

BEGGARS CAN CHOOSE

by Margaret Weymouth Jackson

WNU Service

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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 marry. Their married life in humble surroundings. John Poole, Will's best friend, gives a birthday party for Ernestine at Ruby Pastano's resort. Ernestine and Will have their first quarrel as a result. Will's father dies suddenly. Lillian and Loring are married. Will's mother dies almost immediately after Ernestine's baby is born. Changes in Will's office fall to bring advancement. Ernestine again is looking forward to motherhood.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued

Ernestine had asked John Poole to come down for the two Sundays they were at the lake. She had come to love the man as much as Will did, and had grown into the way of ignoring his bad habits. He was admirably sober the first Sunday he came down to them, and Will and Poole spent the day in the wood path and on the water, making ridiculous sketches in the sand, carrying Peter about with them.

But the second Sunday was a day of misfortune. Ernestine was ill and could scarcely rise that morning, and it seemed to her that Will was impatient and unsympathetic.

Loring telephoned that he had stripped his gears and put the car in the garage. He would have to come on the train, and Ernestine realized with dismay that John Poole would be with him. Lillian brought the two from the station in her car. John Poole was already fuddled with drink and elaborately polite, and it was easily seen that Loring was in a state of nervous exasperation. His face was flushed, his brow furrowed.

"I've got to go right over to Pastano's to see a man that's coming out there today," he said to Lillian as soon as they had had Sunday dinner.

"If you are going to see Ruby, I'll go with you," said Mr. Poole. "I have a most important matter to discuss with Mr. Pastano. Most important. He has a nephew—yes, I know—as Will laughed—"he has forty-seven nephews—but this is a most particular one. This boy is to study modeling. He is to be the exception—an artist in a family of clever criminals. I'm to see Mrs. Pastano about him. I'll go with you."

He rose and took a familiar hold on Loring's arm.

"Will can take you over in the boat, after while," Loring said. "I must hurry, and Pastano can't talk to both of us at once."

"No, I want to go with you," insisted Mr. Poole.

Loring no longer made the faintest effort to conceal his disgust.

"Your desire is unrequited," he said, and Will laughed and came around the table to his friend and boss and took hold of him.

"You're coming with me, you old war-horse," he said. "You're drunk. I'll wager you haven't done a lick of work all week. We'll go over to see Ruby after while. Loring doesn't want you, John, so come along with me."

John Poole turned and detained Loring who was trying to escape.

"You don't want me?"

"No," said Loring nervously. "I've had enough of you—too much. I don't ever want to see you again as long as I live."

"Come outside and fight with me, and I will beat you, and then we'll go to Pastano's—together."

Loring was furious. "I won't fight with you—you old fool!"—Will, for G—d's sake, take him off me. Why did you bring him down here, anyhow?"

"Don't be so hard with him," said Will, smiling wanly. "He's got a little money—he might come in handy some day. You've changed your mind about friends of mine before—Pastano and Wiston, for instance."

Loring turned to Lillian who stood, silent and grave, by her table. "If this is what I am to expect here it's the last Sunday I come down."

Will flushed. "So Ernestine is intruding now?" he said slowly. "Perhaps you have already consummated your intention of cheating her out of her privileges in this house as elsewhere—"

"Anybody could cheat Ernestine," exclaimed Loring. "She was cheated once and for good when she married you. She ruined her life then, and now she must endure anything because she lacks protection and is handicapped to boot."

Will took a step forward, his big hand raised, and though he still smiled his face was evil. He spoke low and rapidly, and with an indescribable effect of vituperation:

"You great big stuffed shirt—you imitation—you safe-player and bribe-taker, you! You covet! Do you think I don't know what's the matter with you?"

There was a pause which lasted in-

definitely. Loring had swollen to rage, and then he had collapsed, until he stood looking at Will with a dreadful, haunted face.

It was strange, Ernestine thought afterward, that none of them felt, even then, that Loring was afraid of Will. There was some other element which gave Will tremendous advantage. Before the blaze in Will's eyes, before his curving, breathless phrases, Loring fell into a strange, dejection. The two men looked at each other in the stillness that swirled around them all. Will turned at last to Ernestine.

