have I?" she asked, pitiously.

"Certainly not dear," and Virginia smiled a little. As if shy, tender-hearted, little Flossie could disgust any one—even Sir Oracle himself!

"Then I don't know what is the matter," the girl sighed. "Perhaps I don't know enough. Anyway he hasn't spoken to me for almost two weeks."

"Hasn't spoken to you?" Virginia echoed in dismay. "That is serious."

"Oh, he has been polite, of course," Flossie said cheerfully. "But it is just because he is a gentleman, and doesn't count. I mean he hasn't spoken to me on purpose, as if he wanted to, not once."

"That does look odd," Virginia admitted, knitting her brows again. Of course, the most plausible explanation was that Lyle Richmond had not returned Flossie's fancy, and discovering that gossips were coupling their names was quietly avoiding any further cause for such talk. A less honorable man might have showed all the partiality he had, without meaning anything, but she had thought Lyle Richmond more scrupulous.

"I don't understand it, dear," she said frankly. "But there might be half a dozen satisfactory explanations. Cheer up, and I'll soon find out what the matter is!"

"You can't make me any better," Flossie answered hopelessly, "nor smarter either. And I believe he has found somebody more suitable to him."

"Perhaps he has," Virginia admitted. "But there's time enough to cry over spilt milk when you are sure it is spilt. I wouldn't worry yet."

"He never said anything definite," the younger girl sighed. "Perhaps I was a goose to feel so, but—Virginia, wouldn't you think it meant something if a gentleman put his arm around you and kissed you?"

"Depends on the man. With Lyle Richmond, yes. Did he?"

Flossie nodded. "That moonlight night we were all out in the rose-garden. Hadn't I a right to think he meant something?"

"You shouldn't have allowed it," said Virginia, gravely.

"I know, and I wouldn't if it had been anybody else. But Lyle Richmond—I couldn't insult him by as good as saying to him, 'You aren't behaving like a gentleman,' could I?"

It was so manifest an impossibility for timid little Flossie, that Virginia did not argue the point, only asked, "What did he say?"

"Only a compliment. I thought perhaps he might have said something more, but the others were so near, just beyond the rose-hedge, and so—" She broke down in confusion.

Virginia bent and kissed her, a little anxiously. "Then, dear, it all hinges on one question. 'Is Lyle Richmond capable of trifling with a girl's heart, or not? If he is the prince you think him, you are distressing yourself for nothing. If not, you

are well rid of him, even at the cost of a few weeks of heartache. Cousin will find out just as soon as she can, pet."

But it wasn't easy. Lyle Richmond's perfect politeness and complete self-possession were an armor of proof, which even Virginia, bold as she was in Flossie's cause, had not courage to attack outright. He was as pleasant and thoughtful as ever of Flossie when they met. True, there was something missing from his voice and manner, but it was a vague intangible something, hard to name or define. So more than a fortnight passed, and Virginia was forced to conclude that there never had been anything on his part, that the caress of which Flossie thought so much was merely a passing gallantry, born of the roses, the moonlight, and Flossie's childish loveliness. Wrong, no doubt, but barely singular, and perhaps even princes were not always faultless.

Flossie had recovered her spirits, in a great measure. "He only thought me a child," she concluded at last. "I don't care—much. Of course there's nobody like him, but then it was hard work to be always trying to come up to his ideas. It's easier to be with other folks who like me just as I am. I suppose Harry Nelson isn't as fine a gentleman, but—" Her unfinished sentence was more significant than any words she could have added.

"Harry Nelson has the very essence of a gentleman," Virginia answered decidedly. "He has the faculty of setting every one at ease and drawing out the best side of the company."

Truth to tell, she thought Flossie would be far happier with Harry Nelson than Lyle Richmond. He was far less princely in appearance and manner, with less money and less classic education, but every whit as true and honorable, and what he lacked in fastidious taste and critical judgment was made up in quick sympathy and unflinching generosity. That shy, sensitive girl, who had never dared forget her demeanor for a moment in the presence of her fastidious prince, was perfectly at ease when with Harry Nelson.

