

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

- A.J.Cronin

Two Gentlemen of Verona – Summary

The author and his companion had been driving near the city of Verona, when they were stopped by two small boys who were shabbily dressed, selling strawberries. The author's driver cautioned the author against purchasing the fruits. The boys were very skinny but their eyes were sincere and attracted attention. The author took an instant liking for these boys and ended up buying their biggest basket of strawberries.

Next morning, the author noticed those two boys polishing people's shoes. The boys smiled and told the author that they performed many other kinds of jobs, like escorting tourists around the city. Impressed, the author had the boys immediately. Due to close interaction, the author discovered that the boys were very friendly and innocent. Beneath their cheerful smiles, however, he could discern seriousness, a hint of sadness that defied their age. The author didn't regret his decision since the boys proved to be resourceful. The author found their eagerness to do work really remarkable. The author was struck by their desperation to do more and more work, but he was surprised to know that they still wore torn clothes and hardly ate anything.

The author's trip was coming to an end. Before leaving, he asked if he could do something for them. Nikola, the elder one refused, but the younger one requested the author to drive them to Poleta, 30 kms away, next day. As a last gesture of goodwill, he volunteered to drive the boys himself.

The following afternoon, they all drove to the tiny village, near a hill. The author was surprised to halt beside a villa. Before he could question, the boys leapt out and asked the author to pick them up from the same place, after an hour. The author couldn't restrain his curiosity. He went in and was greeted by a nurse, and through a glass partition, the author saw that the boys were seated beside a hospital bed, with a girl aged 20, who appeared to be their sister. The author refused to be ushered inside, as he didn't wish to interrupt a happy family reunion. On being asked, the nurse told the author that the children's father had been killed in a war, and a bomb had destroyed their house and rendered them homeless. Since the Germans ruled the city for many years, the children had to undergo a lot of suffering, and their sister, Lucia, who wanted to be a singer, couldn't bear the cold and starvation, and contracted tuberculosis of the spine. The boys brought Lucia there, and every week, they brought enough money for her treatment.

The author was rejoined by the boys and they drove back to the city. The boys remained tight-lipped, and the author also decided to remain quiet, because he respected their privacy. The author left, filled with admiration, at the courage and relentless effort of two young boys who remained determined despite the setbacks of the war.

Important General Questions:

1. Nicola said to the narrator, “waiting for the last bus from Padua. We shall sell all our newspapers, when it comes in”. Why were the boys waiting for the last bus?
2. Why does the narrator make an offer for help to the two boys? What does it entail?
3. Why did the two boys survive only on black bread and figs, despite making a decent earning?
4. What scene does the narrator see through the glass partition?
5. The nurse said regarding the two boys, “I don’t know what they do, I don’t ask. Work is scarce in Verona.” What does this remark reflect upon the speaker?

Text book Questions:

1. Appearances are deceptive. Discuss with reference to the two boys.

Answer: At the surface level, the boys appeared to be friendly, fun-loving and childish. But, gradually the author discovered that they were too mature to keep their private griefs safe. Moreover, they never showed their suffering in any way. Behind their smiles, there was a hint of sadness that could be seen once in a while.

2. Do you think the boys looked after Lucia willingly? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer: The ultimate mission of the boys’ life centered on the welfare of their sister Lucia. Day and night, they slogged and starved only to provide for medical expenses for Lucia. This couldn’t have been done without their will and desire.

3. How does the story 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' promise hope for society?

Answer: Both Nicola and Jacopo show selflessness and reflect great dignity in their behaviour. They are deeply devoted to save their sister. In their earnest endeavour they become role models, epitomes of sacrifice who can enlighten the path for rest of the humanity to follow.

Exercise: 3 - Answer the following questions briefly.

a. "We do many things, sir," Nicola answered seriously. He glanced at us hopefully.

Answer: *The author was surprised to see Nicola and Jacopo polishing shoes instead of selling wild berries. Nicola said that, they do many other jobs like working as tourist guides, because he wanted the author to engage him as a guide to earn more money.*

b. He coloured deeply under his sunburn then grew pale.

Answer: *The author is taken aback to see both the boys working so hard, but still wearing torn clothes and hardly ate anything. When he asked Nicola, what he did with so much money, he couldn't reveal the fact that the money was for his ailing sister. So, his face bore an embarrassed look.*

c. He smiled uncomfortably. "Just plans, sir," he answered in a low voice.

Answer: *When Nicola didn't wish to answer that they were saving the money for their ailing sister, he just smiled uncomfortably and did not wish to comment any further.*

d. Yet in both these boyish faces there was a seriousness which was far beyond their years.

Answer: *Both Nicola and Jacopo appeared to be friendly, innocent, and carried out each job with great fun and zest. Yet, there was a hint of lingering sadness in their eyes which is generally not seen in a boy of their age group.*

Brief Synopsis of the Story

This story is about the indomitable courage and perseverance of two young boys, whom the destruction and ravages of war has not been able to crush. Their adversity becomes their strength and they are spurred on to take up extraordinary loads of work to fend for their ailing sister.

Reference to Context:

1. *“Nicola, the way you and Jacopo work, you must earn quite a bit. You spend nothing on clothes. You eat little enough...”*
 - a. **Who said the above lines?**
 - b. **Why did the speaker get the feeling that the boys were not spending any money?**
 - c. **What do these lines reflect about the two boys?**

2. *When the war was over and we had peace at last, they came back to their beloved sister. And they found her...*
 - a. **Identify ‘they’.**
 - b. **Which war is the speaker talking about?**
 - c. **In what condition did they find their sister?**

3. *“They couldn’t do it better”, I agreed.*
 - a. **Who is ‘I’ and who are ‘they’?**
 - b. **What great thing had the above mentioned people done?**
 - c. **Do you think the speaker is earnest in his saying?**

WRITING EXERCISES:

1. ***As the narrator, write an article on the lesson of love, faith and trust that you have learnt from the two young boys of Verona.***

Answer:

IT DOESN'T TAKE YEARS TO GAIN MATURITY

Tragedies and adversities either bring out the best, or the worst, among people. They prove to be great testing times which end up in glory or disaster. The bitter and indomitable struggle of Nicola and Jacopo, amidst the ravages of war, takes on epic proportions. The two young boys depict great maturity, wisdom and faith in the invincibility of human spirit. The die-hard nature of two boys changes the nature of people around them, with their vibrant spark of humanity.

The two boys not only create a home to survive from the rubble, but pitch in their best efforts to sustain their sister Lucia. Their intrinsic vitality encourages them to take up any work that is available i.e. shining shoes, selling newspapers and fruits or escorting the tourists for sightseeing.

They don't mind eating black bread or figs, or wearing torn clothes because they're single-mindedly focused on their sister's treatment. The boys resort to any kind of emotional blackmail or charity to provide for their sister. Their dignity and perseverance show their extreme faith in their own ability to cater to their sister's medical treatment.

So, the relentless struggle of two boys offers a kaleidoscopic view of love, tenderness, wisdom and trust, which even a catastrophic war failed to crush.

- 2. *After her brothers' visit, Lucia writes a page in her diary about her past life and her present situation. As Lucia, write the diary in about 150 words. (Own answer with appropriate expression of ideas.)***