

BEGGARS CAN CHOOSE

by MARGARET WEYMOUTH JACKSON

WNU Service

(© by Bobb-Merrill Co.)

THE STORY

Renewing a childhood attachment, Ernestine Briceland, of a wealthy family, is attracted by Will Todd, newspaper artist. Her sister, Lillian, urges her to break off the affair, but Ernestine refuses. A runaway marriage follows. Loring Hamilton wins Lillian's consent to become his wife. Will and Ernestine begin their married life in humble surroundings. John Poole, Will's best friend, gives a birthday party for Ernestine at Ruby Pastano's resort.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

"But you have lived in the country?"

"Oh, yes, always, in the summer. My grandmother Langley had a home in Indiana where my father's quarries are. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind me. Tell me of yourself. This house in the country, and your home on Sheridan road is a long way from here."

Ernestine understood his idea, but she refused to be drawn into such a complicated conversation.

"It is only a few miles," she replied, and he gave an impatient exclamation.

"It is a thousand miles and a hundred years at least," he said. "Tell me about your mother's house."

Ernestine thought about it.

"Do you know anything about American period furniture, Mr. Pastano? There is a Duncan Phyfe table, and pierced brass fire-fender, in the living room; four-poster beds upstairs, with hooked rugs and woven counterpanes—all of the things have come into the family honestly, through natural possession, and not from auction rooms. But, of course, you know."

She smiled at him. Her long hands lay together in the immaculate perfection of her yellow chiffon lap. Her voice was low, only for his ears, and she thought he might very strange, she gave him her gravest, youngest courtesy.

"I know nothing about America, at all, it seems."

"It's just the house—I'll take you to see it some day, if you like, although mamma doesn't like people to consider it a museum, as some experts do. Of course, I don't live there since my marriage. We live in a rooming house on Erie street, and it just shows that furniture and things do not mean so much, for I am happier now than I was."

"You have left this house of your mother, with pierced brass from your own ancestors, to live in Erie street?"

She nodded and smiled again, and her eyes pleaded for his understanding.

He shook his head sadly. He heaved a vast sigh.

"No, I do not understand America. Continually I am full of new astonishment. Women are somewhat the same the world around—but American men are outside my comprehension."

"You have been successful here," she reminded him, but he brushed her



"But You Have Lived in the Country?"

comment aside, pursuing his own thought aloud.

"No, I do not understand. If my son is penniless; if he is an artist starving in a garret, and the great, the incredible good fortune come to him that he shall marry a girl of noble birth, who has a quiet voice, and gentle still hands, and a brow where breeding shows its lovely smile—If my son have the grace and the smile of fortune to marry such a girl, and he bring her to a place like this—"

He looked about him with scorn. "If he bring his wife to this brothel—this sink—I take a knife in my own hand and stab him through the heart. You must get away from here instantly—now! There is activity in this room that pollutes the very air. You will strangle in it—"

Ernestine's heart stopped beating at her astonishment. She felt that

she had been unbearably affronted, and she rose and stood pale with anger. Mr. Pastano rose and stood before her, and met with approval the blaze of her eyes. A waiter appeared instantly with her coat, and he took it and wrapped it about her with immense dignity.

"So, go, princess?" he exclaimed, and bowed a little, and looked at her again, his own eyes alight. "You have only my good wishes. It is unfortunate I must confess the title to a place unfit for you, but this place was not made for you. The unfit, the broken, the abnormal must have their haunts, and they are not for others. Some day, perhaps, it will be my fortune that we shall be friends."

Every one was staring at them. Will had risen and stood beside her, smiling uncertainly, not knowing at all what was going forward.

"I want to go home," Ernestine said to him lily.

"Tommy will take you," Will answered easily. "I have to take Mr. Poole to his flat."

Ernestine felt herself beginning to tremble with the indignities heaped upon her. She had been so in love, so exposed, that it all hurt her incredibly. She looked about her uncertainly, then laughed and answered Will with composure.

"I don't believe I'll have to depend on Tommy. Here are Lillian and Loring. They'll take me home."

Will swung about in astonishment, and there, indeed, coming through the room, were Lillian and her lover. Ernestine stood, smiling malignantly, as they came forward.