So, though Richmond was as attentive as ever to the cousins, Flossie generally slipped away, leaving her elder and more self-possessed cousin to enjoy his society.

Thus relieved from anxiety, Virginia had almost forgotten the matter when the explanation came. They were standing in the moonlight together, listening to the mellow music floating up from a band on the river below. "Love's Young Dream" thrilled through the balmy summer air till the whole scene and hour seemed enchanted when Virginia felt her companion's arm steal around her waist and lifted startled eyes to meet a gaze that set her heart bounding. Was this the secret? Was it only as her cousin he had petted little Flossie? Was this princely gentleman her lover?

In that bewildering thrill it cost an effort, even for the stately Virginia to disengage herself from the encircling arm and say gently, "That is rather a liberty, Mr. Richmond, even considering the moonlight and the music. No offense, you know, but we ladies have to observe the proprieties."

She was almost frightened at her own audacity. As Flossie said, it was very hard to even imply that this perfect gentleman could be guilty of any improper conduct. But to her relief he showed no sign of vexation.

"So far as being offended, I am greatly pleased to find a lady who respects herself too much to allow the slightest liberty. Believe me, Miss Thorne, I honor you all the more for that delicacy of feeling."

His tone was eager and earnest, but Virginia felt as if suddenly drenched by a cold wave. She remembered Flossie's tearful plea, and her eyes seemed rudely opened to something much less pleasant than the bewildering fancy of a moment ago. The words broke out involuntarily.

"So then, you intentionally took a liberty which you believed any woman of self-respect—with any delicacy of feeling would not permit. I am infinitely obliged to you."

"Miss Thorne!" in extreme surprise. "I beg you not to consider it in that light. I meant no offense."

"No," Virginia answered coldly. "You simply meant to treat me as you admit no lady who respects herself would allow herself to be treated. Decidedly, I have no right to be offended."

"Miss Thorne, pray don't look at the matter so. Permit me to explain," Richmond pleaded eagerly. "It was not that I doubted you, or for one moment imagined you lacking in self-respect or delicacy—no more than the examiner doubts the promising applicant to answer his questions. It was simply giving you an opportunity to display your character—a test, as it were, to prove your delicate sense of honor."

"A test, perhaps, which you are in the habit of applying to your young lady friends?" she asked slowly.

"I have often used it. You surely could not imagine I wished to test you especially, Miss Thorne?"

"May I inquire if the results are generally satisfactory?" Virginia asked, keeping her voice steady with an effort. Her cheeks were burning. What a goose she had been to harbor that fancy even for a moment! This then was the secret that had cost poor little Flossie so many tears.

"Not uniformly, I am sorry to say," Richmond answered with some embarrassment. "I have so often been painfully surprised to find such liberties permitted it not absolutely encouraged that it is with the greatest of pleasure I recognize one who is so thoroughly my ideal lady."

"I think I must say good night. It is growing quite chilly," she was the brief answer.

"But surely you are not offended now that you understand?—now that I have explained myself and my motives?" he urged.

"Mr. Richmond, I must think it over before deciding whether I have or have not just grounds of offense. At present it seems to me that your course has been suspicious and disrespectful, to say the least."

"But I assure you my respect for you is increased tenfold."

"I am sorry, because that simply proves that your respect for me, until tonight, has been of the smallest. Pray excuse me, I would rather say no more without time for thorough consideration. Good night."

And she swept away, leaving Lyle Richmond bewildered, mortified and confused. Her standpoint was so utterly new to him

he was at a loss even to understand it. Fastidious to a fault, it had seemed to him only prudent to make sure of the delicacy and discretion of any lady who began to interest him, and never before had one taken it as Virginia did. Only two or three, even of the half-score or so who bore the test successfully, had ever required any explanation, and they had been completely satisfied, serenely content in his increased respect, and agreeing that a man must be on his guard against indelicacy or folly. Virginia's novel view of the subject dismayed and troubled him. Could it be possible that his test had been discourteous or ungentlemanly?

At the earliest hour allowable he called upon her, eager to have the matter settled. The sitting-room was deserted at his entrance, though scattered needlework gave token of a hasty departure and an embroidered portemanteau lay open upon the table amid a shower of small change, while both silver and bills peeped from its depths. Richmond smiled, but with a trace of vexation.