"Go get your things, kit, and get the baby ready," he said in a gentle voice. "We'll all go back together. I'll go to the hotel and get a taxi to take us to the depot. We can get the afternoon train. Gather your things up again, John."

With tears running down her face, Ernestine obeyed him. Loring went off, cursing under his breath, and Mr. Poole followed him to shout unheeded threats and maledictions. Lillian helped Ernestine to get ready, both of them crying.

"It's the end," said Ernestine. "We can never see each other again now. Our lives are separated indefinitely," and Lillian was thinking, "What will mamma say?"

"I'll call you up, when I get in town. Write to me, Ernestine. Don't let them tear us apart—"

"My life is with Will—yours with Loring," said Ernestine, and wept afresh, trying to stem the tears, trying not to care, but feeling the nervous, uncontrollable necessity for weeping.

In the train, going back to Chicago, she still cried now and then. "Why does Loring hate us so?" she asked at last in a low tone. "Especially me? Why does he hate me? He seems to want to wound me, to strike at me. He's done it before. But I've never harmed him. Why does he hate me, Will?"

"Hate you?" exclaimed Will, and looked at her strangely, his dark bright eyes searching her pale face for guile. "He doesn't hate you, Ernestine. But forget him—I'm glad something has happened. They've only made us unhappy, anyhow."

It was nice to be home again. Ernestine went about her little house with a feeling of comfort and joy.

Will was not due at the office until the end of the week, but on Monday, as Ernestine was finishing up a wash-bowl for the baby, he got dressed to go downtown. As he kissed him good-bye and watched him go, then turned back to the routine of home, Ernestine felt a sense of well-being blot out yesterday's turmoil. She resolved not to think about it, nor to worry.

It seemed to her that Will had barely had time to go to town and come back again before he stood in the kitchen doorway, his eyes upon her with such a look in them that she gave a little cry and her hand flew to her throat.

"Will—what's happened?"

He put his hat down slowly. He hung his head, unable to speak to her, but at last he got it out.

"I've lost my job."

"Will—"

He said no more.

"Tell me—what happened?"

"Craps."

Ernestine sat down weakly in a chair by the kitchen table and gave a foolish-sounding laugh.

"Unarm, Ernie—" she exclaimed and grinned at him. "I'm glad. You would

never have quit, and now you'll get a job where they'll appreciate you."

"Ernestine!" he said, and choked. "I'll make good for you—I will! You'll see—some day."

Mr. Poole had not been at the office when Will was dismissed by Mr. Wiston. It was some days before he learned the details and gave them to Ernestine. The fellows had all surrounded Will with affectionate greet-

ing on his arrival in the office unexpectedly. They had at once planned to eat supper in a crowd. Somebody produced dice to determine immediately who would have to pay. They squatted on their heels in a close ring between the sloping desks, and Tommy Tucker cried a fierce schoolboy "jiggers" at them. Will held the dice, and he straightened up and turned about boldly rattling the cubes in his big hand, and faced Mr. Wiston.

Mr. Wiston made quick work of him, almost, it seemed to Will, or so he said, as though he were glad of the chance. Within ten minutes after his arrival, Will walked out of the Sun offices, his possessions, done up in a paper package, under his arm, while half a dozen indignant but futile youngsters mourned after him.

But John Poole would not have it. "You fire my help and you fire me," he told Wiston, and he left bag and baggage.

Nobody had thought of this. Mr. Wiston remonstrated with him, but nothing would satisfy John Poole except Will's reinstatement, and that Wiston would not concede.

So Will had added to his own anxieties a sense of responsibility about John Poole, of concern over Ernestine's break with that part of her family which was in or near Chicago.

Mr. Poole let it be known in newspaper circles that he and his assistant were available, but to his astonishment he had no offers. He was old, he had been identified with the Sun for many years. The Sun's rivals were busy developing their own artists and establishing them. It was only a year or two longer, it was said, for John Poole, and anyhow he would probably be back at the Sun within a month.

