

THE TEST OF GOLD by Renee Yancy

EXCERPT

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Evangeline Lindenmayer slipped through the marble halls toward her favorite room at 660 Fifth Avenue. Somehow the library had escaped the lavish attention to detail Mama and her architect had opulently bestowed on the other 149 rooms in the chateau.

The massive oak doors opened on well-oiled hinges, and the papery scent of books and leather enveloped Lindy. Sunlight streamed through the leaded glass windows and sparked off the gold lettering on the book spines. Her shoulders relaxed, and she gave a contented sigh. Such riches! In a lifetime, she could never read all the books here.

Her copy of Robinson Crusoe lay in the overstuffed chair where she'd left it the previous afternoon. Her mother had summoned her just as Robinson had been enslaved by a Moorish pirate. And one didn't disobey Vera Lindenmayer. Lindy had waited all day to discover his fate. Curling in the chair, she lost herself in seventeenth-century Africa.

Sometime later, she closed the book and sighed. "Is all well?" A tousled blond head peeked over the back of a leather Chesterfield sofa, and then a young man sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Oh!" Lindy dropped the book and sprang to her feet, her hand at her throat. "Who might you be? What are you doing here?"

The man stood hastily and clutched a book against his black frockcoat. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. I must have fallen asleep."

"You did startle me, sir. And an unwelcome shock it was too!"

He reddened and took a step back. "Please forgive me. My name is Jack Winthrop." He glanced at the bookshelves. "Mr. Lindenmayer has kindly offered me the use of his excellent library while I'm studying for the ministry at Union Theological Seminary." He gulped and ran a finger around his collar.

"Oh." That sounds like Papa, with his tender heart.

"I'm also taking classes at Columbia, where the new anthropology department has recently opened."

Lindy's mouth fell open. Not one but two colleges. Does the fellow even know how fortunate he was? Oh, to have been born a man. It isn't fair.

"Please accept my heartfelt apologies for startling you, Miss..."

"Lindenmayer. Evangeline Lindenmayer."

"I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Lindenmayer."

"Winthrop, you said? Are you related to Reverend Joseph Winthrop at St. Thomas?"

The young man nodded. "He is my uncle."

Lindy examined him a moment. The edges of his sleeves were shabby and his blond hair a trifle too long, falling over his collar, but something undeniably attractive about him telegraphed itself to her. "I recognize you now. You usually sit at the back of the church."

Mr. Winthrop nodded. "That's right." He retrieved his hat off the sofa. "I'll be going now. Sorry to intrude."

Lindy laughed. He looks like a dog caught with the Sunday roast in his paws. "Don't leave, Mr. Winthrop, you won't be disturbing anyone. The only books Papa reads concern the care and breeding of horses, and my mother never comes in here. I'm the only one who frequents it with regularity. But aren't you going to be frightfully busy with classes at two different colleges?"

His face brightened. "I thrive on it, actually. It's a great privilege to attend both the university and the seminary. My uncle has generously made it possible."

"Do you have other family besides your uncle?"

"My mother."

"I don't believe I've seen her with you."

A shadow darkened his face. "She isn't well. Not strong enough to attend the service on Sunday morning."

"I'm sorry to hear that. And your father?"

Mr. Winthrop smiled faintly. "My father died when I was seven, and Uncle Winthrop took us in. My father was his younger brother." He crossed the distance between them and plucked her book off the floor. "Allow me." He glanced at the title before he handed it to her. "What did you think of Mr. Crusoe's adventures?"

My, he's tall. Lindy sank onto her chair as a qualm went through her middle. Mama would have a conniption if she knew a man like Jack Winthrop was given permission to use the library. Having a conversation with a man Lindy hadn't been officially introduced to wasn't done in society circles. But he's not exactly in my social class, and he did introduce himself. Quite nicely at that. And I'm seldom

able to discuss books with anyone. She pushed the thought of her mother firmly out of her head.
“Won’t you sit down, Mr. Winthrop?”