"She seems very confident of the servant's honesty, I would not have thought her so careless," he muttered.

Virginia came in soon, smiling pleasantly, but with a mischievous light in her gray eyes, and greeted him as if last night's misunderstanding had never occurred. Almost immediately she picked up her portemanteau and counted over its contents with every appearance of anxiety. Richmond smiled, remarking: "Rather imprudent to throw temptation around like that, isn't it?"

Virginia seemed not to hear. She satisfied herself the money was all there; then threw it aside and turned to him with beaming eyes and outstretched hands: "I am so pleased—so delighted. You have passed the test gloriously. My respect for you has increased tenfold."

Richmond stared at her, uncomprehending. "I don't understand you at all, Miss Thorne."

"It is a world so full of dishonesty—in corruptible integrity is so rare," sighed Virginia, the castdown lids concealing the sparkle in her eyes, "that a lady is forced to be cautious, to apply a delicate test to her friends—give them an opportunity to display their character, prove their sense of honor as it were. I am so pleased to find a gentleman who respects himself too much to stoop—"

She stopped short in real alarm. Lyle Richmond's brow was thunderous in its wrath. Not trusting himself to speak, he turned and strode toward the door. Virginia recovered herself and sprang before him with laughing eyes, and detaining hands:

"Mr. Richmond, pray don't look at it so. I meant no offense"—then with a total change of tone as she saw he was too indignant to recognize his own words, "Lyle Richmond, I did think you were smart enough to see through a millstone when there was a hole in it!"

He stopped and stared at her, then as her meaning flashed upon him, colored perceptibly.

"Miss Thorne! Surely it didn't sound like that!"

"That!" Virginia answered with an imperious smile. "Why not. Are not dishonest men as plenty as immodest women, and quite as liable to impose on the unwary? Why is my test less justifiable or more insulting than yours?"

"But, good heavens!—a thief—"

"But, good heavens!—a courtesan—"

she paraded mockingly. "Mr. Richmond, I think we are coming to deep water in that direction. Now, if you please, I want to suppose a case. Suppose a gust of wind had scattered my bills over the floor, and you in all friendliness, not dreaming you could be suspected, should hasten to gather them up—to save me vexation and trouble. Suppose I come in and find you with your hands full of bills, and that I was as suspicious as—as I pretended. What conclusion would I naturally draw? And would that conclusion be justice?"

One fierce mental struggle, and then—for his was a brave, princely nature, that could conquer even its own angry mortification—the answer came earnestly. "Gross injustice surely, I humbly beg your pardon, Miss Thorne, but upon my honor, I never dreamed I was insulting any one. I give you my word I never shall use that again."

Virginia's hand was extended in quick cordiality. "Now you are yourself again. Only in all justice you must reverse some of your hasty judgments, for your test was hardly fair. The more thoroughly honorable the gentlemen, the more innocent and pure the girl, the less likely she is to suspect anything wrong. And besides, girls are often very unwilling to hurt their friends' feelings. As one told me, speaking of some liberty you had taken—your test, probably—I couldn't insult him by as good as saying, 'You aren't behaving like a gentleman.'"

"Miss Thorne, have mercy! I am overwhelmed," pleaded Richmond.

"Very well, let the subject drop, for I see Flossie coming. Keep my secret," she added with a merry glance. "Who knows but I may want to use my test again? Anyhow, I don't care to have it made public."

"Rely on my silence," Richmond answered with much gravity, more relieved by the implied promise than he cared to show.

But she told Flossie that evening, believing that the little maiden's mortification entitled her to the story. The girl laughed, but her comment startled even Virginia who knew her so well: "And then I had to come in before he could make things straight by asking you to marry him! What a pity!"

"You little goose!" laughed Virginia.

"Whatever faint possibility of such a thing there might have been last night, there is none now. Men make love to women who please and flatter them, not to those who overturn their ideas and mortify them."