It was dull in Chicago that summer. Mamma was still in Europe, and Ernestine felt that she could not confide in Lillian about Will. There were times when she was frightened about her own health. She felt faint in the heat. She could not eat at all. She had not felt this way before Peter was born, but then she had been strong and well. She couldn't understand this—her feet were swollen until she could not wear her shoes. Mrs. Schluss and Mrs. Pryor expressed their anxiety. Only Will, engrossed in his own troubles, was unaware of her frailty. She presented to Mr. Poole and to Will a superb calm, and a facetiousness that was easier for her than tragedy.

Will found some work for an advertising agency, which he brought home to do. He might have taken one of the jobs papa had offered him from time to time, but papa was in Europe and Loring in charge of his affairs.

Ernestine could not forgive Will for playing baseball in the streets with John Pryor and a half a dozen other half-grown boys, when he came back from his fruitless jaunts after work. "He doesn't care," she thought, and longed to wound him, to strike through his carelessness. She grew almost morbid—"Perhaps he'll have reason to waken—to understand that life's a job for a man."

Will took five dollars, almost the last of their cash, one morning early in August and went out, looking very clean and spruce, and with the light of adventure in his eye.

"I'll find work today, or stay out till I do," he told Ernestine and kissed her on both cheeks.

Peter loves Will the better," she thought, pressing any thorn at hand against her heart. After he was gone, she went to her trunk and got out the bankbook she had obtained that day two years ago, when she had come out here and found Will's father dead. Here was a secret source of supply of her own. She looked at her bank balance. It was enough to pay for herself and the new baby, if she went into a two-bed ward, as Doctor Grey had planned for her. As Will was money. Will would have to manage for himself and Peter. She decided to go and get the money and have cash in the house if anything happened. But she would not let Will know she had it.

She put the small bankbook on the dining room table and went about the clean and tidy house, washing dishes, setting the rooms in order.

There was a long letter from mamma in the morning mail. Ernestine did not finish reading it, for she had to go and lie down on her bed, seized with such pain that she could scarcely forbear crying out. She felt within herself no light at all, no buoyancy, no spark of life. She was dull, leaden, submerged. She felt she ought to make some effort to resist this spiritual inertia but she was too ill. She wondered if her child would be born too soon. This thought zoned her into action. She rose and gathered from her trunk Peter's little baby garments, long since washed and mended and laid away. She made the things she might need for the baby into a bundle and put it in her dresser drawer. She would get her money. She would arrange her own affairs—with competence. When the call came, she would be ready.

But she must rest first. She made herself a pot of fresh tea, asked Mrs.

Schluss to look after Peter, and at length in the early afternoon she started off on the long walk to the street car.

She rode interminably, withdrawing her spirit from the concussion of the heat waves that came up from the stone pavement into the street car. Walking in a mist she reached the bank and went inside. She opened her purse, but found among its contents no bankbook. Like a picture in a dream she could see the leather square of it on the dining room table in the little house. She had left it at home.

If she had been in normal condition she would have realized that it was quite possible for her to establish her identity at the bank. She had made many small deposits. The teller would have remembered her. But as she stood in disappointment, the world grew black before her eyes, and for a straining moment, fully conscious but blind, she stood in silent terror.

The blindness passed, and she picked up her purse and went out of the bank, turned, half instinctively, toward Mrs. Bennett's. A strange girl was at the door, a colored girl who rolled her eyes at Ernestine.

"Miss Bennett's out, ma'am. Will you wait?"

Ernestine left without a word, and went back to the boulevard. The darkness, the blindness was coming down on her again. She felt that she was going to faint. She could not hold on any longer—there was nothing with which to cling—she no longer cared.