"Ernestine," exclaimed Lillian, when she was near enough, "I wanted to see you. We went to Mrs. Bennett's, but the maid said you were here, so we followed you. Can you come with us?"

"I was just going," answered Ernestine. "But wait and meet our friends. This is my sister, Miss Briceland, Mrs. Winston, and Mr. Poole, Lillian, and Monsieur Mostane, and Mr. Winston of the Sun, and Mr. Underwood, and Mr. Hayward—and this is Mr. Pastano, who owns this charming place. And this is Mr. Hamilton, Mrs. Winston—"

The men had risen and were fumbling over the acknowledgments of the introductions. Ernestine seemed the most composed person present, and no one could have guessed that her knees were trembling.

"We wanted to get on, if you and Will can come with us," said Loring, while Mr. Pastano stood and regarded the newcomers evenly.

"I'll come with you, but Will has an engagement before he returns home. Goodbye, Mr. Poole. Thank you for the evening."

She gave her hand to her host, and he put his own hand on her shoulder to steady himself. Loring winced and scowled at this contact, but Ernestine was now in complete command of herself and smiled steadily. Mr. Poole's heavy face, his confusion, did not dismay her. She bade him an affectionate good night, then turned to the others.

"Good night, all of you. I'm sorry to run away from my own party, but somebody must start. If you will excuse me—Good night, Will. I'll see you later."

She gave Will a luminous look. He did not answer but stared at her silently, and she turned, sweeping her wrap about her, carrying herself like a queen of the realm, and went off, Loring's black bulk between the sisters, his face dark with forebodings.

Down the wooden stairs they passed in complete silence. A new sedan stood at the curb, and Loring in majestic silence opened the car door for the girls who got in the back seat. He closed the door and got in the driver's seat and started the engine. Lillian and Ernestine sat close together in the warmth and comfort of the heated upholstered, glass-enclosed interior. Ernestine felt for the first time a poignant homesickness for comfort and convenience.

"Why didn't Will come with us?" asked Loring from the front seat.

Ernestine decided to be frank.

"You could see that Mr. Poole had been drinking too much, couldn't you? Well, Will felt that he ought to take him home and see that he got there safely. He often does that. They're good friends, you know. And you mustn't think badly of Mr. Poole. He's old, and, really, he is a wonderful man."

"But how about you? How would you have got home? Our coming along was an accident."

"Tommy Tucker would have taken me," said Ernestine calmly. "Or the Westons, or Monsieur Mostane. I'd have gone home all right."

There was a silence of disapproval and adjustment. The car rolled smoothly along the quiet streets.

"Then everything's all right?" asked Lillian diffidently.

"Of course, darling."

"I'm so glad. Will you come and have lunch with mamma and me tomorrow and let me tell you all our plans?"

"I'll see," said Ernestine. "Now, I'll have to go home. I'm terribly tired."

"Of course you are. It's late. I'm

tired, too. But, Ernestine, I'm so happy that I wonder if I can be any happier." Her voice was bright and clear—quick and competent. Ernestine remembered the tears and passion of her own engagement.

"You will be happy always. You will," she said with intensity.

They left her at the stone steps and watched until she opened the door with her latchkey and disappeared into the dark prison-like house. Then Loring turned the car about and, with Lillian at his side, started back north. Lillian cuddled against him.

"Oh, Lillian," she said sorrowfully, "she isn't happy. You know she isn't. It wouldn't be so bad for her to be poor, if only he were good to her. But you can see that he neglects her. If he cannot provide for her decently he could at least be a gentleman to her. But after all she has done for him, he mistreats her."

"Don't be disturbed about it, darling," said Loring in a low voice. "There's nothing we can do now. Only be good to her and wait for her to wake up."

In Mrs. Bennett's boarding house Ernestine climbed the stairs slowly, feeling herself weak with rage.

CHAPTER V

The First Quarrel

Ernestine's anger and resentment grew like a bonfire. The small front room was cold, but she was unaware of its temperature or of the frost gathering thick on the window. Everything was fuel to the flame which burned in her. The longer Will delayed the more her anger grew. His cavalier treatment of her, Tommy could take her home! Mr. Poole needed him. More than anything else, more, she told herself, than the humiliation of Mr. Pastano's scorn was this fact, that Mr. Poole mattered more than she did.