"Some men, maybe, but Lyle Richmond isn't little if he was mistaken," persisted Flossie, still loyal to her hero-worship, and under her breath she added, "And I believe he will try to win you for his wife yet, Miss Virginia, and I'll help his wooing all I can."

From which it is plain to be seen that little Flossie was neither resentful nor heart-broken.

Mr. R. L. Allen, of Ottawa, writes: "Having been troubled with weakness of the lungs and general debility the past two years, I concluded to give *Paine's Emulsion* a fair trial. I have taken seven bottles, and find my health much improved, my lungs stronger, my weight increased twelve pounds."

**PROGRESS PICKINGS.**

"Ah, Jim, we poor folks has our trials!" "Yes, I's had a good many; but it ain't the trials what annoys me, it's the verdict they brings in afterwards."—Ex.

Summer Hotel Proprietor: My dear, I've got a piece of good news. His Wife: Do tell me, quick. Proprietor: Your dress-maker has engaged board with me for a month.—Ex.

The Missus: You oughtn't to leave the floor in such a condition. Why don't you take your chips with you. Carpenter: Who do you take me for; the Prince of Wales?—Lile.

"Milkman, why does your milk always look so blue?" inquired the housewife. "My cows come from Boston, mum," proudly replied the milkman, "and they're blue-bloods."—Ex.

"Your wife's new gown is a perfect dream," said Mrs. Kicksaw to Mr. Dimmick. "I think it must be," replied Dimmick. "I had a nightmare when I saw the bill for it."—Epoch.

"Is that wire screen there to prevent people from breaking into the banks?" "No; that is to prevent the bank officers from breaking out and running away with the money."—New York Press.

"No, Harry, I am sorry; but I am sure that we could not be happy together. You know I always want my own way in everything." "But, my dear girl, you could go on wanting it, after we were married."—Life.

"Then you think he struck you with malice aforethought?" Witness (indignantly).—"You can't mix me up like that. I've told you twice he hit me with a brick. There wasn't no mallets nor nothin' of the kind about."—Ex.

The Stout One: I took you for a gentleman when I first met you. The Thin One: And I took you for a loafer the first time I ever laid eyes on you. The Stout One: Well, let's call it square. It seems we were both mistaken.—Ex.

First Little Girl—"Let's play keepin' house an' goin' callin', and dress all up in your mamma's best things." Second Little Girl—"Eversing of mamma's is locked up, 'cept two skirts wiz no bodies to 'em." First Little Girl—"Well, let's play goin' to a party."—Ex.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the judge, "in arriving at a verdict you must take the testimony of the witnesses for the defence into consideration and give them full weight." At the words "and give them full weight," one of the jurymen swooned away. He was a coal dealer.—Ex.

Mr. C. Archibald Sharpe—"Newpopp's little boy is dead." Mrs. S.—"I didn't know he had a boy." "He hasn't. I tell you the boy is dead." "I mean I didn't know he had the boy before he died." "Who in thunder said he was dead? It was the boy that died, stupid!"—Life.

Miss Straitlaced: Do you see that poor blind beggar woman on the corner, Maude? How pitiful it is to see her sitting there in the crowd with that card, 'I am blind,' suspended around her neck. Miss Follibud: Yes, it is pitiful; but Ethel, what a delightful chaparrone she would make!—Somerville Journal.

"You will note, by the way," the professor said, "That a straight line always is the shortest route between two points; Now give an example of this!"

"Certainly, sir," John Jones replied, "Froud to be found awake."

"A straight line's the route a messenger boy has never been known to take!"

—Boston Courier.

The conductor touched the passenger on the shoulder. "Ticket, please," he said. The passenger was one of those facetious persons you sometimes encounter in your travels. He winked at the man sitting next to him, held out his ticket to the conductor, and at the moment the latter was about to take it he pushed out his forefinger instead. The conductor seized the finger, punched a ride out of it absent minded, and passed on.—Ex.



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**SPECIAL NOTICE.**

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FARES.—St. John to Boston, \$4.50; Portland, \$4.00. Return Tickets at reduced rates.

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For further information apply to C. E. LAECHLER, Agent.

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St. John, N. B., March 2nd, 1891.

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