The great bulk of the bus was moving down toward her—gigantic, menacing. She felt that it would crush her, and moved back a little on the sidewalk, her horrified eyes fixed upon the monster which seemed to swell and grow, and then, strangely, to rise from the pavement and to turn slowly and gracefully about in the air. She knew it was delirium, she knew that the bus could not act that way. But her knowledge could not pierce her fear of confusion. And then the bus lunged at her—the blindness came down again, and Ernestine, alone and very ill, fell down upon the pavement of the boulevard with a soft and plaintive moan.

CHAPTER IX

Loring Finds Ernestine

It was nine o'clock when Lillian reached Chicago from Langley lake in obedience to Loring's frantic telephone call. She turned the car into Erie street, as Loring had instructed her, and stopped before Mrs. Bennett's door, her hands falling from the wheel of the car with nervous weariness. She went up the stairs quickly, her heart full of repressed terror for Ernestine. She could not imagine what might have happened to her. It wasn't time surely for her baby. Loring had been brief and unsatisfactory over long-distance.

The door was opened by a colored maid who stared in silence.

"Is Mrs. Bennett in? I'm Mrs. Todd's sister. They told me to come here—"

The girl gave a squawk and threw her hand up over her mouth and rolled her eyes at Lillian.

"Can you tell me where Mrs. Todd is?" asked Lillian sharply.

"Lawd, Miss, Wist I cud. Nobody knows. But you better e-min and talk to Miz' Bennett. She kin tell you the fact's."

Trembling seized Lillian, but she followed the girl in silence to Mrs. Bennett's sitting room, and in a moment found herself confronted by a plump little woman whose face was gray and ravaged. Lillian looked at

City Dweller Need Not Fear Loss of Hearing

A woman's club bulletin, just out, has an article on noise. The customary sort of article by somebody or other who prophesies that because of the pressure of city life, subway roar and rivet-gang symphonies our senses are degenerating. He expresses his belief that in another 20 years Manhattanites will be as myopic and deaf as the stone lions in front of the library.

We are not alarmed, no; only bored. Nobody with sense believes anything like that. The Solomon Islanders, who listen for drums 100 miles off, are supposed to have the acutest ears in the world. Maybe, but New York has a million persons who can detect in the loudest din a click that indicates trouble in their auto engines.

The Patagonian can see an ostrich head at the distance of 85 miles. But it would blind him to pore over this page for an hour, and he would see nothing but a blur. Yet a short-sighted proofreader, peering through thick glasses, could spot a single error on it in a few seconds.

It would be nearer truth to say that man's senses are exactly now as they were in the Stone Age. And there is something to be said even for the subway roar. In war time we do not become shell shocked so easily.—New York American.

English Philanthropist

Between 1858 and 1868 Josiah Mason built up a great orphanage at Erdington, England, at a cost of about \$1,500,000. For this he was knighted in 1872. He was born at Kidderminster in 1795, began selling cakes on the street at the age of eight and later taught himself to read and write while serving as a shoemaker's apprentice. Finally he became a manufacturer of steel pens and built up an enormous business. He added to his fortune by gold and silver plating and copper and nickel smelting. He gave \$1,000,000 to Mason's college, now a part of the University of Birmingham.

Joint Note

The signer of a joint note is responsible for the entire amount if called upon to meet it.—Detroit Free Press.

her with pleading eyes, afraid to trust her voice. Her throat was dry and closed.

"Please—where is she? What has happened?"

"We don't know. We can't find her."

"Tell me—please."

"She's not been well—you knew of course that she was expecting another confinement?"

Lillian nodded, realizing that she was ignorant of the date.

"Well, since Will's been out of work, she's not been well."

"Will out of work? I didn't know that." Her heart was shaken with remorse. Will out of work, and Ernestine ill, and she had known nothing of it—playing bridge and golf and swimming at the lake.

"But where did she go? Who was with her last? What happened?"

Mrs. Bennett tried to be coherent. "She left her little boy with a neighbor and went out alone, early in the afternoon. Evidently she intended to go to the bank, for Will found her bankbook lying on the table. We can't find out whether she was at the bank or not. No one noticed her, and she did not withdraw any money. But she came here about four. I was out and she left, but the maid said she looked as though she were going to drop then. That's the last that's been seen of her. Will got home about three, and he began to worry because Ernestine had not told him she was going out, and



"We Don't Know. We Can't Find Her."