She gave herself up to anger as she had given herself to love—with abandon. Will had neglected her. He had humiliated her. She knew that she would not have cared for any of it so much if she had not been forced to see it through the horrified eyes of her sister and Loring. They were pitying her now. She could imagine Lillian's comments, Loring's sympathy. That was the crux of the whole matter. And Mr. Poole, the vile old drunkard! Was this the sort of friendship her marriage was to bring her? She had given up everything for Will—everything! Was he to sacrifice nothing for her? Could he not abandon this adoration of an obscure old man who happened to be a cartoonist? It was not necessary for these gifted people to foregather in such a place. She burned and trembled as she recalled Pastano's contempt. That strangers should need to instruct her as to her proper place—

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

So absorbing were her thoughts, so wrapped was she in the resounding cadences of her own inner tumult, that she did not hear the outer door no: Will's soft step on the stairs, when at last he came.

"Up yet?" he asked in a husky whisper. "You should have been in bed two hours ago. It's cold as the devil outside. But what's the matter, kitten? Aren't you well?"

"Don't speak to me!" said Ernestine, and the fact that, like himself, she had to lower her voice in consideration for people sleeping on either side only added to her rage.

"But Ernestine!"

"Don't speak to me!" she cried again, and this time her voice was clear. "I never want to go anywhere with you again."

"Be silent," he commanded in a voice low but stern, and his eyes leaped back at her with an anger equal to her own. "Have you lost your wits? Shouting in this place in the middle of the night?"

Ernestine stood, her mouth open a little in amazement at his tone. Hot words trembled upon her tongue.

"Undress and get in bed," said Will. "What do you mean, sitting here without more clothes on, in this icy room? Do you wish to harm yourself?"

She laughed. "You are concerned about my welfare, aren't you?" she taunted him, and for answer he seized her shoulders and gave her a quick little shake.

"Ernestine," he demanded, "will you do as I say?"

She stood trembling, fighting down the stupid well of tears, reaching out after her departing anger.

"Will,"—her voice was as low, as vital as his own—"I'm in such a rage that I have got to talk to you. You can't treat me this way. You can't leave me to the courtesy of strangers. You can't take me to such places—where there's drunkenness and immorality. You have got to be a better husband to me than that. I have given up everything for you—every-

"When you are in bed, I'll talk to you," he answered, as he threw off his coat and went to the wardrobe and brought her her warm dressing gown, nightgown and fur-lined moccasins. He undid the fastening of her dress and before she could arm herself against him, he lifted it off over her head. The satin slip, the silken underthings—her body was like cold marble. In a moment, it seemed, she was in nightgown and dressing gown. In bed, and he was drawing off her gossamer hose and chafing her feet in his own cold hands until the mottled skin showed red with blood. Then he tucked her under the covers and brought a chair and sat down beside her, not touching her. Ernestine laughed again.

"If you really cared," she said, her eyes dark with anger and pain, "whether I were warmly in bed you might have come with me to see."

He was silent. He was very pale. Small beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead in the cold room.

"I am not likely to be ill," she said scornfully. "Don't be afraid of that."

Still he did not speak, but looked at her as though he were trying to arrange some momentous decision in his mind. He took a cigarette from his pocket with hands trembling so that when he lighted it he burned himself, and then the match away with an angry exclamation.

"Ernestine," he said, turning to her, "there is one thing that I will never take from you. You are hysterical now, but no matter how angry, how sick or upset you are, there is one thing that you must never say to me. Never again. I won't take it from you."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

At least, that is not the way I thought of it, and I don't think you did either. But if you made one, I will never ask you to continue it. Any time you want what you left you have only to put on your hat and go back and get it. This must be understood between us. You are under no compulsion to stay with me. If you gave up other things, it was because this was something you wanted more. Either our marriage was a gain for both of us, or it was a mistake."

"Why don't you go ahead and remind me that I proposed to you?" she said, too helpless in her own emotions to be sensible.

"Did you?" he asked coldly. "I thought the matter was spontaneous. I thought it was inevitable. Don't cheapen yourself with such a thought."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."

He drew the smoke into his lungs with an effort at self-control, while she stared up at the blur of him, her dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I didn't know that you gave up anything for me," he said. "I thought this marriage was on both sides the satisfying of a strong need. I never asked you to make a sacrifice for me."