

Mrs. Rachel Lynde Is Properly Horrified

by Lucy Maud Montgomery from *Anne of Green Gables*

Anne Shirley is a young Canadian orphan girl who has come to live with Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert. Anne is usually a sweet and happy person, but that changes when the Cuthberts' nosy neighbor Mrs. Lynde comes to visit. As this passage begins, Mrs. Lynde has said some rude things to Anne, and Anne was not able to keep her temper. She said some equally rude things to Mrs. Lynde. Marilla has sent Anne to her room while she thinks about how to handle Anne's disrespect.

On the way upstairs she pondered uneasily as to what she ought to do. She felt no little dismay over the scene that had just been enacted. How unfortunate that Anne should have displayed such temper before Mrs. Rachel Lynde, of all people! Then Marilla suddenly became aware of an uncomfortable and rebuking consciousness that she felt more humiliation over this than sorrow over the discovery of such a serious defect in Anne's disposition. And how was she to punish her? The amiable suggestion of the birch switch—to the efficiency of which all of Mrs. Rachel's own children could have borne smarting testimony—did not appeal to Marilla. She did not believe she could whip a child. No, some other method of punishment must be found to bring Anne to a proper realization of the enormity of her offense.

Marilla found Anne face downward on her bed, crying bitterly, quite oblivious of muddy boots on a clean counterpane.

"Anne," she said not ungently.

No answer.

"Anne," with greater severity, "get off that bed this minute and listen to what I have to say to you."

Anne squirmed off the bed and sat rigidly on a chair beside it, her face swollen and tear-stained and her eyes fixed stubbornly on the floor.

"This is a nice way for you to behave. Anne! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"She hadn't any right to call me ugly and redheaded," retorted Anne, evasive and defiant.

"You hadn't any right to fly into such a fury and talk the way you did to her, Anne. I was ashamed of you—thoroughly ashamed of you. I wanted you to behave nicely to Mrs. Lynde, and instead of that you have disgraced me. I'm sure I don't know why you should lose your temper like that just because Mrs. Lynde said you were red-haired and homely. You say it yourself often enough."

"Oh, but there's such a difference between saying a thing yourself and hearing other people say it,"

wailed Anne. “You may know a thing is so, but you can’t help hoping other people don’t quite think it is. I suppose you think I have an awful temper, but I couldn’t help it. When she said those things something just rose right up in me and choked me. I had to fly out at her.”

“Well, you made a fine exhibition of yourself I must say. Mrs. Lynde will have a nice story to tell about you everywhere—and she’ll tell it, too. It was a dreadful thing for you to lose your temper like that, Anne.”

“Just imagine how you would feel if somebody told you to your face that you were skinny and ugly,” pleaded Anne tearfully.

An old remembrance suddenly rose up before Marilla. She had been a very small child when she had heard one aunt say of her to another, “What a pity she is such a dark, homely little thing.” Marilla was every day of fifty before the sting had gone out of that memory.

“I don’t say that I think Mrs. Lynde was exactly right in saying what she did to you, Anne,” she admitted in a softer tone. “Rachel is too outspoken. But that is no excuse for such behavior on your part. She was a stranger and an elderly person and my visitor—all three very good reasons why you should have been respectful to her. You were rude and saucy and”—Marilla had a saving inspiration of punishment—“you must go to her and tell her you are very sorry for your bad temper and ask her to forgive you.”

“I can never do that,” said Anne determinedly and darkly. “You can punish me in any way you like, Marilla. You can shut me up in a dark, damp dungeon inhabited by snakes and toads and feed me only on bread and water and I shall not complain. But I cannot ask Mrs. Lynde to forgive me.”

“We’re not in the habit of shutting people up in dark damp dungeons,” said Marilla drily, “especially as they’re rather scarce in Avonlea. But apologize to Mrs. Lynde you must and shall and you’ll stay here in your room until you can tell me you’re willing to do it.”

“I shall have to stay here forever then,” said Anne mournfully, “because I can’t tell Mrs. Lynde I’m sorry I said those things to her. How can I? I’m not sorry. I’m sorry I’ve vexed you; but I’m glad I told her just what I did. It was a great satisfaction. I can’t say I’m sorry when I’m not, can I? I can’t even imagine I’m sorry.”

“Perhaps your imagination will be in better working order by the morning,” said Marilla, rising to depart. “You’ll have the night to think over your conduct in and come to a better frame of mind. You said you would try to be a very good girl if we kept you at Green Gables, but I must say it hasn’t seemed very much like it this evening.”

Questions

1. What did Mrs. Lynde say that made Anne so angry?
2. What is Marilla's punishment for Anne?
3. What does *exhibition* mean here: "Well, you made a fine exhibition of yourself I must say"?
4. What do you think of Anne's punishment? Was it fair or unfair? Why?