It was so hot, and she's not been well. He decided to come over here to the bank, and when he found that she hadn't been there, he went to your mother's. Ernestine wasn't there. Then Will came here, and Mr. Hamilton met him here. I phoned to Mrs. Schluss for them, but Ernestine wasn't at home yet.

"Wherever she was she would have come home to Peter, as Will argued, and I agreed with him. Will was nearly distracted—the men quarreled bitterly, and Mr. Hamilton called up Ruby Pastano and the papers, and organized a search—of course, people in the city go off and are delayed and don't get home on time. But you see, now it's nearly ten and we haven't heard anything of her. Mr. Hamilton has notified the police. They'll find her—unless—"

"What do you mean?" cried Lillian sharply. Her hands were shaking so that she could scarcely hold her purse and gloves.

"Well—your husband—Mr. Hamilton, he's got the idea that she may have destroyed herself. But Will says no—she wouldn't do that."

"Will is right. Ernestine wouldn't do such a thing."

"But pregnant women get wonderful queer notions in their heads," insisted Mrs. Bennett dolefully. "Mr. Hamilton was nearly wild. He told Will that he had killed Ernestine—it seemed hard for Will to hear, but she brushed it away like nothing." She paused.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Reason for Alteration in Name of New Baby

On the very last day of the census, a baby was born at the Good Samaritan hospital and the proud father told the enumerator about it.

"And what is the baby's name?" asked the census taker, posing his pencil.

"Why, it hasn't any name yet; it was born just about two hours ago."

"Can't very well list it without a name," protested the statistician.

"Well, I'd like to have it in the count to make Los Angeles a little bigger," said the husband, and he and the enumerator went into conference as to a suitable name. They finally decided on Henry, and the husband called up the hospital to get his wife's approval.

"She can't talk now," stated the nurse over the phone, "but she says if you've decided on Henry, it's all right with her, except that you'll have to make it Henrietta."—Los Angeles Times.

Skeptical Public

Brian Jewett, grand exalted goof of his well-known Goof club, couldn't sell \$5 gold pieces in Congress street, Portland, Maine, for \$4 each. About five o'clock he emerged from a bank with ten new gold pieces. He started in with a sales talk something like this: "I say, here is a \$5 gold piece and I need some ready money. Will you purchase it for \$4?" Most of the replies he got were ha! ha! One man, however, a foreigner, took a look at one of the gold pieces, bit on it sharply and passed over \$4 with no hesitation. And one other was in on the purchase; but Jewett could not sell the other eight, though hundreds of passersby stopped to listen.—Indianapolis News.

Cannibalistic

Leslie lives in a big city and his opportunities to visit the country are limited, consequently he is "country green" as his country cousin wittingly put it.

On his first visit to the farm, when milking time came, he, of course, was an interested observer. Milk, as he knew it, came from the milkman, in bottles. One of the cows had a calf. When she was turned in with it and it began in a most vigorous manner the business of getting its breakfast, Leslie was terribly excited and worried.

"Oh, mother! mother!" he cried, "that calf is going to eat that cow up."

Maybe

Councilman Randall had been talking to some of the young folks in North Hollywood about the glories and profits of outdoor life in southern California. Orange groves, fig ranches and apricot orchards were touched on in colorful and convincing manner.

"And what?" he asked, "will be the outcome of the simple life?"

"A simple death," shouted some one at the rear of the hall.—Los Angeles Times.

Disposing of Estate

A will may be simply stated as a disposition of your life insurance, of your general estate and of personal keepsakes. The administration of the will is the other weighty problem. The choice of executor is of great importance.

In a Manner of Speaking

"Well, I think I'll repair home-ward." "Oh, you have a used car, too?"—Life.

Nothing leads to good which is not natural.—Schiller.



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Will and Poole Spent the Day in the Wood Path and on the Water.

never have quit, and now you'll get a job where they'll appreciate you."

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